

DATING FAQS

Here are some answers to teens' frequently asked questions about dating.

At the New Era we often receive questions about dating. We have also visited with youth from a variety of places and have found that there are some common questions that LDS youth would like answered. Here are a few questions from youth about dating, along with answers we hope are helpful.

Answers are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.



WHAT IS **DATING**, AND WHAT'S IT FOR?

What is the purpose of dating as teenagers? If we aren't "looking for someone" during high school, why bother dating at all?

For the Strength of Youth says, "Dating can help you develop lasting friendships and eventually find an eternal companion" ([2001], 24). Your ultimate goal is to spend eternity with Heavenly Father, and in His kingdom we will live as eternal families. So the ultimate goal of dating is to find an eternal companion you can make and keep temple covenants with. When you're a teen, dating helps you learn how to interact with others, make friends, have fun, and learn and practice respect and courtesy. These skills will be helpful in your social interactions and then later in courtship and marriage.

"When you are old enough [age 16], you ought to start dating. It is good for young men and young women to learn to know and to appreciate one another. It is good for you to go to games and dances and picnics, to do all of the young things. We encourage our young people to date. We encourage you to set high standards of dating."

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "You're in the Driver's Seat," *New Era*, June 2004, 5.

Other resources: Matthew and Janine Clarke, "Why Date?" *New Era*, Aug. 2006, 38.



**What is considered dating?
How is it defined?**

Dating is when two people of the opposite sex arrange to pair up with each other and participate in an activity. Some teens use the word *dating* to describe a couple that has decided to be exclusive, but this is not the kind of dating you should be doing in your teens.

Is "going out" the same as dating?

Whatever you call it—"going out," "dating," or even "hanging out"—if you are pairing up with someone so that you can spend time together, it's pretty much the same thing. To know if it's a date, ask these questions: (1) What's in your heart and mind; what is your intent? (2) What do you hope to gain from the experience? (3) Are you pairing up—talking to and being close to one person exclusively—even while in a group of friends?

What is the difference between hanging out in a group and dating in a group?

Group dating means that everyone in the group is paired up for an activity. Hanging out in a group

means that you're just a group of friends doing things together. Some teens report uncomfortable situations where a couple of friends pair off and the rest of the people in the group feel like they are tagging along on a date. Avoid the awkward hybrid activity where some of you are paired up and others aren't. Make sure everyone is lined up with a date when you're group dating.

Also, don't tell your parents you're going somewhere with a friend just to get their approval and then meet up with someone else. This places your friend in the awkward position of being a third wheel on a supposedly accidental date. It's not kind to your friend, and it's being dishonest with your parents.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT 16?

Why do we wait to date until we're 16?

Modern prophets have counseled us to follow this standard because they know that it will protect us and help us to be happy. Turning 16 isn't necessarily a magical event that makes you suddenly ready to date. The counsel against dating before you're 16 is based on principles of physical, emotional, and spiritual safety.

Don't get stuck in the racetrack mentality—"ready, set, date!" It isn't about dating as fast and furiously as you can the moment you turn 16. The age of 16 simply means you can now begin dating when you feel ready, starting with group dates.

"Do not date until you are at least 16 years old. Dating before then can lead to immorality, limit the number of other young people you meet, and deprive you of experiences that will help you choose an eternal partner."

For the Strength of Youth, 24.

"The Lord has made us attractive one to another for a great purpose. But this very attraction becomes as a powder keg unless it is kept under control. It is beautiful when handled in the right way. It is deadly if it gets out of hand.

"It is for this reason that the Church counsels against early dating. This rule is not designed to hurt you in any way. It is designed to help you, and it will do so if you will observe it."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," New Era, Jan. 2001, 13.



"In dating relationships with the opposite sex, making a wrong choice early may limit making the right choice later."

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Where Do I Make My Stand?" Ensign, Nov. 2004, 18.

How do you politely tell someone you don't date yet, but you can still be friends?

