

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Valentine's Day

Love is a Many-Splendored (or Stressful or Depressing) Thing!

It's that time of year again. Starry-eyed boys and girls are anticipating getting valentines from their special someones. Or maybe they're dreading the reminder that they're not in a relationship. Or maybe they're just trying to ignore Valentine's Day completely.

But the holiday can be hard to ignore. The average person in the U.S. [is projected to spend around \\$143 this Valentine's Day](#), with Americans spending \$19.6 billion dollars total on the holiday this year.

People sometimes call Valentine's Day a ["Hallmark holiday."](#) It can seem like the day's primary purpose is to rack up sales for greeting card companies, florists, candy makers, and restaurants. Interestingly enough, in 2018 Valentine's Day falls on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The two "holy days" couldn't be more different.

Lent is a penitent season of sacrifice and self-denial in order for long-term spiritual growth to occur. Valentine's Day can feel self-serving, especially when our culture links love with emotional and sexual gratification. Regardless, it's a funny coincidence that can open the door to some interesting conversations with your teens as you help them discover the differences between the secular calendar and the Christian calendar. (Check out our ["Parent's Guide to Lent"](#) for more on this!)

How Valentine's Day impacts our kids will depend a lot on their personalities, their school's culture, and our families' attitudes toward the holiday. It's helpful for us to be aware of how the holiday affects our children. Whether or not we use Valentine's Day as a chance to educate our kids about love and relationships, it's an excellent opportunity to remind them how much we love them.

———— How did Valentine's Day get started?

[The holiday has a murky history](#) with roots in the rather shocking Roman festival of Lupercalia. This pagan celebration was Christianized by Pope Gelasius in the 5th century, when he named February 14th "St. Valentine's Day." There are three different men named Valentine whom Pope Gelasius might've been honoring, all of whom were martyred and all of whom had possible connections with romance. One saint supposedly performed secret marriages in the 3rd century when marriage was outlawed by Emperor Claudius II. Another allegedly sent the first "valentine" from prison to his beloved.

The idea of Valentine's Day being a day for sending greetings to loved ones lasted through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The first valentines were sold in bulk in America in the middle of the 19th century. Now, Valentine's Day is supposed to be the most romantic day of the year, a time for grand gestures between lovers.

However, because there is so much pressure on Valentine's Day to be a romantic time, it's easy for it to be more full of stress or sadness than romance. Depending on their situations, there are a number of ways our teens might react during the holiday. We'll explore a few of the responses teens might have and then look at ways we can use Valentine's Day to encourage them.

Conversation Starters

- How do you feel about Valentine's Day? Do you enjoy it, hate it, feel annoyed by it, or just

not care that much about it?

- How do your friends feel about Valentine's Day? Do you think their attitudes toward it affect you, and vice versa?

—— What do I do if my teen is single and indifferent?

There are plenty of teens out there who, for one reason or another, simply don't care about or pay attention to Valentine's Day. It's just not that big of a deal to them. There's nothing wrong with this mentality—in fact, it can be very good. Teens who aren't focused on Valentine's Day won't be worried about being single and won't be distracted by trying to find a boyfriend or girlfriend. Keep reading for suggestions on how to help them make the day a time to celebrate friendship and family.

Conversation Starters

- Why do you not care about Valentine's Day? Would you care more if you were interested in someone?
- Do you think there's any value in celebrating Valentine's Day, even if you are single?

—— What do I do if my teen is single and wanting a relationship?

If there are some teens who don't care about Valentine's Day, there are probably exponentially more who do, or at least feel like a failure for not having a significant other. Even if they don't have that extreme of a reaction, the holiday could make them feel more self-conscious about being single—hence why people joke about the more accurate name for the holiday being [“Singles Awareness Day.”](#)

A survey done by the social media platform [We Heart It](#) found that a majority of teenage girls think that Valentine's Day is [either pointless or painful](#). Social media has a strong impact on how modern teens feel about Valentine's Day, and the survey found that impact to be mostly negative. 79% of respondents said that social media is at least “somewhat important” to Valentine's Day, but 65% said that social media also makes them feel “jealous or stressed out.”

