

## ***Kids: Valentine's Day, Friendships, and Dating***

"What the world really needs is more love and less paperwork."—Pearl Bailey, American singer

Valentine's Day. It's a day kids either love or hate. Those who love it enjoy all the care, attention, and connection with others. Those who dislike it can feel left out and lonely. Older teenagers who are dating often find the holiday romantic, which can get parents worried about *how* romantic it is for them. Make Valentine's Day a memorable day with these ideas.

### ***Try it...***

#### ***For all parents***

- Write a short note that describes what you admire in your child. Give the note to your child on Valentine's Day. If your child is too young to read, include a photograph of the two of you, or draw a picture.
- Talk about your favorite and least favorite Valentine's Day experiences, and explain what made them so. It helps kids to know that adults have different feelings about the holiday, depending on what's happening in their lives.
- Instead of emphasizing the romantic, sexy qualities of the holiday (which marketers do), focus on deepening relationships and showing people you care. Instead of giving candy, give the inexpensive mini-poster [150 Ways to Show Kids You Care](#).

#### ***For parents with children ages birth to 5***

- Young children love holidays. Make a big deal out of Valentine's Day. Consider making red and white cupcakes (or heart-shaped cookies). Or purchase a box of inexpensive children's valentines and write your child's name on the envelope of every valentine in the box. Then hide the valentines and have your child find them in a scavenger hunt around your house.
- Consider serving a heart-shaped food, such as a heart-shaped pancake for breakfast, raw carrots that make an outline of a heart for lunch, or a pizza from scratch for dinner—arrange the toppings in the shape of a heart.
- Young children love stickers. Find heart-shaped and other valentine-themed stickers and have them create a valentine sticker book from a small sketchbook.

#### ***For parents with children ages 6 - 9***

- Schools often send home a list of classmates for Valentine's Day. Help your child choose a type of valentine he likes and then help him address a valentine for every child in the class, no matter how much he likes or knows each child. Make sure to

give a card to the teacher.

- Some children enjoy including an item with a valentine's card to give to classmates. Ask what your child would like to give, but set a budget so that your child doesn't go overboard with spending.
- Toss any valentines that your child receives that are mean. Your child does not need to look at these over and over and feel bad. Say that it hurts you that people can be mean, but focus more on the kind valentines rather than the hurtful ones.
- If you're creative, encourage your child to make homemade valentines. This can become a big project (especially if you're trying to make one for everyone in the class), so start early. Or make homemade valentine cards only for family members.

### ***For parents with children ages 10 - 15***

- Monitor your child's feelings about giving valentines. Some stop giving them at a certain age, and honor that. However, if your child wants to give valentines to only close friends and not to everyone in the class, suggest that your child mail valentines to friends so other students don't feel left out. Talk about how other people feel when they see some kids receiving valentines and others not getting any.
- Gauge your child's feelings about Valentine's Day. If your child enjoys it, go all out and make a big deal of it. If your child finds it a painful holiday, figure out how to connect with your child in meaningful ways that don't go overboard, such as making their favorite cookies.
- Talk about how Valentine's Day is about love—not sex. Some young kids get the message from the media that the way you show love is by having sex. Discuss why it's important to wait to have sex and how you can show someone you care in other ways, such as holding hands or just being together. For ideas on how to talk to your child about sex, read the excerpted from [\*Third Base Ain't What It Used To Be: What Your Kids Are Learning About Sex and How To Help Them Grow Into Sexually Healthy Adults.\*](#)
- Kids at this age like to make fun of holidays and mushy feelings. As long as their humor is funny and appropriate, let them do so. But make sure their humor doesn't cross the line into being gross, mean, or crass.

### ***For parents with children ages 16 - 18***

- Some older teenagers are in exclusive dating relationships, and Valentine's Day can put pressures on taking the relationship further. Talk about that with your teenager. Discuss alternatives to deepening the relationship, such as going out to eat or telling their special someone how they feel. If your teen is getting very serious with someone, talk about your worries about teen pregnancy. For more information, read this article on [\*teen pregnancy.\*](#)
- If your older teenager thinks Valentine's Day is dumb, don't make a big deal of it with her. However, if you have other children or a significant other, don't let your teenager's feelings about the holiday hijack your celebration with other family members.
- Expand the holiday so that it's about caring, not just romance. Consider doing a family service project together, such as bringing cookies to an elderly family member, making valentine cards for cousins, or offering to serve a meal at a soup

kitchen.