Teens, Technology and Romantic Relationships

From flirting to breaking up, social media and mobile phones are woven into teens' romantic lives

BY **Amanda Lenhart, Aaron Smith AND Monica Anderson**

About This Report

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals who variously helped design (and translate) the quantitative instrument, conduct focus groups, analyze data, write the report and design graphics. The authors would also like to thank our outside reviewers who helped us think through our consent process with our teen respondents and question development for the qualitative and quantitative instruments; Amy Bleakley, danah boyd, Lisa Jones and Lois Scheidt. This is the third of three reports based on this data collection that broadly examine how teens use technology particularly in the context of peer friendships and romantic relationships. The first report was Teen Social Media and Technology Overview 2015 and the second report was Teens, Technology and Friendships. Find related reports online at www.pewresearch.org/internet

About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. The center conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. It studies U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.
© Pew Research Center 2015

Summary of Findings

Adolescence is a time of incredibly physical, social and emotional growth, and peer relationships – especially romantic ones – are a major social focus for many youth. Understanding the role social and digital media play in these romantic relationships is critical, given how deeply enmeshed these technology tools are in lives of American youth and how rapidly these platforms and devices change.

This study reveals that the digital realm is one part of a broader universe in which teens meet, date and break up with romantic partners. Online spaces are used infrequently for meeting romantic partners, but play a major role in how teens flirt, woo and communicate with potential and current flames.

This report examines American teens' digital romantic practices. It covers the results of a national Pew Research Center survey of teens ages 13 to 17; throughout the report, the word "teens" refers to those in that age bracket, unless otherwise specified. The survey was conducted online from Sept. 25 through Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10 through March 16, 2015; 16 online and in-person focus groups with teens were conducted in April 2014 and November 2014. The main findings from this research include:

8% of All American Teens Have Met a Romantic Partner Online
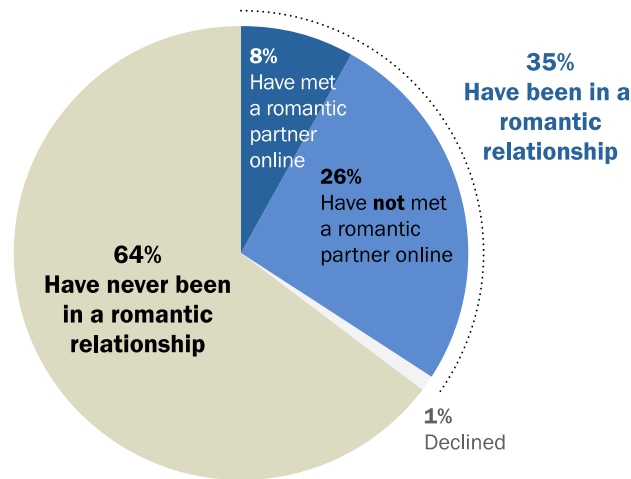
% of all teens who ...

8%
Have met a romantic partner online

35%
Have been in a romantic relationship

26%
Have **not** met a romantic partner online

64%
Have never been in a romantic relationship

1%
Declined

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Relatively few American teens have met a romantic partner online

Overall, 35% of American teens ages 13 to 17 have ever dated, hooked up with or been otherwise romantically involved with another person,[1] and 18% are currently in a romantic relationship. [Though 57% of teens have begun friendships in a digital space](), teens are far less likely to have embarked on a romantic relationship that started online. A majority of teens with dating experience (76%) say they have only dated people they met via offline methods. One-quarter (24%) of teen "daters" or roughly 8% of all teens have dated or hooked up with someone they first met online. Of those who have met a partner online, the majority met on social media sites, and the bulk of them met on Facebook.

Social media is a top venue for flirting

While most teen romantic relationships do not start online, technology is a major vehicle for flirting and expressing interest in a potential partner. Along with in-person flirting, teens often use social media to like, comment, "friend" or joke around with someone on whom they have a crush. Among all teens:

- 55% of all teens ages 13 to 17 have flirted or talked to someone in person to let them know they are interested.
- 50% of teens have let someone know they were interested in them romantically by friending them on Facebook or another social media site.
- 47% have expressed their attraction by liking, commenting or otherwise interacting with that person on social media.
- 46% have shared something funny or interesting with their romantic interest online
- 31% sent them flirtatious messages.
- 11% have made them a music playlist.
- 10% have sent flirty or sexy pictures or videos of themselves.[2]
- 7% have made a video for them.

Digital flirting has "entry-level" and more sophisticated elements for teens, depending on the nature of the relationship and their experience with virtual flirting strategies

Each of the flirting behaviors measured in the survey is more common among teens with previous dating experience than among those who have never dated before. But while some of these

---

[1] In this report, the question that established whether a respondent was a "dater" was asked as follows: "Have you ever dated, hooked up with or otherwise had a romantic relationship with another person?" No other definition was provided for any of the terms in the question, though "hooking up" is intended to elicit a positive response from teens involved in more casual, physical relationships with peers.

[2] This study did not ask about sexting, or the sending, sharing or receiving of nude or nearly nude photos and videos. For our previous research on teen sexting, please see "[Teens and Sexting]()" and "[Sexting]()" in "[Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites]()."

behaviors are at least relatively common among dating neophytes, others are almost entirely engaged in by teens with prior relationship experience.

When it comes to "entry-level" flirting, teens who have never been in a romantic relationship are most comfortable letting someone know that they are interested in them romantically using the following approaches:

- Flirting or talking to them in person: 39% of teens without dating experience have done this.
- Friending them or taking part in general interactions on social media: Roughly one-third (37%) of teens without dating experience have friended someone they are interested in romantically and a similar 34% have liked, commented on a post or otherwise interacted with a crush on social media.
- Sharing funny or interesting things with them online. Some 31% of teens without dating experience have done this.

On the other hand, more advanced and sometimes overtly sexually suggestive online behaviors are most often exhibited by teens who have prior experience in romantic relationships:

- Fully 63% of teens with dating experience have sent flirtatious messages to someone they were interested in; just 14% of teens without dating experience have done so.
- 23% of teens with dating experience have sent sexy or flirty pictures or videos to someone they were interested in, compared with just 2% of teens without dating experience.

Girls are more likely to be targets of uncomfortable flirting tactics

Not all flirting behavior is appreciated or appropriate. One-quarter (25%) of all teens have unfriended or blocked someone on social media because that person was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable.

Just as adult women are often subject to more frequent and intense harassment online, teen girls are substantially more likely than boys to experience uncomfortable flirting within social media environments. Fully 35% of all teen girls have had to block or unfriend someone who was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable, double the 16% of boys who have taken this step.

Social media helps teen daters to feel closer to their romantic partner, but also feeds jealousy and uncertainty

Many teens in relationships view social media as a place where they can feel more connected with the daily events in their significant other's life, share emotional connections, and let their significant other know they care. At the same time, teens' use of social media sites can also lead to feelings of jealousy or uncertainty about the stability of their relationships. However, even teens who indicate that social media has played a role in their relationship (whether for good or for bad) tend to feel that its role is relatively modest in the grand scheme of things.

Among teen social media users with relationship experience (30% of the overall population of those ages 13 to 17):

- 59% say social media makes them feel more connected to what's happening in their significant other's life; 15% indicate that it makes them feel "a lot" more connected.
- 47% say social media offers a place for them to show how much they care about their significant other; 12% feel this way "a lot."
- 44% say social media helps them feel emotionally closer to their significant other, with 10% feeling that way "a lot."
- 27% say social media makes them feel jealous or unsure about their relationship, with 7% feeling this way "a lot."

Boys are a bit more likely than girls to view social media as a space for emotional and logistical connection with their significant other

Among teens ages 13 to 17 who use social media and have some relationship experience:

- 65% of boys say social media makes them feel more connected with what's happening in their significant other's life (compared with 52% of girls). Some 16% of these boys report that these platforms make them feel "a lot" more connected.
- 50% of boys say social media makes them feel more emotionally connected with their significant other (compared with 37% of girls). Some 13% of boys feel "a lot" more emotionally close.

Teen daters like being able to publicly demonstrate their affection and show support for others' romantic relationships. Yet they also find it allows too many people to be involved in their personal business

For some teens, social media is a space where they can display their relationship to others by publicly expressing their affection on the platform. More than a third (37%) of teens with

relationship experience (also called "teen daters" throughout this report) have used social media to let their partner know how much they like them in a way that was visible to other people in their network. As noted above, teen daters say social media makes them feel like they have a place to show how much they care about their boyfriend, girlfriend or significant other. A bit less than half of teens (47%) say they feel this way about social media.

Teens also use social media to express public support or approval of others' romantic relationships. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of teens with dating experience have posted or liked something on social media as a way to indicate their support of one of their friends' relationships. Girls are especially likely to support friends' relationships on social media: 71% of girls with dating experience have done so, compared with 57% of boys.

But even as they use social media to show affection, display their relationships and support their friends' relationships, many teen daters also express annoyance at the public nature of their own romantic partnerships on social media. Some 69% of teen social media users with dating experience agree that too many people can see what's happening in their relationship on social media; 16% of this group "strongly" agrees.

Many teens in romantic relationships expect daily communication with their significant other

Most teens in romantic relationships assume that they and their partner will check in with each other with great regularity throughout the day.

- Overall, 85% of teens in a romantic relationship expect to hear from their partner or significant other at least once a day, if not more often.
- 11% expect to hear from their partner hourly.
- 35% expect to hear something every few hours.
- 38% expect to hear

Teen Daters Usually Have Similar Communication Expectations as Their Significant Other

% of teens with some kind of relationship experience who
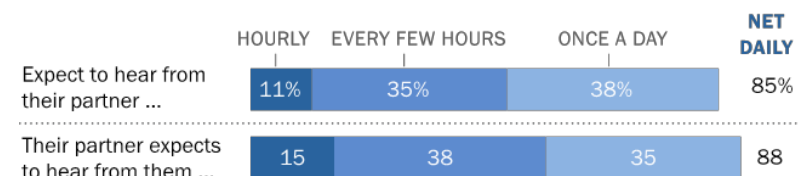
	HOURLY	EVERY FEW HOURS	ONCE A DAY	NET DAILY
Expect to hear from their partner ...	11%	35%	38%	85%
Their partner expects to hear from them ...	15	38	35	88

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

from their significant other once a day.

When asked about their partner's expectations for their own communication, a similar pattern emerges.

- 88% of teens in romantic relationships say their partner expects to hear from them at least once a day.
- 15% say they are expected to check in hourly.
- 38% are expected to do so every few hours.
- 35% are expected to do so once a day.

Texting, voice calls and in-person hanging out are the main ways teens spend time with their significant others

When it comes to spending time with a significant other, teens say texting is the top method, but phone calling and in-person time mix with other digital means for staying in touch. Asked how often they spent time with their current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or significant other on particular platforms, teen daters told us they use:

- **Text messaging** – 92% of teens with romantic relationship experience have spent time text messaging with their partner at least occasionally.
- **Talking on the phone** – 87% have spent time talking on the phone with their significant other.
- **Being together in person** – 86% have spent time together in person, outside of school hours.
- **Social media** – 70% have spent time together posting on social media sites.
- **Instant or online messaging** – 69% have spent time with their significant other using instant or online messaging.
- **Video chat** – 55% say they have spent time with their partner video chatting.
- **Messaging apps** – 49% have used messaging apps to stay connected to their partner.
- **Email** – 37% have used email to spend time with a significant other.
- **Talk while playing video games** – 31% talk with their partner while playing video games together.

Teens consider the text message breakup to be socially undesirable, but a sizeable number of teens with relationship experience have been broken up with — or have broken up with others — using text messaging

The most socially acceptable way to break up with someone is by having an in-person conversation, and these conversations are the most common way that breakups occur in a "real-world" setting. While most teens rate an in-person talk as the most acceptable

Breaking Up In Person Is Most Socially Acceptable Method

On a scale from 1 to 10, teens' average rank of the acceptability of each breakup method

LEAST ACCEPTABLE · MOST ACCEPTABLE

1 · 3.4 Text message · 5.4 Phone call · 8.4 In person · 10

2.7
Message on social media
Get a friend to tell them
Change social media status to "single"

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

way to break up with someone, some 62% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone in person, and 47% have been broken up with through an in-person discussion.

Text messaging – which is widely viewed as one of the least acceptable ways of breaking up with someone – is more common in the context of actual relationships than its perceived acceptability might indicate. Some 27% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone via text message, 31% have been broken up with in this way.

Phone calls, which are seen as the second-most acceptable way of breaking up with someone, are just as common as a breakup text; 29% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone over the phone, and 27% have been broken up with in this way.
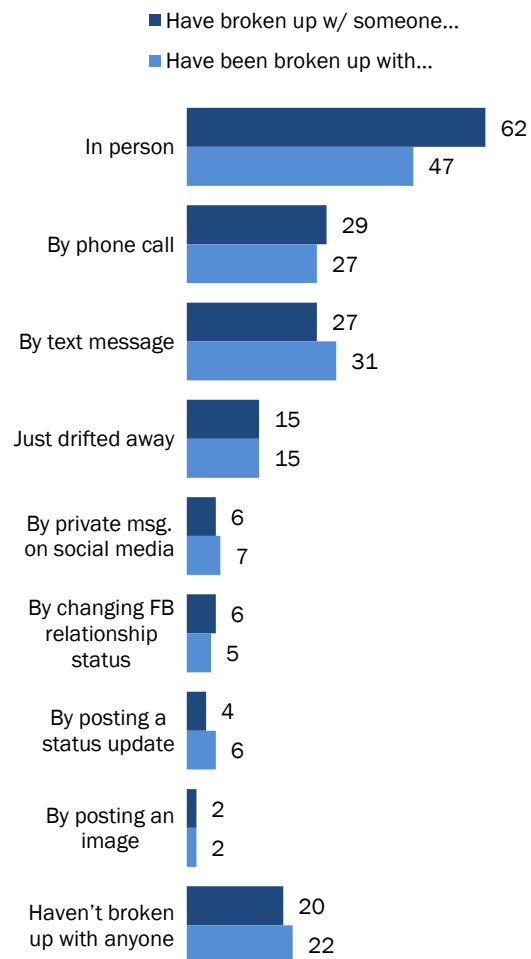
And breakups through social media (which, like texts, are also viewed as having low levels of acceptability) are also relatively common – 18% of teens with dating experience have experienced or initiated a breakup by sending a private social media message, changing their relationship status on Facebook or posting a status update.

Relatively small numbers of teen daters engage in potentially controlling or harmful digital behavior to a partner or ex-partner

Dating isn't always a positive experience for youth, in person or digitally. In this study, we asked teen daters about a number of things they might have done online or with a phone to someone they were dating or used to date. These behaviors fall on a spectrum of seriousness, from potentially innocuous to

Despite Being Much Less "Acceptable," Breaking Up by Text Message Is as Common as Breaking Up By Voice Call

% of teens with current or prior romantic experience who have broken up with someone or been broken up with in the following ways

■ Have broken up w/ someone…
■ Have been broken up with…

	Have broken up w/ someone…	Have been broken up with…
In person	62	47
By phone call	29	27
By text message	27	31
Just drifted away	15	15
By private msg. on social media	6	7
By changing FB relationship status	6	5
By posting a status update	4	6
By posting an image	2	2
Haven't broken up with anyone	20	22

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

troubling. And most of these activities are highly dependent on context – as one person's cute is another person's creepy.

- 11% of teen daters have accessed a mobile or online account of current or former partner.
- 10% have modified or deleted their partner's or ex-partner's social media profile.
- 10% have impersonated a boyfriend, girlfriend or ex in a message.
- 8% of teens have sent embarrassing pictures of a current or former partner to someone else.
- 4% have downloaded a GPS or tracking program to a partners' device without their knowledge.

A small share of teen daters have experienced potentially abusive or controlling behavior by a current or former partner

Beyond perpetrating potentially inappropriate or harmful behavior, teen daters also can be the recipients of –possibly more serious – controlling or potentially abusive experiences at the hands of significant others. These questions ask about nine experiences and whether they occur during a relationship and/or after a relationship ends. And like the practices our survey respondents told us they engaged in above, these behaviors and experiences are in some cases dependent on context of the interaction.