We often only post the good aspects of our lives on social media and then feel bad about ourselves when other people's lives seem perfect. When teens see their friends' adorable posts on Valentine's Day, they can easily feel bad that they are not with anyone. It can also be hard on teens when they [see their classmates getting valentines](#) during the school day, but aren't receiving any themselves.

Single girls (who tend to focus on romance more than guys do) in particular can feel depressed on Valentine's Day. And even if they don't feel a deep loneliness, it wouldn't be unusual for them to harbor a wish that, at least once, they would get an unexpected valentine from someone.

It is possible for a guy to also experience Valentine's Day as a painful reminder that he isn't in a relationship or that the girl he likes doesn't like him back. But more likely, if they register it at all, they simply feel their singleness more than usual or see Valentine's Day as an annoyance. It can be very confusing to know how to react to the holiday. Do they try to

find a girlfriend? Do they make fun of people who are in relationships? Do they go off and do something cool with their friends?

Conversation Starters

- Why do you find Valentine's Day annoying, frustrating, or depressing?
- Do you have friends who struggle on Valentine's Day? If so, why?
- Do you think it's normal for single people to have a hard time on Valentine's Day?
- What are indications that someone is too obsessed with getting romantic attention?
- How does social media affect you on and around Valentine's Day? Is there anything you can change about your social media habits to help with this?
- How can you encourage others through social media on Valentine's Day?
- How does your school handle Valentine's Day? Do they try to make it fun for everyone, or does the day end up seeming like a popularity contest?

— What do I do if my teen just went through a breakup?

Depending on how bad the breakup was, experiencing Valentine's Day right after one can be excruciating. Bear in mind that adolescence is full of more extreme emotional highs and lows than other phases of life. If your teen has just broken up with someone right before Valentine's Day, be particularly sensitive to how the holiday might affect him or her.

Also, we need to be empathetic if a child asks someone to be their valentine and gets rejected. Although being rejected as a valentine likely just means the other person isn't interested, *some teens can take it as a rejection of who they are as a person*. We need to be available to love on and encourage them, while also pointing them to the truth that others' rejection, though painful, is not a value judgment.

Conversation Starters

- What do you think will be the hardest part of Valentine's Day for you this year?
- How can I be there for you on Valentine's Day and help to make the day less painful for you?
- How can I encourage you through your breakup even when it's not Valentine's Day?

— What do I do if my teen is single and cynical?

There are teens who react to the lovey-dovey sentimentality that Valentine's Day often promotes by having an all-out protest against it. So they celebrate "[Anti-Valentine's Day](#)."

[Anti-Valentine's Day activities](#) might include making black roses, eating "anti-kissing" (i.e. bad breath) food, and dressing in dark clothing. While it's understandable that teens might want to react sarcastically, let's try to encourage them not to respond to the holiday with cynicism. Yes, Valentine's Day can be cheesy and annoying, but romantic love is still a very good part of life!

Conversation Starters

- Do you think that having an Anti-Valentine's Day party is a good idea? Why or why not?
- Why do you think people want to have Anti-Valentine's Day celebrations?
- What are more constructive ways of reacting to Valentine's Day than by attacking it?

— What do I do if my teen is in a relationship?

Teens who are in relationships will use Valentine's Day as a special occasion to show their love and respect for their significant others. But it's easy for a couple (especially the girl) to have high expectations for the holiday. The guy in the relationship might feel, either because of culture or because of his girlfriend, that he needs to do something extremely romantic or confess his love to her.

But the guy, the girl, or both might not be at the point where they're ready to express such strong feelings for each other. Conforming to perceived expectations, instead of being honest, is dangerous and will only lead to pain and confusion.

Also, there could be a tendency for guys to use Valentine's Day as an "easy way out" to make up for how they've failed in or neglected the relationship up to that point.