If you're not 16 yet and someone asks you on a date (or to "hang out" with them in a situation obviously very much like dating), simply thank them for the invitation, but tell them

you're not going to start dating until you're 16, or that it's a rule in your family not to date until you're 16. If they ask why, tell them that it's something the Church teaches. Don't apologize for the Church standard, but let the person know what that standard is.

Other resources: Q&A, New Era, Nov. 2008, 12.

What should someone do if they find themselves getting into a relationship before they are old enough to date?

Now that you've recognized what's happening, set limits. Your parents or Church leaders can help you establish some rules. If you're spending too much time alone with just one person, invite other friends or siblings to join you. But be sure that you really do include people rather than just using them as a shield to cover the fact that you're pairing off. Don't hang out at your home or the other person's home if no parents are present.

Other resources: Q&A, New Era, July 1995, 17.

Is dating before you are 16 a sin that must be repented of?

Modern prophets have counseled against dating before 16, so willfully disregarding this counsel should not be taken lightly. While dating early may not be something you need to confess to your bishop, you should repent by asking Heavenly Father's forgiveness for not following the standard set by modern prophets. Part of that repentance should include a change of heart and a commitment to stop dating if you are still under 16. If you need more help in this area, talk to your parents or Church leaders.

What kind of dates are OK when you first turn 16?

When you are just beginning to date, it is best to keep things light and fun. Focus on strengthening the friendships you already have. *For the Strength of Youth* says, “When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates. . . . Plan dating activities that are positive and inexpensive and that will help you get to know each other. Do things that will help you and your companions maintain your self-respect and remain close to the Spirit of the Lord” (25).

Other resources: For a list of fun dating ideas, see page 46.

Is it a type of sin not to want to date at all right now? What if I don't date until a little while into college?

No, delaying dating is not a sin. *For the Strength of Youth* says, “Not all teenagers need to date or even want to. Many young people do not date during their teen years because they are not yet interested, do not have opportunities, or simply want to delay forming serious relationships. However, good friendships can and should be developed at every age” (24).

Whether you're doing the right thing or not, however, may depend on how long “a little while” ends up being. Right now, relax, ease into dating, starting with group dates as you feel comfortable. When you're in your 20s, you should be looking to date with an eye toward

“For many years the Church has counseled young people not to date before age 16. Perhaps some young adults, especially men, have carried that wise counsel to excess and determined not to date before 26 or maybe even 36.

“Men, if you have returned from your mission and you are still following the boy-girl patterns you were counseled to follow when you were 15, it is time for you to grow up. Gather your courage and look for someone to pair off with.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Dating versus Hanging Out,” *Ensign*, June 2006, 13.

marriage, so don't let “a little while” turn into several years. It will be better for you and your future spouse if you gain some experience by getting to know people.



WHEN DO WE GO ONE-ON-ONE?



Why can't we single date as teenagers? When is single dating appropriate?

For the Strength of Youth says, "When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates" (25). Following this guideline will help you have more fun and stay safer. As the old saying goes, there is safety in numbers. If you've chosen the right kinds of friends, this is certain to be true.

Church leaders haven't specified an age when single dating is appropriate. When you are older and in a position to consider marriage, you most certainly should single date. Until then, talk to your parents about the decision to start single dating.

Are occasional single dates as a teen wrong?

Not necessarily, but make sure you understand why the Church encourages you to date in groups when you begin dating. Single dates always seem to be taken a little more seriously than group dates, and it's always best to keep your relationships on a light, fun level before you are old enough to date with the intention of finding a

marriage partner. For more specific advice, talk to your parents.

If I'm 18—a young single adult—but have never dated, do I start by group dating or single dating?

This is an interesting question, because it assumes that leaving the Young Men or Young Women program may signal the beginning of the single-dating era of your life. *For the Strength of Youth* says, "Do not date until you are at least 16 years old. . . . When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates" (24–25). Somewhere between 16 and the age when you're considering marriage, you will probably start going on single dates. But regardless of your age, if you haven't dated before, it may still be a good idea to go in groups to start out with, because it's less awkward, there's less pressure, and there's more opportunity to learn social skills. As always, it's good to talk to your parents about it.

