

An Analysis of Dating Issues and Ethics among Adolescents Aged 17-18 in Building Healthy Relationships

¹Nugroho Putra Noto Negoro Ledo, ²Adie Putra Ledo, ³Ishak Isai Kaseh

^{1,2,3} Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Agapes Jakarta, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Transformasi Indonesia Manado, Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologia Indonesia Timur di Makassar

nugroholedo11@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Dating among adolescents aged 17-18 is a developmental phenomenon that can serve as a space for cultivating emotional maturity, yet it also presents various challenges such as emotional instability, jealousy, peer pressure, emotional dependency, and behaviors inconsistent with Christian values. This study aims to analyze the issues surrounding dating for this age group and to formulate approaches for building healthy relationships based on Christian ethical perspectives. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, utilizing a literature review and an analysis of Christian ethical principles relevant to adolescent relationships. The study's novelty lies in integrating the realities of late-adolescent dating challenges with Christian ethical principles to create a practical framework for fostering relationships that are healthy, responsible, and oriented toward faith growth. The findings indicate that proper dating relationships should be built upon love, holiness, self-control, honesty, respect for one's partner's dignity, open communication, and healthy boundaries, alongside the involvement of family and the church community in guiding adolescents.

Keywords: Issues; Dating; Adolescents; Ages 17-18; Christian Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings were not created to live alone but in partnership (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2017). Dating can therefore serve as a bridge in seeking an appropriate partner. Today, this phenomenon is commonly encountered both in immediate social environments and through social media (Siahaan et al., 2023). Adolescence is a crucial transitional phase in the human life cycle, characterized by identity formation and emotional development

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Corresponding author: Nugroho Putra Noto Negoro Ledo

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(Makoro, Tangayo, et al., 2026). At ages 17–18, individuals begin to develop an interest in forming dating relationships (Mulyani et al., 2024). Dating at this age is not merely a matter of following social trends; it has become part of the search for deeper relationships that may affect mental health. This age also marks a transition from senior high school (SMA) to the next stage of life, and changes in environment and related circumstances can influence adolescents' psychological well-being.

Dating is a relationship in which two individuals of the opposite sex are mutually attracted and express feelings of love through more intensive communication. It is also a social activity that allows two unrelated individuals of the opposite sex to interact socially on the basis of such feelings. Dating commonly involves planned activities undertaken together by two unmarried young people of the opposite sex (Hermanto & Cyntiawati, 2024). When conducted appropriately, dating can serve as a means of deepening one's relationship with God and encouraging one another to strengthen their faith; however, without a clear understanding of dating, it may produce the opposite effect.

Christian adolescents increasingly face challenges in maintaining their spiritual identity in the modern era, which is marked by influences that conflict with moral values (Pangaribuan & Rumetor, 2024). This situation raises serious concern about the moral future of the younger generation because it may erode Christian ethical values that have long served as a foundation for adolescent character and behavior (Verkuyl, 2012). Adolescents may become trapped in relationships centered primarily on momentary emotions or growing social pressure, leaving little room for genuine spiritual development (Kristiawan, 2026). It is therefore important to examine dating relationships more deeply so that they can be directed toward practices that foster adolescents' spiritual growth.

This study is motivated by the shift in moral values among adolescents aged 17–18, whose dating practices can become entangled in destructive relationship patterns, compromises in sexual ethics, dating violence, and the loss of healthy boundaries under the influence of secular popular culture. These issues create tension between adolescents' emotional development at an age when they are still searching for identity and the standards of purity established within the Christian faith (Nida, 2020). Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: What are the issues and ethical considerations of dating among adolescents aged 17–18 in building healthy relationships?

Previous research by Gulo and Sinaga entitled “Etika Berpacaran dalam Tinjauan Etika Kristen” argues that Christian dating should be grounded in agape love, preserve purity, and be oriented toward holy marriage rather than merely toward temporary emotional fulfillment (Gulo & Sinaga, 2024). Nazara's study, “Peranan Etika Kristen dalam Membangun Pranikah yang Kudus bagi Remaja Kristen,” identifies the prevalence of sexual activity in premarital or dating relationships among adolescents as resulting from inadequate understanding of theological ethics and emphasizes the active role of pastors and parents in supervision and in establishing ethical boundaries in premarital relationships (Nazara, 2021). Siahaan and Marpaung, in “Etika Berpacaran Menurut Tinjauan Etika Kristen,” discuss healthy dating relationships from a Christian perspective, emphasizing respect for one's partner *as Imago Dei* (the image of God), which fosters respect for each person's body (Rade Anjani Siahaan, 2024). *The research gap* lies in the absence of studies that specifically integrate the dating issues of adolescents aged 17–18 with Christian ethical

