

Teaching adolescents how to end a dating relationship

Relationships are of central importance during adolescence. As adolescents start their journey of “crushes” and “going out” with peers, they need to learn how to negotiate and how to end relationships. This time in their life is often characterized by a series of short-lived relationships and heartache. Parents can help prepare adolescents so they know when and how to end relationships and how to accept when someone ends a relationship with them. Breaking up is an important skill for adolescents to learn. Conversations with adults about relationships can provide insight and be very beneficial for adolescents.

Tips for how to end a relationship

1. The earlier the better.
 - It is easier to end a relationship early on rather than dragging it out.
2. Honesty is the best policy.
 - Teach your adolescent not to make up excuses. It only makes it worse for everyone. Often the person they are trying to break up with will have a solution for each one of their excuses if s/he doesn't want to break up and this may trap them into staying in the relationship.

For example:

- Your adolescent says: “I can't see you anymore because I just don't have time for a relationship right now.”
 - Partner says “I will see you only when you can. You don't have to be with me all the time.”
3. Encourage your adolescent to be thoughtful, considerate, and to the point.
 4. Help your adolescent understand how control techniques can be used to try to get them to stay in the relationship. Such as:
 - Guilt
 - Pity
 - Threats

Caution them not to stay in the relationship because of these tactics. If the person persists, explain to your adolescent that s/he should tell you or another safe adult for help to end it.



Teaching adolescents how to end a dating relationship (cont'd)

5. Empathize with them on how ending a relationship is always a hard thing to do. Discuss the temptation to avoid the awkwardness and difficulty of breaking up by staying in the relationship, but also discuss the negative side of staying in a relationship they do not want to be in.

Get your adolescent ready

Your adolescent may have spent a lot of time with this person, so they are probably a very important part of her/his life (perhaps one of her/his best friends). It is typical for adolescents in this situation to be scared that they will feel lonely. To help your adolescent get through this, go over the following:

- Make a plan to keep your adolescent busy.
- S/he should expect up days and down days.
- Remind your adolescent that break-ups take courage.
- S/he should be prepared to feel uncomfortable, but know that it will pass. It is important for your adolescent to remain clear, honest and compassionate.
- Encourage your adolescent to remind her/himself of all the reasons why s/he is ending the relationship.
- Caution your adolescent not to go back into the relationship just because it feels easier!

Tips to help make breaking up easier

- Don't live in the past. Have your adolescent look forward to all the exciting things s/he wants to do.
- Suggest to your adolescent that s/he confide in someone s/he trusts. Choosing someone to talk to is the best way for her/him to deal with the emotional stress of a bad relationship and break-up.
- Tell your adolescent to call friends and go out.
- Taking care of her/himself is pertinent.
- Suggest to your adolescent that s/he put away pictures and things that remind her/him of the relationship.



Teaching adolescents how to end a dating relationship (cont'd)

Remind your adolescent of the following:

- Just because s/he is breaking up with someone does not mean that s/he doesn't care about the person anymore. S/he does not need to be mean or become enemies.
- It can be as hard on the person doing the breaking up as it is on the person they are breaking up with.

Reasons why breaking up is hard to do:

- Their friends may pressure them to stay in the relationship or get mad at them for ending it.
- Their friends and family may really like the person.
- They may really like their friends and family.
- The breakup could split up their group of friends.
- They do not want one of their friends to date her/him.
- They do not want to hurt her/his feelings.
- They think it will eventually get better or think they can change the other person.
- They do not want things to change, because s/he is a major part of their life.

Breaking up is an important skill for adolescents to learn. Help them:

- Avoid blame.
- Look forward.
- Reassure her/him that second guessing her/himself or missing the person is normal, but it's not a reason to get back together.
- A relationship doesn't have to be abusive to be unhealthy or not right for her/him.
- If one person isn't happy in the relationship anymore and wants out, it needs to end.
- Romantic relationships are one of the largest sources of stress for teens.

