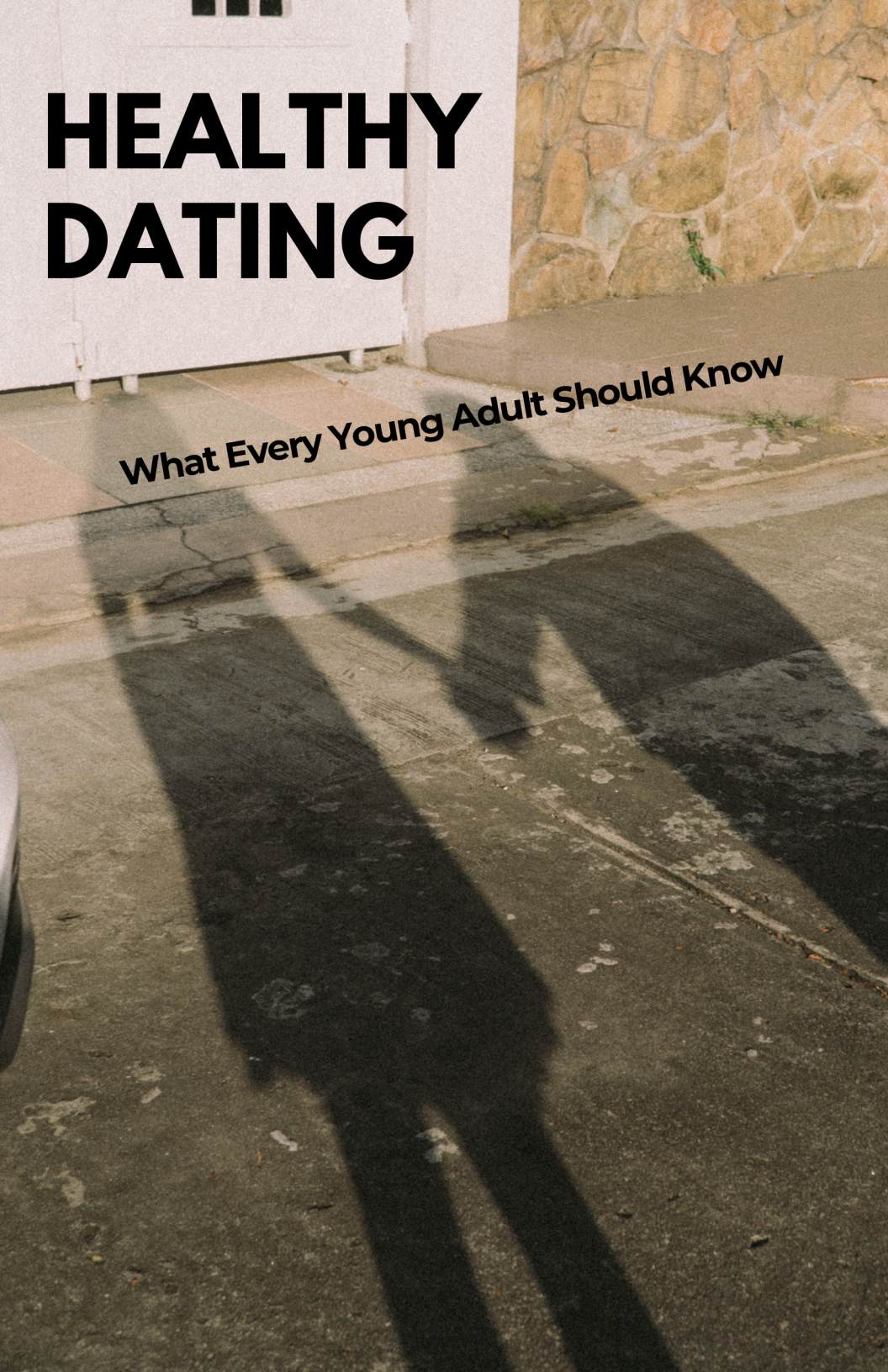


HEALTHY DATING

What Every Young Adult Should Know



DATING:

What to Look For

A healthy dating relationship is about more than simply liking someone—it's about mutual respect, trust, and growing together in a way that brings out the best in each other.

If you're in a relationship that's built on a strong foundation, you should expect to see these qualities:

- **Mutual Respect** – You value each other as individuals and honour each others boundaries.
- **Trust & Honesty** – There's openness, honesty, and no fear of being manipulated or deceived.
- **Individuality** – You don't have to change who you are to make the other person happy. In fact, you should feel more secure in who you are.
- **Healthy Communication** – You listen to understand, not just to respond. Arguments happen, but they're handled fairly and with respect.
- **Healthy Physical Boundaries** – Physical intimacy is always mutual and never pressured. No one should feel forced, manipulated, or guilted into physical intimacy (even in marriage).

