

How to avoid falling for a JERK



A Parent's Guide to Guarding
the Hearts of Sons and Daughters

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Adapted by Gregg Hunter, with Jen Talaber, from materials by John Van Epp, Ph.D., including his book, *How To Avoid Falling In Love With A Jerk* and his curriculum, *How To Avoid Falling For A Jerk(ette)*.

Section 1 – Introduction

“Driver’s ed? C’mon, son, you don’t need that! Just slide behind the wheel and head on out to your party. Be home by midnight!”

Who would agree that it’s better for a child to drive without any driver’s training, perhaps even to crash a few times before they get their license? Would we say the same about riding a horse or a motorcycle? “Let ‘em fall off or crash-and-burn a few times, get some scrapes and bruises, they’ll learn how to handle themselves soon enough.”

A safer approach to driving and riding would certainly be to give the child solid instructions (and clearly, to provide a good example) before they head out on the road or trail so you could help them avoid danger, pain, scars or even death. Should we not be equally as intent upon preparing the next generation of husbands and wives to make the best, most informed decisions they can make about building lifelong relationships – or even close friendships? The consequences can be as serious as a car crash.



So why aren’t more parents participating in their child’s relationship decisions? There are several likely reasons:

1. Parents believe their kids wouldn’t want them involved (and nobody likes to be rejected).
2. Many adults didn’t have a good model for parental involvement when they were young: “My parents didn’t help me with these choices; my kids will be fine on their own.”
3. They may believe it’s healthy for kids to experience a number of relationships – including joys and heartbreaks – before they “settle down” and get married.
4. Parents don’t have a lot of time with their kids; life is so busy.
5. They feel awkward or uncomfortable talking about very personal choices their kids are making, including talking about sex.
6. They simply don’t know where to start.



The workshop you’re about to participate in provides a starting point for meaningful discussion with your child. And we hope to remove any apprehension and self-doubt you may have in this area, while giving you a map to follow in ongoing dialogues with your child about his or her relationship choices.

“How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk” course in your local school

You were most likely invited to this workshop because your son or daughter is enrolled in a class that will include either 5 or 10 weekly lessons on How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk. Today’s seminar will give you an overview of what the students will be learning, plus it will equip you to interact with them from an informed position regarding the course content.

If your son or daughter is not enrolled in the class, this workshop will better prepare you for meaningful conversations with him or her about the many facets of building healthy relationships.

And if this guide is your first exposure to the “How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk” content – meaning that you didn’t attend the workshop and your child is not receiving the course instruction in school – you will still find the content in these pages useful in starting conversations that will enlighten both you and your child.

Our desired outcome for you is that you will feel prepared to talk with your child about building healthy relationships and making wise choices with friends, dating partners and ultimately, a spouse.

Why does all this matter?

When families break down or fail to form, people suffer. Today, it's likely that many people reading this have experienced divorce or single parenthood, either as a child or as an adult.

Our hope is to lower the number of failed relationships by equipping the next generation of adolescent and adult singles, singles-again and parents to make better relationship decisions – decisions that lead to life-long, healthy marriages and strong families.

There is a large body of research that shows that the alternative — broken families or those that never form in the first place — carries with it a series of related outcomes that bring pain to individuals, families and entire communities:

- Crime
- Academic failure
- Poverty
- Teen pregnancy
- Teen suicide
- Substance abuse
- Gang membership

As you can see from this list, when families fall apart or fail to form, we all experience the effects. Whole communities where families are fragmented suffer the consequences of the problems above.

Of course, not all children of divorced or single parents fit these statistics. We have certainly seen loving single parents raise their children to be healthy adults. And we've seen two-parent families in which the kids end up a mess. Just because a child is raised in an intact family does not guarantee that he or she will grow up to lead a wonderfully successful life. But the research shows what is more likely to occur for fragmented families.

We are working together on the “How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk” curriculum and parents’ seminar because we want to see

- young people better equipped to make wise relationship decisions;
- parents equipped to be “first teachers” of their kids;
- families strengthened;
- and entire communities experiencing the benefits of healthy marriages and families.

