# When your child has a crush, how should you react?

**Source: Tanu Shree Singh, Author, Keep Calm & Mommy On**

Teenage sexuality is real, but sadly remains taboo. We shake our heads at that other kid, and firmly believe that our child is not interested in all that ‘nonsense’. The schools are in a hurry to wash their hands of it. The easiest route is usually suspension or, worse, expulsion, with no thought of how this is going to affect the young people involved.

**Keeping Your Child Safe**

This is our fault, as parents and as a society. We pretend that a teenager is just a grumpy, slouchy, overgrown child. We choose to focus exclusively on academics as the determinant of a child’s future value in adult society. We send them to school for an education, not romantic interludes. (We say this huffily, forgetting our own crushes at the same age.) However, everything matters—academics, relationships, crushes, thoughts, feelings—everything.

But things are changing. I see parents asking on social media about how to react to teenage crushes. At least they are wondering; there are beginnings of dialogue somewhere. But is it enough? Schools need to wake up, as do we.

We might not want teenage romance to exist but it does. We may think that school-time romances are not important, but for the young people involved, they are. So, what do we do? How one approaches it, and what words one uses are personal choices. I have not had to face it so far, but I hope I will deal with it, thus:

**Accept the inevitable**

Teenage romance is real. In the proverbial ‘our times’, it was less talked about. Now, with social media taking over a big chunk of communication, and the added openness in relationships, it is in our faces. This simply means that there will be crushes, heartbreaks and stolen kisses. Once we have accepted this reality, we can help our children understand what boundaries there ought to be and why.

**Communicate**

Communication is always a two-way street. Don’t limit it to ‘What happened at school?’ or ‘Did you get any homework?’This does not mean that you interrogate your child, or bore them with sermons. Sentences like ‘Who are your friends?’ or ‘That boy? You better stay away from him!’ are pointless and don’t serve any purpose.

Communication requires us, among other things, to share details about our lives in order to elicit unguarded responses from our children. If you want your child to talk about her life to you, talk to her about your life and thoughts, and do not be judgmental or preachy about what she tells you.

**Be neutral**

Don’t be too judgmental about the stories your child tells you of his day at school or things his friends said. Some of the things I hear from the boys, well, I am tempted to tell them that it is not completely acceptable. But I resist. When we correct them every step of the way, they stop sharing. Telling a child what good boys or good girls do or not do has never led to epiphanies for the child. It leads to doors being shut and wormholes being blocked off so that you are left feeling your way around in the dark.

**Talk about love**

Do not make love or attraction a taboo topic, and do not show disrespect for it, even if you are personally cynical about it. It helps if you talk about love in general to your preteen child, encourage your child to share what she feels about it. This goes a long way in arming her with the capability to understand what she is feeling when the time comes.

**Accept differences**

Sexual orientation, skin tone, religion, caste–these are all just labels. If you have accustomed your mind to the idea that teenage romance might happen, think further. Expecting the person in question to be of what is to you the acceptable gender, caste, or religion is your illusion. Your child has made her choice, and as a parent, you need to accept that she has the right to do so.

**Help your child to deal with peer pressure**

Sometimes it is perceived—in the strange, fraught world that is middle school and high school—that ‘cool kids’ have love interests. And this drives other kids to want to pair off as well. If children are taught to deal with peer pressure, and made to feel comfortable in their skin, things are smoother.

If your child has a partner, peer pressure can often play a role in shaping how the relationship progresses. Discuss with your child how she should only do what she feels comfortable doing, not what is decreed by the peer group.

**Distract**

A child who is preoccupied with a million things she loves is less likely to fall into the trap of peer pressure or curiosity. The boys learn guitar, read like maniacs, and play at least one sport of their choice. We try to incorporate varied experiences in our lives—from watching superhero movies, to attending book festivals and history walks.

Multiple interests also help children tide over heartbreaks. Where there is love, broken hearts cannot be far behind. Movie dates with your child, and more stuff to take her mind off the jolt, helps them move on.

**Be philosophical**

Teenage romances are learning grounds for young people to understand complex feelings, to deal with rejection, and to respect each other. Romantic relationships are a major developmental milestone, irrespective of whether the teenagers learn through experience or observation of one’s peers. From identity development to changes in self-respect, romantic relationships impact a lot of areas. Ignoring their existence results in turning a blind eye to developmental changes that they might effect.

**Resist the urge to cry**

Have faith in your child and in your parenting. As a parent, I want my boys to know that love happens, to know that there are boundaries, and to know I am there, and I will always stand with them. As a parent, I do not want them to confuse morality with the strange feeling in the tummy. Getting attracted to someone doesn’t make them immoral. Shunning love in one’s growing years does not make one a good human being, good deeds and thoughts do. I want them to learn that difference.