Of course no relationship is perfect, however, it is important to honestly assess your relationship to see if the above qualities are exhibited overall.

RED FLAGS

Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

If you are unsure of if you are in an unhealthy relationship or not, consider the following red flags:

- **Control** – One person makes all the decisions and dictates things like what the other wears, who they spend time with, or what they do.
- **Dishonesty** – Lying, hiding things, or even stealing from the other person.
- **Disrespect** – One person belittles the other's opinions, interests, or feelings.
- **Dependence** – "I can't live without you" becomes a threat. They might manipulate you by saying they'll do something drastic if the relationship ends.
- **Physical Violence** – Using force to get their way (hitting, slapping, grabbing, shoving).
- **Sexual Violence** – Pressuring or forcing someone into sexual activity without clear, enthusiastic consent.
- **Loved ones' concerns about your partner** – it's really important to listen to your close friends and family who want the best for you. You don't have to do what they say, but you should give it some thought.

It's crucial not to overlook or make excuses for these red flags. Rather, it's important to end the relationship before it escalates into something worse.

PLAN AHEAD!

Did you know that people are more likely to stick to their values when they feel in control of their actions? This applies to all kinds of decisions—dating, drinking, curfews, and more—but let's focus on physical boundaries in relationships.

Before going on a date, take a moment to think ahead. What do you want the experience to look like? Will you hug? Kiss? At what point in the relationship do you feel comfortable with physical affection?

Going in without a plan can lead to decisions you didn't intend to make. For example, Jake and Jill go out on Friday night. When they get to their destination, Jake leans over and kisses Jill. It feels good, so they kiss for a few minutes before heading inside. After dinner they want to feel that same rush again, so they cuddle up in the car. Later, when they reach her street, they kiss again—longer this time. Without realizing it, they've set a precedent for their dates, where things will likely escalate.

Now imagine they set boundaries ahead of time. Maybe they agree that their goal is to really get to know each other first, so they decide on a short hug at the end of the night and nothing more. Or they might choose to wait three months before sharing their first kiss.


Making decisions before the moment takes the pressure off and helps you stay true to your values.

A photograph of a stone wall on the left and a white door on the right, with a small black handle visible on the door.

DATING SAFELY

Personal safety in dating is important! Below are some practical tips to help you stay safe as you date.

- **Don't** go out with a person if you don't know them very well.
- **Don't** go on a blind date alone. Insist on a double date with a friend.
- **Don't** go to quiet or secluded spots with your date.
- **Don't** leave your drink unattended at a party. Drugs can be slipped in a drink.
- **Don't** go to your date's home alone with them.
- **Don't** let your date violate any portion of your boundaries. If they do - LEAVE.
- **Don't** get in a car with someone if you don't feel safe with them.
- **Don't** think you owe your date any physical or sexual favours.

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- A dark, textured surface, possibly a floor or a wall, with some light-colored lines or patterns.
- **Do** keep a cell phone with you at all times.
 - **Do** keep an emergency stash of money for an Uber if needed.
 - **Do** make sure someone knows where you are at all times.
 - **Do** learn some self-defense moves.
 - **Do** get to know your date in a group setting first.
 - **Do** suggest going somewhere public.
 - **Do** develop high standards and set boundaries. Inform your date.
 - **Do** trust your instincts. If you sense something off - LEAVE.
 - **Do** report any abuse to the police.

SNAPCHAT

Snapchat has had a huge impact on dating, changing how people flirt, communicate, and even break-up. Though sending snaps can be a low-pressure way to start conversations and keep things light, there are some negatives to consider, including the following:

- **It Encourages Non-Committal Relationships** – Snapping can feel like “talking” without actually moving toward real dating. People can keep multiple “situationships” going without real effort.
- **Response-Time Stress** – Some people obsess over the time it takes for someone to read and respond to a snap, creating insecurity.
- **Inappropriate Photos** – People feel safe sending inappropriate photos, and requesting inappropriate photos be sent to them, because they disappear. However, photos can still be saved or screenshot.
- **Ghosting is Even Easier** – Someone can stop replying, remove you, or block you without explanation—instant disappearance.
- **Over-Reliance on Digital Communication** – Some people get so comfortable snapping that they struggle with real-life, face-to-face connection.

So while Snapchat can be a tool to meet and see if you are interested in someone, it cannot replace real-life interactions. A real relationship includes spending time together in person.

