

# Sexual Integrity



Your high schooler has only a few short years until they're out of the house—and don't you both know it! They're becoming increasingly independent, and you're shifting as a parent from authority to influence. In push and pull, just remember you still have a critical role to play when it comes to helping them grow with sexual integrity. Don't disconnect. Now more than ever you need to be available for them. Even though the conversations may be challenging, they need for you to show up.

### Your role during this phase is to...

Coach them toward healthy relationships so they will establish personal boundaries and practice mutual respect.

This guide is designed to help you meet your high schooler where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of sex. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this

end goal in mind for your teen: Sexual integrity means guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

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# Tips to Help High Schoolers Understand Sexual Integrity

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future.

## To high schoolers...

### SAY THINGS LIKE

"If you ever feel pressured to do something you don't want to do, you could always say..."  
(Help them script responses to difficult situations.)

"Don't give someone control of your life."

"What kind of friend is Peyton?" (Stay interested in their relationships and ask follow-up questions.)

"Thanks for telling me."

"How often do you still talk with your other friends?"  
(If your teen is dating, ask questions to help them think objectively about the relationship.)

"How do they make you feel about yourself?"

"What do you think about that?" (Give them a safe place to process values with you.)

"What are your favorite things about him/her?"

"Do you think he is good for her?" (Let your teen process their thoughts of other healthy/unhealthy relationships they see)

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?" (Always finish the conversation with room to pick it back up again later.)

"Even if he texts you that he's here, invite him in to say hello." (Create opportunities for boyfriends/girlfriends to connect with you.)

"Have you talked about whether you plan to stay together next year?"

## Remember

The high school years are the years to mobilize their potential, so encourage their questions and affirm their sound decision-making. Keep the lines of communication open by asking questions that help them clarify their values and boundaries. Remember, your role as a coach is to encourage and affirm their growth.

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## Enhance the Conversation

When having a conversation with your teenager, here are a few tips to consider:

**Normalize conversations** about sex and dating in your household. That's not to say you should make light of either topic, or that it's okay to tease your student about crushes or relationships with the opposite sex. Instead, create a safe place for your student to voice their concerns or questions by maintaining a consistent dialogue about sex and dating. How? Initiate conversations on these topics, while also allowing conversations to happen naturally. That means you may be caught off guard when your teenager brings up sex and dating, but even if you are surprised, react in a way that lets your teenager feel safe and encourage them to continue coming to you about these important topics.

**Remember, they are their own person.** You knew that already. You probably realized that when they hit the terrible two's. But remembering this in light of sex and dating is different. They will make mistakes and make choices you wouldn't make and will probably disappoint you. Whether they get too serious with a boyfriend or girlfriend, go too far physically, become depressed when they feel like the only one not dating, engage in pornography, or send or receive inappropriate photos—chances are, your student isn't going to handle sex and dating perfectly. When that happens, your response is key. Avoid shame and silence. Your student needs you to talk

to them, to reassure them, and most importantly, to forgive them.

**Acknowledge the awkwardness.** Sometimes, as kids get older, it becomes harder to discuss sensitive topics like sex with their parents. They're likely not going to tell you everything. Don't take it personally. Instead, invite other adults you both feel comfortable with, to join in the conversation—who will say the same kinds of things you would say.

*This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application.*

*To discover more ways to understand this phase, check out the Parenting Your... book series at [parentcuestore.org](http://parentcuestore.org).*

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