During a relationship teens are most likely to experience:

- 31% of teens with dating experience report that a current or former partner has **checked up on them multiple times per day** on the internet or cellphone, asking where they were, who they were with or what they were doing.
  - o 26% of teen daters report that their partner checked up on them during their relationship.
  - o 5% of teen daters report that a former partner checked up on them multiple times per day after their relationship ended.
- 21% of teen daters report that a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or partner has **read their text messages without permission**.
  - o 18% of teen daters report such an experience during the course of their relationship.
  - o 3% report that a partner read their texts without permission after their relationship had ended.
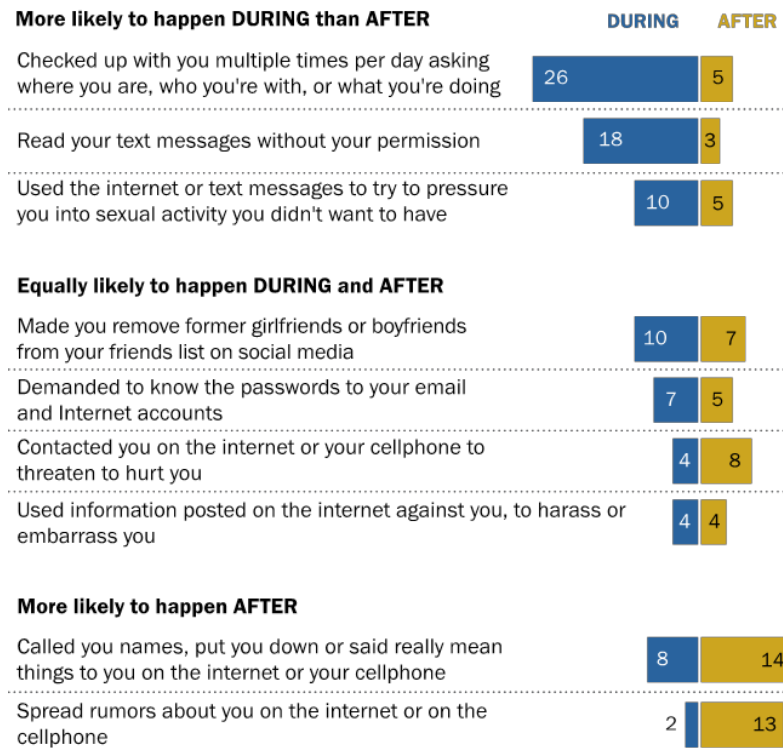
- 15% of teen daters (or 5% of all teens) say a current or former partner used the internet or text messaging to **pressure them to engage in sexual activity** they did not want to have.
  - o 10% of teen daters report that this happened during a relationship.
  - o 5% report that a former partner did this to them after a relationship ended.

Potentially controlling and harmful behaviors teens experience both during and after a relationship with similar frequency[3]:

- 16% of teen daters have been required by a current or former partner to **remove former girlfriends or boyfriends from their friends list** on Facebook, Twitter or other social media.
  - o 10% of teens experience this during their relationship; 7% experience it after a breakup.

Relatively Few Teen Daters Experience Potentially Controlling or Abusive Behavior

% of teen daters who have experienced the following from a current or former romantic partner, and whether it occurred during or after the relationship...

More likely to happen DURING than AFTER   DURING   AFTER

	DURING	AFTER
Checked up with you multiple times per day asking where you are, who you're with, or what you're doing	26	5
Read your text messages without your permission	18	3
Used the internet or text messages to try to pressure you into sexual activity you didn't want to have	10	5

Equally likely to happen DURING and AFTER

	DURING	AFTER
Made you remove former girlfriends or boyfriends from your friends list on social media	10	7
Demanded to know the passwords to your email and Internet accounts	7	5
Contacted you on the internet or your cellphone to threaten to hurt you	4	8
Used information posted on the internet against you, to harass or embarrass you	4	4

More likely to happen AFTER

	DURING	AFTER
Called you names, put you down or said really mean things to you on the internet or your cellphone	8	14
Spread rumors about you on the internet or on the cellphone	2	13

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have any type of romantic relationship experience).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

[3] The differences between the percent of teens who experienced these things during vs. after a relationship are not statistically significant for any of the items in this section.

- 13% of teens with dating experience report that their current or former partner **demanded that they share their passwords** to email and internet accounts with them.
  - And teens are about equally as likely to experience this during a relationship (7%) as after a relationship ends (5%).
- 11% of teens with relationship experience report that a current or former partner has contacted them on the internet or on their cellphone **to threaten to hurt them**.
  - 8% of teens with dating experience have been threatened digitally by an ex.
  - 4% experienced this during a relationship.

- 8% of teen daters report that a current or ex-partner **used information posted on the internet against them**, to harass or embarrass them.
  - 4% had this happen during a relationship, and another 4% have experienced this after the relationship ended.

After a relationship ends, teens are more likely to experience:

- 22% of teens with relationship experience have had a partner use the internet or a cellphone to **call them names, put them down** or say really mean things to them.
  - 14% of teen daters report that this happened after a relationship ended.
  - 8% of teens report that a boyfriend or girlfriend had done this to them during a relationship.
- 15% of teen daters report that a current or former partner **spread rumors** about them using digital platforms like mobile phones or the internet.
  - 13% of youth with dating experience report that this happened after a breakup;
  - 2% of teen daters experienced this during a relationship.

About This Survey

Data for this report was collected for Pew Research Center. The survey was administered online by the GfK Group using its KnowledgePanel, in English and Spanish, to a nationally representative sample of 1,060 teens ages 13 to 17 and a parent or guardian from September 25 to October 9, 2014, and February 10 to March 16, 2015. In the fall sample, 1,016 parent-teen pairs participated in the survey. The survey was re-opened in the spring and 44 pairs were added to the sample for a total of 1060 parent-teen pairs. The study also included 12 focus groups conducted in three cities in November 2014 with a total of 70 teens, and four online focus groups, each with 10 teens from around the U.S., conducted in April 2014. Focus group participants were teens between the ages of 13 and 17. The groups were separated into middle school students and high school students and were segregated by gender. For four of the in-person focus groups, participants must have had some previous experience in a romantic relationship. Teen participants were paid an incentive. For more on the methods for this study, please visit the Methods section at the end of this report.

Introduction

As teens grow and develop, the creation of peer relationships – both for friendship and romance – is a major focus of their social and personal lives. The pursuit of romantic relationships becomes increasingly important as teens mature physically and emotionally, and explore how romance factors into their emergent identities. As digital technologies like mobile phones and social media become ever-more deeply enmeshed in teens' lives, these tools are playing a role in all types of peer relationships, including romantic attachments. As C.J. Pascoe writes in her qualitative study of youth: "Young people are at the forefront of developing, using, reworking and incorporating new media into their dating practices in ways that might be unknown, unfamiliar and sometimes even scary to adults."[4] Understanding the norms that teens are constantly developing (and revising) in relation to both changing expectations around gender roles and relationship practices, and the rapidly changing technological landscape is critical for parents, educators and policymakers.

This study examines the role of digital tools in teens' romantic relationships – how teens meet, flirt, ask out, hang out, hook up and break up with their significant others. The structure of this report, like our previous report on teen friendships, follows the arc of a relationship, from meeting and flirting to breakups.

The study explores how many American teens ages 13 to 17 are in relationship with others and the variety of types of those relationships. It explores how teens research prospective partners and flirt with others who interest them.

The report then focuses in on teens with romantic relationship experience (either current or in the past). We refer to these teens as "teen daters" – they represent 35% of the teen population. The study then looks at how teens ask someone out, what teens share with each other online, where teens spend time together – in person or digitally - and what sort of expectations romantic partners have for communication with each other.

Social media is the focus of the next section of the report. It looks at the positives of social media and relationships, including an increased sense of connection to a partner and a chance to see another side of one's partner's personality. And it probes the negatives, which can include the way digital media is used to deliberately create jealousy and uncertainty. This section also examines the way teens simultaneously use social media to display and publicly "perform" affection in their

---

[4] Pascoe, C.J. "Intimacy," in Ito, M. (2010). Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. pp. 117 - 148

relationship, but also how they feel as though their online digital network is overly involved in their romantic relationship.

Finally, it looks at breakups. What do teens consider an acceptable mode for breaking up – in person or on the phone – and then how teens really do it. After the breakup, some teens prune content from their profiles and sometimes kick their exes from their lists of social media friends and phone address books. And while a majority find that social media and its web of friends helps them feel supported after a breakup, many teens also find that breakups foment the worst of social media-based drama.

The report ends by looking at potentially controlling and harmful behavior within romantic relationships – both behaviors in which teens have participated and those they have experienced. It also makes a distinction between the experiences teens have during a relationship and the abuse they suffer after it ends.

We have also woven the voices of teens themselves throughout the report, gleaned from the conversations in a series of 16 focus groups, 12 conducted in person in three cities in November 2014 and four conducted online among a national sample of youth in April 2014.

Chapter 1: Basics of Teen Romantic Relationships

35% of Teens Have Some Experience with Dating or Romantic Relationships; 18% Are Currently in a Relationship of Some Kind

Dating and experience with romance are relatively common – but far from universal – among teens ages 13 to 17. Some 35% of teens have some type of experience in a romantic relationship, a figure that includes current and former daters, as well as those in serious and less-serious relationships. The survey asked about three different categories of romantic relationships and found:

- 14% of teens are currently in a relationship they consider to be serious with a boyfriend, girlfriend or significant other.
- 5% of teens are in a current romantic relationship, but do not consider it to be serious.
- 16% of teens are not currently dating, but have had some sort of romantic relationship (whether serious or otherwise) in the past.

35% of Teens Are or Have Been in a Romantic Relationship of Some Kind

% of all teens
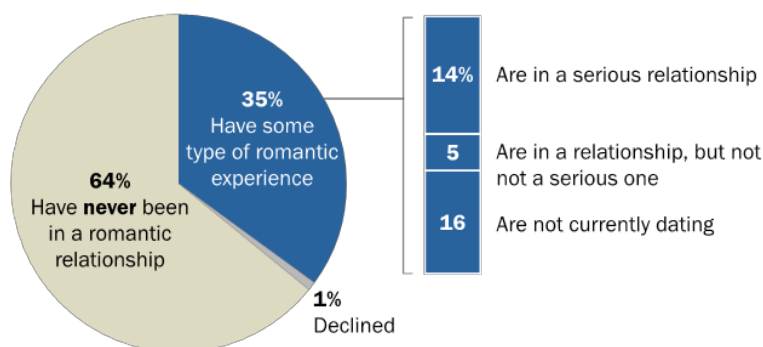
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Some 64% of teens indicate that they have never been in a romantic relationship of any kind (and 1% declined to provide their relationship status). The 35% of teens who say they are either currently involved with a romantic partner or have ever dated, hooked up with or had a romantic relationship with someone will serve as the focus of the remainder of this report. When we refer to "teen daters," "teens with relationship experience" or "teens with dating experience" we are referring to this roughly one-third of teenagers who are currently in some type of relationship or have been at some point in the past.

Most teens with romantic relationship experience are not sexually active. Some 30% of teen daters say they have ever had sex.[5] Two-thirds of teen daters (66%) indicate that they have not had sex, and 2% declined to indicate whether they are sexually active or not.[6] [7]

Older teens are more likely to have experience with dating and relationships, and they also are more likely to be sexually active

Age is the primary demographic dividing line when it comes to dating and romance. Teens ages 15 to 17 are around twice as likely as those ages 13 to 14 to have ever had some type of romantic relationship experience (44% vs. 20%). These older teens also are significantly more likely to say they are currently in an active relationship, serious or otherwise (18% vs. 6% of younger teens).

Older teens also are more likely to be sexually active, as 36% of 15- to 17-year-olds with romantic relationship experience have had sex, compared with 12% of 13- to 14-year-olds with relationship experience.

Besides age, there are relatively few demographic differences when it comes to teens' experiences with dating and romantic relationships. Boys and girls, and those with different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds are equally likely to have been in such relationships.

Older Teens Are More Likely to Have Experience With Dating and Relationships

% of teens in each age group with past/current dating experience
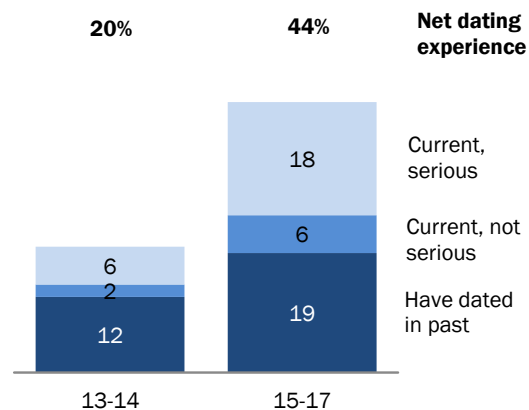
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

[5] When looking at all teens in our survey, about 10% report having had sex. Data from Pediatrics suggests that on average about 20% of teens ages 13-17 report having had sex. Finer, L. and Philbin, J. (2013) "Sexual Initiation, Contraceptive Use and Pregnancy Among Young Adolescents," *Pediatrics.* Vol 131, number 5. May 2013. http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/03/27/peds.2012-3495.full.pdf+html

[6] In this study, teens were asked about their sexual orientation and gender identity. The number of teens responding that they were something other than heterosexual was not large enough to allow us to use the data as a point of analysis. For more information, and the basic data about the % of LGTBQ and transgender youth in this study, please see Appendix A.

[7] Note: Teens received the invitation for the survey from their parents. The invitation was sent initially to parents, who completed their portion of the study and then passed the invitation on to their offspring. There were measures in place to ensure that teens took the survey privately. Instructions to parents and teens at the beginning of the survey asked that the teen be allowed to take the survey in private and a question at the end that asked both the interviewee and interviewer whether there was someone else in the room when the teen was taking the survey (5% of teens replied yes). However, it is possible that some teens would have not felt comfortable being truthful in their answers to questions about sexual experience, orientation or gender identity.

Chapter 2: How Teens Meet, Flirt With and Ask Out Potential Romantic Partners

## One-Quarter of Teens with Dating Experience Have Met Someone Online; Facebook Is the Primary Venue for Meeting Partners Online

A majority of teens with dating experience (76%, or 26% of all teens) say they have only dated people they met via in-person methods. Still, a quarter of teen daters (24%, or 8% of all teens) have dated or hooked up with someone they first met online. Half of this group (representing 12% of all teens with dating experience, or 4% of all American teens) have met just one romantic partner online, while the other half have met more than one partner online. Among teens with dating experience, boys and girls are equally likely to say they have met someone online, and younger and older teens are equally likely to have experienced this as well. Overall, 4% of all teens ages 13 to 14 have dated someone they met online, compared with 11% of all teens ages 15 to 17.

The survey also found that among teen daters who have met a romantic partner online, Facebook is cited more often than other sites as the primary source for online romantic connections. Facebook was mentioned 46 times in the open-ended responses to this question, while the second-most popular (Instagram) was cited only eight times. Twitter, Kik and online gaming also were mentioned in a small number of responses, as were a range of other social media, video and chat sites (Hot or Not, IMVU, MySpace, Omegle, MeetMe and SnapChat each were mentioned once in these responses).

8% of All American Teens Have Met a Romantic Partner Online
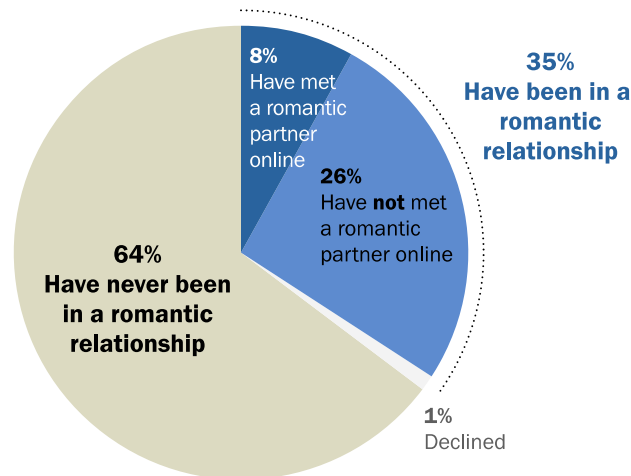
% of all teens who …

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

For teens who meet romantic partners online, it is common for those relationships to never actually progress to the point of a physical meeting. Some 31% of teens who have met a partner or partners online, indicate that they have been involved in a romantic relationship with someone online they never met face to face, while 69% of teens who have met a romantic partner online say they have met them in person. Overall, 3% of all teens have met a romantic partner online but never met them in person.

