

A Teener's Guide To Dating

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Preface

This book is written for young people and the adults who care about them, as a guide to dating and the relationships between sexes.

When thousands of questions from youth were collected and analyzed as background for Facts of Life and Love for Teen-Agers, two of the most frequently asked questions were: (1) How do you get a date? and (2) What do you do with a date when you get one?

The Teener's Guide To Dating attempts to answer them both.

This book, belongs to young people. It has come from them. It is directed to them. Our task as reporter and interpreter is done if the book serves not as a set of answers, but as a stimulus to further questioning; not as a directive, but as a guide. That is the spirit in which it was written.

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1.

Dating is one of the most exciting periods of your life. Suddenly, there are new horizons before you, friendships flower, your personality blooms, and your sense of being a desirable person worthy of affection becomes real. This is a time of great exhilaration, splendor, and discovery. To live it fully is to enjoy one of life's most delightful experiences.

To miss out on dating is a shame and a waste, especially when there is still time to do something about it. Dating is an art, and like all arts it must be cultivated to give results. Approach it with honesty, enthusiasm, energy, and it begins to take form. And soon you have answers to the questions that were worrying you.

Long before you actually start dating, you dream about it. Wistfully, you see other fellows and girls out together on dates, laughing, talking, going places, having a seemingly effortless, wonderful time. Before you ever get a date, you see yourself as the gallant hero or the glamorous heroine of a romantic situation. You imagine all the right words and actions so easily, so vividly, that you can hardly wait to start dating. Yet, somewhere inside you anticipate the awkward moments when you will stand tongue-tied and clumsy before some very special person, finding that dating is anything but wonderful. And so you swing between eagerness and anxiety, impatient to try your wings at one moment, and afraid of a take-off in the next.

When you consider the nature of dating, this emotional see-sawing is quite understandable. For dating fun is different from the fun a boy has playing ball with the fellows or the joy a girl knows confiding in her closest chum. In dating you are involved with persons of the other sex. You are learning about these other special people. And in the process you are also discovering a great deal about yourself. You are on the threshold of a new kind of experience that is grown-up, romantic, and full of promise for your life ahead as a full-fledged adult.

Probably you are wondering when you can start participating in this new exciting experience. For some of you the answer will be easy. If you belong to a closely knit group that does everything together, having dates within that circle of familiar friends will come naturally and simply. But for the majority of young people the answer is not so easy.

OVERCOMING BASHFULNESS

Shyness with members of the other sex is common among young people. You are not alone in this problem. Getting over self-consciousness to the point where you can relax and be friendly with those you most admire is a challenge. The more thrilled you are with the presence of the other person, the more likely you are to be embarrassed, it seems. But with experience you gradually become more comfortable with the opposite sex. Then, as you develop poise and self-confidence, you discover and put into practice more and more of the art of dating. How to develop that poise and confidence is the question.

Since girls grow up sooner, and are ready for dates before boys of their age and grade generally are, a particular problem for a teen-age girl is how to get a bashful boy to notice her. This is why girls' clubs so often center around planning boy-girl activities. Many a shy boy has come out of himself at a well-planned party. With encouragement he finds that he can carry on a conversation and have fun in a mixed group. 2

OFF TO A GOOD START

Soon he, too, is ready for dates, usually first with the girl who was friendly and approachable while he was getting up his courage to ask her.

A fellow needs to be reasonably sure a girl wants to go out with him before he asks her. So it's a girl's responsibility to let a boy know that she is interested in him, without behaving so boldly that she scares him off.

When Girls Take the Initiative

There is a thin line between being available and being too forward. The girl who gets a reputation for being a flirt finds that many of the nicer boys and girls avoid her. Yet, when a girl acts too demure or feigns coolness or disinterest out of fear, she may chase boys away and miss out on the fun of friendship and dating. It is important to remember that boys are also scared and shy, and a smile or gesture from you can begin a friendship.

Girls frequently ask if it's all right to telephone the boys they like. Well—let's look at it from the boy's point of view. If Joan calls Bill about a specific question, or to invite him to some definite affair, he can respond without necessarily feeling that she has put him on the spot. If she calls repeatedly, or for no particular purpose except to chat aimlessly, his family may tease him and he becomes embarrassed by her "chasing."