Other resources: Q&A (group dating), *New Era*, Aug. 1998.

WHEN CAN WE PAIR OFF AND BE EXCLUSIVE?

Why should we not steady date until we are older? When is it appropriate? What constitutes steady dating?

You need to try to make many friends, even if there's one person you prefer being with. *For the Strength of Youth* says, "Avoid going on frequent dates with the same person" (25). The reasons for this counsel have to do with timing and safety. You're not yet ready for marriage, so steady dating has no real purpose yet. And people in that kind of exclusive relationship will probably want to begin to express their feelings physically. The longer the relationship goes on with no immediate prospect of marriage, the more likely a couple is to get into trouble.

"I realize the importance of setting your course, of knowing where you are going. Please date extensively. Please know the kind of person you want to be with. Please make sure that you help those you come in contact with. Please point them in the direction of associating with many people."

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Preparing for a Heavenly Marriage," *New Era*, Feb. 2006, 5.

Other resources: For more on this topic, read "Unsteady Dating" on page 38.

How often can you date a certain person?

There is no set number. Talk to your parents and youth leaders about it, and learn from what other people have done and observed.

When is it OK to call someone your boyfriend or girlfriend?

The answer to this question depends on what these terms mean to

you and others. Many people would take them to mean you're exclusively dating one another, which is contrary to the Church's counsel on dating in the teen years. So, you should probably reserve the "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" designation for relationships leading to engagement. For now, just call them friends.

Other resources: Q&A, *New Era*, May 1996, 17.

Why is it so bad to steady date before guys go on missions?

Before his mission, a young man should not be looking for a serious relationship. It may distract him from the call to full-time service he will receive from a prophet of God. It just doesn't make sense to add the complication of a steady girlfriend when a young man is trying to prepare for a mission, and especially when he's on his mission. It might create temptations and even expectations regarding the relationship. It's not fair to him or the young woman. Neither of them needs that sort of distraction or pressure.

This is a good question to ask your father, uncles, or youth leaders, as well as recently returned missionaries. They will have a good perspective on the problems that come from steady dating before missions.

"Temple marriage should wait until after a young man has served an honorable full-time mission for the Lord. And I would admonish you to date only faithful young women who also believe this and give you that encouragement."

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), "To the 'Youth of the Noble Birthright,'" *Ensign*, May 1986, 44.



WHAT'S A GUY OR A GIRL TO DO?



How should we ask someone on a date?

Calling someone on the phone or speaking to them in person is best. Ask them if they would like to go with you to a dance or on a date on a certain day and at a certain time. You don't have to go to great lengths or spend a lot of money just to ask someone on a date. People should not feel pressured into a date and should be able to decline without feeling uncomfortable.

Is it appropriate for girls to ask guys out?

This is a good subject to ask your parents about. Follow their advice and make sure they approve of your dating choices. For events such as girls' choice dances, girls are expected to do the asking.

But generally, these events are the exception rather than the rule.

The boys I know don't ask girls out on dates. How do we girls let them know that we'd rather date than hang out?

It's easy just to show up at someone's house to "hang out," and it may be hard to break this habit, but it's worth the effort. If activities are more organized, guys may begin asking girls on dates more often. Also, simply telling guys that you'd prefer dating should change their minds, as long as it doesn't include too much pressure or expense.

How should a guy treat a girl on a date?

Young men should use good manners, even if the activity is casual. Go to the door to pick the girl up, and say hello to her parents. Pay her compliments. Even if she is a good friend, go out of your way to make sure she is enjoying herself.

"The young women want young men to respect them and show them common, sincere courtesy. Do not hesitate to show good manners by opening a door for them, taking the initiative in inviting them on a date, and standing as they enter a room. Young women, you can also show respect and dignity by being considerate and polite, extending simple courtesies to others."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Away from the Blinding Dust," *New Era*, May 1991, 50.

