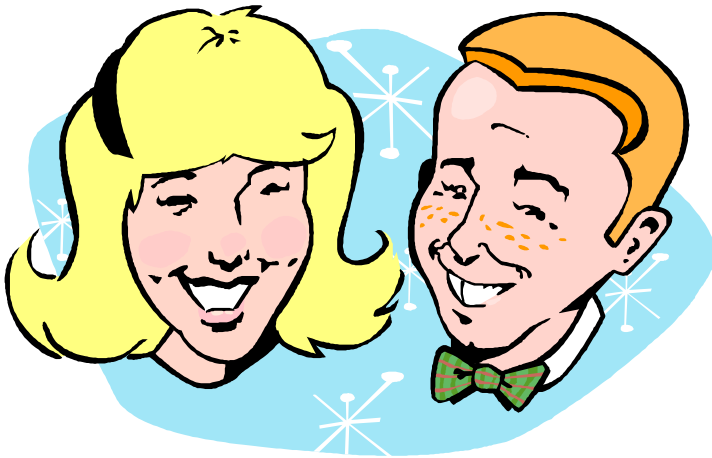


Booklet 2

# Helps for Young People



**Am I in Love?**

**My Friends Are Going Too Far**

**I Want To Be A Mom**

# **How Far Is Too Far**

## **Am I in Love?**

**I've been dating a guy for about a year, and we really have fun together. He says he loves me, but I've never responded, "I love you, too." I guess my question is, how do you know when you're in love? I mean, I'm 16 and I've never been this close to a guy before. I just don't know if I'm mature enough to know what love is. Can you help?**

I'd like to start by looking at another important question: What should you say when he says "I love you"? Here's what you shouldn't say: "I love you too, if that makes you feel any better." If a guy loves you and wants to say so, that's wonderful, but it doesn't mean you're obliged to match his feelings. If you're unsure, you're unsure. Don't say what you don't mean, but don't answer with silence, either. That just leaves the guy hanging. Instead, try something like this: "I appreciate your telling me that, but it makes me feel a little awkward. See, I like you a lot, but I don't really know what love is yet. I don't want you to think I don't like you. I'm just not ready to use the 'L' word. When I am, you'll be the first to know."

We don't have scientific instruments to measure love. It's a powerful thing, but each individual has to figure out for herself or himself what it means. You can't compare notes with your friends. You can't say, "I'm at 6 on a scale of 10, and when I reach 7 I'll tell him I love him."

There's a certain amount of truth to the saying, "If it's really love, you'll know it." That's almost the same as saying, "Don't push ahead until you're really sure." In the Song of Songs, the Bible's great love poem, one phrase is repeated three times: "I want you to promise, O women of Jerusalem, not to awaken love until the time is right" (8:4, NLT). Translated into contemporary language, that means, "Don't get ahead of yourself. Take your time in the game of love."

## **My Friends Are Going Too Far**

**Two of my best friends are dating. Both are strong Christians, but I'm worried about them. The girl has recently been through a lot. Before she started dating her current boyfriend, she was raped two or three times. She also had sex with several other guys. She's changed since then, but it's only been about six months. While I know my friends aren't having sex right now, they do some pretty heavy "petting," which makes me nervous. What can I do? I don't want them to think I'm being nosy. I'm just afraid what they're doing will lead to more.**

You're obviously a caring friend. It's easier to take a "none of my business" stance, but real friends do care about the spiritual and physical welfare of others. What you describe between these two would definitely count as risk factors. Past sexual experiences (including negative ones) often lead to greater sexual promiscuity. You feel uncomfortable with the kinds of interactions you see between them, and I'd say it's wise to trust your feelings. If you feel concerned, there's a good chance you should be.

So what should you do? I would start by trying to talk to them individually about their relationship. You're concerned they'll think you're "nosy," but they might just appreciate your care and concern. Still, they may not welcome your advice. If that's the case, I'd try to offer resources instead. For example, you might copy a Campus Life article that speaks to sexual issues (maybe even this one!), and give it to them. Or, ask your pastor if he has a book or other resources he'd recommend, and pass it on to them. Then, ask one or both of them what they thought, and whether they'd like to talk about it.

You can only offer. You can't insist. But you never know. One or both of them might be struggling, ready and waiting for any help or counsel. If you don't put yourself out there, you'll never know for sure.

## **I Want to Be a Mom**

**Why do I want a baby? I know it's wrong to have sex before marriage, but sometimes I feel like it wouldn't be so wrong since I'd be multiplying God's creation. Then I decide against it because I don't want to disobey him. What do I do?**

You want a baby because of the way God designed you. He made the desire for children to be one of the deepest human instincts. Lots of people aren't aware of it until they try to have a child but find out that they can't.

This urge you feel is natural and good. Babies are wonderful. If you handle the urge for children correctly, it will give you a very satisfying life as a parent and spouse, and provide a good mother for your children.

The longing for children is meant to be fulfilled in a loving marriage. That's one reason God says not to have sex (and thus babies) outside of marriage. Planning to have a baby without a loving father is not a wise choice, and it's unfair to the baby. It shows you're thinking about yourself, not about the baby, who really needs both a mother and a father who care for each other, as well as for the child.