Teens describe experiences meeting romantic partners online

Teens in our focus groups related their experiences meeting partners through online venues. A high school girl described meeting a boyfriend online:

> "*For me personally, it was from Facebook and it was a friend of a friend. And then like we just like really liked each other. I don't know. We could talk to each other really easily. And then we started Skyping, and after that we just kind of started a relationship.*"

A high school girl described the process she used to meet a guy via Instagram:

> "*I've met a person over Instagram, actually. And, I mean, you...it's not like you just kind of comment on their picture like, hey, here's my number. Text me and let's hang out. Like you can do that. But for me, I DMed the person. Direct messaged them. And we talked for about a week, and then I decided he actually seems kind of chill. I'm going to give him my number. And then I took it slow, like, 'cause meeting someone over the Internet isn't always the best idea. So if you're going to do it, like do it very carefully.*"

And this same high schooler eventually met her beau in person:

> "*Well, I said...we just said, like, do you want to hang out at the movies sometime? I said sure. And we kind of met there and then we just kind of became romantically involved. But it didn't last that long.*"

Facebook Is the Most Common Venue For Teens to Meet Romantic Partners Online

Among teens who have met a partner or hookup online, the site(s) on which they met

Site	# of mentions
Facebook	46
Instagram	8
Other chat/social media	6
Twitter	4
Gaming	4
Kik	3
Unspecified	5

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=76 teens ages 13 to 17 who have met a partner online).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

One high school boy explained how he met a girlfriend through a dating app:

> *"I was dating this girl that I met through a social website that probably hardly anybody knows about. So it's a dating website for teens. ...It's called Meet Me. It's like more of an app kind of thing. I was actually surprised. ... It was like, oh, what the hell. I'll try it. And I met a girl on there and she lived up in [town]. I still talk to her, but we're not together."*

And this same teen explained that he never met his online girlfriend while they were together:

> *"Yeah, I met her in person. After we dated. Broke up and then we finally met."*

And for some teens, online relationships, like offline ones, can be uncomfortable and devolve into creepy situations. One high school girl related the experience of one of her friends:

> High School Girl: "*She met this guy through Facebook and ... it feels weird. But he said he lived in Florida and then last weekend, she got a ring in the mail from him. Yeah. And so ... I don't know. She just had a lot of problems with him and she...they talk all the time, but it just ... I don't know. It's weird.*
>
> Interviewer: "*But she gave him her address?*
>
> High School Girl: "*She didn't give it to him. One of her friends did. And so she told him that it was the wrong address because he asked her. He asked, like, did you get what I sent you? And she was like, that's not my address. So I don't know. I just feel weird about the whole situation. I told her she should just, like, leave it, but she doesn't want to, I guess."*

Teens Use Social Media and Search to Connect With and Research Potential Romantic Partners

Teens deploy social media and the web of connections they create to help them connect with and learn more about potential romantic prospects. One-in-five (20%) of all teens have used their social networks to find new partners by following or friending someone because a friend suggested they might want to date them. Older teens are more likely to do this than younger ones; 23% of 15- to 17-year-olds have followed someone at a friend's behest for dating purposes, while 15% of 13- and 14-year-olds have done so. Boys and girls are equally likely to friend a potential partner on another friend's recommendation.

Teens also avail themselves of the search capacities of the internet to connect to more information about romantic prospects. A little more than one quarter (28%) of teens have searched for information online about someone they were currently dating or interested in. And the searching doesn't end when the relationship is over; 13% of teens (or 38% of teens with dating experience) have ever searched for information online about someone they dated or hooked up with in the past.

Digital Tools Help Teens Research Potential and Former Romantic Partners

% of all teens

Searched for info online about someone they are currently dating or interested in	28%
"Followed" or "friended" someone because one of their friends suggested they might want to date that person	20
Searched for info online about someone they dated or hooked up with in the past	13

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Older teens ages 15 to 17 are more likely than younger teens to search for information online about current or prospective romantic partners, with 35% of older teens searching, while 16% of younger teens do so. Similarly, older teens are more likely than younger ones to search for information online about a past romantic partner – while 17% of 15- to 17-year-olds have searched for information about someone they dated or hooked up with in the past, just 7% of all 13- to 14-year-olds have done so.

Much of teens' research on their potential romantic prospects happens via social media

Given the number of years today's teens have been using social media and the volume of content posted to social media profiles, potential suitors have access to a motherlode of material on their crush. One high school girl describes falling down the rabbit hole of a crush's profile. *"And then like if you go on their page, then you end up on their next page. You know who their mom is already."* A middle school boy describes his social media research, *"Well sometimes you might use social media to see if, like, they're going out with someone or something,"* and a high school boy uses *" Instagram and Twitter just to see what people are doing."*

Teens use social media resources because, as one high school girl explains: *"You want to know everything you can about them."*

The trick, teens say, is not to reveal that you've been digging deeply into someone's profile unless you are ready to make your feelings public. As a high school girl said; *"You don't want to go back and you don't want to, like, comment on their actual photo from 100 years ago. You don't want to do that."* Such a move, she noted, will reveal to the profile owner via a notification that you've been looking through their profile.

And if the feelings aren't reciprocated, such liking of old photos can border on disturbing. A high school girl explained:

> *"It looks a little more creepy. I'd be kind of creeped out if someone mentioned my photos from a long time ago, especially because those photos tend to be very embarrassing. They're old, and I'm like, why did I post a photo of me?"*
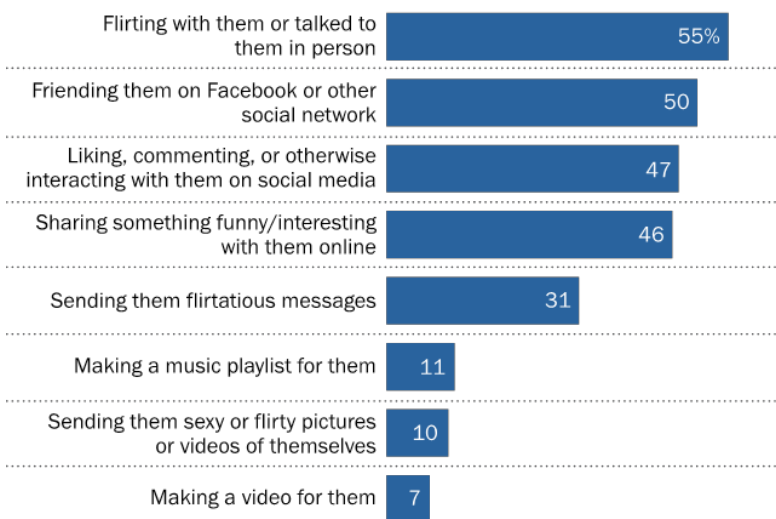
Teens Take a Range of Approaches to Let Someone Know They Are Interested in them Romantically

Flirting and otherwise letting someone know you are interested in them is typically the first step to building a romantic relationship, and teens approach this in numerous ways across a range of online and offline venues.

Social media interactions, along with in-person flirting, are among the most common ways for teens to express romantic interest in someone. Half of all teens (50%) have let someone know they were interested in them romantically by friending them on Facebook or another social media site (this represents 65% of teens who use social media), while 47%

Social Media-Based and In-Person Flirting Are Top Methods for Teens

% of all teens who showed romantic interest in someone by …

Flirting with them or talked to them in person	55%
Friending them on Facebook or other social network	50
Liking, commenting, or otherwise interacting with them on social media	47
Sharing something funny/interesting with them online	46
Sending them flirtatious messages	31
Making a music playlist for them	11
Sending them sexy or flirty pictures or videos of themselves	10
Making a video for them	7

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(representing 62% of social media users) have expressed their attraction by liking, commenting or

otherwise interacting with that person on social media. And just over half of teens (55%) flirt or talk to someone in person to let them know they are interested.

Other ways in which teens let someone know that they are attracted to them include sharing something funny or interesting with them online (46%), sending them flirtatious messages (31%), making them a music playlist (11%), sending flirty or sexy pictures or videos of themselves (10%)[8] and making a video for them (7%).

Certain types of flirting behavior are relatively common among teens who have never dated before; others are almost entirely the purview of those with past experience in romantic relationships.
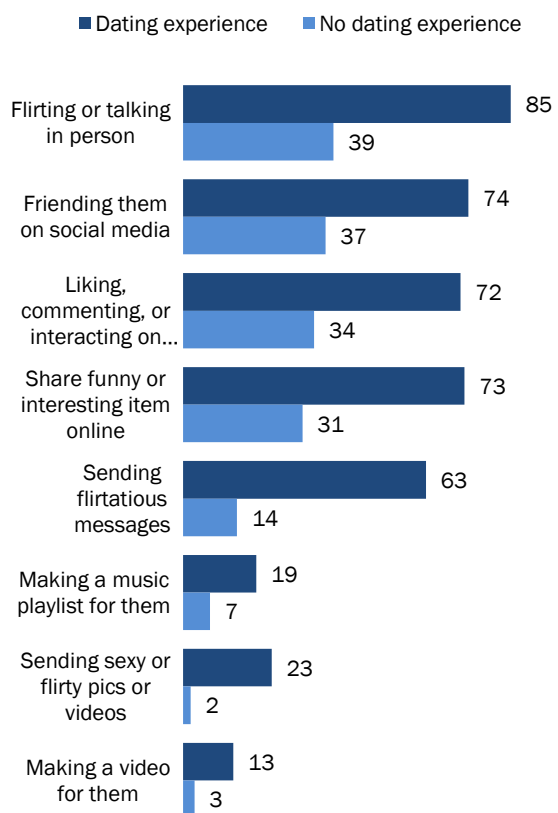
Each of the flirting behaviors measured in the survey is more common among teens with previous dating experience than among those who have never dated before. But while some of these behaviors are at least relatively common among dating neophytes, others are engaged in almost entirely by teens with prior relationship experience.

When it comes to "entry-level" flirting, teens who have never been in a romantic relationship are most comfortable letting someone know that they are interested in them romantically using the following approaches:

- Flirting or talking to them in person (39% of teens without dating experience have done this).

Certain Types of Online Flirting Are Used Almost Solely by Teens With Prior Relationship Experience

% of teens with/without dating experience who have let someone know they were interested in or attracted to them by…

■ Dating experience   ■ No dating experience

Flirting or talking in person — 85 / 39
Friending them on social media — 74 / 37
Liking, commenting, or interacting on… — 72 / 34
Share funny or interesting item online — 73 / 31
Sending flirtatious messages — 63 / 14
Making a music playlist for them — 19 / 7
Sending sexy or flirty pics or videos — 23 / 2
Making a video for them — 13 / 3

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

[8] This study did not ask about sexting, or the sending, sharing or receiving of nude or nearly nude photos and videos. For our previous research on teen sexting, please see "Teens and Sexting" and "Sexting" in "Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites."

- Friending them or taking part in general interactions on social media: Roughly one-third (37%) of teens without dating experience have friended someone they are interested in romantically and a similar 34% have liked, commented on a post or otherwise interacted with a crush on social media.
- Sharing funny or interesting things with them online (31% of teens without dating experience have done this).

On the other hand, more advanced, and sometimes more overtly sexual, online behaviors are used to flirt almost entirely by teens who have prior experience in romantic relationships:

- 63% of teens with dating experience have sent flirtatious messages to someone they were interested in; just 14% of teens without dating experience have done so.
- 23% of teens with dating experience have sent sexy or flirty pictures or videos to someone they were interested in, compared with just 2% of teens without dating experience.

Older teens are more likely than younger teens to have engaged in all of these flirting behaviors; girls and boys take similar steps to express romantic interest

As noted earlier, older teens are more likely than younger teens to have experience with dating and relationships – and as such, older teens are substantially more likely than younger teens to say they have let someone know they were interested in them romantically in all of the ways measured on this survey.
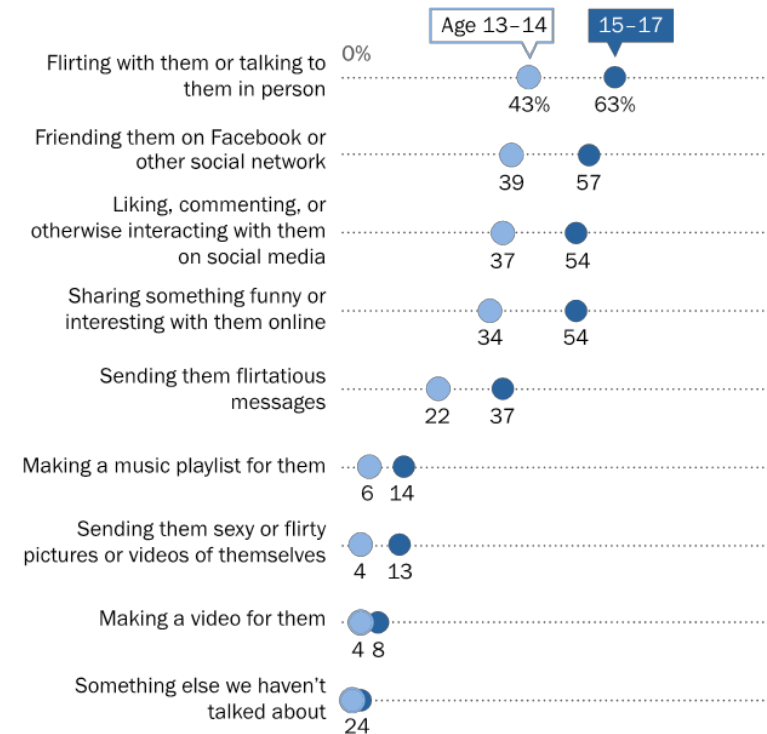
The correlation between flirting behaviors and age, however, is not as strong as the correlation between these behaviors and dating experience. For example, there is a 15-point gap between older

Older Teens More Likely Than Younger Ones to Engage in Flirtatious Behaviors

% of all teens

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

and younger teens when it comes to sending flirtatious messages (37% of older teens and 22% of younger teens have done so), but a substantially larger 49-point gap between those who are or have been in a relationship of some kind and those who have not (63% of teens with relationship experience have sent flirtatious messages to someone, compared with just 14% of those without).

There also are some modest differences relating to race and ethnicity in terms of the ways in which teens show interest in potential romantic partners. For instance, Latino teens are more likely than whites to say they have created a music playlist for someone they were interested in dating (14% vs. 8%), while African-American teens are more likely than whites to say they have expressed interest by sending flirty/sexy pictures or videos (15% vs. 8%).

On the other hand, girls and boys take nearly identical steps to show their romantic interest: There are no significant differences between girls and boys on any of these behaviors.

Teens talk about the variety of digital flirting practices they employ

Teens in our focus group described a variety of practices for flirting on social media. One high school girl explained:

> *"When I have a crush on someone and I want them to know I go on their page and like a lot of pictures in a row."*

A high school boy says he posts *"a bunch of emojis under her photo."* And as one high school girl describes, there are ways to signal your level of interest:

> *"Well, if you're really putting yourself out there, you could comment on their picture with a heart emoji."*

Texting is also a critical component of early courtship. One high school boy detailed the progression of a flirtation that begins with texting:

> *"A lot of times when you talk to some you like, you'll start texting, then you'll start talking. Then you'll start talking heavy."*

One high school boy told us:

> *"I usually text my crushes. … I flirt with emojis and I usually be myself. If they don't like me for me […tough]. I'm very open and talk to a lot of people or talk to them face to face."*

Another high school girl related the way she used her phone in the digital approximation of old-school note passing:

> *"I don't know if you guys do this, but usually if I kind of like the person, if I'm sitting next to them, sometimes I'll pass my phone to them."*

But not everyone is confident. Some nervous teens find solace and strength in digital methods of flirting such as texting. As one high schooler related, she could be:

"A little bit more bold over text, because you wouldn't say certain things in person. You would ... you just wouldn't say certain things in, like, talking face to face with them because that might be kind of awkward. But over text, it's like, OK. Cause they're not really there."

And some teens customize their approach based on the particular alchemy of their personality and their crush's. As one high school girl explained:

"Yeah. I honestly don't really have, like, a signature flirt type thing. Honestly, it just depends on the person and my personality and theirs."

Flirting online is challenging and worrisome for some teens, but nonetheless a critical method for expressing interest in someone else

For some teens, flirting by digital means isn't appealing or workable. One high school girl said:

"I can only ever flirt in person and that is on the rare occasion when I have been gifted with superpowers, clearly."

Other teens worry about the durability of their flirtations in a social media environment. As one middle school boy told us:

"I wouldn't do that because, like, once you put something on social media, it's out there forever. You can't get it back."

Digital technology plays a critical role in courtship for many teens. As one high school boy noted:

"It's going to be hard to impress a girl that you can't even talk to on the phone or text."

But use of technology can be a part of a broader strategy where in-person and online flirting work together. As a high school boy put it:

"Like usually I see them around school or something. Then on Instagram. They post a picture and [I] comment on it, then we just start talking."

Girls are Especially Likely to Experience Unwanted Flirting on Social Media

One-quarter of teens have blocked or unfriended someone who was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable

Many teens use social media as a venue to flirt and interact with potential romantic partners, but for those on the receiving end of those advances, social media flirting can often turn in a much less desirable direction. Indeed, 25% of all teens (representing one-third of teen social media users) have unfriended or blocked someone on social media because that person was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable.

Just as adult women are often subject to more frequent and intense harassment online, teen girls are substantially more likely than boys to experience uncomfortable flirting within social media environments. Fully 35% of all teen girls have had to block or unfriend someone who was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable, double the 16% of boys who have taken this step.

