

# Should They Call it Puppy Love?

## How to Have a Reasonable Relationship in the Teen Years

*By Beth Rogers-Doll, PhD.*

Relationships in the teen years are simultaneously thrilling and devastating. Why is that? Here are some reasons and some things to remember:

### **1. The Big Buildup**

All your life, you have seen movies and shows which have told you that falling in love is the most important step in your life. Even though there are tons of things more important, TV puts the spotlight on anything romantic and sexual. Anytime a step in life seems like a big deal, you are gonna be more nervous about making a wrong move or ruining it. Your first date may put you in a panic state, because of all the buildup about romance. Try to relax and enjoy it. You will later laugh to recall how scared you were when talking with “a crush”.

### **2. Teens Fall in Love with the Idea of Love**

Some of you know exactly what this means. Ever wanted something so much that you forced it to happen? Many times, a 16 yr old wants a relationship so much that he/she will go with someone who is clearly not compatible or right. Different values, different dreams, different habits. Sometimes the person is not even nice to you. Why would you go with someone so wrong for you even if the idea of love sounds sweet? Going out with an incompatible person is a recipe for heartbreak.

### **3. Love in OmniMax**

Teenage love tends to be a little exaggerated. It is normal to feel attraction very intensely in the first few years you start having feelings for others. You may feel intense joy when someone you barely know speaks with you. Ratchet down your emotions by continually reminding yourself that you are in the beginning stages of love, a dress rehearsal for your life in the 20's. Technically speaking, you should not be trying to meet the “love of your life”. Studies show that women who marry before the age of 21 are more likely to divorce than women who wait until they are older. This finding does not hold up for men. To whom we are attracted at 16 differs greatly by age 25. Dating is perfect practice for being with different types of people.

### **4. Can Teenagers Really Be in Love?**

The intense joy of being with someone is NOT LOVE. So, that squooshy feeling you get when a new crush speaks with you is not the real thing. The body's hormones are ramping up that feeling of attraction, but that feeling is not love. Fortunately, you are probably not interested in being with your boyfriend or girlfriend the rest of your life, having children together, paying bills and cleaning toilets together, are you? Infatuation usually wears off within a few months. The 3-month mark is the time when teen couples often break up, as they should.

Older teens who are 17 and 18 and in a serious relationship—more than a year—can feel love for one another. It is not typically the kind of love that can support a marriage, but it is the kind of love that can be unselfish and understanding. You may love each other, but have the instincts to know that it is *not* going to wind up in marriage.

## **5. When Should I Start Dating?**

Even though girls and guys begin to pair up a bit more in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, that doesn't mean you're ready to date. At age 12 and 13, you should probably feel completely overwhelmed and clueless about dating. That is because you're not supposed to know much! Girls and guys at this age do not date, but may go around in a pack together. Meeting at someone's house with a large group is a safe way to begin to think about dating issues without jumping in too soon.

Kids have more fun and end up less heartbroken when they wait until 15 to start to date. This may sound kind of old to you, but your emotional mind is more mature and better able to interact at this age. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk to your crush on the phone or internet ( be safe with the internet and don't give your number or address to people you do not know in person).

## **6. What is a Reasonable Dating Relationship for People 15-18 years of age?**

- date each weekend (not every day)
- depending on your parents' rules, you may do homework together during the week or attend each others' sports games
- talk on the internet at reasonable hours (that doesn't mean midnight)
- talk on the phone when you can, but don't let it interfere with important things
- even though you are serious about one another, you still reserve time away with just your friends
- always seek balance in all your activities and don't give up your sports, your parents, your music and hobbies. If people give you hints that you are obsessed with your girlfriend, you listen carefully and try to adjust things
- don't put all your hopes and fears into the relationship, because you know this is just practice for later life

## **7. Breaking Up for Beginners**

If someone you cared about broke up with you, chances are you were pretty destroyed for a few days, especially if you didn't see it coming. Here are some pointers to help you avoid bitterness and melancholy.

- don't hate the other person when they let you know their feelings have changed. (By the way, most teens are not very practiced at breaking up respectfully)
- don't expect that their attachment to you should be indefinite or that it absolutely has to be as strong and as durable as your attachment to them
- practice telling yourself that if they do not adore you, it is better to be rid of the relationship so that you can find someone who deserves you
- realize that your ego is guiding some of the hurt you feel. No one likes to be rejected. That is mostly what a breakup is.
- treat your former love with kindness and let go with grace and acceptance

