

## Friendships to Dating with Heather Flies 1/22/07

With humor and bubbling energy, Heather Flies engaged us with her view of how teens today view dating and sex. She shared her experiences as a youth minister who hears things teens don't tell their parents and her experiences from her own teenage years. Asking us first to remember what it felt like when we were teens, Heather set out twelve points to build a bridge to our teens to guide them through their changing world of friendship and dating.

1. Recognize what a teen sees as the world's view of sex: everyone's doing it, there are no consequences, and that it is only physical, not mental or emotional.
2. Acknowledge some truths about sex: it's not dirty, bad or icky—it's an amazing thing which has profound mental, emotional and physical consequences. Sex does not confer power, assets or social status. Not everyone is doing it.
3. Parents still have influence over teens. In fact, kids desperately want parents to set boundaries.
4. Volatility in teens is supposed to happen. Teens have to grow from dependence to independence and have to separate from their parents. This happens at different rates for different children.
5. Take a look back at your own experiences with dating. What were your parents' ideals? Did you have opposite gender friendships? Your past affects how you communicate about and react to dating.
6. Encourage opposite gender friendships (not dating). Having friends of the opposite sex takes a lot of the tension out of dating.
7. When is it time to date? As late as possible. Each relationship packs an emotional bag, and each one affects the next. Rather than setting a specific age or time when dating can start, set tangible goals for the child to meet before he or she can date: Does your child make good choices in friendships? Is he or she responsible in academics? Curfews? Vehicles? Is the child open to your insight? What is your child's perspective on the opposite sex? Using goals like that gives a parent the flexibility to say yes or no to dating based on the personality of the child, not on a magical age or time.
8. Be authentic with your teen. If you share your own experiences, the teen will feel you understand him or her.
9. Communicate again and again about sex. A child changes at least every six months, and can hear different things at different times. A good place to start is with factual, biological information. Don't freak out in front of them, even if they

tell you something really upsetting. Let your child know you are open to talking about anything.

10. Help protect teens from themselves. Their brains are still developing.
11. Understand and model grace. We all screw up. Don't stop loving them if they screw up. However, it is okay to show disappointment and to have them earn back your trust.
12. Abstinence works best when you set out a plan for it before you end up in a tempting situation.

Heather then concluded by answering questions from the audience, which can be summarized by saying she encourages parents to continue to be engaged in their teenager's lives by setting boundaries and communicating with love and understanding.