



# CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & PERSONAL GROWTH

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"The course of true love  
never did run smooth."  
William Shakespeare  
(1564-1616),  
*A Midsummer Night's  
Dream*

## PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

### Communication tips for "dating" couples

"We're always laughing and talking with friends, but when we're alone we don't seem to have much to say." Being able to communicate with each other is vital to developing a relationship, but takes work and can be awkward in the beginning. "On our first date, Tonya and I went to a movie," says Erick, a high school senior. "I wasn't enjoying the movie at all because I was thinking of what I would say after. It was really uncomfortable." "Now we talk about everything," Tonya says. "What's going on with each other, our relationship, what's happening with our families and friends." How do couples get to this type of closeness?



#### **Being honest and open.**

Let the other person know your feelings in an honest and respectful way.

#### **Really listen.**

Try to determine the emotions that are coming through, the tone of voice, how the person acts, and the expression in his or her eyes.

#### **"Listen" to actions, not just the words**

**being spoken.** The things you do and the way you treat each other communicate huge amounts of information.



*Continued on page 2*



## Communication tips for “dating” couples

Continued from page 1

**Be yourself.** Don't pretend fake, hyped-up emotions with the dramatic fights and kiss-and-make-up celebrations. If you are trying to get attention this way, the other person is likely to catch on and tire of these charades.



### Try harder to learn from arguments than to “win” them.

When you're hurt or angry, it can feel good to yell, scream, and insist that the other person admits to being wrong. But that's not real communication. Instead, try “I” statements like: “I feel hurt, and I want to hear what you feel”; “I want you to tell me what you think is happening, so I can understand”; “I want to work this out, so let's talk.” Take time to check out the messages you hear from the other person to see if you are truly understanding how he or she is feeling.

**Learn each other's communication style.** Do you come from families that are very open or very quiet about emotions and conflicts? Are you an aggressive talker who likes to control the conversation? Are you more likely to state what you want directly, or try to find out first how everybody else feels about it? Learn to work with each other's communication style to create more understanding between the two of you.

### Expand your conversations to more than just about your relationship.

There's more to the two of you than the “us” part.



Find out about each other's dreams, favorite music or books, political views, and learn more about each

other's families, where you have lived, etc.

**Be willing to move on.** Is this relationship working out for both of you? The quality of your communication should tell the story. Do you talk easily and openly, or are you keeping secrets from each other? Do you feel happy and safe, or always “on guard” not to say the wrong thing? Are you still communicating with friends, or does he or she try to keep you away from them? Does he or she show respect and interest in your life outside the relationship, or put you down?



Good communication is a set of skills. It takes practice and even if you aren't a “natural,” you will get better if you try!

Excerpts from: You are dating...but are you communicating? Written by Farrington, Jan (Feb 2001). *Current Health*, 2(27) p. 25-27. Reference this article if using in other written work.

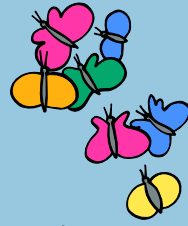
# Extension Spotlight

## Pamela Muntz

For 16 years, Pamela Muntz has been the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Kiowa County. After receiving a BS in vocational home economics from KSU, she worked four years in Edwards County and nine years for the Kiowa County Farm Bureau. Also, while her children were young, Pam operated a day care in her home. Her other job for the past 35 years has been 'Mom' and now 'Grammy.'

The most rewarding aspect of Pam's job is "knowing that I can give my audience information that will make a difference in their lives." Her training as a teacher prepared her to teach all ages in a non-structured classroom. She values the university resources and the credible information that comes from the land grant system. Her greatest challenge, however, is her audience. "There are many people we know could use the information we have to offer, but they choose to not participate." Another challenge is keeping a balance between the job and personal life. "You can be on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week because our audiences seem to forget we have another life after the office closes!"

Having received money during the last two years from the Kiowa County Health Foundation, Pam does much programming with the Health Department and the local Mental Health Center. "By partnering we can make our programs stronger and build unity between these organizations." Among Pam's efforts is a program that meets four times a week called *Strong Women*—with a very diverse and growing audience. Her other work includes WIC monthly displays and assisting with commodity food distribution by using displays to promote family well-being. Pam also writes monthly newsletters and weekly news columns for the local paper.



"We have created a coalition called Kiowa County Kids Count (for which I am very proud), funded

by our County Commission. We provide services and money to help with expenses for families that tend to fall through the cracks in the social system."