Custom has it that a girl may speak first when meeting a boy on the street or in the hallway at school. She doesn't have to wait for the boy to nod or address her. It's simple courtesy that she recognizes him with some friendly greeting or gesture. She does this by making some pleasant sign that she recognizes the boy, and that she feels friendly toward him. She may smile or nod, or say "Hello" or "Hi, Bill!" Perhaps she'll add some casual remark.

But a girl should not interrupt a boy who is talking to someone or is with a group of fellows, or is obviously absorbed in something else. That, too, is simple courtesy. If a boy indicates his awareness of her by disengaging himself from the group, or shows her in some other way that he knows she's there, she greets him.

A girl gets a reputation for being "fast" not because she's friendly toward boys but because of the way she behaves when they are around. The "forward" girl overly

emphasizes the fact that she's a female—by the way in which she dresses, walks, talks, looks, and laughs. She goes beyond the bounds of what is considered “nice” in her attention to the boys. By her seductiveness she encourages boys to be too fresh, too loud, and too boisterous.

Is it ever all right for a girl to chase a boy? Throughout the ages women have found ways of being appealing and interesting to the men they have liked. Nowadays girls are taking more initiative than ever. The important thing is that a girl not be too obvious, or she defeats her own purpose. It's best if she waits for some sign of a boy's interest before she embarks on a campaign. And then she must make it look as though he, rather than she, is the pursuer. In Grandma's formula, it's all right for a girl to “chase a fellow until he catches her.”

BOY MEETS GIRL

How does a fellow get to meet a girl he likes? is a question many boys ask. Girls who have to use subtle approaches think a boy has no real problem in this direction. But what a boy really wants to know is how to operate so that his advances won't be rebuffed.

Traditionally, a boy asks a mutual acquaintance to introduce him to a girl he wants to meet. He takes it from there, usually with an invitation to a date that will further their acquaintance.

In modern settings it's not always easy to find a go-between. Fortunately, today it's no longer necessary. If a boy and girl attend the same school or classes, or belong to the same club, that in itself constitutes an introduction. If Janet goes to a different school, then Ted can try attending one or more of her school's functions in an effort to meet her.

The hardest moment, perhaps, comes when a couple are finally face to face. If a boy is an outgoing type of person to whom friendly pleasantries come readily, then it's easy. He'll find the right little compliment to pay a girl, the right opening remarks. But the shy, inexperienced boy—and he is legion—will find these first efforts at gallantry very trying. Such a boy ought to plan ahead of time just what he will say to a girl. Even then he may not follow through with his plan; tension may erase every rehearsed word from his mind and he may end up blurting out an abrupt invitation that startles the girl. But if she is sensitive and interested, she overlooks his clumsiness and encourages him with her acceptance, knowing that experience will take the rough edges off her new friend's manner.

Meeting a strange girl in a strange place can really give a boy stage fright. This time he had no chance to rehearse; suddenly he's expected to do and say the right things. It's no wonder that he gets tongue-tied. (Of course, later on, in long solitary post-mortems, he can think of the most brilliant, most witty conversation.) That's why it's a good idea for beginning daters to develop a few little formulas to use when words fail.

A good opener, for instance, would be: “Didn't I meet you at the Joneses?” Or a boy might make a comment that linked them to a common friend or interest. He could also ask a girl where she hails from, what brought her to this place, how she spells her name, or how long she has known the person who introduced them. Such simple little icebreakers that get conversation rolling are worth developing.

All Work and No Play

Many high school and college girls complain that the boys they know have no time for girls. And it is true that there are serious-minded boys of all ages who are so absorbed in school work, hobbies, or plans for the future that they pay little or no attention to girls. A fellow with his mind on the future, busily weighing the pros and cons of business versus the professions, considering whether college or military training should come first, seemingly cannot further complicate his life with a girl. And before he knows it he has a reputation as a “woman hater.”

There are young men so absorbed in work or study that they can talk about nothing else. Girls complain that such a man is a bore—that he never seems to notice them or their interests, that he’s unwilling to do anything to cultivate a friendship. This kind of self-absorbed boy who is essentially nice often misses out on the friendship of a suitable girl and then falls prey to an unscrupulous one who plays upon his central interest to make an insincere place for herself in his life.

Some boys and girls who appear to be devoted to an absorbing interest actually are afraid of members of the other sex, and use their interest as an excuse to avoid contact with them. A girl who doesn’t want to be too obvious in her datelessness may feign busyness or an intense interest in music or her family, for instance, to cover up for her lack of boy friends. Similarly, a boy’s interest in planes, electronics, sports, or what-have-you may, in reality, be masking his fear of being unable to win and hold a girl’s attention. Such boys and girls would do well to face up to the truth, and, with the help of a wise counselor or good friend, change their ways to catch up on some wholesome dating fun.