Girls Are Much More Likely Than Boys to Experience Uncomfortable Flirting on Social Media

% of all teens who have blocked or unfriended someone on social media who was flirting in a way that made them uncomfortable

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).
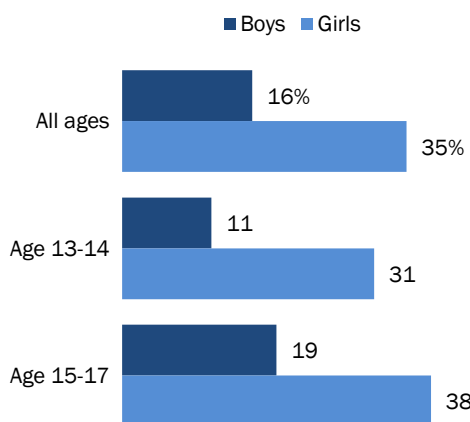
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Notably, this phenomenon is not just limited to older girls who might have greater exposure to dating and relationships. Fully 31% of 13 and 14-year-old girls have blocked or unfriended someone for this reason—this figure is similar to the 38% of older girls who have done so, and nearly triple the rate among 13- and 14-year-old boys.

A high school girl in our focus groups related her experience with uncomfortable online pursuit:

> *"I think of stalking like if a person is constantly typing to you or something. Like I was on [the app-based messaging service] Kik the other day. I was on there. I got a Kik and I don't know this person. They're like, 'where are you?' I'm like 'who are you?' He's like … 'I don't know you.' I'm like, 'Why are you talking to me? I don't want to talk.' He's 'why?*

Why? What happened?' I just thought he was playing. I feel like that's a stalker. You don't know me. Why are you talking to me?"

Even though girls experience this more often, some boys face uncomfortable flirting and try to manage it through digital means. One middle school boy described an experience he had:

"Well, there was this girl who was kind of crazy for me. One day … she somehow got a hold of my number. And then I didn't want to talk to her anymore because it was creepy, and she tracked my phone to my house. … She was on the lawn and she used lots of vulgar language … It was awkward and creepy and stalker-ish."

Liking old photos in people's profiles struck many as creepy, because it revealed that the person was searching deep into your history. A group of high school boys describe another scenario where flirting becomes unnerving – when the volume of communication became inappropriate:

High school boy 1: *"If you just comment on every single…"*

High school boy 2:   *"Or, like, every half hour or something you try and message them on Facebook."*
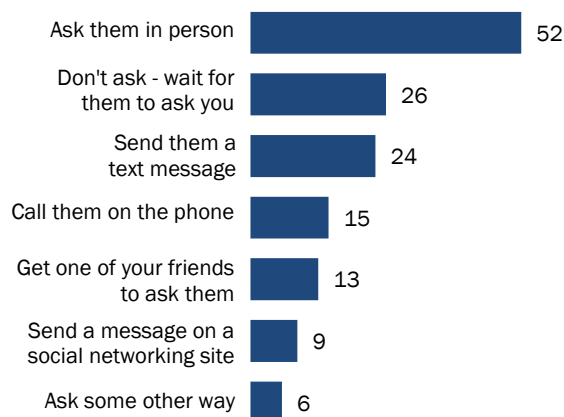
For Teens, Asking Someone Out in Person Is the Most Common Approach, Although Digital Tools Also Play a Role

Ultimately, getting someone to actually go out on a date is presumably the primary objective of these various modes of flirting. But despite the wide range of communication technologies available to modern teens, the time-tested tradition of asking in person continues to be the main way teens would ask out someone they were interested in. Some 52% of teens say if they wanted to ask someone out on a date, they would usually do that in person. However, other approaches – online as well as offline – are relatively popular as well:

- 24% of teens say they would usually send a text message if they wanted to ask someone out.
- 15% would call the person they're interested in on the phone.
- 13% would get one of their friends to ask for them.
- 9% would send a message on a social networking site.

Asking in Person Is the Most Common Way to Ask for a Date, but Texting – and Waiting to Be Asked – Also Are Popular

% of teens who would usually take the following approach to ask someone out on a date

Ask them in person   52
Don't ask - wait for them to ask you   26
Send them a text message   24
Call them on the phone   15
Get one of your friends to ask them   13
Send a message on a social networking site   9
Ask some other way   6

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Around one-quarter of teens (26%) say they would not ask at all – that they would wait for the person they were interested in to ask them first – while 6% indicate they would ask the person out using some option other than the ones listed above.

Girls are far more likely than boys to wait for someone they are interested in to make the first move

When it comes to dating, some traditional practices remain common. Girls are far more likely than boys to wait for the person they're interested in to initiate contact. Nearly half of girls (47%) say they usually wait for someone they are interested in dating to ask them out first, compared with just 6% of boys. By contrast, boys are nearly twice as likely as girls to say they would usually ask

someone out in person if they're interested in going on a date (69% vs. 35%), and are also significantly more likely than girls to ask someone out via text message (27% vs. 20%). Boys and girls are equally likely to say they would ask someone out by calling them on the phone, messaging them on a social networking site or getting one of their friends to ask for them.

This tendency among girls to wait for someone to ask them out first is true for both younger and older teens. However, girls tend to take a more active role in reaching out to potential dating partners as they get older. Some 19% of younger girls (ages 13 and 14) indicate that they usually enlist a friend to ask potential dating partners on their behalf, a figure that falls to 11% among older teen girls ages 15 to 17. Similarly, the proportion of girls who usually ask someone out on a date by asking them in person rises from 27% among younger girls to 40% among older girls. But even among older girls, the single most common way of asking someone out on a date (with 49% of older girls indicating that they usually use this method) is simply to wait for the other party to broach the subject first.

Boys Are More Likely to Ask Someone Out on a Date in Person or Via Text; Girls More Likely to Wait for the Other Person to Ask First

% of boys/girls who would usually take the following approach to ask someone out on a date
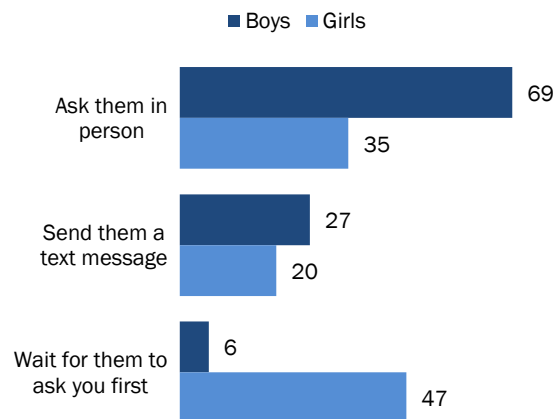
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The types of approaches teens take when asking someone out on a date also are correlated with age. In particular, older teens are more likely than younger teens to say they would ask someone out on a date in person (56% vs. 46%), while younger teens are more likely to say they would get one of their friends to ask for them (16% vs. 11%).

# Chapter 3: How Teens Incorporate Digital Platforms and Devices Into Their Romantic Relationships

Teens Spend Time With Romantic Partners in a Wide Range of Venues and Communication Channels, but Texting & Talking on the Phone Are Most Common for Daily Chats and Check-Ins

Teens in romantic relationships spend time with their partners in a wide range of places and on a variety of platforms – both online and offline. When asked about a number of ways in which they might spend time with their current partner or significant other (or most recent past partner, in the case of teens who are not currently romantically involved but who have been in a relationship of some kind in the past), several venues and communication channels stand out as especially widespread:

- **Text messaging** – 92% of teens in romantic relationships spent time text messaging with their partner at least occasionally.
- **Talking on the phone** – 87% spent time talking on the phone with their significant other.
- **Being together in person** – 86% spent time together in person, outside of school hours.
- **Social media** –70% spent time together posting on social media sites.
- **Instant or online messaging** – 69% spent time with their significant other using instant or online messaging.

Text Messaging Dominates Daily Communication for Teens and Romantic Partners

% of teens with relationship experience who spend time with a significant other in the following ways
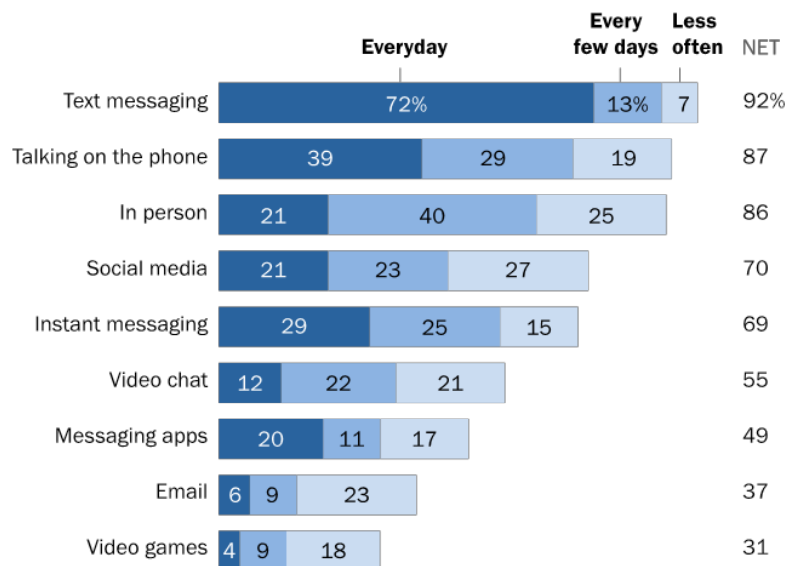
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Other common ways in which teens spent time with their romantic partners included video chatting (55% of teens in romantic relationships spent time with their partner in this way); using messaging apps (49%), email (37%) and talking while playing video games together (31%).

Teens in romantic relationships may spend some amount of time with their partners in a wide range of venues, but text messaging stands head and shoulders above all other communication venues when it comes to the *frequency* of those interactions. Fully 72% of teens who have been in a romantic relationship say they spend time text messaging with their partner every day, a proportion that far surpasses any other communication channel in terms of daily usage.

By way of comparison, talking on the phone is the second-most-frequently used communication channel among teens in romantic relationships, but just 39% of teens in these relationships talk on the phone every day with their significant other. Similarly, 29% of these teens spend time every day with their partner via instant messaging, 21% do so via social media platforms, 21% spend time together every day in person, and 20% spend time together every day using messaging apps.

Older teens spend time with their significant others in a wider range of venues than younger teens

Older teens ages 15 to 17 spend time with their romantic partners in a wider range of venues than do younger teens ages 13 to 14, especially when it comes to in-person interactions that are more feasible with the increased autonomy that comes with age. Fully 90% of older teens who are in a relationship (or have been in the past) say they spend at least occasional time with their significant other in person and away from school, compared with 75% of younger teens. Older teens are also more likely to report spending time with their significant other talking on the phone (90% vs. 79%), as well as using text messaging (95% vs. 84%). Indeed, 76% of older teens say they spend time with their partner via text messaging "every day," compared with 62% of teens ages 13 and 14.

Girls and boys tend to communicate in similar ways in relationships, although girls are somewhat more intense users of text messaging

Girls and boys tend to spend time with their significant others in similar venues and at similar frequencies. Girls use text messaging with slightly greater frequency than boys within the context of their romantic relationships (79% of girls and 66% of boys say they spend time with their significant other via text message "every day"); but overall, the vast majority of both boys (92%) and girls (93%) with relationship experience indicate that they spend time with their partner using text messaging at least occasionally.

Teens from lower-income households communicate more frequently with their romantic partners using social media, as well as instant/online messaging

Teen daters from less well-off households use social media more frequently to communicate and spend time with their partners. Some 30% of teens with dating experience who are from households with an annual income of less than $50,000 say they spend time with their significant other by posting on social media sites "every day," compared with 17% of teens from higher-income households who communicate via social media with the same frequency. But even as teens from less well-off households communicate with romantic partners via social media more frequently, overall around seven-in-ten teens from both higher- and lower-income households spend time with significant others on social media at least occasionally.

Teens from these less well-off households are also more likely to communicate with a significant other using online or instant messaging. This is true both overall (77% of teens with dating experience from these lower-income households do this with their partner at least occasionally, compared with 65% of teens from higher-income households) and as a daily communication tool (39% of less well-off teens communicate with their partner in this way "every day," compared with 25% of teens from higher-income households).

Teens Share a Wide Variety of Content Online With Their Significant Others; Humorous Material and 'What I'm Up to Now' Posts Are Among the Most Popular
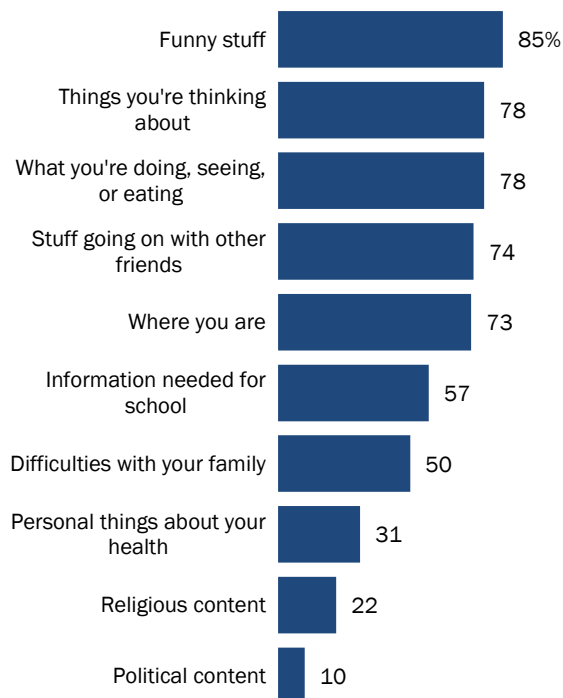
Along with spending time together in a wide range of venues, teens in romantic relationships also share many types of content online with their significant others. The survey asked about 10 different types of content teens might share, ranging from silly to serious and from the everyday to the highly personal.

Humorous or funny material leads the way as the most common type of information teen daters share online with their romantic partners: 85% have shared this type of material. General updates about one's thoughts, activities, location or friends also are very common. Some 78% of teens with dating experience have shared their personal thoughts online with a significant other; 78% have shared what they are doing, seeing or eating; 74% have shared updates about happenings with their other friends; and 73% have shared information about their location at the time.

Other topics that get shared or discussed online are weightier or more sensitive. For instance,

Humor, Life Logistics and Personal Updates Lead the List of Items Teens Share With Romantic Partners Online

% of teens with relationship experience who have shared the following <u>online</u> with a significant other

Funny stuff	85%
Things you're thinking about	78
What you're doing, seeing, or eating	78
Stuff going on with other friends	74
Where you are	73
Information needed for school	57
Difficulties with your family	50
Personal things about your health	31
Religious content	22
Political content	10

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

half of teen daters have discussed difficulties with family online with their significant other, while 31% have discussed personal health issues in these venues. At the same time, discussions of religion or politics are generally not widespread: Only 22% of these teens have shared religious content online with a significant other, while just 10% have shared political content.

Boys and girls share similar content online with partners; older teens share slightly different types of content than do younger teens

Overall, boys and girls share similar types of content online with their significant others – there are no significant differences between boys and girls on any of the 10 types of content included in the survey. And although there are very few differences between older and younger teens when it comes to the types of material they share online in the context of romantic relationships, older teens are a bit more willing to share certain types of material. In particular, older teens are roughly twice as likely to share personal information about their health with a partner or significant other (36% of older teens with relationship experience have done so, compared with 16% of younger teens). They are also more likely to share information about what they are doing, seeing or eating (81% vs. 69%).

Teens who have ever met a partner online share a much wider range of content than those who have not made a romantic connection online

Teens who have ever met a partner online report sharing a significantly wider range of content online with a partner or significant other –although they are not necessarily sharing such content with (or solely with) the partner they met online – compared with those who have not met someone online. Much of this content pertains to general "life logistics" that other teens might share in person, such as:

- Funny stuff (97% of teens who have met someone online have shared this type of content with a significant other, compared with 82% of teens who have not met someone online).
- What they are doing, seeing or eating (96% vs. 73%).
- Things they are thinking about (93% vs. 74%).
- Things that are happening with other friends (87% vs. 70%).
- Their location (83% vs. 71%).

Teens who have ever met someone online are also much more likely to share sensitive information about themselves, and to discuss challenges at home – though, again, not necessarily with, or solely with, the partner they met online:

- 65% have shared information relating to problems with their family (compared with 45% of teens who have not met someone online).
- 46% have shared information online related to their health (compared with 27% of teens who have not met a partner online).

But even as they share certain types of content at elevated rates, teens who have met someone online are no more likely than other teens to discuss political or religious content online with their significant other, or to share information needed for school.

85% of Teens Expect to Hear From Their Significant Other at Least Once a Day, and 11% Expect to Hear From Them Hourly

Most teens in romantic relationships assume that they and their partner will check in with each other with great regularity throughout the day. Overall, 85% of teens in a romantic relationship indicate that they expect to hear from their partner or significant other at least once a day, if not more often: 11% expect to hear from their partner hourly, 35% expect to hear something every few hours and 38% expect to hear from them once a day.