Pamela Muntz

Pam is a member of the Kiowa County Kids Count coalition which partners with the health department, district court, mental health center, Parents as Teachers, schools, and county commission. The Kids Count board approves requests for school supplies, athletic shoes, gas money for doctor visits, eye exams/glasses. They also provide holiday food baskets for needy families, extra food children like not typically received through WIC or commodity foods, and sponsors a Family Resource Fair during the local elementary school open house night.

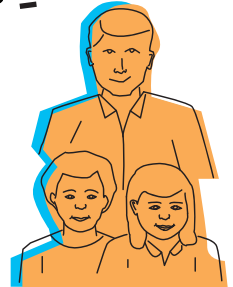
Pamela has four children, three married and the youngest engaged. She has "five beautiful grandchildren and they all live here in Greensburg and I consider that to be a blessing." The bonds between Pam and her children were especially important when her 37-year marriage ended this past year. For hobbies, Pam enjoys rose gardening and finds yard care almost becoming a full time job. She likes to sew and is planning, with her daughters' help, on redoing her living room. She looking forward to 2006, ready to accept new ideas and challenges in her job and to learn how to live as a single person.



## PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT



# Dating Issues When You Have Children



Source: University of New Hampshire Extension  
[http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Family/Documents/s\\_dating.pdf](http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Family/Documents/s_dating.pdf)

## Take your time

After a separation, divorce, or the death of a loved one, it takes time to cope with feelings, and move on to another relationship. Before beginning a new romance, people need to work through stages of loss from previous ones. Usually, it takes at least one to two years to resolve feelings from a previous relationship. People also need time to form a new identity. One of the keys to success is to work on your emotional and psychological growth. Don't look to another person to make you feel whole. Instead, work on making yourself whole by identifying personal goals. Remarrying is not a way to avoid loneliness. Form friendships rather than romances to help develop stability, independence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging.



## Children experience a range of emotions

Feelings of loss, anger, and hurt are common among children whose parents have separated or divorced. Children who have lost parents through death have similar feelings. Because children lack experience, they don't know that things will get better. As a parent, you can help your children. Encourage them to express their feelings in ways that are acceptable. Children of all ages will react to lifestyle changes, including the separation and/or divorce of their parents. It's important, however, to discuss and accept all of your children's feelings.

Following the separation of their parents, children may feel sad, insecure, afraid, hurt or confused. They may think if they love mom or like her new boyfriend, dad won't love them. If they love dad and like his new girlfriend, mom won't love them. They're confused about being loyal to both parents. It's common for children to want to protect parents from feeling hurt and pain.

When a parent begins a new relationship, children commonly feel jealous. They may compare your new friend to their father or mother who doesn't live in the home anymore. Or your children may seek a lot of attention or interrupt conversations you have with your new friend. Many parents have found the following ideas helpful when introducing and adjusting to family changes. Remember, change rarely comes without pain. Yet it's possible to make the transitions smoother by talking with your children.

- Explain that dating is similar to their spending time with friends.
- Prepare your children before introducing a new date.
- Children may be confused. Let them know you're not dating because you don't like spending time with them. Rather, you need to spend time with adults who have similar interests.
- Don't spend too much time with your new friend. As everyone gets used to one another, gradually increase the amount of time you all spend together.
- If there are times you usually spend with your children, keep that time for them.





- Spend time with your children before and after your date. They will be less likely to feel your friend is taking you away from them.
- Meet your new friend in other places, instead of always at your home.
- If you know of something specific that upsets your child, let your date know ahead of time.

When beginning a new relationship, consider the following:

- Take time to listen to your child's feelings about your new relationship without being defensive or giving explanations. Tell your child that you understand his or her feelings.
- Ask your child if she or he would be willing to listen to you, and why you want to spend time with your new friend.
- Make sure your actions match your words. For example, if you tell your child you will be back from your date before he or she goes to bed, be sure to get home on time.
- Do some problem solving to find solutions that work for everyone concerned. For example, you may decide only to date on weekends when your children are with your ex-spouse.
- Above all, be patient. It will take time for your children to adjust to your having relationships with other adults.

### **Dealing with change**

*Changes in routines.* It's sometimes difficult for children when there are changes in routines. This is especially true when it involves a parent's new friend. For example, be sensitive to how your child feels when there's a new adult at the dinner table. Be sensitive about seating arrangements. Have your children sit where they usually sit. Encourage

your children to share their feelings. Let them know it's OK to feel excited about meeting Mom or Dad's new friend. Tell them it may also feel confusing or sad, and that's normal and OK.

