DATING AND SEX

A GUIDE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY TEEN BOY

By Andrew P. Smiler, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

You're looking at a book for teen boys about dating and sex. You're probably wondering what you can learn from a book like this. After all, you've probably seen hundreds, maybe thousands, of people kiss, date, and be sexual on-screen. Doesn't matter if we're talking about TV, movies, or online porn, it all looks pretty straightforward. You're probably asking yourself, "What else do I need to know?"

The answer is that in real life, dating and being sexual with someone is more complicated than it appears on-screen. There, disagreements and difficulties are easily resolved and everyone is usually happy with the outcome; people rarely get turned down when they ask for a date, kiss, or sex; and no one discusses sexual safety, has an unplanned pregnancy, or catches a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Throughout the book, we'll use the general term "being sexual" because it includes a wide range of sexual activities like kissing, touching, and sex. Terms like "having sex" and "sexing" can leave out kissing and touching.

If you're a fairly typical guy—or you've been raised like a fairly typical guy, even if you aren't one—then you probably haven't been taught a lot of important things about how to get and keep a partner, how to be sexual with someone, and even how to think about

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these things. There's also a good chance that your parents or guardians (aunt, uncle, grandparents, etc.) have not had "The Sex Talk" with you. Or maybe they've just given you this book and told you to let them know if you have questions. (The book is good, but there are some things you'll need to hear from your parents or guardians.) Even if the adults in your life haven't said anything, you've probably heard about dating and being sexual from other teens and you've certainly seen it on-screen.

So, what's in the book? It's got a lot of information to help you think about what different parts of dating and sexuality look like and what they might mean to you, your partner, and other people around you. The Frequently Asked Questions following this introduction will give you answers to some common questions guys like you have. Each chapter contains graphics that show statistics, facts, and important points in an easy-to-understand handy format. You'll also see sidebars with extra info, examples, and related points. Some chapters include a series of questions you can answer in order to help you understand yourself, while other chapters end by discussing two or three different answers to the question "what do guys typically do?"

The first section talks about relationships. Mostly dating, but there's some discussion of hookups, especially in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 focuses on starting a relationship: how to figure out who you want to be in a relationship with, how to ask that person out, and what to do if that person says yes or no or something else (and how to figure out what that something else means). We'll also talk about what to do if someone asks you out. Chapter 3 talks about how to keep a relationship going and strong. It's more complicated than you think, in part because unlike the rules of sports or video games, the rules of a relationship can change during the relationship. It's also complicated because even though you know things like trust are important, you probably haven't had many conversations about deciding how much

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to trust someone. In Chapter 4, we'll talk about how your reputation—both the reputation you have and the reputation you want—might influence your decisions about whom to date and be sexual with, and when. We'll discuss pleasure and sexual behavior in the second section of the book. We'll begin with consent in Chapter 5. You wouldn't want someone to be sexual with your body without your permission—and you do have the ability, and the right, to say no. Likewise, you should never be sexual with someone else's body without their permission. In Chapter 6, we'll talk about sexual activities you can do alone, including why, how-to, and what to beware of. Then, in Chapter 7, we'll discuss sexual activities with a partner, and again talk about why and how-to. In Chapter 8, the discussion shifts to being safe, including how to protect yourself, your partner, and your future. Kids are cute, but you probably do not want to be a teen father. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and diseases are probably also on the list of things you don't want. We'll finish off this section by talking about gender roles and sexual orientation, as well as their connections to identities and stereotypes, in Chapter 9. Again, each chapter will help you figure out where you stand and what you want to do.

The last two chapters of the book are about putting dating and sexuality into the bigger picture of puberty and adolescence. Chapter 10 talks about appearance and the male body. We'll talk about having ripped muscles, dressing well, and the ways in which appearance is both important and not important. And we'll also talk about penis size, because many guys worry about it. Chapter 11 talks about the changes you'll experience as you go through puberty. Some of those changes are explicitly about your body. We'll also discuss other changes, like changes in your ability to think and process information, changes in the intensity of your feelings, changes in the definition of friendship, and changes in how you define and describe yourself, all of which influence the way you approach dating and being sexual, as well as how you understand yourself. At the end of

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the book, you'll find a resources list, with more reading on certain important topics, and an index.

The book is written so that you can jump around, reading about topics in the order that makes the most sense to you. As you go, you'll see lots of references to other parts of the text, so when you're reading Chapter 5 about giving and getting consent, you might be pointed back to Chapter 2 in one paragraph and then ahead to Chapter 8 in the next paragraph. Did I mention that dating and sexuality are complicated?

This book is written for guys, mostly between ages 13 and 16. It's written for guys who are just starting to think they might possibly, maybe, sort of be interested in starting to date or kiss people sometime in the not-too-distant future, as well as for guys who have dated or been sexual with lots of people. This book is written for guys who identify themselves as guys, regardless of what parts they have. It's written for you, whether you are interested in boys, girls, both, "not yet," or none of the above.

So who am I? Like many guys, I'll tell you I'm just a regular guy. That's what we've been trained to say, right? But I was never quite a regular guy. As much as I watched sports, went to games, followed my hometown Philadelphia sports teams (the Flyers, Eagles, and Phillies), and enjoyed action movies, I was also a stereotypical nerd. I was into computers before everyone had one, was on the chess team and the math team, and yes, I played Dungeons & Dragons. When it came to dating and girls, I was about as smooth as sandpaper. In fact, I was clueless. But I couldn't ask for advice: guys are supposed to know it all and we don't ask for directions.

After college, I became a therapist and I started working with teens. And because I'm a guy, most of those teens were boys. I could talk to them in ways that many of my female co-workers couldn't. At some point, I went back to school to get my doctorate—a PhD in developmental psychology—and I started doing academic research on male-oriented stereotypes and typical aspects of sexual develop-

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ment. Since getting that degree, I've written more than 25 research articles and published a book for adults on male sexuality called *Challenging Casanova: Beyond the Stereotype of the Promiscuous Young Male*. My friend and colleague, Chris Kilmartin, asked me to help him update his college-level men's studies textbook *The Masculine Self*, so I've done that too. I taught at university for a while and I was even the president of a professional organization: the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity. These days I split my time between being a therapist—mostly working with guys age 12–25 and their families—and being an author.

But this book, this book gives guys the information they need about dating and sex before and when they need it. There's no other book like it. Seriously: there's no other book on this topic that's written for teen boys. They're all written for boys and girls together or just girls. Almost all of the books out there are written by women. And no one who writes for boys has the research background and the therapy experience that I have. Put it all together and you know what it means? It means I've got a clue. Maybe even two or three clues.

I hope you like the book.

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There's a good chance you've had the "sex talk" with your parents. Or not. Or learned about human reproduction in health class. Or maybe you've heard a lot about dating, sex, and relationships from friends, movies, and the internet.

So you are all set, right? Maybe.... But there's more information that you need to know—and *really* want to know—inside this book.

Dating and Sex is an awesome, easy-to-read, funny, and insightful book that is chock-full of information and advice to help you get ready for the world of dating, relationships, and sex.

This book is your how-to guide to become a responsible and mature relational and sexual being. And then, you'll be ready for just about everything.

Andrew P. Smiler, PhD, is a developmental psychologist, therapist, author, and the go-to expert on the psychology of male sexual development and relationships. This is his first book for teen boys and written just for you. Go ahead, read on!

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