



## Preparing Kids for Love, Romance and Healthy Relationships

Yesterday we were surrounded with hearts and flowers celebrating love and romance. But beyond the cards, candy and flowers of Valentine's Day, what is our society's take on love and romance? And what are the images and messages that shape our children's understanding of this important part of life? Here is Marti's advice for how parents can prepare children to be in healthy, respectful relationships when they begin to grow up and discover the power of Cupid's arrow:

### I. Issues to consider

- Media images tend to be superficial, idealized or extremely dysfunctional. It is rare to find examples of regular people building lasting relationships, making a commitment and working through the ups and downs that are part of any romance.
- Adults often are uncomfortable talking with children and teens about romantic relationships (especially sexual aspects), leaving it to media or peers to be the guides. Even more, we often fail to listen to what our children feel or believe about love, romance and sexual relationships.
- We often hide from our children some of the most important elements of our own relationships – romance and conflict resolution, for example, depriving children of seeing healthy models of both.

### II. What parent can do

- **Build a secure attachment with your child**, beginning in the first months of life  
*A powerful finding from research at the U of M shows that babies who receive sensitive, responsive care grow up to be better romantic partners as young adults.*
- **Be intentional about the example you set** in your own relationship and seek out family friends who have strong, healthy relationships
- **Discuss with your children the messages of pop culture** and seek out books, movies and music with healthy images
- **Talk explicitly with your children about respectful, loving sexual relationships**