

WHO NEEDS 'E-MATCH'M'UP'?

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When I was a teenager one of my biggest questions was, "How will I know when I am in love?" This question was really a precursor to, "How will I know when Mr. Right comes along?" Some of the most valuable coaching you can give your teenager is the wisdom to choose the most compatible life partner.

Many parents don't feel qualified or confident enough to give good advice to their kids, because they have had failed marriages themselves. Sometimes, because of the home environment, kids make a life decision based on what they *don't* want in a partner rather than what they really do want. Many teens are attracted to a boy or girl because of their looks, their abilities and/or whom they run with, rather than the real qualities that make that person tick. To be truthful, I based my decisions about boys on this premise when I was a teen. Many kids grow away from parental influences in their mid to late teens due to attending college or securing jobs elsewhere.

In the quest for independence the teen decides whether to adhere to parental guidelines or whether to be influenced by friends. Against sound parental advice, sometimes they choose to make their own mistakes and to learn from them. So how can you, as parents, have any influence on your kids' choice of a life partner?

It is really best to start shaping your children's thinking as they hit the 'tweens' – you know - just before the hormones take over. It can be part of preparing them for dealing with the alien feelings that will soon surge through their bodies. It can stress the importance of maintaining their own integrity and having utmost respect for their special friend, especially when there is no parental supervision. For our own children I made up what I jokingly call, 'Aunt Agatha's List'. I feel the points made are vitally important to a healthy relationship.

Here are the main points to remember:

1. Make sure that you share the same beliefs and values. There is often such a rush to get into the physical side of a relationship that if the 'real' person's 'uglies' show up, excuses will readily be made to accommodate the negatives, because the physical side is too good to give up. Having the same beliefs and values means you will have the same solid foundation to base your future on.
2. You need to be able to respect one another at every level. If he/she is trying to be controlling or distrusts you, run for your life!
3. It is important to have equal aspirations and goals. I had a friend whose marriage nearly ended because one 'outgrew' the other. One developed a real yearning for higher education and the other wasn't interested. They

lost communication because their interests became so different. Fortunately, they realized what was happening just in time to make some adjustments. They are still together.

4. It is valuable to both have a similar level of ability. When you can't exchange ideas and thoughts at a comparable level, cracks can develop in your relationship and it is easy to become bonded with someone else you meet who is operating at your level of understanding. Not that there is anything wrong with having a wide group of friends to share your life with, but when it comes down to what really holds a relationship together, then being 'together' on the real issues matters.
5. Check to make sure there is real respect demonstrated between your friend and their parents – and between the parents themselves. When parents disrespect one another, or habitually put their kids and others down, it is role modeling that is very hard to overcome. Not too far down the road your marriage will very likely imitate a similar pattern. If your friend comes from a screaming household, invest in earplugs or better still, run!
6. If your boy/girlfriend has habits that really annoy you, don't expect you will change them e.g. If you like things to be very neat and your boy/girlfriend is very untidy in his/her own home, then guess what?
7. Find someone with a complimentary temperament to yours. It is all about having enough common ground to make a relationship strong and long lasting.
8. Marry your best friend. My husband always tells people he married his best friend. He was just glad I was a girl!!!!

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.