"In dating, treat your date with respect, and expect your date to show that same respect for you."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Standards of Strength," *New Era*, Oct. 2008, 2.

"In a dating and courtship relationship, I would not have you spend five minutes with someone who belittles you, who is constantly critical of you, who is cruel at your expense and may even call it humor."

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "How Do I Love Thee?" *New Era*, Oct. 2003, 6.

"Happiness abounds when there is genuine respect one for another. . . . [To show respect, two people] need willingness to give and take in the search for harmony; and they need unselfishness of the highest sort—thought for their partners taking the place of desire for themselves. This is respect."

President Thomas S. Monson, "In Quest of the Abundant Life," *Ensign*, Mar. 1988, 2.

Should guys really have to pay for every date?

Not necessarily, but if the young man is the one who asked the young woman out, he ought to pay. However, don't fall into the bad habit of taking advantage of the one most willing or able to pay.

Dates don't always have to cost money. With a little planning, ordinary activities can become dates, such as going for walks or playing games. Most teens don't have enough money to go out to dinner and a movie regularly, so creative dating that doesn't cost much is the thing to try. When two people enjoy each other's company, then even simple activities can become fun and allow you to get to know each other better.

What are proper manners for a girl on a date?

A girl has the same obligation to show good manners as a boy. She

should appreciate the efforts he goes to and thank him. She should talk to him and help him have a nice time. She should never be texting others during a date. She should never "ditch" him to go do something with others during the date. She should make every effort to be pleasant and talkative.

Is there anything wrong with flirting?

Showing interest is all right—smile, laugh, talk, be friendly—but flirting can cross the line if it's too aggressive. You may not even be totally aware that you're flirting. And because it isn't just what you say but how you say it (including body language), flirting can also be easily misinterpreted. People who are overly flirtatious often make others feel uncomfortable and may send the wrong messages about their intentions.

"How you speak says much about who you are."

***For the Strength of Youth*, 22.**

"What may appear to be harmless teasing or simply having a little fun with someone of the opposite sex can easily lead to more serious involvement."

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1984), "The Law of Chastity," *New Era*, Jan. 1988, 6.

Why does *For the Strength of Youth* say, "In cultures where dating or courtship is acceptable"? Are there cultures where dating and courtship aren't appropriate?

Customs concerning dating may vary widely from one country and culture to another. What is important is to apply the principles and standards from *For the Strength of Youth* to your situation. For example, if dating is not encouraged in your culture, you can still find appropriate ways to form friendships and to learn social skills.

WHAT ABOUT BEING PHYSICALLY CLOSE?



When is it OK to hold hands? How serious is holding hands?

Holding hands, in and of itself, is pretty innocent. Usually the meaning of holding hands changes with the situation and with how two people feel about each other. For instance, if they are friends and are trying to keep track of each other in a crowd, it is simply a common courtesy and usually isn't serious. However, if two people hold hands all the time, it's like announcing that they're a couple, or dating exclusively, which is not what teens should be doing.

At what point is it appropriate to kiss?

There's no rule, but it's wise to save your kisses. A person once told of making the mistake of trying to kiss a girl on their first date. He realized he did not think kisses were special, but she did. That experience changed his mind. He then said, "There are good reasons why you should be discriminating and self-controlled in your giving of affection. . . . Once a couple begins to share affection in a physical way, this activity tends to become the focus of interest" ("Speaking of Kissing," *New Era*, June 2001, 32).

Other resources: Bruce Monson, "Speaking of Kissing," *New Era*, June 2001, 32; John Bytheway, "What Do Kisses Mean?" *New Era*, Oct. 2004, 39.

What about hugging?

Some people are very casual with hugs, and others are not. What might seem normal to you may be interpreted by another as quite intimate. And hugs are much more common in some cultures than in others. A brief hug can be a nice way to show

affection without being too serious. For instance, at the end of a date it can show appreciation without becoming inappropriate. But don't use hugs as an excuse to initiate contact that someone else doesn't want or appreciate.