Teen Daters Usually Have Similar Communication Expectations as Their Significant Other

% of teens with relationship experience who
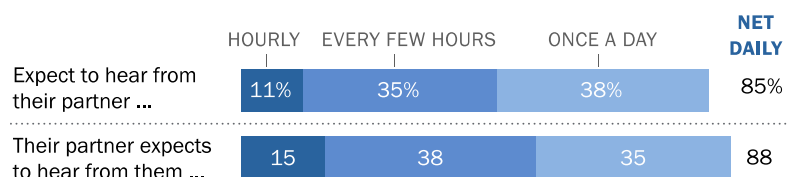
	HOURLY	EVERY FEW HOURS	ONCE A DAY	NET DAILY
Expect to hear from their partner ...	11%	35%	38%	85%
Their partner expects to hear from them ...	15	38	35	88

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

When asked about their partner's expectations for communication, a similar pattern emerges. Some 88% of teens in romantic relationships say their partner expects to hear from them at least once a day: 15% say they are expected to check in hourly, 38% are expected to do so every few hours and 35% are expected to do so once a day.

These expectations for communication between romantic partners are consistent across a range of demographic groups: There are no significant differences on either of these questions between boys and girls, younger and older teens, those from higher- and lower-income households or those who have met someone online and those who have not.

Teens find managing communication on multiple platforms and their partner's expectations for a quick response a challenge

Teens from our focus groups talked about the challenge of managing their partner's expectations for communication in a highly visible, multiplatform communication environment. As one high school boy noted, *"You're tweeting but you can't text me?"* A high school girl wonders, *"It's like he*

made the status and I just texted him. Why didn't he reply?" One high school girl read even more negative meaning into a lack of response from a romantic partner: *"On Facebook it says "seen" too, so it's like 'are you avoiding me?'"*

One high school girl elaborates by saying that ignoring someone digitally is a delicate art:

> *"Well, you kind of learn if you're going to ignore someone, like, just don't … you can go on, like, social media, but don't do things. Don't like someone's Instagram photo, cause sometimes people get like really … obsessive. They go through and see like who's liked what. They'll screenshot it. It's like you liked something, and they'll send it to you. Then you're like, OK, I'm caught."*

Another girl continued:

> *"I'll apologize and stuff. But if I just stop talking to them, and they like catch me doing something, I'm like, 'You're boring. Leave me alone. The conversation wasn't going anywhere.'"*

In an age of constant connectivity through mobile phones (and teens' reluctance to be parted from their mobile devices), complications arise when responses to texts or calls or posts aren't immediate. The expectations for communicating with a romantic partner are about frequency, but also about timing and content. As one high school boy explained, *"You've got to expect a good morning text. You've got a whole paragraph in the morning text."* And another high school boy detailed what kinds of questions his girlfriend expected him to ask. *"And you've got to text her periodically to ask her what she's doing, how is her day, stuff like that."*

And when expectations aren't met, relationships can end. As one high school boy explained:

> *"Yeah. Like a lot of times, people expect to be texted a lot and then … they don't necessarily have to … a lot of relationships, like, break up because they don't talk enough. But it also depends on the relationship and the trust level between them."*

About 20% of teens in serious relationships believe their partner tries to pressure them into responding to their calls, texts, emails or IMs

In a darker twist on differing expectations around communication between partners, about one-in-five (21%) teens in a serious relationship say their partner tries to pressure them into responding to their phone calls, texts, emails or IMs "always" or "sometimes." The largest portion

(18%) of these teens say they feel this way "sometimes;" just 3% say they feel this pressure to respond "always." About a third of teens (32%) say they feel pressured to respond by their partner "rarely" and about half (47%) say they never experience this pressure.

27% of teens with dating experience have used social media to track their significant others' whereabouts

Some 27% of teens with dating experience have used social media to keep track of where their significant other is or what they happen to be doing. Girls are a bit more likely than boys to engage in this behavior (33% of girls do so, compared with 22% of boys), while older and younger teens, and those from higher- and lower-income households are equally likely to do so.

Digital devices and online platforms can be a source of both conflict and closeness in romantic relationships

Even as cellphones, social media, and other digital tools can be used to build closeness and connection in the context of romantic relationships, these same tools can also lead to friction and hurt feelings between partners.[9]

The survey asked about several different ways in which technology might cause both positive and negative consequences in the context of romantic relationships. In terms of positive outcomes, among teens with dating experience:

- 70% have felt closer to a significant other because of

Digital Tools Enhance Closeness Between Teen Partners, But Also Distract

% of teens with relationship experience who …
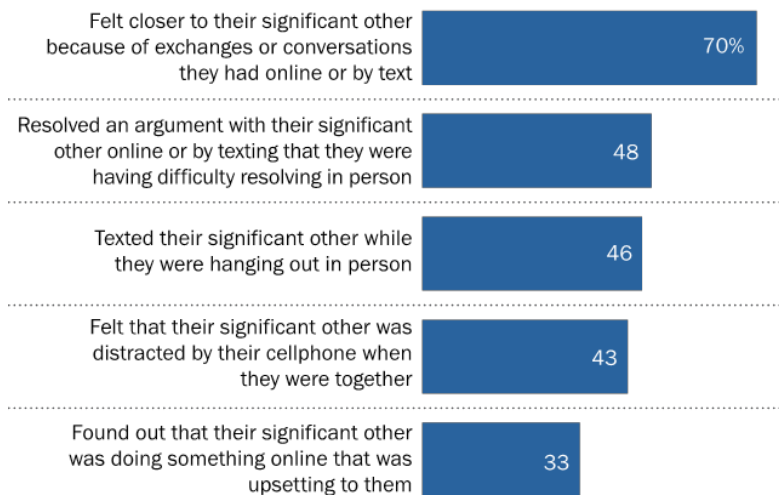
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

[9] For adult data on a similar topic, please see the Pew Research Center's report 'Couples, the Internet and Social Media."
http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/11/couples-the-internet-and-social-media/

conversations that took place online or by text message.
- 48% have resolved an argument with their significant other using text messaging or other digital channels that they were having trouble resolving in person.

Teen daters of various demographic stripes—boys and girls, older and younger teens, those with lower and higher household incomes—are equally likely to say each of these situations has happened to them.

Along with these positive outcomes, teens also report negative outcomes resulting from technology use in the context of romantic relationships:

- 43% of teens with relationship experience have encountered a situation in which they felt that their partner was distracted by their phone when the two of them were together in person.
- 33% of teens with romantic relationship experience have discovered their partner or significant other was doing something online that was upsetting to them.

Boys and girls are equally likely to report each of these experiences in the context of their romantic relationships, as are older and younger teens. However, less well-off teens are more likely to say they have encountered a partner doing something online that was upsetting to them—some 43% of those from households earning less than $50,000 annually say this has happened to them, compared with 28% of teens from higher-income households.

Along with the experiences listed above, teens are using mobile devices to stay connected or share information even when they are not physically separate. Some 48% of teens with romantic relationship experience have texted their significant other while they were hanging out together in person. Boys and girls, younger and older teens, and those from higher- and lower-income families are equally likely to report doing this.

22% of teens with dating experience have shared a password with a significant other, similar to the 19% of all teens who have shared a password with a friend

Sharing a password with one's partner can serve as a means of establishing trust and closeness in romantic relationships, and roughly one-in-five teens with dating experience (22%) has shared one of their passwords with a significant other. This is similar to the 19% of all teens who have shared a password with one of their friends. And as was the case with password sharing among friends, there are few demographic differences when it comes to sharing passwords between romantic

partners – girls and boys, younger and older teens, and those from higher- and lower-income households are equally likely to do so.

Teens in our focus group described sharing passwords as a way to show trust in their partner. When asked why he shared his password with his significant other, a high school boy explained:

> *"'Cause I don't have anything to hide. … I'm saying that she should trust me, and so that's why I give it out. Because I have nothing to hide, but it shows that she doesn't trust me. She's asking for my phone."*

One high school boy, when asked about what his girlfriend did with his password, explained:

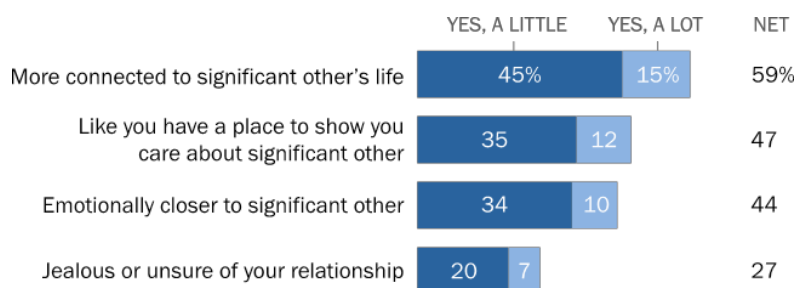> *"She goes through my DMs. … [To see] who's talking to me."*

Chapter 4: Social Media and Romantic Relationships

Many Teens View Social Media and Text Messaging as a Space for Connection, Emotional Support – and Occasional Jealousy – in the Context of Their Relationships, Although Most Say Social Media Has a Relatively Minor Impact

Many teens in relationships view social media as a place where they can feel more connected with the daily contours of their significant other's life, share emotional connections and let their significant other know they care – although these sites can also lead to feelings of jealousy or uncertainty about the stability of one's relationship. At the same time, even teens who indicate that social media has had an impact on their relationship (whether for good or for bad) tend to feel that its impact is relatively modest in the grand scheme of things.

Social Media Can Increase Emotional and Logistical Connections in Teen Relationships, but Most Teens Feel This Impact Is Relatively Modest

% of teens who use social media and have dating experience who say social media makes them feel …

	YES, A LITTLE	YES, A LOT	NET
More connected to significant other's life	45%	15%	59%
Like you have a place to show you care about significant other	35	12	47
Emotionally closer to significant other	34	10	44
Jealous or unsure of your relationship	20	7	27

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=317 teens ages 13 to 17who use social media and have any dating experience).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Among teen social media users with relationship experience:

- 59% say social media makes them feel more connected with what is going on in their significant other's life, although just 15% indicate that it makes them feel "a lot" more connected. About one-third (35%) of these teens say social media *does not* make them feel more connected with their significant other.
- 47% say social media offers a place for them to show how much they care about their significant other, with 12% feeling this way "a lot"; 45% *do not* feel that social media offers a venue for this type of interaction with their significant other.

- 44% say social media helps them feel emotionally closer to their significant other, with 10% feeling that way "a lot." Half (50%) *do not* feel that social media offers a space to feel emotionally closer.
- 27% say social media makes them feel jealous or unsure about their relationship, with 7% feeling this way "a lot." Roughly two-thirds (68%) *do not* feel jealous or unsure of their relationship due to social media.

Boys are a bit more likely than girls to view social media as a space for emotional and logistical connection with their significant other. Some 65% of boys with relationship experience who use social media agree that these sites make them feel more connected about what's going on in their significant other's life (compared with 52% of girls). Similarly 50% of boys say social media makes them feel more emotionally connected with their significant other, compared with 37% of girls. At the same time, even among boys this impact is fairly muted: Just 16% say social media makes them feel "a lot" more connected to their significant other's life, while just 13% feel "a lot" more emotionally close to their significant other thanks to social media.

Teens in our focus group explained the way digital communication platforms – social media as well as texting – can enhance and expand on in-person meetings. One high school girl noted:

> *"I feel like it helps to develop a relationship because even if you meet someone in person, you can't see them all the time or talk to them all the time to get to know them, so you text them or message them to get to know them better."*

Focus group teens told us how talking with their significant other over text and social media helped them overcome shyness and create a greater sense of connection:

> *"My boyfriend isn't shy … but I'm more shy. And it gets easier for him to tell me everything in person, but when we're … when I'm in person with him, like, it's harder for me to tell him what I'm feeling. So like I'll think about it when we're together, and then like afterwards I'll probably text him like what I was feeling and tell him my problems."*

Another high school girl relates how texting helped her relationship with her boyfriend:

> *"I think texting kind of makes you feel closer because – boys are more shy. I'm more shy, but … my boyfriend, he doesn't like to express himself like that. But when we text, it seems like it's so much easier for him to talk to me. So I think he says more stuff, like how he feels through text. So it kind of makes [the relationship] stronger."*

For some, one other useful feature of multiple digital communication platforms (e.g., texting, messaging apps, Twitter, Instagram) is that those platforms allow teens to manage communicating with multiple people and multiple romantic partners. One high school boy from our focus groups relates his strategy:

> *"Sometimes, if you [are romantically involved with] a bunch of girls, you can have set time periods – where it's like you can ignore her for a little bit and talk to her. And then you would go back and instead of talking to her, be like, sorry, I was in the shower or something like that. Or I was asleep? Do you know what I mean? You use different apps to talk to different girls. You can text one girl. You can be Kik-ing[10] another girl, then Snapchatting another girl."*

Photos and posts can be used by teens to incite jealousy in others, often former partners, and lead to jealous feelings for some teens. Teens in our focus group described peering at photos on their partner's profile to look for suspicious images. One high school girl explains her calculus:

> *"It depends on like what they're doing in the picture. If they're just standing side by side, it's like, chill. But if they're like … if he's got his arm on her or something, like, more. … Like I guess it just depends on your jealousy level if you can feel like, 'oh, I know my man wants me.' Or if you're like 'does he really want me?' It just depends on the person."*

A Substantial Minority of Teen Daters Feel Their Significant Other Shows a Different Side of Themselves – or Is Less Authentic – on Social Media

As seen in our report on teen friendships, social media allows users to curate their online presence in a way that puts their best digital foot forward, or shows a different side of their personality than they can show offline. At the same time, this self-presentation can sometimes appear inauthentic or phony to others. Teens are especially attuned to this type of social curation: When it comes to teen friendships, fully 85% of teen social media users agree that social media allows people to show a side of themselves that they can't show online. At the same time, 77% agree that people are less authentic and real on social media than they are in real life.

Teens tend to experience each of these behaviors to a lesser extent in the context of their romantic relationships than they do in their broader friend networks. But a substantial minority feel that their partner acts differently – in positive or negative ways -- on social media than he or she does in real life. Among the 31% of teens who are "teen daters" who use social media:

---

[10] Kik-ing refers to sending a message through Kik, a messaging app.

- 42% agree that their significant other shows a different side of themselves on social media than they do in person, with 9% agreeing strongly. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) disagree with this statement.
- 36% agree that their significant other is less authentic and real on social media than they are offline, with 7% agreeing strongly. Roughly two-thirds (64%) disagree.

Girls are more likely to "strongly disagree" with the notion that their partner shows a different side of themselves on social media than they do offline: 13% of girls strongly disagree with this statement, compared with just 4% of boys. On the other hand, there are no differences between boys and girls on the question of whether their partner is less authentic on social media than they are in real life.

The Publicness Paradox: Many Teens Use Social Media to Publicly Express Affection for Their Partner and Support Their Friends' Relationships, Even as They Feel Their Own Relationships are Too Visible to Others

37% of teens with dating experience have taken to social media to publicly express their affection for a significant other

For a substantial minority of teens, social media offers a space to publicly express affection or solidarity with their romantic partner. Some 37% of teens with dating experience have used social media to tell their significant other how much they like them in a way that is visible to other people.

Teens from less well-off households, as well as those who have met a partner online, are especially likely to have done this. Among teens with relationship experience:

- 47% of those from households earning less than $50,000 annually have used social media to publicly express affection for a significant other (compared with 33% of teens from higher-income households).
- 54% of those who have met a partner or significant other online have used social media in this way, compared with 32% of those who have not met someone online.

63% of teen daters use social media to express support of others' romantic relationships

Beyond publicly displaying affection and one's own relationship, social media is a space where many teens can express public support or approval of others' romantic relationships: 63% of teens with dating experience have posted or liked something on social media as a way to indicate their support of one of their friends' relationships.

Girls are especially likely to publicly support their friends' relationships using social media (71% of girls with dating experience have done so, compared with 57% of boys) although boys and girls are equally likely to publicly express affection for their own partner in social media environments.

In addition, teens from less well-off households (those earning less than $50,000 per year) engage in each of these behaviors at higher rates, compared with those from higher-income households. Among lower-income teens with dating experience, 73% (compared with 59% of higher-income teens) have supported their friends' relationships on social media, while 47% of less well-off teens (and 33% of higher-income teens) have publicly expressed affection for their own partner in a public way on social media.

