

The First Crush

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Early Grade School Crushes:

- May take parents by surprise, but are actually quite normal.
- Generally, at this age, involves a peer rather than a celebrity figure.
- Little girls may be more verbal and expressive (Valentines, “love notes”, phone calls and other verbal communications).
- Boys may show their intentions via actions (running by and tickling, teasing, or playing together on the playground).
- Early socialization promotes crushes: media hype, Disney movies (who gets to have the Prince?)
- Not true or erotic love—but another type of playing “grown up” similar to pretending to be a teacher, coach or actor.
- In the older grade school years, may be an attention-getter or used to fit in with the crowd.

How Should Parents Handle the Crush?

- Don’t try to dissuade your child or to talk her out of her feelings, as long as the “crush” is moderate. Caring for a peer is nice—this encourages kind and thoughtful feelings and actions.
- Show reasonable interest—“Why do you like Jason so much? Is he nice to you?”
- Allow sensible responses and activities such as the giving of a Valentine or appropriate birthday gift. Discourage love notes, phone calls or too many play dates to the exclusion of other friends.
- If the crush seems to be getting too intense (your child not playing with other children, obsessing on the friend, or getting feelings hurt when the crush is not reciprocated) have a frank talk. Focus on how it’s nice to care for another person, but that a sure-fire way to lose a friend is to overwhelm or to smother them. Also, discuss how it’s rude to overlook the other kids in class or to exclude previous relationships—feelings are hurt and prior friends may not be there when your child is ready to spend more time with them again.

Tween Crushes:

Celebrity Infatuation

- Generally begin about age eleven. What distinguishes a celebrity crush from a true romance is that the relationship is distant and one-sided.
- Both genders are equally infatuated, but girls tend to be more verbal about their “love” interests and to carry these into conversations with family and friends.

- Sexual feelings may or may not be involved. Many kids choose “unattainable” people to have a crush on (celebrity crushes)—this is safe and socially acceptable. Sex doesn’t even enter the picture when the object of the feelings lives in Hollywood and no longer is even in school!
- Celebrity crushes are a great way of fitting in with peers. It’s cool to display posters of Billy Gilman or the N’Sync guys, and is a relatively harmless preoccupation.
- Celebrity crushes are a great ice-breaker when meeting new kids—it’s safe and easy to discuss the latest hit song, athletic endeavor, or Britney Spears’ most recent CD cover.
- Movie stars and band members are the most frequent recipients of crushes—just check out their web sites!
- Helps a child to establish their own identity—enables tweens to clarify what qualities they like in themselves and others (cute, personable, outgoing, etc.).

Real-Life Crushes

- Not as safe as an “unattainable crush”—a good way to get the first heart-break!
- Some tweens really do fall head over heels in love, and can continue a relationship throughout middle school and even into the high school years.
- Generally, this type of relationship narrows the child’s interests and involvement with others (sports, clubs and even academics). Hours spent on the telephone or IM’ing on the Internet with the boy or girlfriend can be better spent with a more balanced approach to “dating”.
- Discuss balance in relationships if your child is getting too involved or obsessed with the crush or infatuation. You may have to set some limits on telephone or Internet time, or insist that activities and time are spent with a variety of friends.
- Caution your child to not spend too much money on gifts for the other person—it’s expensive, and may not be received well.
- ***Rule of thumb for tweens and first crushes:*** shy away from buying gifts that are to be worn on the body (jewelry, clothing)—it’s very personal and may be viewed by the recipient (or their folks!) as too intimate. Safer choices are CD’s, books or cool Valentine cards or candy. Feelings are easily hurt if the gift is not received well or even reciprocated. Guys should keep it simple—a card, flower or small box of candy is usually a safe bet. Girls—too sentimental may come across as smothering—keep the gift simple, cute or perhaps even humorous.

How Should Parents Handle the Tween Crush?

- Don’t ridicule your kid—no matter how unrealistic the crush (whether celebrity or peer). Your child’s feelings are real and should be respected.
- Communication is key. If you make fun of the feelings, your kid may become secretive about this and other relationships.

- Let the child lead the way. Unless the crush becomes obsessive or interferes with other life activities, just enjoy your kid's involvement and new interest.
- Use the "relationship" as a jumping off spot for communication. Get to know your child's interests, friends and how he or she wishes to be perceived by others via the object of the crush. Kids love to talk about their infatuations—have fun with it and respect your child's feelings. Remember what your first crush was like and enjoy it the second time around!