



First romantic relationships

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD GOING THROUGH?

During adolescence, children usually have their first experiences with love: they will feel attracted to someone else and will want to attract this person and get to know them. Before starting a romantic relationship, children will have questions and concerns. They will go through many and sometimes contradictory emotions: they may be excited and daydream one day and then become preoccupied, anxious, embarrassed or disappointed the next.

Before starting a relationship, children will go through a few stages.*

- **Attraction:** This means feeling different pleasurable emotions towards another person and wanting to get to know them better.
- **Flirtation:** This means wanting to please the other person and to be with them, talk to them, and get them to notice us.
- **Getting to know the other person:** This means understanding the other person (favourite things, hobbies, etc.). It means wanting to be with the person all the time, wanting the person to like being around you and wondering about whether the person likes you.
- **The start of a romantic relationship:** This means finding out that the other person likes you, knowing that you are unique for this person and asking how they see your relationship.

Young people will make discoveries at each of these stages. They may also wonder if they are ready to have sex or if they should have sex because their friends are having sex. At any of these stages, your child could break up with the other person for various reasons. If the relationship ends, your child may feel very bad, even if the relationship seemed short-lived from the beginning.

Things that kids might be wondering

- How do I get someone I like to notice me?
- How do I tell someone that I am attracted to them or interested in them?
- Is it normal for me to blush when I talk to someone I think is good-looking?
- How do I know whether I'm really in love?
- Can I have a boyfriend or girlfriend without wanting to have sex with this person?
- How can I break up with someone without hurting them?

* Adapted from DUQUET, Francine, Geneviève GAGNON and Mylène FAUCHER. *Oser... être soi-même*, UQAM, 2010.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT?

Talk to your child about the desire to be noticed

Explore the reasons for pleasing someone else (to get the person to notice you, to have fun, to see if you can attract looks, to feel desired, to impress your friends, to do what everyone else is doing, etc.).

Take this opportunity to talk about the importance of:

- **Being yourself** (e.g., Attracting someone means wanting to be noticed and appreciated for who you are. You don't need to change who you are to please someone else).
- **Pleasing others with your talents and strengths** (e.g., Getting people to notice you or attracting them is not based on appearance alone. You have other qualities, and don't forget that other people see them too).
- **Going at your own pace.** Children shouldn't feel obligated to have a boyfriend or girlfriend if they don't want one. (e.g., Everyone experiences things when they're ready. You don't have to feel pressure to do things like other people, even if you sometimes feel alone or different.)

Talk about your concerns

Does your child have a boyfriend or girlfriend and you're concerned about this?

Express your fears and explain why you're worried:

- I'm afraid you haven't taken the time to get to know each other. I'm afraid that you're skipping steps and that you'll get hurt. I think it's important for you to find out the other person's intentions and explain your intentions to make sure no one is disappointed. I want your first romantic experience to be a good one, etc.

Tips

Avoid downplaying children's experiences. Their experiences are important to them. Adults don't always perceive things in the same way as children.

Value their qualities. This will help children recognize their strengths.

Listen, even if you don't agree with what your child says. This will show that you think his or her experiences are important.

WHAT CAN HELP YOU?

Books for young people

ROBERT, Jocelyne. *Full sexuel: la vie amoureuse des adolescents*, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2002.

VAISMAN, Anne. *Premiers sentiments amoureux*, Éditions de La Martinière Jeunesse, 2000.

Book for parents

COPPER-ROYER, Béatrice. *Premiers émois, premières amours: quelle place pour les parents?*, Les Éditions Albin Michel, 2007.

Web site

www.sexualityandu.ca

Do you need a professional resource?

Call Info-Santé at 811 or the parent help line at 1-800-361-5085.



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