Where do you draw the line on a date? How close can you get on a date?

The question is never "How far can I go?" but rather "How can I stay safe?" Just because you know where the line should be drawn in order to be morally clean, that does not necessarily mean that any physical contact short of that line is OK.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) once said about crossing the line on dates, "Conscience tells the individual when he is entering forbidden worlds, and it continues . . . until silenced by the will or by sin's repetition" ("President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality," *New Era*, Nov. 1980, 41). In other words, we know when things are getting into a dangerous or wrong area, and we must not keep ignoring these promptings until we don't feel them anymore.

The good thing about group dates is that opportunities for inappropriate behavior are lessened. The difficulty with physical attraction is that people often want more than they had the last time they were together. Opportunities for "crossing the line" usually come through little things.



Is a public display of affection a bad thing?

Usually when people speak of public displays of affection, they are talking about couples kissing, wrapping their arms around each other, or engaging in other kinds of touching in public. This kind of behavior shows a lack of self-control and self-respect, and it is also self-centered and inconsiderate, because it often makes others feel uncomfortable.

"Before marriage, do not do anything to arouse the powerful emotions that must be expressed only in marriage. Do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person's body, with or without clothing. Do not allow anyone to do that with you. . . . Always treat your date with respect, never as an object to be used for your lustful desires. Stay in areas of safety where you can easily control your physical feelings. Do not participate in talk or activities that arouse sexual feelings."

For the Strength of Youth, 27.

"Of course you are to socialize . . . , to date, to have fun of a wholesome kind in a hundred ways. But there is a line which you must not cross. It is the line that separates personal cleanliness from sin. I need not get clinical in telling you where that line is. You know. You have been told again and again. You have a conscience within you. Stay on the Lord's side of the line"

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008),
"Be Ye Clean," *Ensign*, May 1996, 48.



DOES MODEST DRESS REALLY IMPRESS?

How can guys encourage girls to dress modestly?

Guys, let girls know you notice and appreciate it when they dress modestly. Compliment them on their modest clothes, and then show that you mean it.

“When strong young priesthood holders see a girl immodestly dressed, most will not want to date her because her standards are not consistent with their eternal perspective. Immodesty in women cheapens their image. It causes embarrassment and loss of respect. It is not likely to win them the hand of a worthy, honorable young man who desires to marry a righteous young woman in the temple.”

President James E. Faust (1920–2007),
Second Counselor in the First Presidency,
“Womanhood: The Highest Place of Honor,”
Ensign, May 2000, 97.

“Young men, let . . . young women know that you will not seek an eternal companion from those that are overcome by worldly trends. Many dress and act immodestly because they are told that is what you want. In sensitive ways, communicate how distasteful revealing attire is to you, a worthy young man, and how it stimulates unwanted emotions from what you see against your will.

“Those young women who do embrace conservative dress standards and exhibit the attributes of a devoted Latter-day Saint are often criticized for not being ‘with it.’ Encourage them by expressing gratitude for their worthy example. Thank them for doing what is pleasing to the Lord and in time will bless their own husband and children. Many young women have returned to righteousness because of the example and understanding support of a worthy priesthood bearer. Perhaps a group of you could frankly discuss your concern in an appropriate setting such as a Sunday School or seminary class. Will you begin a private crusade to help young women understand how precious they are to God and attractive to you as they magnify their feminine traits and divinely given attributes of womanhood?”

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Sanctity of Womanhood,” *New Era*, Nov. 2008, 4.

Why does it seem like boys date girls who dress immodestly?

Some national surveys in the U.S. have shown that most boys prefer modestly dressed girls. Yet many girls, especially LDS girls, have the opposite impression. This may come because immodestly dressed girls are sometimes more outgoing and assertive toward boys. And often boys are uncomfortable with what girls wear but don’t know how to tell them. So, boys, make your true feelings about modesty known. And girls, enlist the help of seminary teachers or Church leaders to get the message across: LDS girls expect LDS boys to favor modesty.