Thank you for joining us. We hope you'll see the value in this program for your kids and for your own relationships.

Equipping parents to more actively participate in their child's relationship decisions.





Section 2 – The 10 Truths

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In “How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk,” your child will be taught a curriculum that will help them think differently about love, dating, building good friendships – even about marriage. There are 10 key points in this curriculum – a “Truth” covered in each lesson – that can provide a wealth of understanding as your young person grows and builds relationships.

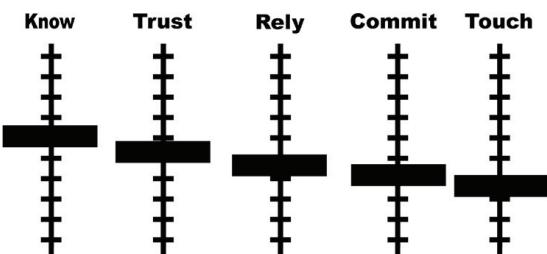
Three facts before we get started

1. It matters who you marry.
 - a. Think of the ways the person you marry can affect your life.
 - b. It is equally important to everyone, male or female, which person you choose to marry.
2. Some people are real jerks in relationships.
 - a. Jerks can be either gender
 - b. There is a difference between *acting like* a jerk and being a jerk.
 - c. The defining characteristic of a jerk is the *unwillingness to change* a significant problem area that disrupts relationships and negatively affects another.
3. Developing good character and choosing friends with good character is most important.
 - a. It's important to *be* a good friend *and* to *choose* a good friend. One of the best ways to not fall for a jerk is not to *be* one!
 - b. It's important to be a good partner in dating/courting/marriage *and* to choose a good partner.

TRUTH #1

Relationships are comprised of five bonding links whose balance depicts the risk and safeness of the relationship. Healthy relationships tend to develop with a specific balance between these five relationship connections: know, trust, rely, commit, touch.

R.A.M. Relationship Attachment Model



Dr. John Van Epp has developed the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) to provide a picture of a relationship and the different bonds or links that make people feel connected.

The five relationship links on the RAM board above represent the overall relationship; the strength and balance of these links describe the closeness and health of the relationship. Let's briefly look at each one and then see how they work together to describe healthy and risky relationships.

Note that each of the five links of the RAM are "reciprocal;" that is, they work both ways. You can know someone and you can also be known, you can trust and you can be trusted, and so on. As you can imagine, the stronger each of these areas are for both people, the stronger the bond.

However, vulnerabilities and potential risks result whenever extreme imbalances exist between any of the five links of the RAM or even between what one person is investing in the relationship compared to the other.

Know – The more you know and are known by someone, the more potential you have to feel a strong tie to him or her. Deeply knowing someone takes time and develops only after having many shared experiences and open communication. In this first lesson, students will learn about communication and self-disclosure, using discretion and setting boundaries with what they share with others, and the importance of taking time to truly get to know someone in a new relationship.

The most important areas to explore, or grow to **know**, can be represented by the acronym **F.A.C.E.S.** – five keys to truly understanding who another person is and whether they make a good candidate for a close friendship or romantic involvement.

1. Family experiences and background
2. Attitudes and actions of one's conscience
3. Compatibility potential
4. Examples of other relationship patterns
5. Skills for building good relationships

The 10-lesson curriculum is organized around the RAM and the five areas (FACES) to explore when building a relationship. Lesson one introduces the RAM and describes the importance of truly getting to know someone ("Know").





Lessons two through six define and describe each of the five FACES. The rest of the links of the RAM (Trust, Rely, Commit, and Touch) are covered in lessons 7 through 10. The five-lesson version follows the same outline but simply groups two or three points in each lesson.

Trust – Trust is a feeling of **confidence** in someone that is based on your opinion of them. This confidence should be based on their **track record**. In other words, as they prove themselves worthy of trust in small things, you then allow yourself to trust them with larger things.

Rely – Reliance is **trust in action**. It grows as you look to someone to be there for you, to meet your needs and/or they depend upon you to meet theirs. Examples include looking to someone for companionship, fun, and understanding; or giving a friend a ride home from school, copying notes from a class if they're out sick, or doing someone a favor.