principles as a foundation for building healthy, responsible relationships that respect the dignity of one's partner. The novelty of *this* study lies in its specific focus on the psychological dynamics and issues experienced by adolescents at the transitional age of 17–18 while simultaneously formulating contextual and practical approaches to maintaining healthy dating relationships without neglecting Christian moral principles.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the various issues that arise in dating relationships among adolescents aged 17–18 and of the ethical principles that can be used to build healthy and responsible relationships. Accordingly, the research question is: What are the issues and ethical considerations of dating among adolescents aged 17–18 in building healthy relationships? This study therefore aims to identify the root problems within romantic dynamics among adolescents approaching adulthood, evaluate them from the perspective of Christian ethics, and analyze efforts to maintain dating relationships that are healthy and consistent with Christian moral values.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to analyze dating issues and ethics among adolescents aged 17–18 in building healthy relationships (Soesana et al., 2025). A qualitative method was selected because the study is not oriented toward numerical measurement but toward an in-depth understanding of adolescent dating phenomena, the various issues that arise within them, and the ethical principles that can be used to understand and guide such relationships. The descriptive approach is used to systematically describe the forms of issues experienced by adolescents, the factors that influence them, and relevant ethical values based on a review of various literature sources (Creswell, 2018). Thus, this study is not intended to generalize the experiences of all adolescents aged 17–18 but to provide a conceptual understanding based on relevant sources.

Data were collected through a literature review. The research data were obtained by searching, reading, recording, and examining written sources related to adolescent development, dating relationships, social ethics, moral development, character education, interpersonal relationships, and Christian ethical principles relevant to adolescent life. Literature was obtained through *Google Scholar*, *Semantic Scholar*, *Google Books*, scholarly journals, academic books, and relevant theological sources (Sugiyono, 2021). Searches used keywords such as dating among adolescents aged 17–18, adolescent dating issues, dating ethics, adolescent moral development, adolescent interpersonal relationships, and Christian ethics in dating.

The criteria for selecting literature included direct relevance to the research focus, clear authorship and source identification from accountable institutions, and relevance to the context of adolescent development and the ethics of interpersonal relationships (Nasution, 2023). More recent literature was prioritized, particularly publications from the past ten years, while older sources were retained when they constituted major theoretical works underpinning the conceptual foundation of the study. Sources were selected on the basis of quality, relevance, and contribution to the discussion rather than publication year alone.

The data analysis procedure involved several stages: data reduction, information grouping, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The collected literature was first read critically to identify information related to forms of dating issues, causal factors, adolescents' moral and emotional development, and ethical principles for building healthy relationships. The data were then grouped according to emerging themes. Each theme was compared and critically interpreted with attention to similarities, differences, and relationships across sources. The interpretations were subsequently organized into a descriptive account linking adolescent dating issues with relevant ethical principles (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020).

The trustworthiness of the interpretation was maintained through source triangulation, namely by comparing information from different journals, books, and academic sources. The researcher also critically examined the context, purpose, and limitations of each source to avoid taking statements out of context. The interpretation clearly distinguished findings derived from the literature from the researcher's own interpretation (Wijayati et al., 2024). In addition, consistency among the problem formulation, sources used, analytical process, and conclusions was re-examined so that the findings rested on an academically accountable argumentative foundation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition and Development of Adolescents Aged 17–18

Adolescence is a transitional developmental phase between childhood and adulthood that encompasses biological, cognitive, social, and emotional changes (Gainau, 2021; Widiyaningtyas & Prasetyo, 2023). In personality development, adolescence has particular significance, yet its position within the developmental sequence is not clearly defined. Adolescents are no longer children, but neither are they fully adults. A child is still developing, an adult has reached fuller development, while adolescents, although increasingly developed, have not yet fully mastered their physical and psychological functions (Hikmandayani, 2025). A careful analysis of developmental aspects places adolescence between the ages of 12 and 21, divided into early adolescence (12–15 years), middle adolescence (15–18 years), and late adolescence (18–21 years) (Mohamad Ali, 2010). Developmental periods fundamentally involve systematic changes in physical and psychological functions. Physical changes include basic biological development resulting from conception (fertilization of the ovum by sperm) and from interactions among biological, genetic, and environmental processes. Psychological changes encompass the individual's overall psychological characteristics, including cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development.