### *Feeling insecure.*

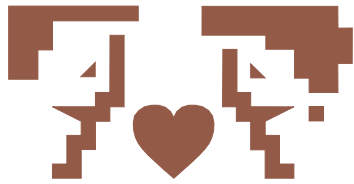
Some children may feel their security threatened when their parents begin to date. They may become angry and aggressive. It's common for children to have difficulty relating to new adults in their lives. They wonder if they'll still be loved and wanted if their parents find new companions. Tell and show your children how much you love them. Show an interest in their schoolwork and congratulate them for small successes.



*Dreams of a new parent.* Dating may also encourage children's fantasies of having a new mommy or daddy. Children may become attached to a regular in the household. Because of this, some parents decide not to introduce a new friend to their children until the relationship seems to be one that will last. Seven and eight-year-olds especially may be loyal to absent parents. It may be hard for them to relate to new adults.

### **Affection and sexuality**

Children may feel uncomfortable with physical displays of affection. Older school age children and teens are attempting to cope with their own emerging sexuality. They may feel jealous, confused, angry or frustrated if they must deal with their parent's sexuality as well as their own. Seriously consider your children when it comes to your romantic life. It's better to keep displays of affection and sexual activity, including sleepovers, for times when your children are out of the home.



## Dating Violence Common Among Teens

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health

Teen life, with its fads, crushes, clashes, and breakups, seems to be a world away from abusive relationships. Yet, there's a dark side to all of the social drama. Many teens go through the same types of abuse—sexual, physical, and emotional—that we know some adults go through.

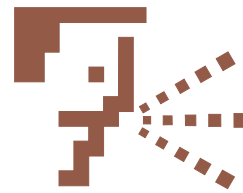
Dating violence often involves sex. More than one in four female college students say they have suffered rape or attempted rape at least once since age 14. At a large college, more than half of the women surveyed noted some type of unwanted sex, most often from their dates.<sup>1</sup> Such violence can start at an early age. About 1 in 12 eighth and ninth graders suffered sexual violence in dating.<sup>2</sup>

Still, dating violence is common outside of sexual situations. Studies show that more than one in five high school students and almost one in three college students have been victims of dating violence that did not involve sex. In a study of eighth and ninth graders, one in four reported nonsexual violence in dating.<sup>3</sup>

Most victims of physical dating violence are females. Seven in 10 pregnant teens report abuse by their partners.<sup>4</sup> Although female high school and college students are just as likely as male students to inflict dating violence, females most often do it to defend themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Abuse in dating isn't just about hurting a partner physically. Bullying, for example, is a form of emotional abuse. Many young

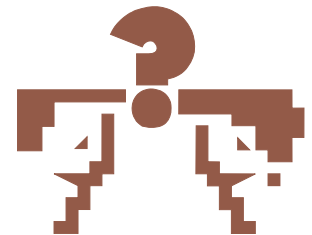
people face other types of emotional abuse in the form of:



- Name calling
- Blame
- Threats
- Envy
- Anger
- Attempts to control a

partner's dress, activities, and friendships.<sup>6</sup>

Teens may be confused by a boyfriend or girlfriend who abuses them and may not know how to deal with a dating partner's mind games. Threats and rage may be followed by vows of love and pleas for forgiveness.



Teens may be afraid to break up with their partners out of fear that their partner will hurt them or will harm himself or herself. A teen may want to be there to help a boyfriend or girlfriend, may hope that things will get better, or simply may not realize what can happen. Over time, violence can escalate and teen victims may mistakenly begin to believe that they deserve the abuse.

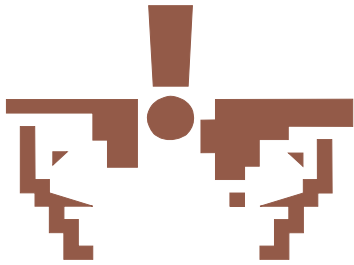
If you have a teen who is dating, be alert for signs of abuse, both physical and emotional. Outward signs include:

- Having bruises and injuries
- Changing the way they look or dress
- Dropping old friends
- Giving up things they care about.



New friends as well as changes in attitudes, styles, hobbies, and school activities are common in young people. Still, they can be clues that a teen is being controlled by a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Emotional abuse is harder to see than physical abuse, since it happens over time and can take several forms. A young person suffering emotional abuse may become insecure, destructive, angry, or withdrawn. He



may abuse alcohol or drugs and may even become suicidal.