Some young people have intellectual, aesthetic, or spiritual interests during high school which are just enough out of step with the majority of their age and grade so that they don’t find their associates congenial until they get into college or university life. These are the fellows and girls whose abilities seem to overshadow their personalities in their early development. They “come out” as interesting persons as they find themselves, but as teens they are discouraging both to themselves and to those who care about them. The important thing to remember is that social development and maturity cannot be rushed, and that eventually most young people find their proper social niche.

Not Ready to Date?

It’s a good idea to investigate the reason why a particular individual is slow to get started dating. Is he shy and bashful? Then maybe he needs encouragement in getting social experience; maybe he or she needs to be drawn into a group activity as a starter.

Is the person an outsider because of interests and dreams that are not shared by his contemporaries? Then he needs further to develop his unique personality, confident that congenial companions will be available beyond high school or even college.

Some young people have been so hurt in the process of growing up that they may need special help to straighten out. They must be made to realize that they have within them the potentialities of becoming wholesome, happy persons. Special counselors, psychological services, and guidance facilities, can help this kind of unhappy young person; and those who are concerned with his happiness should be carefully guide him in that direction.

Too Ready to Date?

Frequently girls are ready for dates long before others of their age and grade are. These are the girls who grow up fast, and before they're out of grade school are taller or more physically mature than others in their class. They become interested in boys at a time when fellows their own age are not even aware that girls exist, in a special personal sense.

Because the early developing girl is tall for her age, it is hard for her to find a boy taller than she is and still within the range of those considered datable by her family. Parents often object to a girl's dating older boys, for they know that although she looks grown-up, she actually is too inexperienced to handle the complicated situations that might arise with an older fellow. Yet the boys of her own age are still "little guys" both literally and socially. So the early maturing girl is expected to "freeze" where she is until others of her age catch up with her.

The fact is that at junior high school age, girls are taller than the majority of boys. Lamentably, at dancing classes, group dates, or boy-girl parties, the tall girl who is big for her age is avoided by shorter fellows. So she, more ready to date than most, is more frequently delayed in the very social experiences, such as dancing lessons, that would ready her for dating when it finally does come. This problem is accentuated in our country because exaggerated emphasis is put on the importance of a boy being taller than a girl.

There are many particularly well-adjusted girls who weather this handicap quite nicely. They become natural leaders to whom other girls and boys turn. They take the initiative in social affairs and help others have a good time. By the time pairing off begins, and the fellows are beginning to shoot up in height, such early maturing girls come into their own time developed some special skills in group activities, such as running a party or playing a musical instrument, or have found themselves a place in sports or drama.

HOW TO BE POPULAR

Most teen-agers would like to be popular if they could. But many are baffled as to just what it takes to achieve popularity, or even to get a date. Knowing that is generally considered attractive to the opposite sex helps. Also understanding what boys expect of girls and what girls expect of boys in a given community is especially important.

In general young people like members of the other sex who are (1) careful of their personal appearance; (2) courteous and thoughtful; and (3) fun to be with.

A girl doesn't have to be a beauty to get a date. She just has to dress appropriately, be neat and well groomed, and then try to forget her appearance. The same goes for a boy. If he's clean and neat (hair combed, fresh shirt, nails clean) he's acceptable, and probably attractive to someone.

Courtesy is mentioned frequently by both boys and girls as a desirable quality in a date. Actually, being courteous is just being thoughtful of others; it's easy to get the habit. Sometimes a young person grows up in a family that is careless or casual about little courtesies, and he has to learn not to speak when someone else is talking, not to talk with a mouth full of food. If you keep your voice low and pleasant, say "Thank you" and

“Excuse me” at appropriate times, it makes a pleasant impression on new and old friends. Some schools have special courses in social arts where students get opportunities for practicing those graces that make getting along with others easy. Books, articles, and lectures also help to give boys and girls an idea of what kind of behavior is expected of them when they begin to have dates.