SEX

A HEALTHY PERSPECTIVE

Sex is a big deal and it's important to treat it as such. Too often our culture minimizes sex and treats it as a casual physical activity. But sex is much more than that. It creates a deep connection to your partner.

Sex is not something that should be rushed into or that either partner should be pressured into. It should be mutual and exclusive, fostering trust and security.

Though sex feels good in the moment, there are many things to consider if you are having sex outside of marriage or a long-term committed relationship.

- **Pregnancy** - Pregnancy is a natural result of sex. Don't have sex with someone you are not prepared to co-parent with. (And if you think abortion is a quick solution to an unplanned pregnancy, think again. Abortion is a very scary and traumatic experience for most women.)
- **STDs** - Sexually transmitted diseases are extremely common and impact physical, mental, and sexual health, including fertility.
- **Mental Health** - Research shows that teens and young adults that have sex are more likely to struggle with:
 - Higher anxiety and depression
 - Lower self-esteem and emotional distress
 - Increased relationship conflict and instability
 - Confusion about sexual identity
 - Unhealthy relationship patterns in adulthood

Sex isn't just about satisfying a physical need—it's meant to be deeply personal, emotional, and spiritual. When we see sex as just a physical act for a physical need, we objectify our partners.

Saving sex for a healthy, long-term, committed relationship will keep sex a positive and safe experience for you emotionally, physically, and mentally.

CONSENT

Consent isn't just about sex—it applies to kissing, touching, and even something as simple as leaving with someone.

Consent is an agreement between people that is freely given, informed, and enthusiastic. It means that all parties involved agree to something without pressure, manipulation, or fear. Consent is not just about physical boundaries—it applies to emotional and digital interactions too.

Here are some key things to remember about consent:

- **It must be clear and voluntary** – Saying “yes” under pressure is not real consent.
- **It can be withdrawn at any time** – If someone changes their mind, their decision must be respected.
- **It is specific** – Agreeing to one thing does not mean agreeing to everything.
- **It requires full awareness** – Someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, asleep, or unconscious cannot give consent.

Respecting consent is a key part of healthy relationships, ensuring that everyone feels safe, valued, and in control of their own choices.

PORNOGRAPHY

Although pornography has been normalized in our culture, it is incredibly harmful. While some argue it offers relaxation or sexual education, research acknowledges that the negative effects far outweigh any perceived benefits.

1. Distorted Views of Sexuality

- Pornography creates unrealistic expectations about sex, bodies, and relationships, leading to dissatisfaction with real-life intimacy.

2. It Promotes and Normalizes Violence Against Women

- It often portrays coerced sex and violent sexual acts done to women & girls. (In fact, many women & all minors are coerced into the porn industry.)

3. Reduced Relationship Satisfaction

- Regular pornography use creates emotional distance between partners, decreasing intimacy and connection.

4. Negative Impact on Sexual Function

- Pornography use has been linked to physical performance issues in men including erectile dysfunction and delayed ejaculation.

5. Mental Health Struggles

- Porn use is linked to increased anxiety & depression and feelings of shame & guilt.

6. Impaired Social and Emotional Skills

- When virtual sexual experiences replace real-life relationships, individuals may withdraw from meaningful social connections.

Porn isn't just a "personal choice." It affects mental health, relationships, and society in ways we often don't realize. If you are struggling with a porn addiction, it is important to get help.

RETHINKING MODESTY

For a long time, modesty has mostly been about girls/women covering up so boys/men are not sexually tempted. There are multiple problems with this perspective of modesty, including:

- Making women responsible for men's sexual thoughts & actions.
- Treating men as if they have no self-control over their thoughts & actions when it comes to sexuality.
- Blaming and shaming women who are harassed or assaulted because they were dressed "immodestly," shifting blame away from the perpetrator.
- An obsession with sexuality. Ironically, an extreme focus on modesty can lead to an unhealthy obsession with sexuality, making normal aspects of the human body seem inappropriate or forbidden.

The truth is, everyone is responsible for their own thoughts and actions, and we should not blame others for what is going on in our own heads. Feeling attraction or discomfort towards someone is not an invitation for judgment, control, or entitlement.

Rather, we should focus on self-control, integrity, and seeing people as whole individuals rather than reducing them to what they wear.



FINAL THOUGHTS

As you move forward in your relationship journey, remember that the foundation of any healthy relationship is mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Don't ignore red flags and plan ahead to stay true to your values.

If you are struggling with unhealthy sexuality or pornography, seek help. The decisions you make in these areas negatively impact you and those around you, particularly current and future relationships.

If you have regrets from the past, it is never too late to start fresh and make good decisions going forward.

And finally, never settle for less than a partner who values, supports, and treats you with the care you deserve.



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