Most importantly, the holiday's pressures can escalate as far as one or both people thinking it's a good time to take the physical relationship one or many steps further. In fact, it's not uncommon for a teen boy to go all out for his girlfriend on Valentine's Day—chocolate, flowers, nice dinner, a cute poem, a piece of jewelry, the works—simply because he hopes it will make her feel more inclined to go further physically. Sure, not every teen in a relationship feels this pressure nor will every teen who feels the pressure give in to it, but it's worth being aware of and talking with both boys and girls about. Girls especially need to know that love isn't a transaction, that no matter how lavishly their boyfriends treat them it doesn't mean they are required to respond physically. That isn't love; it's manipulation. Help your daughter resist the cultural norm to link romantic love with sexual expression and how to say no to a guy's demands if they're not in line with God's beautiful plan for their lives.

Conversation Starters

- Do you feel like Valentine's Day puts a lot of pressure on your relationship? How so?
- Do you know how your boyfriend/girlfriend feels about Valentine's Day (i.e., what his or her expectations are)?
- How can you show your boyfriend/girlfriend that you appreciate him/her without doing anything you feel uncomfortable doing?
- Are you making it a habit to treat your significant other with love and respect all year long, not just on Valentine's Day?
- Do you feel that you and your significant other can be honest with each other? Do you talk about what boundaries are appropriate?
- Do you feel pressure to do more physically? Why or why not? If so, what do you think that says about the relationship?

— How can I be proactive in helping my girls on Valentine's Day?

Some teens use Valentine's Day to celebrate one another, whether they're single or dating. The TV show *Parks and Rec* has popularized the idea of "[Galentine's Day](#)," which is basically a time for girls to celebrate each other by having delicious food and exchanging chocolate or gifts, but it really could be whatever they want it to be. Whether or not they have a party, girls in particular tend to value affectionate gestures. This can also really help combat the tendency to view other girls solely as competition to be defeated.

It's actually become so common for friends to celebrate each other on Valentine's Day that [some are suggesting](#) it's important for companies to use the holiday to market to single people, as well as to couples.

Conversation Starters

- Do you have any friends you know will feel sad because they're not in a relationship on Valentine's Day? If so, how can you make them feel special, loved, and valued instead?
- Even if your friends aren't single or won't be bothered by being single on Valentine's Day, do you think they'd appreciate it if you used the day to make them feel special?
- What are ways you can be proactive and make Valentine's Day a fun time with your friends?

— Where does sex fit in?

Thanks to our over-sexualized culture, sex is strongly connected to the Day of Romance. It's no coincidence that each film in the sex-focused Fifty Shades series was released [within 5 days of the holiday](#) in different years. Teens are not immune to this pressure and influence, regardless of what kind of school they attend.

Not every teen in a romantic relationship will decide to be sexually active, but every teen living in the 21st century will feel the pressure to be. And Valentine's Day only serves to amplify this pressure, especially when their hormones are raging and they're very attracted to someone. Beyond that, many teen girls want desperately to be accepted, loved, and popular, to the point that they will give into boys' demands in the hopes of finding it. Some teen boys know this about girls (often referring to someone who seems desperate and willing to do anything as "[thirsty](#)" <—*language!*) and will take advantage of their vulnerability.

One key difference in whether teens decide to be sexually active or not is how we parents disciple them regarding sex and love. Simply telling them not to isn't enough. Because culture is continuously disciplining them that sex is the answer to many of their questions and desires, we need to consistently combat that with the truth that God's design for sex is the only way to find true fulfillment. In addition, we need to help our daughters by addressing the root cause (why are they so desperate for love and affection?), and we need to teach our sons to protect those who are vulnerable, not exploit them. Finally, if our teens do cross sexual boundaries set up by God, we need to give them a safe place to confess, repent, and start over again.

Conversation Starters

- Have you ever felt pressure to be sexually active? How did it make you feel?
- Have you ever had the desire to be sexually active? Was it hard to not give in to it? Why/why not?
- Why do you think God tells us to wait until marriage to have sex?
- If you did decide to be sexually active, how do you think it would affect you, both now and down the road?
- What does it mean to truly love someone?

