

Sisters are more comfortable and honest in conversations about dating and sex

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Parents of teenage daughters might consider leaving the room to let their daughters talk about dating and sex.

New research from the University of Missouri indicates older sisters can play a role in shaping healthy conversations about [romantic relationships](#) and sexuality. Sarah Killoren, associate professor of human development and family science in the College of Human Environmental Sciences and an expert on family relationships, found that that sisters can promote adolescent girls' healthy romantic relationships based on their experiences—especially older sisters' experiences—through one-on-one conversations. Her findings suggest that sisters might be more comfortable and honest in conversations about sex and dating than they are with parents or other adults and even friends.

"If parents want their daughters to have healthy relationships, they should encourage their [daughters](#) to talk to one another about sex and dating," Killoren said. "Making certain topics taboo could be a disservice to young women as they navigate adolescence and relationships."

Killoren and her colleagues examined the content of more than 60 pairs of sisters' conversations to identify messages about dating. The average age for the older sisters was 19, while younger sisters were around 14 years old.

"Older sisters used their experiences and lessons learned from dating to try to help their younger sisters make good choices about dating partners and sexual relationships," Killoren said. "In many cases, they focused on the negative aspects as a way to protect their sisters, talking about risks of unprotected sex and abusive relationships."

During sisters' conversations about dating and sexuality, sisters talked with one another about the progression of relationships, partners, sex and the importance of self-care. Many of the messages were consistent with societal views on adolescent sexuality—to avoid having sex until in an older, committed [relationship](#) and the negative consequences resulting from having sex as a teenager. The researchers also found that sisters can

be good messengers on the importance of not ignoring other significant relationships while dating.

"Sister relationships are peer-like, but they also are involuntary, meaning that sisters don't get to choose one another the same way they can choose their friends." Killoren said. "Sisters can be honest with one another in a way that they can't be with their friends. For example, an older [sister](#) can voice her disapproval about a younger sister's boyfriend without necessarily severing the relationship with her sister. If a [friend](#) shared such concern, the younger sister could terminate the friendship as a result."

"Content and correlates of [sisters'](#) messages about dating and [sexuality](#)," was published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

More information: Sarah E. Killoren et al. Content and correlates of sisters' messages about dating and sexuality, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0265407518781039](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518781039)

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