

Hyde County Hotline, Inc.

24-Hours Crisis Line 252-925-2500

Visit us at: HydeCounty-Hotline.org Facebook: [Hyde County Hotline](https://www.facebook.com/HydeCountyHotline)

Hyde County Hotline's Mission

The purpose of Hyde County Hotline, Inc. is to work to eliminate domestic abuse, sexual victimization, and human trafficking and provide safe shelter in Hyde County, North Carolina through the collaborative efforts of a compassionate community. We promote dignity, respect and safety at home resulting in safer communities.

Talking to Our Kids About Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships



As we are gearing up for a new school year, it is a great time to take the opportunity to speak with our children about relationships. We should not be shy about talking to them about healthy and unhealthy relationships. We should not just expect them to know how to navigate through the uncomfortable relationships. They need guidance and even practice in expressing themselves. They need to know it is safe to speak to the parents or caregivers about their relationships.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH 3-6 YEAR OLDS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS:

Eliminate Secrets

The idea of not keeping secrets should be introduced early to children. Explain that surprises are okay, but secrets are not. Kids keep things from adults when they think they will get into trouble. Let them know you are glad they told you something, even when it is something you did not want to hear.

Practice “What Ifs”

Young children have a hard time with abstract concepts. Instead of the broad “If anyone ever hurts you, tell me,” rephrase it as a “What if.”

Limit Suggestions and Questions at This Age.

Children can incorporate hints or possibilities into their beliefs about a specific situation. Asking questions repeatedly can communicate to a child that something is wrong, when nothing may have happened.

Be Relaxed

Children tend to interpret anxiety in their caretakers as an indication that something bad has happened or that they did something wrong. They may also try to read you and tell you what they think you want to hear. You do not want them to feel like this conversation is scary.

Practice Skills

Playing out scenarios can help children learn how to deal with relationships. Use puppets, toys, or examples from TV shows or movies to help your child act out scenarios and resolve conflict. Provide them with feedback on what they do well.

Pick Your Time and Place

Begin this conversation during a time of day when your child is awake and alert. You can even make it a regularly scheduled time, once a week during a drive somewhere. Your child does not need to know that you have scheduled this time to talk with them; they will appreciate being engaged by you.

Remain Calm and Neutral

If your child feels like you are expecting certain answers from them, they may shut down or only tell you what they think you want to hear. Giving them the space to talk about issues creates trust.

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Let Them Say No

Just as children have to practice saying “please” and “thank you”, they have to learn to say “no”. Let them know it is okay for them to say no in situations where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Teach them that you will not get angry with them if they tell someone no. Children are often afraid that they will get into trouble if they say no. Let them know that it is okay to come to you if someone is making them uncomfortable.

Emphasize Safety

Sometimes the world can feel overwhelming for small children. You can remind them of all the ways in which people work to keep them safe. Emphasize that there are adults who care deeply for them and that if they ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe, they can seek out those adults for support.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH 7-10 YEAR OLDS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS:

Model Behaviors

Before they ask you what to do, they look at your behavior and see if they can figure out how it is done. This applies to relationships too. Model good communication, constructive disagreements and respectful interactions in all your relationships and they will follow your example.

Keep It Going

Any conversation about relationships should be ongoing. Know that you are not going to cover all the issues in one sitting. Do not be afraid to revisit topics of conversation. Something they mentioned the last time you talked could be a great jumping off point for the next conversation, plus it shows that you listen.

Define Terms

How you define terms like dating, boyfriend, girlfriend and relationship may be very different from how they define it. Compare your definition to theirs during the conversation. Remember, no one is right or wrong; you are just making sure you are both on the same page.

Strategize

Brainstorm ways they can remove themselves from uncomfortable situations. Practice refusal skills from saying no to finding excuses to leave difficult situations. Identify trusted adults in their lives. Do not be offended if you are not at the top of their list. Remember, it is important that they feel connected to multiple safe adults.