If you believe that your child is being abused, talk to her.

Ask questions, set limits, and offer advice. She may find it hard to talk about stress in her dating life. So, don't show anger or push so hard that she pulls away. Instead, let her know that you respect her views and are there for her. Tell her that you care about her and want her to be safe.

If you believe that your child is abusing his dating partner, confront him about it, and seek expert help.

\*We refer to a child as "him" in some places and "her" in others. We do this for easier reading. All information applies to both boys and girls unless otherwise specified.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Dating Violence, last referenced 3/11/04.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Washington State PTA. Every Teen Counts, last referenced 3/11/04.

<sup>5</sup>National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

<sup>6</sup>Washington State PTA.

## Resources

Washington State Office of the Attorney General: Teen Dating Violence, FAQ: Relationship Violence—Help for Parents  
The National Women's Health Information Center: Violence Against Women: Dating Violence



# Dating Relationships and the Demand/Withdraw Pattern of Communication

prepared by Jose Uriel "Udy" Estrada

Source: David L. Vogel, Stephen R. Wester and Martin Heesacker, *Sex Roles* 41.3/4 (1999): 297-306

## Abstract

This study examines whether a female-demand / male-withdraw pattern occurs in dating relationships and whether this response increases during discussions of difficult topics. One hundred and eight individuals (women = 60, men = 48) currently in a dating relationship completed the Communication Patterns Questionnaire, Short Form (CPQSF) regarding either a difficult or non-difficult discussion. The racial composition of the undergraduate student population at the time the study was conducted was 68.8% Caucasian, 8.9% Hispanic, 8.9% International, 6.0% African American, 5.6% Asian American, and 1.8% Native American (data on socioeconomic status were unavailable). Results show that dating couples do employ a predominantly female-demand / male-withdraw pattern, which increases in response to difficult discussions. However, this study also found that many dating couples employed male-demand / female-withdraw or equal demand / withdraw patterns. Post hoc tests also showed that couples exhibiting either female-demand / male-withdraw or male-demand / female-withdraw patterns were more ingrained in specific negative behavior patterns, employed more demand / withdraw behaviors, and exhibited less positive behaviors than couples with an equal demand / withdraw pattern.

Implications of this research: It is important to identify demand / withdraw way of dealing with relationship issues early on in the relationship before marriage. In general, communication behaviors appear to be relatively stable over time. Specifically married couples in conflict acknowledged that they were often in conflict before marriage. In addition, some couples' communication patterns remained stable for a 2-year period after marriage. These findings suggest that perhaps the blueprint for marital communication is established well before the marriage. Therefore, understanding of marital communication must include a focus on the communication patterns of dating couples.

In order to have a healthy relationship, good communication patterns should be established during the dating relationship. If couples observe a demand / withdraw pattern, they should try to change the pattern because it can be a major problem later on in the relationship. In a way, demand / withdraw in a dating relationship starts out like the small snowball tumbling down the cliff. At first, it may not seem like such a big problem and the couple may push it to the side. But, the problem can eventually build up and give a detrimental hit to the couple. In order to avoid this possible outcome, couples should establish good communication patterns during their dating relationship.





FROM THE DESK OF

**Charlotte Shoup Olsen**



**Dating Relationships!**

Valentine's Day has come and gone, but was the inspiration for this issue's topic on 'dating' and some of the complex issues involved in two persons developing a relationship. The invited co-editor was Jose Uriel 'Udy' Estrada who did the lit review on this subject area.

As you may also note, this *Connections* did not hit your email 'newsstand' as early as past issues. We most likely will go to bi-monthly issues more often in the future.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen  
Jose Uriel 'Udy' Estrada



**Resources**

## Dating Resources

### Organizational Websites

#### **Connections + PREP®: Relationships and Marriage**

- Interpersonal Relationship Unit for Secondary Students
- The Dibble Fund for Marriage Education Instructor's Kit

A research-based curriculum designed to help teachers guide students in developing the skills necessary for establishing sound interpersonal relationships and preparing for marriage.

#### **About the curriculum**

The *Connections + PREP®: Relationships and Marriage* unit has been written in four sections:

- Section I - Personality
- Section II - Relationships
- Section III - Communication
- Section IV - Marriage

For more information, go to:

[www.buildingrelationshipskills.org](http://www.buildingrelationshipskills.org)

### Extension Research-Based Materials

<http://www.cyfernet.org>

For Extension fact sheets from other states, go to CYFERNET and type 'dating' in the search engine.