Adolescents aged 17–18 are generally in their final year of senior high school (SMA) and undergo changes related to the search for identity, social roles, and life goals. During this period, they increasingly focus on preparation for adult life. Adolescence is often marked by intense emotions and various challenges, and adolescents may experience difficulty achieving particular goals (Suci & Anggapuspa, 2021). For this reason, they need appropriate guidance so that they do not become involved in situations that may harm them and so that their transition into adulthood can proceed more positively.

During this transitional period, identity formation among adolescents aged 17–18 influences how they build relationships with others. The emotional instability they

experience at this stage coincides with emotional needs for self-recognition, acceptance, and a safe space. At this point, attraction to the opposite sex is no longer merely a biological impulse but also develops into a psychological need for validation beyond the family environment. Unfortunately, when the desire for a romantic relationship becomes intense amid unstable emotions and insufficient moral guidance, adolescents may become trapped in relationships that jeopardize their future.

The Anatomy of Dating Issues among Adolescents on the Threshold of Adulthood

Adolescents aged 17–18 are particularly vulnerable to problems in dating relationships because emotional instability can make them susceptible to toxic relationships, compromise sexual boundaries under peer and environmental pressure, and use dating as an escape from stress associated with life transitions.

Risky sexual behavior among adolescents, particularly unmarried adolescents, tends to increase. Adolescent sexual behavior can take various forms, ranging from attraction and dating to holding hands and more intimate behaviors. Adolescents today experience rapid social change from traditional to modern social contexts, which in turn alters norms, values, and lifestyles. The protections once provided by rules within traditional families have been eroded by this rapid shift. This development has also been accompanied by a media revolution that is accessible to all segments of society (Afriani, 2022).

A *toxic relationship* is an interpersonal relationship that consistently produces harmful effects on the mental, emotional, and even physical well-being of those involved (Putri & Kurniawan, 2023). The consequences of toxic relationships in early adulthood or late adolescence are extensive: they can impair sound decision-making, make interaction with others difficult, and hinder the realization of personal potential. Such relationships may also contribute to serious mental health problems, including excessive anxiety, severe depression, and a significant decline in quality of life. These effects demonstrate *how* conflict-ridden and manipulative relationships can influence individuals over the long term, disrupting emotional stability and well-being. At this age, the impact of *toxic* relationships can also extend to social functioning, particularly social interaction (Taturu & Nendissa, 2026). Dating violence is another issue that requires attention. Physical or emotional violence in dating relationships is a complex problem because these relationships are often not legally formalized (Kristhi & Sukmaningrum, 2023). Dating relationships do not always bring happiness; when they are characterized by obsessive behavior or excessive dependence on a partner, they become unhealthy, as reflected in a decline in relationship quality (Raffagnino & Puddu, 2018).

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that dating issues among adolescents aged 17–18 arise from the accumulation of psychological crises or stressful conditions that create a sense of loss, the pervasive pressure of digital secularism that erodes spiritual values, and the loss of firm moral commitment. When romantic relationships function merely as a means of emotional escape without spiritual maturity, ethical boundaries are likely to collapse. From a Christian perspective, moral erosion and the increase of toxic relationships indicate the loss of the essence of genuine love. Therefore, these systemic issues cannot be addressed solely through secular psychological approaches; they require a radical reconstruction

grounded in Christian ethics in order to reorient adolescent dating toward the standard of holiness desired by God.

Christian Ethics and Healthy Dating Relationships

Ethics is a branch of value theory concerned with morality and may be understood as the study of human habits or conduct. The term ethics can refer to habit, disposition, or character (Ibu & Nendissa, 2023). Ethics is a moral philosophy concerned with moral values and judgments of right and wrong that influence individual behavior and actions (Palit & Ratag, 2026). Christian ethics differs fundamentally from ethics in the general philosophical sense: Christian ethics derives its moral values from God, whereas general philosophical ethics understands moral values as arising from human thought and cultural influence (Gulo & Sinaga, 2024). Christian ethics is essentially understood as the human response to God's gracious act of redeeming human life from sin (Sugianto, 2025; Wewengkang et al., 2025). Christian ethics and general philosophical ethics belong to the same broad field, yet Christian ethics places particular emphasis on moral values that come from God and therefore must be practiced according to the biblical standard of truth, both to bear witness to Christ's redemption and to bring restoration to human life as a response to God's grace.