What Do They Want

Encourage them to start thinking about what they want in their relationships. Children are often pushed to include everyone and be nice. While those traits are important, you also want them to be aware that they have choices about the people they let into their lives and how people are allowed to treat them.

Don't Be Vague

Infuse your family's values into this conversation. Do not answer a question with “because I said so.” Explain why your family feels a certain way or does certain things. Consider the messages you want them to carry out into the world.

Define Boundaries

Personal boundaries help define expectations about how people want to be treated. Remind them that everyone has the right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. Encourage them to communicate their personal boundaries by sharing with others when those boundaries have been crossed. They should also learn that everyone has different personal boundaries and that a friend's boundaries may be different from their own.

Emphasize the Good Stuff

Teach that in any healthy relationship there is respect, safety, support, individuality, equality, acceptance, honesty and trust. Healthy relationships should also be fun. Use these principles to encourage emotional awareness. Teach them how to express their feelings, both good and bad, appropriately.

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TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH 11-14 YEAR OLDS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS:

Reflect On Your Own Values Before You Talk

Checking in about your own values before you begin this conversation can help you engage with your child. Thinking about this can help you explain your reasoning and give you examples to back it up.

Talk About the Big Picture

Dating can be viewed as the ultimate romantic experience. You do not have to squash that notion, but it is important to be realistic that relationships can be imperfect. Let them know that, while all couples may disagree at times, violence is never acceptable.

Encourage Assertiveness

Help your child learn how to communicate their feelings and opinions by stating them clearly. This skill can help them express themselves in situations where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Promote Openness

The exchanging and keeping of secrets can feel like a sign of trust in an adolescent relationship. Remind them that strength does not mean dealing with everything on their own, and they can rely on the adults in their lives if they need to.

Be Willing to Listen

Let them take the lead in the conversation and if they raise ideas that you do not agree with, practice your poker face. Larger conversations can start as an offhand remark.

Don't Multitask

When they talk, give them all your attention. If you really cannot talk at that moment let them know that, you want to talk later time and schedule that time right then. Be sure to keep that time to talk, even if they forget about it.

Start the Conversation

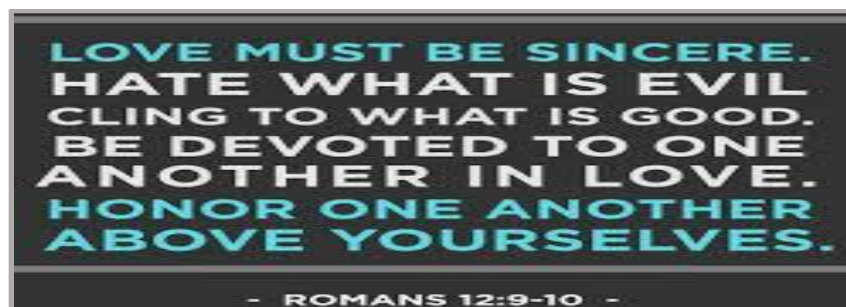
If you feel awkward bringing it up, they definitely will. Do not let that awkwardness stop you from talking. Do not have "The Talk" Instead, have many little conversations. Chatting often both reinforces your family's values and shows them that you have an interest in their world.

Where's the Digital Line?

Many young people are engaging in relationships with technology. Help your child think about what digital boundaries they want to set in relationships by modeling your own digital use and ask them questions to help them think critically about what they are comfortable with when it comes to communicating with technology. Consider establishing time when not everyone in the family is using digital devices to encourage them to take breaks from being in contact with their partner or friends.

Make Sure You Know What They Are Talking About

If you are not sure, ask. When you understand what they are asking, give an honest answer and seek solutions together. "I don't know" is an acceptable answer when it is followed by "let's find out."



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TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH 15-18 YEAR OLDS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS:

Tell Them What You Did

Although they may not seem to care about what you do, they are aware of what they see happening in your relationship. Take a quick inventory of your past and present relationships: what worked, what didn't work and what you learned. Do not be afraid to use those lessons in conversations.