Teens in our focus group explained specific ways in which a relationship might be displayed on social media. As a high school boy related, people in relationships change *"their status. And then other times, on Instagram it says in their bio, they put like the date that they started going out."* Changing *"profile pictures and then just regular pictures,"* to be images of the couple is also a common method of displaying one's relationship and relationship status. A high school boy explained what he believes must be on social media when dating someone. *"You've got to put the date in the bio and her in the bio. For real. ... You need to have the padlock emoji with a heart and two people holding hands. ...On Facebook, you've got a cover photo... Or a date. Or just a date,"* plus your beloved's username or profile.

Focus group teens also noted that posting publicly about a relationship – noting the date you started the relationship in your bio, declaring your affection, posting photos – sometimes had to do with gaining a sense of status, expressing possessiveness or getting attention from peers:

> High school boy 1: *You just want people to know. With some people, it's for the attention and stuff like that.*

> High school boy 2*: Well, speaking in terms of the way people generally seem to behave, it's victory.*

> High school boy 1: *And it's also probably to tell people like, hey, back off. She's mine or he's mine.*

Other focus group teens questioned how meaningful and authentic these social media displays of affection really were:

> High school boy 1: "*How about the girls that post they love you every 20 minutes on Facebook."*

High School Boy 2: *"People are really quick to say I love you. A lot of people use it so loosely."*

High School Boy 1: *"It don't mean nothing no more."*

Many teen daters feel social media allows too many people to see what is happening in their relationship

But even as they use social media to support their friends' relationships, many teen daters express annoyance at the public nature of their own romantic partnerships on social media. Fully 69% of teen social media users with dating experience agree that too many people can see what's happening in their relationship on social media, with 16% indicating that they "strongly" agree. Just 31% of such teens disagree with this statement, and only a small percentage (2%) disagree "strongly." Boys and girls, older and younger teens, and those from higher- and lower-income households are equally likely to agree with this statement.

Teens in our focus groups explained their concerns about people being overly involved, especially in breakups, and their discomfort with the permanence of posted content. One high school boy explained why someone might not want to post any details about their relationship on social media:

> *"I don't know. Maybe they just want it to be their business. Then, you know, if you were to post it online and then you break up, you probably wouldn't want to change it and then everyone asks you what happened, so you might not put it there in the first place. Just let it be the people you actually know who knows. … It comes back because it's stuck there. It's like a permanent tattoo."*

A middle school boy related:

> *"I think some people in my class keep [their relationship] secret because they just like it that way. They don't like to have everybody know."*

Other teens point to avoiding drama as a reason people kept relationships off social media. As a high school boy explained:

> *"A lot of people kind of don't like it on social media because it doesn't need to be on there. 'Cause as long as the two know how they feel about each other, I feel like if you have it on*

social media, it's like more drama. Because like more people ask questions and stuff like that."

And some teens don't post much about the relationship on social media because they're not sure of the relationship status or they don't want to seem like they're bragging about their good fortune. A high school girl explained:

"Maybe they're just not sure about it, too. I mean, I feel like that would be me. I wouldn't really know if we were in a relationship yet, so I wouldn't say anything about it. And I wouldn't want to be obsessive about it, and I wouldn't want people to think I was bragging either, so I just wouldn't show anything."

Occasionally, relationships are kept off social media to keep them from the prying eyes of parents. One middle school boy explained:

"Sometimes if your parents find out, I mean, my mom lets me have a girlfriend, but some protective parents … they sometimes don't even let them out with their friends. One of my friends, he can never come out. But he liked a girl that I liked and he asked her out, and she said yeah. And then he went home and I walked home with him and I went by his house and then he told his dad and his dad said I had to leave. And then his dad slammed the door and started screaming."

Chapter 5: After the Relationship: Technology and Breakups

An In-Person Talk Is Viewed as the Most Socially Acceptable Way to End a Relationship, Followed by a Phone Call. Breaking Up With Someone Using Text Messaging or Social Media Is Largely Frowned Upon

Teens have many options for how to end romantic relationships, but some ways of doing so are viewed as more socially acceptable than others. The survey asked all teens – those who have dated and those who have not – to rate various ways of breaking up with someone one on a scale of 1 to 10, where a rating of 1 indicates that the approach is "least acceptable" and a 10 indicates that the approach is "most acceptable."

Out of the six different options presented, telling someone in person is viewed as the most socially acceptable way of breaking up with someone by a wide margin – teens give this an average of 8.4 points on a 1-10 acceptability scale, and 78% rate it an 8 or higher. Breaking up with someone over the telephone is the second-most acceptable approach, although teens consider this a much less acceptable method than telling someone in person. Breaking up over the phone receives an average rating of 5.4 points, with 31% of teens rating it as an 8 or higher. As its comparably lower rating indicates, a

For Teens, Telling Someone in Person Is by Far the Most Socially Acceptable Way to Break Up

% of teens who rate each method of breaking up with someone as…

	Mean Rating (1-10 scale)	*% of teens rating each method…*		
		Most Acceptable (8-10)	Moderately Acceptable (4-7)	Least Acceptable (1-3)
Tell them in person	8.4	78%	5%	14%
Call them on the phone	5.4	31%	34%	31%
Send them a text message	3.4	12%	25%	59%
Send them a message on a social media site	2.7	8%	16%	72%
Get one of your friends to tell them	2.7	7%	20%	69%
Change your social media status to "single"	2.7	7%	19%	71%

Note: Respondents were asked to rate the acceptability of each method of breaking up with someone on a scale ranging from 1 (least acceptable) to 10 (most acceptable). Respondents who declined to provide a rating for any method are not included in the calculation of the mean ratings and are not reported here.

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

substantial minority of teens find breaking up via phone call to be highly *un*acceptable, as 31% rate it as a 3 or lower on the 1-10 scale.

Several methods of breaking up with someone rank even lower on the social acceptability scale. These include:

Breaking Up in Person Is Most Socially Acceptable Method

On a scale from 1 to 10, teens' average rank of the acceptability of each breakup method.

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).
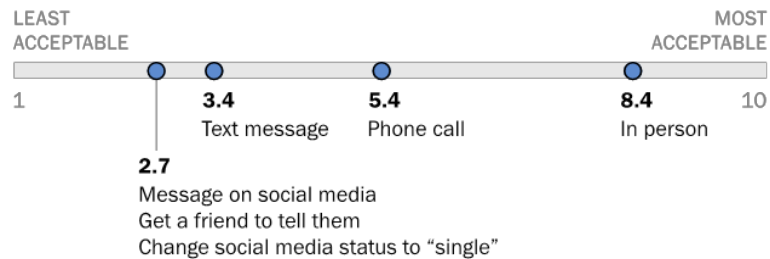
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

- Sending them a text message: This receives an average rating of 3.4 points on a 1-10 scale, with just 12% of teens rating it an 8 or higher and 59% rating it a 3 or lower.
- Sending them a message on a social media site: This receives an average of 2.7 points, with 8% rating it an 8 or higher and 72% rating it a 3 or lower.
- Getting a friend to tell them for you: This receives an average of 2.7 points, with 7% rating it an 8 or higher and 69% rating it a 3 or lower.
- Changing your status to single on a social media site: This receives an average of 2.7 points, with 7% rating it an 8 or higher and 71% rating it a 3 or lower.

Teens of all stripes (boys and girls, older teens and younger teens, whites and non-whites, those with relationship experience and those without, among others) rank these approaches in a nearly identical manner. Regardless of their demographic or other characteristics, teens view an in-person conversation as the most socially acceptable way of breaking up with someone (in every instance by a substantial margin); they view calling someone on the telephone as moderately acceptable; and they say breaking up via text message, social media or through a personal intermediary is generally unacceptable.

Teens consider the text message breakup to be socially undesirable, but a sizeable number of teens with relationship experience have been broken up with – or have broken up with others – using text messaging

Along with asking all teens (regardless of whether they have been in a romantic relationship) about the social acceptability of various ways of breaking up with someone, the survey also asked teens with romantic relationship experience about ways in which they have broken up with someone, as well as ways in which a partner has broken up with them.
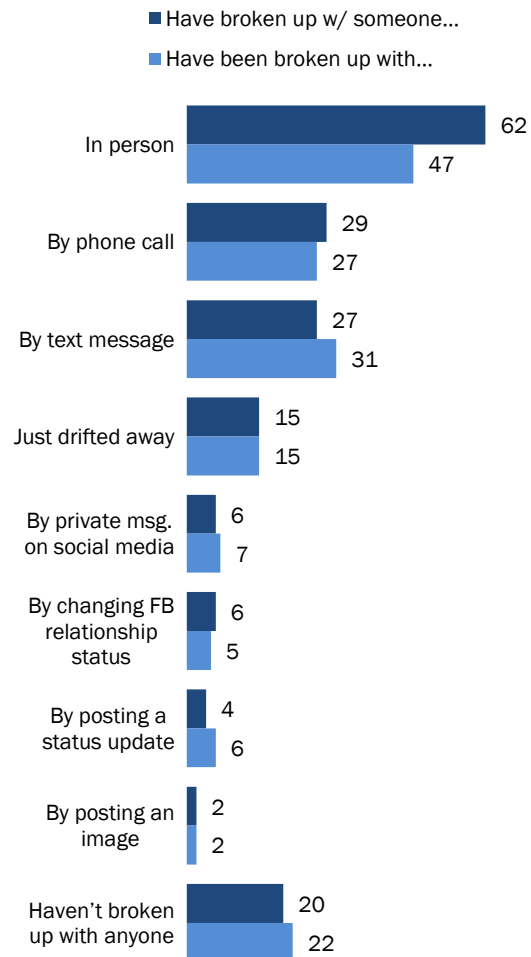
In certain ways, these reported real-world experiences line up with teens' general attitudes about the most socially appropriate ways to break up with someone. For example, having an in-person conversation is viewed as the most generally acceptable way to break up with someone, and these conversations are the most common way that breakups occur in a "real-world" setting. Some 62% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone in person, and 47% have been broken up with through an in-person discussion.

Similarly, phone call conversations (which are seen as the second-most acceptable way of breaking up with someone) are relatively common: 29% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone over the phone, and 27% have been broken up with in this way. And at the other end of the spectrum, breakups through social media (which are viewed as having low levels of acceptability) are quite *un*common—fewer than one-in-ten teens with dating experience have experienced or initiated a breakup by sending a private social media message, changing their relationship status on Facebook or posting a status update.

At the same time, text messaging – which is widely viewed as one of the least acceptable ways of breaking up with someone – is more common in the context of actual relationships than its perceived acceptability might indicate. Some 27% of teens with relationship experience have broken up with someone via text message,

Despite Being Much Less 'Acceptable,' Breaking Up by Text Message Is as Common as Breaking Up by Voice Call

% of teens with current or prior romantic experience who have broken up with someone or been broken up with in the following ways

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have any dating experience).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

31% have been broken up with in this way. That makes text message breakups as common as voice call breakups – even though voice calls are viewed as much more socially acceptable.

Finally, many relationships go out not with a bang but with a whimper – some 15% of teens with relationship experience have experienced a breakup that never ended formally, but "just drifted away." Indeed, teens are more likely to experience this type of breakup than to experience any of the other options mentioned in the survey outside of in-person talks, voice calls and text messaging.

Demographic differences in how teens end relationships are relatively modest

Overall, there are only modest differences between different groups of teens when it comes to their experiences with breakups. Girls are a bit more likely than boys to say they have broken up with someone by sending them a private message on a social network site (10% of girls with relationship experience have done so, compared with 2% of boys), and teens ages 13 and 14 are a bit more likely than older teens to have broken up with someone by posting a status update (9% vs. 2%) or posting an image (4% vs. less than 1%).

There are also modest differences along socioeconomic lines. Teens from households with an annual income of less than $50,000 are more likely than those from higher-income households to say they have broken up with someone by text message (39% vs. 22%) as well as by changing their relationship status on Facebook (15% vs. 2%). They also are more likely to say someone has broken up with them via a private message on a social networking site (13% vs. 3%).

Teens mostly break up on the phone or in person, but sometimes deploy digital tools out of fear, immaturity or self-preservation

Summarizing the feelings of a majority of teens, a high school boy in one of our focus groups said of breaking up with someone:

> *"Yeah, the best way is in person. Second best way is probably on the phone. I feel like it should be in person. It's kind of rude to do it on social media."*

But others employ other methods. One high school boy described his breakup tactics:

> *"Yeah, it's just slowly drift away. Talk to other females. Hug other females, then do other stuff with other females. Text."*

One high school boy describes breaking up by text as juvenile:

> *"You have to have maturity. That's like eighth grade stuff. … I'd do it in person."*

Others describe breaking up by text as way to be nonchalant, or a bit callous, even when you aren't. As one high school boy relates:

> *"A text officializes it. So you show that you really don't care, but you do care."*

A middle school boy describes why digital tools make breaking up easier:

> *"I think it's easier to break up with them because … you don't have to see them if they get sad. If you see them getting all emotional, then you'll feel bad and be harder on yourself to break up with them."*

Another middle school boy characterizes text-based breakups as self-protective:

> *"I think that texting is better because you're not really in person. Like one time I told her you're just kind of being too clingy and it's getting really annoying. And she like threw a book at me, so that's why it's probably better to do texts."*

Social media and the ability to capture and copy content make breaking up with someone via digital means tricky. As one middle school boy relates:

> *"For me, I broke up with a girl [I knew] on Facebook … and I broke up with her [in a text message]. And then she defriended me, but she still had the message. The messages. So I guess she got it. She copied it and posted it. She's like, 'I hate this guy.' And it was me. I looked at it. I'm like, 'Oh my God.' Everyone was … they were like hating me."*

For some teens the breakup is a drawn-out affair, moving from public digital spaces to private ones. As one high school boy explained:

> *"It's crazy. It goes from private to public and then you guys talk it out privately again. … She'll send a text and be like why you have to do that on Twitter?"*

Post-Breakup Rituals and Maintenance: Pruning Connections and Blocking Contact on Social Media and Cellphones Are Common Among Teens

For teens who experience and document the history of their romantic relationships through social media and mobile devices, the end of those relationships can leave behind a trail of digital memories in the form of messages and photos scattered across multiple platforms or the name of

an ex in a cellphone address book. These digital platforms also can offer a way for exes to initiate potentially unwanted contact, or simply serve as a visible reminder of a connection that no longer exists in person.

Accordingly, teens often take steps to prune these digital connections when romantic relationships end. Among teens with romantic relationship experience:

- 48% have removed someone they used to date from their cellphone's address book.
- 38% have untagged or deleted photos of themselves and a past partner on social media.
- 37% have unfriended or blocked someone they used to be in a relationship with on social media.[11]
- 30% have blocked an ex from texting them.

Girls are substantially more likely than boys to take these steps in the context of social media. Some 44% of girls with relationship experience have blocked or unfriended an ex on social media (compared with 31% of boys), while 46% girls have untagged or deleted photos from a previous relationship (compared with 30% of boys). By contrast, there are no gender differences when it comes to relationship pruning on cellphones – girls and boys are equally likely to have removed an ex from their phone contacts list (48% of boys and 47% of girls have done so), and to have blocked a previous partner from texting them (29% for boys, 32% for girls). Beyond these gender differences pertaining to social media, there are few other demographic differences when it comes to pruning past relationships on social media or cellphones.

Girls Are More Likely Than Boys to Block Exes or to Untag or Delete Photos on Social Media From Past Relationships

% of teens with romantic relationship experience who have...
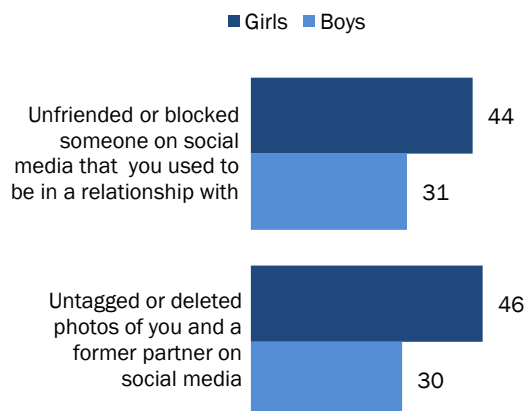
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

[11] 55% of all teens have unfriended or unfollowed an ex-friend, and 43% of teens have blocked a former friend. See our "Teens and Friendships" report for more data on the end of friendships.

