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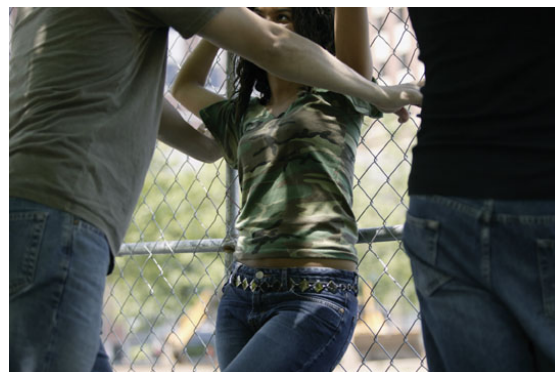
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# May I Kiss You?

## Talk to Your Teen About Date Rape

By Tamekia Reece

When it comes to date rape, daughters often hear, "Don't let it happen to you!" and sons hear, "If she says no, stop." But date rape isn't something someone lets happen, and sometimes a person can say no non-verbally. Before your teen becomes either a victim or victimizer, we're going to help you determine when and how you should discuss date rape.



### My Child? Never.

It's quite easy to think that date rape could never happen to your child or that your sweet kid would never commit this heinous crime against anyone. But before you say never, you should first look at exactly what date rape is and how prevalent it's becoming.

According to Michael Domitrz, author of [May I Kiss You? A Candid Look at Dating, Communication, Respect & Sexual Assault Awareness](#)

(Awareness Publications, 2003), there are many different versions of date rape, including sex, oral sex, sexual touching, making someone take explicit photos and more, "but the more generally accepted version is a sexual assault that occurs between two acquaintances."

Studies show that nearly one in four young women are sexually assaulted by the age of 18. Of those, about 70 percent knew the attacker. Though the numbers show that date rape is most commonly committed against females, it can happen to both males and females and doesn't matter if they're heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

Date rape isn't always someone saying "no" to someone's advances with that person continuing on anyway. "If somebody's ignorant about what rape is or what it means, then it's possible that they are not aware that they raped somebody," Domitrz says. "However, that ignorance does not excuse them from the rape." That's why he says communication and asking for permission before doing anything is so important. But unless your child is taught, he'll never know. That's where you come in.

### Perfect Timing

All the talking in the world about date rape won't do any good if your teen isn't

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listening. Choosing the right time to discuss it with your child is just as important as what you say during the conversation. "The beginning process should begin when they go to school," Domitrz says. This doesn't mean you'll be discussing the term "date rape," though. "You're discussing proper touching of other students, what the special parts of the body are, why those parts are special and how all people don't have the right to touch your child there," Domitrz says. This will make it much easier to have the date rape conversation later on down the road.

Here are a few more pointers to make it easier:

- DON'T wait too long. By putting off this important conversation you give your child the chance to learn incorrect information from friends or learn nothing at all, which can lead to dangerous dating practices.
- DO have their attention. One of the worst mistakes you could make is to try to talk about date rape when your teen's attention is focused elsewhere. When he's playing the latest Xbox game is not a time he'll be zoned in to what you're saying. Do your teen and yourself a favor: Have this discussion when you're both able to be as attentive as possible.
- DON'T play it up. When you do decide to talk with your teen, don't try to skirt around the issue by bringing up playful, less serious things first. Acquaintance rape is a serious issue and the conversation with your teen should be handled that way. If you approach the topic as if it were a joke, chances are your teen will do the same.
- DO know it's better late than never. If for whatever reason your child is already an older teen and you haven't spoken with him or her about date rape, don't feel doing so now would be pointless. Even if he or she has learned dating habits that could be dangerous from friends or personal experience, you may still be able to teach them about date rape. Even if your teen is 18 and headed to college, you can still sit her down and have a chat. It's never too late.



### The Talk

Just as the right timing can determine how effective your date rape talk is, so is what you say and how you say it. "It's essentially important that parents realize date rape can happen to any gender," Domitrz says. "For instance, if you only thought it happened to females and your male son were sexually assaulted and you didn't believe him, imagine the horror of him trying to move forward and seek help or counseling."

Jane Covner, mother of a 19-year-old son who recently went off to college, understands this and has discussed the subject with her son. "I told him, as a general rule, not to take any drink unless he's poured it himself," she says. Furthermore, she's taught him that it's best if he opens the container himself. "He's young and heterosexual, but he needs to protect himself just like everyone else."

One aspect of talking about date rape that parents often have questions about is whether it's better to have one "big" discussion or to constantly address the issue. Bonnie Russell, owner and operator of [www.familylawcourts.com](http://www.familylawcourts.com), says it's

definitely better to address the issue again and again. "Never stop talking," she says. "Keep it fresh and keep it new. Then the child becomes vigilant to recognize potentially bad situations and avoid them."



Domitrz agrees. "If you just have one talk, over time their friends will have many talks and each time yours becomes weaker because it was only once," he says. "By having consistent talks over a long period of time, you're always reminding them, always in their head, instead of it being their friends."

As far as teaching protective behavior, Domitrz says it's fine to try to teach a teen how to defend himself or herself, but you shouldn't go overboard. Every date rape situation is different, and there is no step-by-step self-defense technique that will work each time.

Before you end the talk, Domitrz suggests you say the following to your child: "I will always be here for you." What does that mean? "Letting your child know that if they are ever in a date rape situation, they can come to you," he says. Russell says being there means accompanying the child to report the crime, telling the child it's not their fault and insisting on prosecuting. "Basically, it means backing up your child at every turn," she says. And that's one of the most important things parents can do for their child.

#### Find Out More

If you or your teen would like more information on date rape, contact:

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network) 1-800-656-HOPE

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