— What are some other things I can do?

Besides discussing Valentine's Day with your teens, here are some other suggestions to keep in mind as you help them navigate the holiday.

Don't Make It Big Deal

We probably don't need to mention this, but we don't want to increase whatever pressure is already on our children when it comes to Valentine's Day. Hinting—even in a joking way—that we expect them to get romantic attention will probably just make them feel stressed or bad about themselves. Help them deal with the holiday by not making a big deal out of it in a negative way.

Help Them Have a Healthy View of Relationships All Year Round

Our culture holds romance up as the ideal type of love. Love songs dominate pop culture. It's rare to see a movie (such as *Master and Commander*) that celebrates other types of relationships without including romance at all.

Your kids might or might not be susceptible to idolizing romantic love, so it will be up to you to know where they are and disciple them accordingly. Don't downplay romance—it's a beautiful gift from God that we should celebrate! But the first and greatest commandment in the Bible is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbors. So how can we encourage our kids (whether they're in relationships or not) to love God and their neighbors well?

If your kids are dating, hopefully you're mentoring them through that process and teaching them how to approach relationships with wisdom. If they are following good relationship principles the rest of the year, it's much more likely they'll know how to approach Valentine's Day well.

Whether or not you allow your kids to date, we recommend encouraging them to focus on friendships with the same sex and teach them how to have healthy friendships with the opposite sex.

Ok, Do Make It a Big Deal

One mom hosts an annual Anti-Valentine's Day party and uses the time to [discuss what healthy relationships look like](#), including how to have wisdom and good etiquette on social media. While you might not want to come out as “anti” Valentine's Day, you could use the holiday as way to do something similar.

Surprise—Love Is the Most Important Thing!

But probably the best way we can encourage our teens on Valentine's Day is by showing how much we love them. Even if they are secretly wishing they'd get a valentine from someone they like, they will appreciate receiving gifts, candy, or affectionate notes from us.

We have a friend who says that, in college, he would send his mom and sister letters and their favorite kinds of chocolate every Valentine's Day. This is something that dads can encourage their sons to do, even from a very young age.

We have another friend who says that Valentine's Day is her favorite holiday of the year, but not because of the romantic aspect of it. When she was growing up, her family used the day as a time to extravagantly celebrate and love one another. Everyone in the family, including her cousins, would send one another valentines. They would have a huge breakfast with elaborate decorations and give each other tons of chocolate. They emphasized how much people in the family were loved, whether they were in relationships or not.

It's also a great opportunity to encourage our teens [to love those around them](#). A new family tradition could be to focus on those in our communities who *truly* need love on Valentine's Day. Take some time to write encouraging notes and take them to prisoners, recovering addicts, the elderly, the disabled, or homeless people. Give gifts (not necessarily chocolate and flowers, but maybe meals and hugs) to those who need them. We don't have to fully take the focus off our teens' romantics interests, but we can make sure to draw them into the bigger picture of God's

desire for us to show His love to a broken, hurting world.

Conversation Starters

- Do you know what specifically makes each member of your family feel loved? Even if you think you do, ask them!
- Guys, how can you love your mom and sisters well on Valentine's Day? Do you have any guy friends who will be cynical or bummed out on that day? If so, how can you encourage them?
- Girls, how can you love your dad and your brothers on Valentine's Day? How can you honor them and receive their love well? How can you help your girlfriends feel special on Valentine's Day?
- Have you noticed someone recently who could really use love and encouragement? How can we do that for them together?
- Because we have already received so much love from God, how can we focus on giving it to others, instead of on what we don't have?

— Takeaway

We don't have to make Valentine's Day an extravagant family holiday, but we also don't have to follow our culture's commercialism and stress. Valentine's Day might not be that big of a deal to our teens, but chances are it's affecting them on some level. Whether or not we use it as a "teaching moment," the holiday is a chance for us to help our kids remember that they are loved very much simply by jumping into their world and caring about the things that matter to them.

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