When you say “Ted is such fun to be with!” do you know why? Do you realize it takes practice to become a “fun person”? It involves some rather complicated skills—knowing how to carry on a conversation, knowing how to enter a group pleasantly, being able to accept and refuse invitations graciously, assuming responsibility for one’s part in the group activity, and generally making others glad that you’re there. Most boys and girls are awkward in group situations at first. But as they gain experience, first in simple situations with others who know and like them, they get over being self-conscious. Soon they become so poised that they feel at home in most social situations. But this takes time and experience —lots of it.

It is no accident that boys and girls who have belonged to clubs and organizations get along more easily with people than do those who have grown up somewhat isolated. Being a member of a group not only gives you experience in planning and making decisions with others, in carrying responsibility for your part in a project, but it also introduces you to a variety of human situations and human beings. You begin to learn how the next guy “ticks.”

If you want to be more acceptable to the other sex, then you ought to get into group activities with other young people of both sexes. Mingling with a mixed group will ready you for dating and develop those skills which will help you carry off a date successfully.

THE DATE FOR YOU

It’s common knowledge that certain teen-age girls swoon over movie and TV stars. There was Elvis Presley, for instance, and before him Frank Sinatra, and long before his time Rudolph Valentino. But few girls actually ever expect to date such an idol. In fact, one of the functions of the celebrity is to serve as a focus for early infatuation without ever requiring the girl to do anything about it. It’s just as common for a fellow to daydream about a movie queen—and a good safe practice, because he will never be expected to court and win her.

Occasionally, however, a young person goes overboard in a crush on some unattainable person, so that he doesn’t make progress with those who are realistically available to him. It’s not just the movie or TV personality who’s unattainable. Many a young girl swoons over the football captain, the president of the senior class, or the most popular boy in the school, with whom she hasn’t the ghost of a chance. Indeed, she wouldn’t even know what to do on such a spectacular date if she had it. Similarly, an inexperienced boy will sometimes moon over a popular teacher, or the school queen—as unattainable for him as Miss Universe.

As long as these super romantic crushes prevail, the inexperienced boy or girl will probably make little progress in getting a date with anyone; for no real and available person can rival the “dream’s” charms and popularity.

Realistically, the beginning dater starts with someone who is not much more socially active than he is. The boy who has never dated courts rejection or failure by asking out the most popular girl in the class two years ahead of him. But he may make a good start with a friendly not-too-experienced girl a year or two younger than he is. A girl who wants to begin dating should look about for some pleasant, shy, interested fellow in her own grade (or a class or so beyond) rather than wistfully pine for an older, inaccessible man about town.

PROVE IT TO YOUR PARENTS

Many a girl comes home with stars in her eyes at having been asked out by a boy, only to find her parents objecting on the grounds that she is still too young to date. And often a boy wants to take a girl out, but his mother or father insists that he give his full attention to his studies, saying, "There's plenty of time later for playing around with girls."

How can parents be convinced that you are ready for dates? This is a question that is asked by young people all over the country. Sometimes, of course, the parents are right, and their son or daughter is too immature to date. Actually it is up to you to prove that you're ready to go out by proving that you're grown-up. How do you do that? By taking real responsibility around the house; by helping with chores such as car-washing, cleaning, lawn-mowing; by showing an understanding and concern for your family's problems and budget; by doing your school job well. Maybe you'll also have to help your parents understand current dating habits in your community, so that they develop

confidence in the social situations open to teen-agers. It helps to encourage mothers and fathers to get out to parents' meetings, to attend neighborhood affairs, and to keep up to date on school and social events. This last is your job. Do you let your folks in on your activities?

WHY NOT TALK ABOUT IT?

Many adults, and some young people too, frequently ask if reading books on dating and talking about dating problems actually help. There's no question about it—the more you learn about dating, the better. The fear that such guidance will "give young people ideas beyond their years" is groundless. Actually, if they did not have the ideas, they wouldn't find such reading of interest. Getting perspective on how other people feel, finding out what is generally expected of you on a date, becoming aware of the many ways you can approach the problem of getting along with others, and coming to terms with your unique answer to life's questions about men and women—all are facilitated by good reading and good discussions of dating, love, and marriage.

Furthermore, books about dating usually point up the fact that all the haunting questions, confusions, and problems that so baffle and hurt are common to most young people. It's encouraging to know that one is not alone—that others are shy, others are clumsy. Reading from a printed page about a poignant experience that you thought was yours alone lessens your sense of loneliness and isolation, makes you feel close to others again.