Healthy dating relationships among adolescents require both partners to maintain good communication with God and with one another, because communication is fundamental to any relationship. Partners should also respect one another so that the relationship remains harmonious and neither person feels pressured or unsafe. Most importantly within Christian ethics, both partners must preserve holiness in their dating relationship so that it is not compromised before God. They should avoid patterns that lead to destructive relationships or sexual compromises that violate ethical boundaries. Instead, the relationship should become a context in which both partners build one another up and encourage growth in the knowledge of God, thereby establishing a romantic relationship that is strong, holy, and right before God (Kristiawan, 2026).

Faith and Spiritual Growth of Adolescents during Dating

Every aspect of life, including interpersonal relationships, should be aligned with the primary purpose of glorifying God and fostering spiritual growth. When pursued with intentions consistent with biblical principles and obedience to the Word of God, dating can become a meaningful means of spiritual growth. Such a relationship is grounded in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, respect for His authority, and the application of love, purity, and commitment to Christ as the center of the relationship (Priyono et al., 2026). Healthy dating is not only about a loving relationship; it can also provide an opportunity for both individuals to grow together toward spiritual maturity. In this way, adolescents can prioritize spiritual values in their interactions and make the relationship a means of strengthening their faith in God (Hermanto & Cyntiawati, 2024). Dating relationships grounded in the Bible encourage mutual accountability and growth in faith and spirituality. Proverbs 27:17 states, "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another." Relationships grounded in the Word of God enable both individuals to encourage and motivate one another toward growth in faith and a deeper understanding of God's Word. Such relationships can cultivate humility, self-sacrifice, and dependence on God, which are

important qualities of spiritual maturity. Through faith-based relationships, both individuals can apply biblical principles in their relational lives (Siahaan et al., 2023). Faith and spiritual growth during dating are especially important for adolescents in this transitional stage, enabling them to learn from, strengthen, and encourage one another to remain in relationships that are healthy and consistent with biblical teaching.

Maintaining Healthy Dating Relationships and the Role of Parents

Maintaining a healthy dating relationship among adolescents cannot be separated from the role of the family in shaping faith and character. Parents should build good relationships with their children so that advice concerning dating is understood not merely as prohibition but as guidance grounded in Christian values (Panjaitan, 2022). Surna and Widodo emphasize that “character formation within the family cannot be separated from a healthy and strong parent-child relationship that is consistent and natural” (Surna & Widodo, 2021). Parents also serve as role models in building healthy relationships. Values such as love, honesty, responsibility, faithfulness, and self-control need first to be demonstrated in parents' own lives. Parents function as primary examples in their children's daily lives. Such modeling helps adolescents understand that dating is not merely about feelings but requires responsibility and conduct consistent with Christian faith (Nendissa, 2024). In addition to modeling, parents should provide adolescents with time, attention, and emotional support. Good guidance enables parents to understand the issues faced by their children without responding harshly or judgmentally (Maria & Nendissa, 2025). Through open communication, parents can understand and wisely assist adolescents in addressing problems in dating relationships on the basis of Christian values. Ultimately, parents have a responsibility to instill Christian ethics as a foundation for decision-making. Values such as love, truth, honesty, faithfulness, and self-control need to be taught continually so that adolescents can distinguish relationships consistent with Christian faith from those that depart from Christian teaching (Makoro, Nendissa, et al., 2026). Therefore, parental example, communication, attention, and faith formation are essential in helping adolescents maintain healthy dating relationships consistent with the perspective of Christian ethics.

A Christian Ethical Analysis of Adolescent Dating

The dating issues faced by adolescents aged 17–18 cannot be understood solely as the result of inadequate self-control; they are multidimensional issues shaped by internal and external factors. Internally, emotional immaturity, identity formation, the need for acceptance, and decision-making capacity can affect the quality of relationships. Externally, family parenting patterns, peer pressure, the social environment, popular culture, and the intensity of digital-media use help shape adolescents' understanding of love and commitment. This condition shows that a moralistic approach focused only on prohibition is inadequate. An ethical analysis is therefore needed that integrates adolescent development, social context, and Christian values.