My advice is that you thank God for this wonderful urge he's planted in you, but make up your mind all the more strongly to handle it correctly. Store the dream of children away in your heart, and work to build in yourself the character to become the kind of parent that your baby deserves. That way you'll see this urge turn into joy.

## **How Far Is Too Far?**

**I've been with a guy for almost a year now, and I don't know how far is too far. I'm not going to have sex with him, but there's so much other stuff that people can do. I know I love him very much, but I just don't know what is too far.**

I'm glad you're asking this question. Most people try to figure out the answer on an experimental basis. Unfortunately, they often learn the hard way that what feels good may not turn out to be good.

The Bible doesn't address your question specifically. People didn't really date in those days. In fact, they might not have seen their spouse until the wedding day. In our day, though, most young people meet the opposite sex long before their wedding day, and they have ample opportunity to spend time alone together. Biology being what it is, however, your question is a crucial one.

The Bible does give general principles that help, such as the basic command to keep our bodies pure from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). As for defining exactly where the line should be drawn, the Bible doesn't say. But I've reached some conclusions based on my understanding and experience—and a lot of data. Thousands of people have shared their experiences with me over the years. And I've spent many years pondering a Christian view of sex.

I'd start by asking: what is the point of physical contact? We know what sexual intercourse accomplishes, but why hug, kiss, touch, hold hands? What's the point?

The only good answer I know is, "To express our love." People will say, "It helps us feel close," or just, "It feels good." When you care for someone, you're drawn together physically. The alternative—not touching—would feel cold.

There's another side to that answer, though, that people sometimes forget. If you love someone, you don't want to do something that will hurt him or her emotionally, or hurt your relationship. So the question becomes, "How do I express my love in a way that's not harmful to either of us, or to our relationship?"

Some basic principles I'd suggest:

- Don't do anything that either one of you will feel ashamed of. Even if you think you shouldn't feel ashamed, you do—and shame can destroy a person's confidence, not to mention ruin a relationship. Why go there?
- Don't do anything that tends to dominate your relationship. Even an activity many people consider harmless—kissing—can turn into long wrestling matches that take up all the time and energy you have together. Physical expressions of love should be brief and to the point. They shouldn't eliminate more important ways of communicating, such as talking. If the trend in your relationship is toward less talking and more kissing, you are off track.
- Don't do anything you're not sure of. It's tempting to experiment. You think, We'll try this, and if we don't like it we'll quit. But bodies don't work that way. They're always pushing us forward, and they make it very difficult to go back. Once you've started doing a certain activity, you'll almost certainly continue until you break up.
- Don't do anything that makes the other person feel uncomfortable. You're expressing love, remember? How could you express love by talking someone into trying something he or she fears?
- Don't do anything that would lead you to believe that your body is not precious and private. There's a reason why your sexual organs are called "private parts." They're meant to be private, shared only with the person you commit your life to in marriage. When that sense of privacy is invaded, it hurts the person. When you're dating, you have to know that you might not stay together forever. And how will it be for you or your partner, knowing that someone who no longer cares for you has explored those private places? And at what cost?

- Don't do anything that could cause you to lose your self-control. It's a biological fact that our bodies want to go all the way. They push forward with just the slightest encouragement. That's God's design, and it's good. It helps create the powerful bonds of marriage. However, it can also be dangerous. It can (and does) make people do things they swore never to do, deeds that make them sick with guilt when they realize what they've done. Don't push the limits of self-control, and ask God to help both of you maintain that control. You don't want to engage in activities that put you into the danger zone.
- Don't do anything that leaves you feeling frustrated. If you get too aroused, it doesn't feel good to stop. In fact, it feels lousy. What's loving and romantic about doing something that leaves one or both of you feeling frustrated?
- Don't do anything that you will be ashamed to tell your husband or wife on your wedding day. The odds are very good you will marry someone else. (Even engaged couples break up—and pretty often, actually.) What's loving about an activity that will take away from the joy of the most wonderful day of your life?

When I put all this together, I come up with one simple guideline: Stick to holding hands and occasional brief kisses—no tongues, no frenching. I think that allows you maximum expression of love. It's sweet, heartfelt, and it usually does no harm.

Of course, plenty of couples go further than that and seem unharmed. In my experience, though, their behaviour is risky and even dangerous. I've heard from way too many people who've written to say, "I was so sure. Now I'd like to die." And for what? What do they gain? I don't think they really express more love by going further. Usually they only express more lust, which only leads to frustration or worse.



On a more positive note, you can do more than just avoid the "don'ts" mentioned above. Concentrate on the "do's" of a good relationship—thoughtful conversation, fun and creative activities (including with groups!), and time together in prayer and discussing the things of faith.

*Due to the volume of mail, Tim cannot answer every letter. Questions should be sent to: "Love, Sex & Real Life," Campus Life, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. You can also reach "Love, Sex & Real Life" via fax (630-260-0114) or e-mail ([CLmag@campuslife.net](mailto:CLmag@campuslife.net)). Look for more on love and dating at [campuslife.net](http://campuslife.net).*

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