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Valentine's Day Teen Romance Advice: Sex is Not Love

Teenagers need to know that true love comes from building a good relationship over time, not "hooking up," says Carole Adlard, founder and director of Healthy Visions, a Cincinnati non-profit organization dedicated to teen health and good relationships.

"Young people suffer from many kinds of self-esteem issues, and most teens don't realize that people are attracted to people who are confident and happy in themselves."

Adlard offers three suggestions for teens to consider before engaging in Valentine's Day romance:

* **Be a friend first.** When teens communicate primarily through email and instant messaging, how well do they really get to know each other face-to-face? Sexual intimacy is not real intimacy, says Adlard, and what you do today affects your tomorrow. A show of hands during Healthy Visions programs at area high schools consistently indicates that 95 percent of teens want to marry and not divorce. Building a relationship, attests Adlard, is a process that cannot be rushed by hooking up at a party one night.

* **Choose who you want to be.** Young men—do you want to be known as a protector or a predator in your relationships with women? The same goes with young women: do you want to be seen as a treasure, or a target by young men?

“Behavior follows attitude,” says Adlard. “Once we instill in young people their inherent value, we don’t say, ‘Just don’t have sex.’ We say sex is awesome with the right person, at the right time, within the security of marriage. Nobody else-- especially popular culture-- is telling teens they are treasures and protectors. Once we instill that value, then teens start to be more respectful to themselves, their peers, and those of the opposite sex.”

* **Virginity is not a dirty word.** Teens may think that everyone else is having sex, but that is not necessarily true.

National statistics indicate 54 percent of teens today are not having sex, and that seven out of 10 sexually-experienced teens report that they wish they would have waited.

About 90 percent of students polled locally during Healthy Visions programs say they don’t want their future spouses to have had premarital sex, either, says Adlard. “They don’t want sexually-transmitted diseases and they don’t want the emotional baggage of a broken heart.”

For more information on Healthy Visions programs, contact Adlard at (513) 793-7268, or contact her at www.healthyvisions.org.

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