Commit – Commitment is your investment in another, the extent to which you give to that person and share a feeling of **belonging** to him/her. Greater amounts of commitment include making sacrifices, overlooking faults and forgiving offenses, sticking by someone through a difficult time, and going out of your way to do something nice or thoughtful.

Touch (Affection) – This relationship dynamic is a strong contributor to feelings of intimacy and closeness, especially in romantic relationships. All forms of affection and touch – hugs, holding hands, cuddling – influence the relationship by expressing one's attention and care for another. More intimate touch also increases feelings of connection and love by creating changes in your thoughts and attitude toward a partner, and activating **chemical changes** in your brain and nervous system which cause strong bonds.



TRUTH #2

Your **FAMILY** influences the ways you build and maintain relationships, and the qualities you tend to look for in a dating partner and someday a marriage partner.

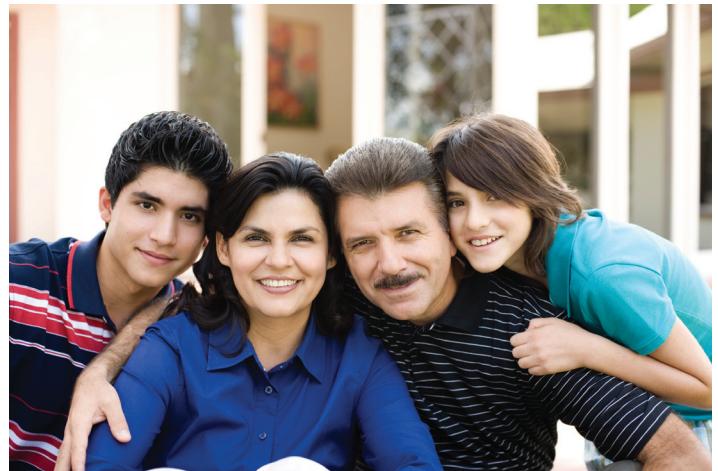
For many young people just beginning to experience deep relationships with the opposite sex, this concept may seem completely irrelevant. "I'm not dating his/her family," one might say. "I'm in a relationship with *him/her*!"

That's true to a point, but the "significant other's" family is involved in the relationship whether your child realizes it or not. Even if their parents are not overbearing or overprotective, their *imprints* are likely to be burnt into the subconscious of their children. And the evidence will come out the longer your child is in relationship with another person.

Family background can significantly impact the way we show **emotions**, especially **love/affection and anger/aggression**.

In "How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk" your child will learn to first identify their own family's influence on them, then what to look for in the background of their friends and any future dating partner. Here are a few questions they will answer in class:

- *What is your temper like? How is anger managed in your home setting?*
- *What do you want to look for in the person you may date (or even marry someday) in order to understand the way that person will handle their temper or express love?*
- *How do you want affection to be shown in your future marriage and family? What kind of family background of your future spouse would help accomplish this?*



Family Roles

The two aspects of family roles are:

- 1.) How I think of **my own role** – what do I think my role should be as a spouse or parent?
- 2.) How I think of **my spouse's role** – or, what are my **role expectations** for my future spouse. In other words, who do I think my partner should be and how should he or she act as a spouse or parent?

Naturally, both of these aspects have a lot to do with the family setting each partner grows up in. Students will be asked where they learned how to be a husband or wife, what they were taught by words and by actions, and what they plan to do differently when they are dating (and what they would like to do in the role of a spouse one day).

Students may be asked to create a **job description** for a husband/father and a wife/mother, working in two groups (boys and girls) and then interact with one another after they've shared their descriptions.

PARENTS, TAKE NOTE:

Young people may quickly identify things they wish were different in your home and upbringing. This can be uncomfortable for parents if the student is willing to share some of these observations. **But please, try not to get defensive.** Instead, stay focused on what's best for your child's relationships and affirm their willingness to imagine a bright, healthy future. This exercise could make a world of difference in the type of person they become close with and ultimately marry.

