CONNECTICUT Clearinghouse
A Program of Wheeler Clinic

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Connecticut DMHAS Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Healthy Dating Relationships

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

A dating relationship can be a fun and exciting part of your life. It can also be confusing, especially if dating is new to you. Once you know that the person that you like also likes you, you may be unsure of what to do next. You can start by learning about what makes a dating relationship healthy and safe.

When do teens start dating?

First, there is no best age for teens to begin dating. Every person will be ready for a dating relationship at a different time. Different families may have certain rules about dating, too. When you decide to start a new dating relationship, it should be because you care about someone and not because you feel you have to start dating. A dating relationship is a special chance to get to know someone, and share your thoughts and feelings with each other.

A healthy dating relationship should have the same qualities as a healthy friendship:

- good communication
- honesty
- respect

A dating relationship is a little different because it may include physical affection, like hugging, kissing, or holding hands. As you start to date, you may find yourself wanting to spend all of your time with this person, but it is important to spend time apart as well as together. This will allow you to have a healthy relationship with the person you are dating and with your friends and family at the same time.

Most importantly, you should NEVER feel pressured to do something that you don't want to do. The other person should always respect your right to say no to anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. It is important that you are both clear with each other about what you will and will not do. By talking about your feelings you may avoid getting pressured into making a hasty decision about something very important.

Tips for having a healthy and safe relationship:

- Get to know a person by talking on the phone or at school before you go out for the first time.
- Go out with a group of friends to a public place the first few times you spend time together.
- Plan fun activities like going to the movies, a picnic, the mall, or for a walk.
- Be clear with the other person about what you feel comfortable doing and what time your parents/guardian want you to be home.
- Tell at least one friend and your parents/guardians who you are going out with and where you are going. Be sure to also tell them how to reach you.

Communication, trust, respect, and feeling safe with another person are keys to a healthy relationship. Getting to know and feel good about yourself will help you to see the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship.

The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office on Women's Health
http://www.girlshealth.gov/relationships/dating.htm