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## Opinion: Teen dating isn't best practice for adults relationships

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While teen dating could be viewed as practice for adult relationships, in reality, teen same-gender friendships provide a far better practice, some experts say. *Getty Images*

When our daughter announced she had a boyfriend in middle school, my husband was really uncomfortable. He saw this as a distraction from school and more important things. I comforted my husband by saying that teen love was practice for when she's older. I thought it helpful she experienced romance on a smaller scale while still at home in a safe environment. We could help her navigate those new emotions and physical attractions that go along with dating. And that's what we aimed to do as parents. But was I right? A new study says maybe not.

Researchers from the University of Virginia and James Madison University followed 165 adolescents as they aged from 13-30 to learn what best predicted who would experience satisfying romantic relationships in their late 20s and into adulthood.

It turns out the best practice comes from friendships.

The study's lead researcher, Joseph P. Allen, Ph.D., Hugh P. Kelly professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, says the "greater stability found in same-gender friendships, allows for more long-term practice with the kinds of give-and-take needed to successfully handle romantic relationships in adulthood."

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Happily coupled adults experience emotional intimacy that, outside of the physical component, feels like deep long-term friendship. The study further identified key developmental milestones that proved important down the road. None were related to adolescent dating. Rather, the most important predictors of adult romantic satisfaction were:

- At age 13, the ability to establish positive expectations of peers and be appropriately assertive with them.
- From ages 15 to 16, the ability to manage an array of peer relationships and to establish close friendships.
- From ages 16 to 18, the ability to establish and maintain close, stable friendships.

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Bottom line? Dr. Allen says, "although teen dating could in some ways be viewed as practice for adult romantic relationships, in reality, teen same-gender friendships provide far better practice."

Turns out that famous quote from 17th century author, Jemery Taylor, has been right all along, Love really is friendship set on fire.

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