Be Okay With Them Being Quiet

It is not always easy to open up about tough stuff. Give them a chance to digest what you are saying and think about their responses. If there is a lot of silence, you can say, "You were really quiet when I brought that up, why was that?"

Find An Ally

Consider finding another adult who is close to your teen to be a sounding board for them. This should be someone who shares your values and someone they would feel comfortable going to for help and advice. You can have a conversation about who this person could be. Remember, the important thing is that they have an adult to turn to for advice and guidance.

Have Patience

It is tempting to have "The Talk" and be done with it. However, good communication takes time and practice. You are creating a foundation of trust so you can be a safe person for them to turn to. Teens usually hear more than they are willing to admit, and much of what you say will be remembered and used later.

Ask Open Ended Questions

These questions encourage open discussion. Make sure you listen to them and give them a chance to speak. As hard as it may be, try not to analyze, interrupt or criticize their feelings or values.

Keep it Low Key

This does not have to be a weekly sit down about healthy relationships. Address things as they come up, whether it is hearing a song on the radio or chatting as you get a cup of coffee. Be supportive and nonjudgmental so they know they can come to you for help if their relationship becomes unhealthy in the future.

Remind Them to Have Fun

While it is important not to minimize their feelings about their relationships, it is important to remind them that dating should be fun and that respect should be the foundation of the relationship.

Present Options

You do not have to be the only person they talk to about their relationships. Remind them that there are people who are there to support them if they witness dating abuse or experience it themselves.

'No' is a Complete Sentence

Remind them that they have the right to say no to anything they are not comfortable with or ready for in their relationship. If their relationship feels uncomfortable, awkward or frightening, assure them they can come to you. Stress that they have the right to make decisions for themselves, even if they are in a relationship.

Learn more about creating healthy relationships: www.reachma.org

(Resource: PAVE (Peers Against Violence) Cards developed by REACH Beyond Domestic Violence)

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Warning Signs of Domestic Violence

It is not always easy to tell at the beginning of a relationship if it will become abusive.

In fact, many abusive partners may seem perfect in the early stages of a relationship. Possessive and controlling behaviors do not always appear overnight, but rather emerge and intensify as the relationship grows.

Domestic violence does not look the same in every relationship because every relationship is different. However, one thing most abusive relationships have in common is that the abusive partner does many different kinds of things to have more power and control over their partner.

Some of the signs of an abusive relationship include a partner who:

- Tells you that you can never do anything right
- Shows extreme jealousy of your friends and time spent away
- Keeps you or discourages you from seeing friends or family members
- Insults, demeans or shames you with put-downs
- Controls every penny spent in the household
- Takes your money or refuses to give you money for necessary expenses
- Looks at you or acts in ways that scare you
- Controls who you see, where you go, or what you do
- Prevents you from making your own decisions
- Tells you that you are a bad parent or threatens to harm or take away your children
- Prevents you from working or attending school
- Destroys your property or threatens to hurt or kill your pets
- Intimidates you with guns, knives or other weapons
- Pressures you to have sex when you don't want to or do things sexually you're not comfortable with
- Pressures you to use drugs or alcohol

(Source: The National Domestic Violence Hotline)

Experiencing even one or two of these behaviors in a relationship is a red flag that abuse may be present. Remember, each type of abuse is serious, and no one deserves to experience abuse of any kind, for any reason.

If you have concerns about what's happening in your relationship, contact us on our

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We are here to support you!

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233/1-800-787-3223 (TTY)

Anonymous and Confidential Help 24/7

www.thehotline.org

Thank you to the N.C. Council for Women, Youth Involvement-Family Violence Prevention, Services Act Program, and US DHHS for financial support.

FYSB Family & Youth
Services Bureau

**Family Violence Prevention
& Services Program**



**Council for Women &
Youth Involvement**
Department of Administration