Of course, there is literature designed to be sexually stimulating rather than thought-provoking. Some jokes and talk are sexy and cheap too. But it's easy to differentiate. That discussion is worth-while if it aims at "growing you up" into the kind of person you want to become. You'll usually find it with other like-minded people, under a wise

leader, in school, church group, or informal club, or even among close friends who bring out the best in each other.

Are You Ready to Date?

How is it that some people start dating at such a young age, and others are so much older before they begin to have dates? Both teen-agers and their parents often wonder what is the best age to begin dating. The question looms even more nowadays because so many young people start their dating so early in life. Should parents be concerned? Is there really a special age at which dating should begin?

WHEN TEEN-AGERS START DATING

The Purdue Opinion Panel Poll of high school students reported in 1957 that 31 per cent of the boys and 40 per cent of the girls started to date before they were fourteen years old. This means that a good many teen-agers begin to date before they get into high school. It also confirms the observation that girls, in general, tend to mature earlier and start dating earlier than boys, age for age.

But still another finding of the Purdue Poll of tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade high school students is that one out of eight teen-agers doesn't date at all! How come that some young people start having dates even before they're in high school, and others have no dating experience whatsoever during their teens? What do teen-agers themselves have to say on this subject?

THE TEENS TALK

When thousands of representative high school students were asked the question, "At what age do you think teen-agers should have their first date?" 41 per cent answered thirteen to fourteen, and 46 per cent said fifteen to sixteen. Such replies indicate that most students feel that the first date should occur in the middle or early teens. It also suggests that many teen-agers appear to date earlier than they really think they should. Why? Who is it that starts dating earliest?

The Early Bird

The Purdue University survey found that high school students living in the western part of the United States start dating at earlier ages than do southern young people (47 per cent of those in the West as compared with 34 per cent of the southerners). Even more interesting is the finding that young people from the higher socioeconomic groups start dating at younger ages than do those from either the middle-income or the lower-income groups.

WHY SOME DATE EARLIER THAN OTHERS

There are interlocking reasons why some teen-agers start having dates at earlier ages than do others. Such factors as these are all interrelated: (1) how their parents feel about early dating; (2) how ready the boy or girl is for dating; (3) how much social experience a young person has had; and (4) how many social opportunities there are open to a given age and social set.

The Folks at Home

Parents who are socially active themselves tend to encourage their sons and daughters to participate in social events from early ages. They arrange mixed parties for their children, send them to dancing classes, buy them the proper clothes for various occasions, and in every way they can, urge them into social situations. The Purdue Poll finding that dating starts earlier in higher socioeconomic groups is understandable. Young people whose parents are socially active have the opportunity to socialize freely from childhood onward. They are acquainted with the children of their parents' friends long before they reach their teens. They are involved with neighbors, church, and community activities. Their parents expect this—they urge their children into the social life of the community so that they will eventually take their place in their social circles.

Ambitious middle-class parents more often want their sons and daughters to pay attention to school work and vocational goals before they get distracted by dating. Families with a different socioeconomic background and outlook, on the other hand, expect their children to get jobs as soon as they can and help out at home even before school graduation.

So it is easy to see how such widely different dating habits exist. Some teen-agers are pressured into dates early by their families, and others are pressured by parents into postponing dates as long as possible.

At Your Own Pace

Of course, some teen-agers are ready for dates before others are. They simply mature earlier. The boy who shoots up tall and manly in his early teens is ready for dates before the "shorty" in his class. The girl who develops early so that she fills a strapless evening gown gracefully is datable at a time when her schoolmates are still looking and behaving like little girls.

The late-maturing boy or girl is just not as interested in the other sex and consequently not as interesting as a dating partner either. But the time will come when the slower-developing youngsters of both sexes catch up. Such a "late-bloomer" should be reassured that there is nothing wrong with maturing late. In fact, there are advantages. The girl who doesn't go "boy-crazy" has opportunities to develop lasting intellectual and cultural interests, to make close friends among other girls, to excel in some skill or art. Certainly the late-maturing youngster need not feel "queer." For a boy, this "breathing spell" between childhood and manhood is an opportunity to get a good start on vocational training, to develop meaningful hobbies, and even to enjoy his family more than is possible for the precocious lad who spends so much of his time and energy on dates. Even so, the late-maturing girl or boy may feel out of things for a while simply because he or she is not personally ready for dates yet.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

The young person who has belonged to social groups since he was a child slips into dating situations more easily during adolescence than does the youngster who was not socially active as a child. Why? Because he has developed social skills that the less experienced youngster has yet to learn.