Some teens prune or block former partners at the end of relationships to ease hurt feelings and to stop hurtful behaviors

Teens in our focus groups described their thinking about how to manage their social media after a breakup. A high school girl described her post-breakup social media protocol: *"I delete the statuses and stuff. I'm just like this is irrelevant now."* When asked specifically about photos, she responded:

> *"I guess it depends. Cause like if you're friends with the person still, that's OK. But if you're not, you're like really bitter, it's just like 'I'm erasing you from my life.'"*

A high school boy stated, *"They've got to go. ... I delete everything."* In one group, a high school boy described deleting photos of an ex as an act of respect to current and future partners. *"They've got to go. That's disrespect to other women."*

Other teens want to retain photos and digital mementos from a past relationship. As one high school boy stated *"I'd keep them,"* while another boy in a different group remarked, *"I wouldn't delete pictures just to have proof that I dated that girl."*

One high school girl related how she believes that social media makes it harder to get over a failed romantic relationship, and that sometimes seeing an ex delete old photos may motivate her to do the same:

> *"Social media does [make it harder to get over someone] because if I don't want to delete them as a friend, I'm going to keep them as a friend. And me seeing their pictures ... because there might be something they texted me that I can't really delete. So me seeing their pictures and all they had and I had deleted, it may put me in a position where I throw some stuff away. Because it's like, dang, that could have been us if he wasn't being so petty."*

Another middle school boy explained his post-breakup practices and suggested that deleting a photo indicates a relatively high level of anger:

> *"I keep photos. I change their status cause you don't want to seem like you hate this person. You don't want to be a jerk to them. Still maybe comment on something under not dating them anymore. Just so like people still don't think you like this person. But you're just keeping [it] up there to be nice. So [if] the other person sees that you deleted the photo and you're like, oh, wow, this person must really hate me now because they deleted this."*

There may be very good reasons for teens to prune or block former partners. As a high school boy related:

> *"Like my friend, he had just broken up with this girl. He just did it recently. But she was like … she was really commenting on every one of his pictures and just had something to say. Just like let people know that they go out. It was already known, but she just took it to the next level. … Like he's mine. Yeah, that's mine."*

Other teens use blocking as a form of revenge with the intent to further hurt an ex. As one high school boy explained:

> *"If she's going to be vicious, you block her. … It shows block. That also will get to her."*

Some teens also use social media to have their say or tell their side of the story to their network. As one high school boy described:

> *"I see some girls post pictures of the boy they just broke up with and wrote a whole paragraph just like roasting them. Just like telling him all the bad things he did."*

A majority of teen daters agree that social media allows people to offer support when romantic relationships end; but some find that others are too nosy

Despite some of the challenges outlined above, a majority of teen daters view social media as a supportive place in the context of relationship breakups. Some 63% of teen social media users with relationship experience agree with the statement that "social media allows people to support you when a relationship ends," although just 8% agree with the statement strongly.

At the same time, a substantial minority of teens do not view social media as a supportive place. Some 37% *disagree* with the notion that social media allows people to support them when a relationship ends, although again most do not have especially strong views – just 3% "strongly disagree" with this statement.

As noted above, girls are more likely than boys to take an active role in pruning photos from past relationships, and to block or unfriend exes. Yet boys and girls have identical views on whether social media offers a place for others to support them in the context of a romantic breakup.

Teens in our focus group told us that social media is a mixed blessing during a breakup, but offers an important place for social support that might be hard for some to receive in person. As one high school girl related:

> *"I think social media makes it hard after a breakup, but it can make it easier. Because sometimes I want to talk to my best friend after I break up with someone. I'll be sad. And then they're always there for me, and it's easier to talk to them over social media because then they won't see me cry or anything. So I can talk to them there."*

Other focus group teens found just the opposite – that after a breakup, people in their networks wanted to be too involved. One high school girl explained why she didn't want support from her network after a breakup:

> *"No, because they always in your business. … Just trying to be nosy."*

Another girl in the same focus group said that her friends would ask *"Like what happened? Why did y'all break up?"* and not always because they were concerned for her emotional well-being, but *"so they can maybe go jump on him or something."*

And sometimes, different friends in a teen's network are trying to be helpful after a breakup but end up creating more drama. As a high school girl explained:

> *"First of all, my friends are just like, well, I'm going to go kill him for you. I'm like, no, you don't have to do that. I mean, it's nice that they care. But, I mean, sometimes … it depends on the friends. I have friends with a lot of different attitudes. Some of them will ask, in a way, just like a status. And just like, oh, I need to tell everybody about this, but some of them, like, they actually care and they want to make sure that everything's OK."*

And some teens just aren't that interested in a friend's breakup. Said one high school girl:

> *"A lot of people, like, will post sad quotes on Instagram [after a breakup]. … I'm like, OK. I really don't care. You know?"*

Teens are divided on whether social media makes it hard to escape former romantic partners

For teens who document the course of their romantic relationships on social media, that documentation might make it more challenging to forget about past relationships when those

relationships end. However, teens themselves are nearly evenly divided on the impact of social media when it comes to forgetting about past significant others. Some 47% of teens with relationship experience who use social media agree with the following statement: "You can't escape people you used to date because you still see them in photos and posts on social media," with 8% agreeing strongly. At the same time 53% of these teens *disagree* with this statement, 7% of them doing so strongly.

Teens of various demographic groups are divided on this question – boys and girls, younger and older teens, and lower- and higher-income teens are all evenly split on this question.

Chapter 6: Teen Relationship Struggles: From Potentially Innocuous to Annoying to Abusive Digital Behaviors

Whether through immaturity, lack of knowledge or malicious intent, teenagers, like adults, occasionally experience controlling or troubling behaviors as part of their romantic relationships. The digital world offers a whole realm of tools to exact revenge, retaliate against, spy on, control, abuse or hurt a current or former partner. While some behaviors are clearly always abusive, others are more nuanced – one person's oppressive number of text messages is another person's close connection to a loved one. In most cases, the context of these behaviors is critical to determining where they fall on a spectrum from potentially innocuous to annoying to controlling and harmful.

A Small Share of Teens With Dating Experience Report Engaging in Behaviors That Range From Likely Innocuous to Troubling
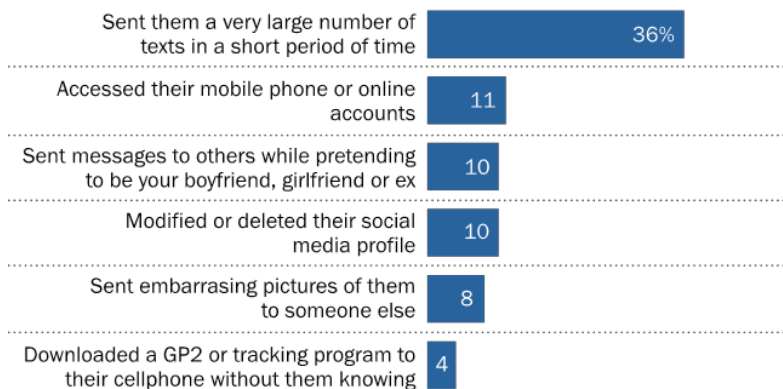
In this study, we asked teen daters about a number of things they might have done to someone they were dating or used to date, and in most cases, few teens report such behavior. There are few differences between boys and girls and younger or older teens in reporting these acts.

The experiences we asked about in our study fall on a continuum from highly context-dependent to almost always controlling or abusive. Some of the behaviors in our study, such as accessing a partner's profile or sending a large number of texts to a partner in a short period of

Few Teens Engage in Annoying or Harmful Behaviors Toward Current or Ex-Romantic Partners

% of teen daters who have done the following to a current or former romantic partner

Behavior	%
Sent them a very large number of texts in a short period of time	36%
Accessed their mobile phone or online accounts	11
Sent messages to others while pretending to be your boyfriend, girlfriend or ex	10
Modified or deleted their social media profile	10
Sent embarrasing pictures of them to someone else	8
Downloaded a GP2 or tracking program to their cellphone without them knowing	4

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

time, depend a lot on the feelings and perspective of the teen's partner. In some contexts, these are intrusive and invasive and in others they are a part of a mutually agreeable interaction. Overall,

teens were more likely to report engaging in these more contextually dependent experiences. Other behaviors, such as impersonating an ex in a message or modifying or deleting their account, are less clear. And some behaviors, such as sending embarrassing pictures of their significant other to someone else and installing a tracking device without permission, fall more resolutely at the controlling and harmful end of the spectrum. Very few teens in our study engaged in these more problematic behaviors.

About a third of teen daters have sent a large number of texts to an ex or partner in a short period of time

Messaging is a potential venue for attacks or revenge on partners or exes. And about a third of teens with dating experience (36%) report sending a very large number of texts in a short period of time to a current or former partner. However even as this question was asked in the context of other questions about potentially vengeful behaviors, "a very large number" is open to interpretation, and could be either abusive, or part of mutually appealing communication between romantic partners.

Roughly one-in-ten teen daters have accessed a partner or ex-partner's phone or online accounts

About one-in-ten (11%) teens with dating experience say they've accessed the mobile phone or online accounts of someone they were dating or had been dating. Older girls are more likely to report this access than older boys (16% vs. 7% of older boys.) Permission is a critical element in understanding the nature of these experiences – while some teens may relish sharing the contents of their digital tools and profiles with a partner, others find it invasive of their privacy.

10% of teen daters have impersonated their boyfriend, girlfriend or ex in a message

Another set of behaviors are also context dependent, but are even muddier. Impersonating an ex in a message and modifying or deleting a partners profile have fewer potential scenarios where they aren't moving into harmful or controlling territory.

One-in-ten teen daters (10%) have sent messages to others pretending to be their boyfriend, girlfriend or ex. Again, context is important here – is it a joke everyone finds funny? Or is it a potentially embarrassing or destructive communication?

One-in-ten teen daters have modified or deleted a partner or ex-partner's social media profile

Another 10% of teens with relationship experience say they've modified or deleted a partner or ex-partner's social media profile. Teens from households earning less than $50,000 annually are more likely to say they've modified or deleted a partner's or ex's social media profile than those from wealthier households (17% vs. 7%). As with accessing a profile, the permission element brings nuance to this finding.

A smaller share of teen daters have sent embarrassing pictures or used GPS to monitor their partner or ex-partner

And for a handful of behaviors in this study, it is difficult to imagine scenarios where they are not controlling or harmful. Some 8% of teens with relationship experience say they have sent embarrassing pictures of their boyfriend, girlfriend or ex to someone else, and 4% report downloading a GPS or tracking program to their partner's or ex's cellphone without their knowledge.

A Small Number of Teens With Relationship Experience Have Experienced Potentially Controlling or Abusive Digital Behavior at the Hands of a Partner or Ex-Partner

Beyond perpetrating possibly inappropriate or controlling behavior, some teen daters experience behaviors at the hands of a current or former partner that range from potentially annoying to abusive during and after their relationships. And while there are many ways to embarrass or harm a current or former partner, this analysis focuses on actions that involve digital tools like texts, cellphones and social media.

Certain activities among the ones included in the study are more likely to occur during a relationship, while others are more likely to happen to teens daters after the relationship ends. Checking up on a partner multiple times a day, reading a partner's texts, and using digital tools to pressure them for unwanted sexual activity are the three activities that occur more during than after relationships. Conversely, spreading rumors, and name-calling and

A Small Share of Teens Have Experienced Controlling or Harmful Behaviors From a Current or Former Romantic Partner

% of teens with dating experience who have experienced the following from a current or former romantic partner
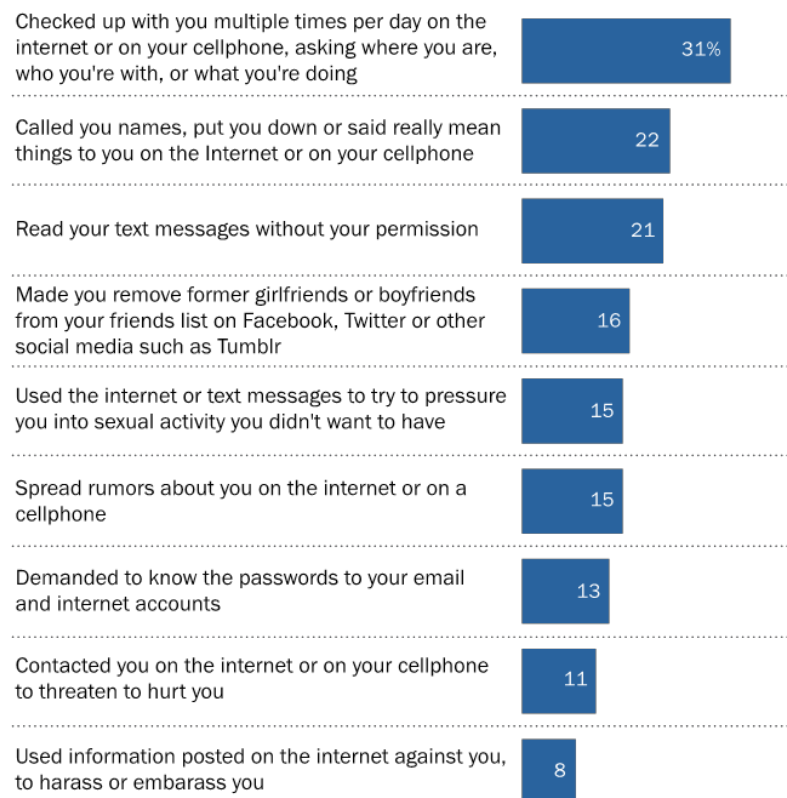
Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

meanness through digital conduits are more likely to occur after teens break up. Pressure to remove exes and give up passwords, making threats as well as having online information used against them are about as likely to happen to teen daters both during and after a relationship.

Experiences Most Likely to Happen Within a Relationship:

Roughly a third of teens report a significant other or ex using the internet or cellphone to check up on them multiple times per day

Fully 31% of teens with dating experience report that a current or former partner has checked up on them multiple times per day on the internet or cellphone, asking where they were, who they were with or what they were doing. Most teen daters who experienced this had it happen to them during a relationship – 26% of teen daters report their partner checked up on them during their relationship and 5% report that it happened after their relationship ended. And as with many of the activities discussed earlier in this chapter, this behavior is dependent on the context in which it occurs – and whether the recipient views it as charming or oppressive.

Among teens who describe themselves as being in a serious relationship, one-in-five say their partner "always" (2%) or "sometimes" (18%) tries to check up on them too often. A majority of teens in serious relationships say they "rarely" (29%) or "never" (51%) experience this.

21% of teen daters have had a current or former partner read their text messages without permission

About one-in-five teen daters (21%) report that a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or partner has read their text messages without permission. For the bulk of teens, this unwanted reading of text messages happened during a relationship, with 18% of teen daters reporting such an experience. For a small number of teens, this intrusion occurred after a breakup, with 3% reporting a former partner reading their texts without permission.
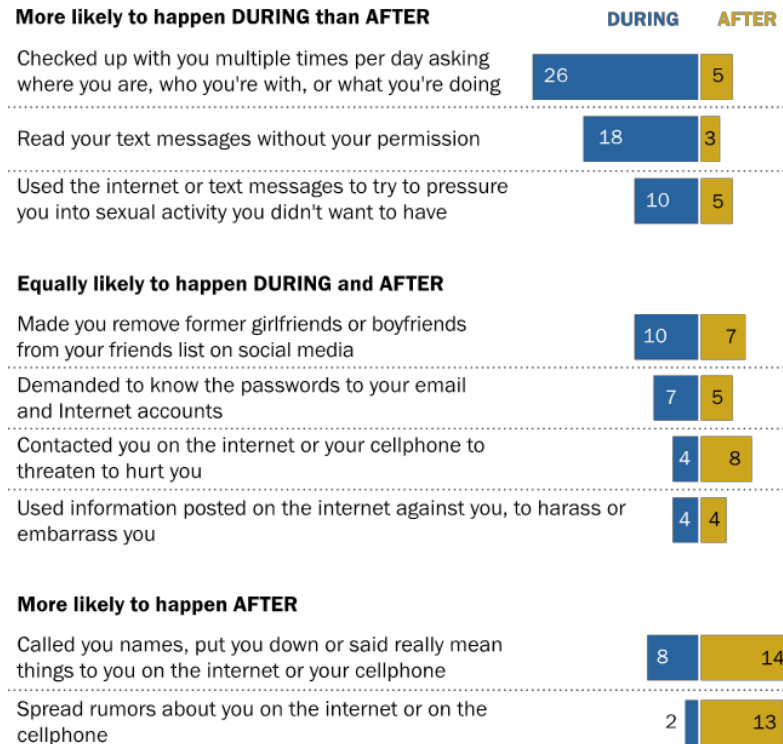
10% of all teens say a boyfriend or girlfriend has used the internet or text messages to pressure them into unwanted sexual activity

Nearly one-in-seven teen daters (15%) say a current or former partner has pressured them, via the internet or text messaging, to engage in sexual activity they did not want to have. One-in-ten teen daters report that this happened during a relationship and 5% report that former partner pressured them after a relationship ended. Teens of early high school age (14 to 15) are more likely to report this than younger or older teens. Teens from families earning less than $50,000 annually were more likely than teens from families earning more to report being pressured via digital means into unwanted sexual activity (21% vs. 12%).