IS THERE A RULE ON THAT?

Should I date someone who is not LDS?

Possibly, but don't date anyone (LDS or not) who, because of low standards, will drag you down. Including friends who share your standards in your group dating can build wonderful friendships and may create missionary opportunities.

"Date only those who have high standards and in whose company you can maintain your standards."

For the Strength of Youth, 24.

"Choose friends who share your values so you can strengthen and encourage each other in living high standards. A true friend will encourage you to be your best self."

For the Strength of Youth, 12.

Other resources: Q&A, *New Era*, June 1977, 18.

How do you get out of a bad date?

If the group or activity makes you uncomfortable, ask your date to take you home or change the activity (such as leaving a bad movie). Let your parents know where you are going, and if you have a cell phone, use it when you need to. There is nothing wrong with standing up for yourself. If nothing inappropriate is going on and you're just not having a good time, then consider how you can help the situation without being rude to your date.

How do you react to a date when he or she doesn't show proper manners?

The best way to help someone with manners is by setting the example yourself. If that doesn't work, take them aside and kindly explain what is bothering you and what they need to do. Make sure they understand that the object is to help them, not embarrass them. If you are afraid that you don't know proper manners, ask your parents or youth leaders to give you some pointers. You can always practice at home or during Mutual or other activities with a group of familiar people.

Other resources: Lynn Scoresby, "How to Treat a Girl," *New Era*, Feb. 1987, 12; "My Worst Date Ever," *New Era*, May 1998, 27.



How long should a date last?

The length of a date depends in part on the activity you choose, but a good rule of thumb is: don't overdo it. Dates that are too long or complex or expensive usually aren't as much

fun anyway. Keeping a date to a reasonable amount of time may leave your date wanting to spend more time with you later. Also, always be sure to honor curfews—your date's as well as your own.

Is it rude to use a coupon on a date?

Not at all! Go ahead and use coupons if you want. Some of the best, most memorable dates are the free or inexpensive ones.

What if someone else I really want to go with asks me after I've already accepted another date?

You can simply tell the second person how sorry you are and then offer to go another time. Plan to go with the one you already agreed to go with, without making a fuss about your dilemma. Make sure your date has a nice time.

Why is it important to take time to plan a date?

Planning an activity in advance shows respect and consideration for your date. Also, planning is good for practical reasons: you will be less likely to run into awkward situations (movie is sold out, restaurant is full), you'll be able to tell your parents and your date's parents where you'll be, and it lets your date know how to dress for the occasion (you don't want to go formally dressed to a picnic or casually dressed to a fancy restaurant).

How do you turn down a date politely?

Be courteous when you need to turn down a date. Don't say anything that might hurt feelings. Simply thank them for the offer and say that you would rather not go or that you are unable to go with them.

"If we are to persuade young men to ask for dates more frequently, we must establish a mutual expectation that to go on a date is not to imply a continuing commitment. . . . Young women, if you turn down a date, be kind. Otherwise you may crush a nervous and shy questioner and destroy him as a potential dater, and that could hurt some other sister."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Dating versus Hanging Out," *Ensign*, June 2006, 14.

What should you wear on a date?

You should, of course, dress modestly. Take time to look your best. This is a way of showing respect to the ones you are with. This is also one of the reasons to plan dates in advance. It lets your date know what you are going to do so that they can dress appropriately.

Other references: "Social Survival," by Margaret Wilding, *New Era*, Mar. 1983; "How to Be a First-Rate Date," *New Era*, Oct. 2004; "A Question of Honor," Alma Yates, *New Era*, May 1983.

What can you do not to feel nervous about a date?

Let's see . . . remember to breathe. That's always good. Imagine yourself not making a fool of yourself. Be prepared; have a plan. Pray. Keep busy. Try listening to good music, or reading the scriptures or another good book, or doing your homework, or doing chores. Then go on your date and have fun.

NEmore

To see more answers to dating questions, go to the Dating topic page at Youth.lds.org.

