



Learning Curve: 11 years & up

Handling Young Love

You overhear your 14-year-old daughter say that she's "going out" with a boy in school. Before you pull her IM privileges, realize what this really means. Young "couples" are most likely just talking on the computer or sitting together at lunch. Your tween or teen is testing out a relationship with the opposite sex and exploring what it's like to have someone special.

"How you help your child handle that initial crush may help set patterns for romantic relationships throughout her life," says Deborah Hatchell, author of *What Smart Teenagers Know ... About Dating, Relationships and Sex*. Consider this: A survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy found that more than half of 12- to 19-year-olds say that their parents are their role models for responsible relationships.

Young romances are opportunities to try out new social skills such as conflict negotiation, sharing feelings and

trusting others. Don't dismiss her feelings as puppy love—or lust. At this age, a desire to date is not synonymous with wanting to have sex.

Similarly, avoid teasing her. "A child who is ridiculed is more likely to keep her emotions secret," says Hatchell. Instead, try to connect with your teen. When you're in the car together, talk to her about the differences between a friend and a boyfriend, and between dating and love. An easy way to start the conversation is to focus on TV characters, such as Ryan and Seth on *The O.C.* Talking about the different types of love can help her decipher what she's feeling.

Often, being supportive means just that—being supportive. "You have to walk a fine line," says Hatchell, "between the natural impulse to shield your children from heartache and your obligation to respect them as people with their own romantic lives." —CH

New Game in Town

Love is the name of the game in **Sprung**, an adventure title for the new handheld device from Nintendo, the DS. Written by the creator of Fox's sudsy Hawaiian soap, *North Shore*, players date their way up the social food chain—finding as they go that all's never fair in love (\$30, www.ubisoft.com).

in-Style iPods

If you think about it, an iPod is a lot like a perfect first love: fashionable, cute and sleek on the outside; mysterious, upbeat and smart on the inside. To keep your teen's little musical friend ever-so-stylish, grab one of **C. Ronson's iPod covers**. They look just like a hoodie and come in bubblegum pink, blue and green velour, lilac terrycloth and traditional heather fleece. Whatever color you choose, your teenager will love it for sure (\$24, www.fredflare.com or 212-625-9074).



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