Teens Engage in Different Forms of Harmful and Controlling Behavior During and After a Relationship

% of teens with dating experience who have had these experiences from a current or former romantic partner

More likely to happen DURING than AFTER **DURING** **AFTER**

	DURING	AFTER
Checked up with you multiple times per day asking where you are, who you're with, or what you're doing	26	5
Read your text messages without your permission	18	3
Used the internet or text messages to try to pressure you into sexual activity you didn't want to have	10	5

Equally likely to happen DURING and AFTER

	DURING	AFTER
Made you remove former girlfriends or boyfriends from your friends list on social media	10	7
Demanded to know the passwords to your email and Internet accounts	7	5
Contacted you on the internet or your cellphone to threaten to hurt you	4	8
Used information posted on the internet against you, to harass or embarrass you	4	4

More likely to happen AFTER

	DURING	AFTER
Called you names, put you down or said really mean things to you on the internet or your cellphone	8	14
Spread rumors about you on the internet or on the cellphone	2	13

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=361 teens ages 13 to 17 who have ever been in some kind of romantic relationship).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Experiences Equally Likely to Occur During and After a Relationship:

16% of teens daters have had a current or former partner force them to remove former girlfriends or boyfriends from their social media networks

Roughly one-in-seven (16%) teens with relationship experience say a current or former partner has made them remove former girlfriends or boyfriends from their friends list on Facebook, Twitter or

other social media. About the same number of teens experience this during their relationship (10%) and after (7%).

Teen daters are about equally likely to have a partner demand their passwords to email and internet accounts during and after a relationship

About one-in-eight (13%) teens with dating experience report that their current or former partner demanded they share their passwords to email and internet accounts with them. And teens are about equally as likely to experience this during a relationship (7%) as after a relationship ends (5%).

A small share of teen daters have had current or former partners make threats against them online or via a mobile phone

Just 11% of teens with relationship experience report that a current or former partner has contacted them on the Internet or on their cellphone to threaten to hurt them. Teens are equally likely to have threats made against them during and after a relationship is over. About one-in-ten (8%) teen daters have been threatened digitally by an ex, and about 4% have experienced online or mobile phone based threats from a partner during a romantic relationship. Teens from less well-off households – earning less than $50,000 annually – are more likely to report receiving digital threats from a current or former partner (17% vs. 9%).

Very small numbers of teen daters have had a current or former partner use information available online against them

Roughly one-in-ten (8%) teen daters report that a current or ex-partner used information posted on the internet against them, to harass or embarrass them. Those who have experienced this are evenly split; about half (4%) had this happen during a relationship, and another 4% have experienced this after the relationship ended.

Experiences Most Likely to Occur After a Relationship Ends:

About one-in-five teen daters has had a partner or ex call them names, put them down or say mean things to them online or on a cellphone

One-in-five (22%) teens with relationship experience have had a partner use the internet or a cellphone to call them names, put them down or say really mean things to them. This is more likely to happen after the relationship is over as it is during it. A full 14% of teen daters report that this happened after the relationship ended, while 8% of teens report that a boyfriend or girlfriend had done this to them during their relationship. Once again, less well-off teens – from families earning less than $50,000 per year – are more likely to experience this type of abuse, with 30% of less well-off teens reporting it, while 18% of teens from higher-income families report such experiences.

13% of teen daters say an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend has spread rumors about them after a relationship ended via the internet or a mobile phone

Fully 15% of teen daters report that a current or former partner spread rumors about them using digital platforms like mobile phones or the internet. However, just 2% of teen daters experienced this during a relationship – the bulk (13%) of youth with dating experience report that this happened after a breakup.

A high school boy from our focus groups details some of the controlling behaviors he has experienced at the hands of exes:

> *"They text you every day, like every photo. They put a photo back with you in it. They talk to your friends about you, and then their friends tell you about what they're saying. … They tweet at the person that you're talking to [dating], and then they DM the person and they say he's still talking to [dating] me. All that nonsense."*

Another high school boy explained how one of his former girlfriends broke into his profiles:

> *"This one girl actually reset my passwords."*

Digital content can also be used to exact revenge. As one high school boys explained:

> *"I mean, if you don't really care about the person that much and they did you wrong or something, you've got something funny on them, [but] I don't think it's going to feel good.*

Like ... some people take it too far, exposing people and putting their news out there and whatnot."

Context for digital behaviors is quite important, as things that seem cute within a relationship seem creepy or uncomfortable outside of it. As one high school girl notes

"If it's like a mutual thing. It's like you like all of each other's Facebook pictures. I've done that with people. That's kind of funny and cute."

Appendix A: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Teens

3% of Teens Identify as Transgender; 2% Identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual; and 3% are Unsure of Their Sexual Orientation

Given that the topic of this study was friendships and romantic relationships, this survey asked teens about their sexual orientation and their gender identity. While the number of teens responding who identified as LGTBQ was not large enough to use sexual orientation or gender identity as a point of analysis, we share the data here for those who may be otherwise interested in this data from a nationally representative sample of American teens ages 13 to 17.

Most teens in this study describe their sexual orientation as heterosexual and their gender identity as not transgender. The survey measured sexual orientation by asking teens to identify whether they consider themselves to be "straight," "bisexual," "gay or lesbian," "something else," or if they are not sure of their sexual orientation. Their responses are as follows:

- 93% identify as straight
- 3% are not sure what their sexual orientation is, and 1% refused to provide their sexual orientation
- 2% identify as bisexual
- Fewer than 1% identify as gay or lesbian

Another 1% identify as something other than straight, gay or lesbian, or bisexual. Teens who selected this option were allowed to write in how they view their own sexual orientation, and their responses included the following: "pansexual" (3 mentions), "demisexual," "feminina," "none of your business," "ninguno," "regular," and "13!"

In this study, 3% of teens identified as transgender, with 1% each identifying as male-to-female transgender, female-to-male transgender, and gender nonconforming; 95% of teens reported that they were not transgender, and 2% refused to answer the question.

Other research has found varying percentages of the teen population describing themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or unsure. Between 2001 and 2009, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance study surveyed teens in grades nine through 12 in nine states about their sexual orientation, and found that between 90% and 94% identified as heterosexual, 1% to 3% identified as gay or lesbian, 3% to

5% of teens identified as bisexual and 1% to 5% stated that they were unsure of their sexual orientation.[12]

---

[12] CDC, (2011) "Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9 through 12 – Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Selected Sites, United States, 2001-2009," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, June 6, 2011. US Department of Health and Human Services.

Methods

Study Design & Documentation

Introduction

The Pew Research Center's Teen Relationship Study was funded, designed and analyzed by Pew Research staff. Quantitative fieldwork was conducted by the GfK Group (GfK, formerly Knowledge Networks). Specifically, the survey examined the attitudes of teens ages 13 to 17 years old, as well as those of their parents, toward technology. The survey examined friendships and romantic relationships within the context of technology use. The survey was conducted using sample from KnowledgePanel®.

The study also conducted 12 in-person focus groups and four online focus groups. The in-person groups interviewed a total of 70 teens ages 13 to 17 years old in three cities in the United States in November 2014. In-person focus groups ranged in size from four to eight participants, and were separated by gender and divided by middle schoolers and high schoolers. Additionally, participants in four of the high school groups (two each with boys and girls) were required to have had some romantic relationship experience, either currently or in the past, to be in the group. Participants were paid a $50 incentive as a thank you for their participation in the research. Participants were recruited with the help of Resolution Research. The online focus groups, conducted in April 2014, ranged in size from seven to nine teens from around the United States in each group. The online groups interviewed a total of 32 teens ages 13 to 17. Each group was gender and age segregated (boys/girls and middle school/high school.) Each participant received a $60 incentive for their participation. The online focus groups were recruited and hosted by 20|20 Research and moderated by the lead author.

The rest of the Methods section describes details about the recruitment, interviewing and weighing of the quantitative survey.

Quantitative Sample Definition

The target population consists of the following: parents of teens ages 13 to 17 and teens 13 to 17 years old residing in the United States. To sample the population, GfK sampled households from its KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel designed to be representative of the United States. The survey consisted of three stages: initial screening for the parents of teens ages 13 to 17, the parent survey, and the teen survey.

The main data collection field periods were from September 25, 2014, through October 9, 2014, and from February 10, 2015, to March 16, 2015. The second data collection was targeted toward

black parents and teenagers, with the intent of increasing to reportable levels the number of black teens in the sample. Parents completed the parent section of the survey in six minutes (median). Teens completed the teen section of the survey in 16 minutes (median). The survey was conducted in English and Spanish. Parents and teens could select different languages for the survey.

Survey Completion and Sample Sizes

The number of respondents sampled and participating in the survey, the survey completion rates for the screener and main interview, and the incidence/eligibility rate are presented below.

Key Survey Response Statistics: In-Field Screening

- N Sampled for Screener: 4111
- N Complete Screener: 1637
- Screener Survey Completion Rate: 39.8%
- Qualified for Main Survey: 1060
- Incidence Rate: 64.7%

While 1,084 parents completed the parent section of the main survey, 1,060 teens completed the teen section of the main survey; the 24 unpaired parents were not included in the final counts. The margin of error for the full sample of teens (n=1060) or parents (n=1060) is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points. This report is focused on teens with any romantic relationship experience – who replied yes to the question "Have you ever dated, hooked up with or otherwise had a romantic relationship with another person?" 35% of teens responded yes, and for "teen daters" n=361, Please see the adjacent chart for the margin of error for this and other subsamples in this study.

Margins of Error

	Sample Size	Margin of error in percentage points
All parents	1,060	+/- 3.4
All teens	1,060	+/- 3.7
Girls	537	+/- 5.2
Boys	523	+/- 5.3
White, non-Hispanic	614	+/- 4.5
Black, non-Hispanic	101	+/- 13.3
Hispanic	236	+/- 8.1
Teen cellphone owners	929	+/- 3.9
Teen smartphone owners	759	+/- 4.4
Teen social media users	789	+/- 4.3
Teen daters	361	+/- 6.3

Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25 – Oct.9, 2014 and Feb. 10 – March 16, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Survey Cooperation Enhancements

As a standard, email reminders to non-responders were sent on day three of the field period. Beyond the standard email reminder on day three of the field period, the following steps were also taken:

- Additional email reminders to non-responders were sent on day 7 of the field period;
- Teens received a cash-equivalent of $5 for their participation;

Documentation regarding KnowledgePanel sampling, data collection procedures, weighting and IRB-bearing issues are available at the below online resources.

- http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html
- http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/knpanel/index.html
- http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/irbsupport/

KnowledgePanel Methods Information

Complete and current information about KnowledgePanel sampling and recruitment methodology and design is available at:
http://www.gfk.com/Documents/GfK-KnowledgePanel-Design-Summary.pdf

KnowledgePanel's recruitment process uses an Address Based Sampling (ABS) methodology for selecting panel members. This probability-based sampling methodology improves population coverage, and provides a more effective sampling infrastructure for recruitment of hard-to-reach individuals, such as young adults and those from various minority groups. It should be noted that under the ABS recruitment households without Internet connection are provided with a web-enabled device and free Internet service.

After initially accepting the invitation to join the panel, participants are asked to complete a short demographic survey (the initial profile survey); answers to which allow efficient panel sampling and weighting for future surveys. Completion of the profile survey allows participants to become panel members, and all respondents are provided the same privacy terms and confidentiality protections.

ABS Recruitment

The ABS recruitment protocol relies on probability-based sampling of addresses from the United States Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File (DSF). The key advantage of the ABS methodology is that it allows sampling of almost all United States households. Regardless of household telephone status, all households can be reached and contacted through postal mail. Pre-identified ancillary information about addresses was used to construct and target households in the following four sampling strata:

- Hispanic ages 18-29
- Non-Hispanic ages 18-29
- Hispanic ages 30+
- Non-Hispanic ages 30+

As detailed below, specific adjustments are applied to compensate for any oversampling that is carried out to improve the demographic composition of the panel.

Randomly sampled addresses from the DSF are invited to join KnowledgePanel through a series of mailings, including an initial invitation letter, a reminder postcard, and a subsequent follow-up letter. Given that approximately 45% of the physical addresses can be matched to a corresponding landline telephone number, about 5 weeks after the initial mailing, telephone refusal-conversion calls are made to households for whom a telephone number was matched to the sampled address. Invited households can join the panel by:

- Completing and mailing back a paper form in a postage-paid envelope
- Calling a toll-free hotline phone number maintained by GfK
- Going to a designated GfK website and completing the recruitment form at the website

Household Member Recruitment

For all recruitment efforts, during the initial recruitment survey, all household members are enumerated. Following enumeration, attempts are made to recruit every household member who is at least 13 years old to participate in KnowledgePanel surveys. For household members aged 13 to 17, consent is collected from the parents or the legal guardian during the initial recruitment interview. If no consent is given, no further direct communication with the teenagers is attempted.

Survey Sampling from KnowledgePanel

For this survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. parents of teens ages 13 to 17 was selected. The general sampling rule is to assign no more than one survey per week to individual

members. Allowing for rare exceptions during some weeks, this limits a member's total assignments per month to four or six surveys.

Survey Administration

Once assigned to a survey, members receive a notification email letting them know there is a new survey available for them to take. This email notification contains a link that sends them to the survey questionnaire.

After three days, automatic email reminders are sent to all non-responding panel members in the sample. If email reminders do not generate a sufficient response, an automated telephone reminder call can be initiated. The usual protocol is to wait at least three to four days after the email reminder before calling. To assist panel members with their survey taking, each individual has a personalized "home page" that lists all the surveys that were assigned to that member and have yet to be completed.

GfK also operates an ongoing modest incentive program to encourage participation and create member loyalty. Members can enter special raffles or can be entered into special sweepstakes with both cash rewards and other prizes to be won.

The typical survey commitment for panel members is one survey per week or four per month with duration of 10 to 15 minutes per survey. In the case of longer surveys, an additional incentive is typically provided.

Sample Weighting

For selection of general population samples from the Knowledge Panel (KP), however, a patented methodology has been developed that ensures the resulting samples behave as EPSEM (Equal Probability of Selection Method) samples. Briefly, this methodology starts by weighting the entire KP to the benchmarks secured from the latest March supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) along several dimensions. This way, the weighted distribution of the Knowledge Panel matches that of the US adults – even with respect to the few dimensions where minor misalignments may result from differential attrition rates.

Study-Specific Post-Stratification Weights

Once the study sample has been selected and fielded, and all the survey data are edited and made final, design weights are adjusted for any survey nonresponse as well as any under- or over-coverage imposed by the study-specific sample design. Depending on the specific target population for a given study, geo-demographic distributions for the corresponding population are obtained

from the CPS, the American Community Survey (ACS) or in certain instances from the weighted KP profile data. For this purpose an iterative proportional fitting (raking) procedure is used to produce final weights that will be aligned with respect to all study benchmark distributions simultaneously. In the final step, calculated weights are examined to identify and, if necessary, trim outliers at the extreme upper and lower tails of the weight distribution. The resulting weights are then scaled to the sum of the total sample size of all eligible respondents.

For this study, the following benchmark distributions of parents with teens ages 13 to 17 from the 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) were used for the raking adjustment of weights for parents (par_weight):

- Gender (Male/Female) by Age (18–39, 40–49, and 50+)
- Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Metropolitan Area (Yes, No) by Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor and beyond)
- Household income (under $25k, $25K to <$50k, $50K to <$75k, $75K to <$100k, $100K+)
- Primary Language (English-dominant, Bilingual, Spanish-dominant, Non-Hispanic)
- Age (18–39, 40–49, and 50+) by Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Gender (Male/Female) By Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic) (collapsed metro status together for Others/2+ Races because of not enough cases))
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) by Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor and beyond) by Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic) (collapsed HS/LHS for AA and HS/LHS for Others/2+ Races)
- Household income (under $25k, $25K to <$50k, $50K to <$75k, $75K to <$100k, $100K+) by Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic) (collapsed income into two categories for Others/2+ Races --- (under $50K, $50K+))
- Metropolitan Area (Yes, No) by Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic) (collapsed metro status together for Others/2+ Races because of not enough cases)

The following benchmark distributions of children ages 13 to 17 from the 2014 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) were used for the raking adjustment of weights for teens (teen_weight):

- Gender (Male/Female) by Age (13, 14, 15, 16, 17)
- Teen Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Metropolitan Area (Yes, No) by Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Age (13, 14, 15, 16, 17) by Teen Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Gender (Male/Female) by Teen Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) by Teen Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Metropolitan Area (Yes, No) by Teen Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Parental Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor and beyond) by Parental Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic) (collapsed HS/LHS for AA and HS/LHS for Others/2+ Races)

The starting weight for teens is the final parent weight multiplied by the number of children ages 13 to 17 years old in the household (1, 2+).

Detailed information on the demographic distributions of the benchmarks is available upon request. Please contact Kyley McGeeney at KMcGeeney@PewResearch.org for more information about the study methodology.

Pew Research Center is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization and a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.