



## What to Do When You Find Out Your Child Has a Boo

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I am the mom of identical twin sons who are currently in fifth grade. Next year, they will be in 6th grade and will be attending middle school. For the majority of my education career, I have been a middle school English teacher. Middle school is a special place. It is the time when hormones are going buck wild, and kids are trying to manage feelings they have never felt before. Kids who couldn't even imagine liking another kid more than a friend are suddenly taken over with strong feelings.

I have lived this life for over a decade. In short, middle school is a soap opera where kids can change “romances” by the week or even by the day. I never thought about kids being overcome by these feelings in elementary school.

Earlier this week, I received a message from my son’s teacher about him and his “girlfriend.” The teacher explained that: (a) he had a girlfriend and (b) they were being too friendly. Hugs were too long and there was a lot of hand holding. I was in shambles. I screamed my husband’s name to come and look at this message. After he came running, he seemed annoyed because I had summoned him, with what he called an unnecessary level of distress.

I couldn’t believe my son was calling himself having a girlfriend and we did not know anything about it. I told my husband we needed to sit him down to get to the bottom of this. I told him we needed to have a plan. This individual looked at me and said, “We just need to wing it.” Let me tell y’all! Winging it is when you find filler content off the top of the dome when your lesson did not go long enough. It is not when your kid had a girlfriend you knew nothing about!

We couldn’t make a plan because we got the information shortly before he was dropped off at our home. Our house is the bus stop. We separated him from his twin brother and asked him if he knew why his teacher had contacted us. He was clueless. For context, any other time we have been contacted by a teacher and we ask this question, he tells us exactly what he did and why the teacher contacted us. Since we have no record of him not being honest in these situations, I decided to read the message aloud. He was shocked and had no clue the teacher had contacted us. Then I asked, “Do you have a ‘girlfriend?’” He said, “Yes, and I was planning to tell you both about it before spring break started.” Spring break begins next week. I asked, “Why were you waiting?” He said, “I was nervous about how you both would react.” He went on to explain that he *REALLY* liked this young lady and asked her to be his girlfriend sometime after they returned from winter break. She said yes and told her mom. My husband said, “I don’t think she told her mom. She just told you that.”

What bothered me most is that my 11-year-old son was in a “relationship” for almost three months, and I was clueless. I was the only parent volunteer at the Valentine’s Day party, and I did not even pick up on any of that. How did I not sense this like I did when I was a middle school teacher? How did I not know?

My biggest fear was if we didn’t get this right, our child would not tell us even bigger stuff. My husband and I concluded that he could have a “girlfriend,” but we set terms. We straight up

asked if they had done anything else not mentioned in the message. My son looked absolutely mortified by our specific questions. "Did you kiss her?" "Did you touch her in any personal places?" He said, "no."

My husband explained what it meant to treat a young lady in a respectable way. Our son agreed to make sure he was being respectable. We also told him that if we got this message, her parents received this message, too. Based on that, her parents might not allow her to speak to him anymore. We wanted him to be well prepared. We also told him to give her our cell phone numbers so her parents could call us. Instead, he came home with her mom's cell phone number. We called her mom. My son was right. She was aware her daughter had a "boyfriend," and she told us that her daughter talks about our son every day after school.

Her mother agreed with us. She did not like the terminology of girlfriend and boyfriend and preferred "special friends." That is what the three of us agreed upon. Just like us, her mom didn't want her child to feel like her feelings were wrong or if she had done anything wrong.

Although, deep down, I am scared out of my mind. I believe we did the right thing. I was raised in an extremely conservative Christian home. I was not allowed to have experiences that other students had, even in high school. The moment I left home and went to college, I tried to have a lot of experiences in one year ... and let me just say that was an extremely bad idea.

As a parent, I rather be a guide on the side helping my children navigate parts of life instead of trying to scare them into submission with my dreams, hopes, and values. I do not want to be shut out. I want to be let in. I want to understand what is going on in my child's head.

If you find yourself in this situation, talk to the other child's parents and get an understanding because this helps your child understand if this "relationship" can even be possible, and if so, what the parameters are. Having open dialogue makes your children feel as if they are important and able to share how they are feeling.

Again, I have been an educator for almost two decades, so I know this "romance" could be over as I am writing this piece, or it might endure the transition from elementary to middle school. Regardless of how this turns out, I think my son and his twin brother know they can talk to us about anything.

And yes, we reminded him we are NOT trying to become grandparents anytime soon.