Dating from the Perspective of Christian Love

Love is a fundamental principle in Christian ethics and should serve as the foundation for dating relationships among adolescents aged 17–18. From a Christian

perspective, love cannot be reduced to attraction, possessiveness, or the desire to be constantly with one's partner. Love has a moral dimension that requires a person to seek the good of, respect the dignity of, and assume responsibility toward the person they love (Taturu & Nendissa, 2026). The principle of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 portrays love as patient and kind, not self-seeking, and not acting improperly. This principle is relevant to adolescent dating because it directs relationships beyond mere emotional closeness toward moral maturity. Love requires the ability to respect boundaries, accept differences, regulate emotions, resolve conflicts maturely, and refrain from imposing one's will (Ledo & Nendissa, 2026). Therefore, dating grounded in love should not be oriented toward personal gratification but toward mutual edification and support for growth.

Problems arise when love is narrowly understood as proving one's feelings through excessive attention, possessiveness, unlimited sacrifice, or even compliance with a partner's wishes (Yohanis Pandie et al., 2026). Such patterns can create unhealthy relationships because love becomes control and emotional dependence (Sureni & Nendissa, 2025). Adolescents may interpret jealousy as evidence of love, demands for constant updates as a form of care, or pressure to do something as proof of faithfulness (Pangaribuan & Rumetor, 2024). From the perspective of Christian ethics, such understandings must be critically examined because genuine love does not eliminate personal freedom or dignity.

Accordingly, dating grounded in Christian love is not a relationship free of problems, but a relationship with an ethical orientation. Love becomes the criterion for assessing whether a relationship promotes growth or instead produces pressure, manipulation, and dependence. Christian adolescent formation should therefore present love not only as a doctrine of faith but as a concrete practice for building healthy, responsible relationships that respect others.

Respect for Human Dignity and the Body

From the perspective of Christian ethics, respect for human dignity and the body is a fundamental principle in building healthy dating relationships (Verkuyl, 2012). Adolescents aged 17–18 need to understand that neither they nor their partners are merely objects for the fulfillment of emotional, romantic, or sexual needs; rather, they are persons of value because they are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27) (Ledo & Nendissa, 2026). This understanding has the ethical implication that every relationship should be grounded in respect for each person's worth, freedom, and personal boundaries.

Problems arise when dating is understood primarily as a form of ownership over one's partner. Possessiveness, excessive jealousy, pressure for physical contact, and even coercion into sexual activity demonstrate a failure to recognize human dignity (Taturu & Nendissa, 2026). In such situations, the partner is no longer treated as a person worthy of respect but as a means of obtaining personal satisfaction. Christian ethics therefore rejects any relationship involving manipulation, exploitation, coercion, or actions that demean a partner's body and personhood.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, Paul emphasizes that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that human beings are therefore called to glorify God through their bodies (Sugianto, 2024). This principle should not be understood merely as a prohibition against sexual behavior but as a call to develop comprehensive responsibility for the body (Kolk,

2024; Lase & Gulo, 2025). Adolescents need to recognize that caring for the body means valuing themselves while also respecting their partner's body (Ledo & Nendissa, 2026). Thus, physical boundaries in dating are not merely external rules but concrete expressions of Christian love and responsibility.

Education in dating ethics should not be limited to prohibitions concerning sexuality. Adolescents need to be formed so that they can understand the theological reasons behind such boundaries, exercise self-control, respect consent, and make responsible decisions. Accordingly, a healthy dating relationship is not one dominated by personal desire, but one that safeguards the dignity, holiness, freedom, and growth of both parties.

Purity and Self-Control in Relationships

Purity and self-control are two important principles in Christian ethics that require critical application to the dating lives of adolescents aged 17–18. Purity should not be narrowly understood as a prohibition against sexual activity, but as a comprehensive disposition of respecting oneself, one's partner, and God's will in building a relationship (Nendissa, 2026). During adolescence, emotional and sexual attraction are aspects of human development that cannot be ignored (Mohamad Ali, 2010). Therefore, a Christian ethical approach cannot stop at prohibition; it must cultivate moral awareness so that adolescents understand the theological rationale and consequences of each choice they make.

From a biblical perspective, Paul emphasizes that God's will is for His people to live in sanctification, abstain from sexual immorality, and learn to control their bodies in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:3–5) (Sugianto, 2023). This principle shows that self-control is not a denial of the body or of sexual feelings, but the capacity to direct such impulses responsibly (Kristiawan, 2026). A concern that requires critical attention, however, is the tendency of Christian formation to emphasize purity primarily through fear, guilt, or moral punishment (Makoro, Tangayo, et al., 2026). Such an approach may lead adolescents to regard sexuality as inherently negative and may produce external compliance without internal maturity. Self-control should therefore be understood as a form of mature faith that enables adolescents to make decisions on the basis of values rather than momentary impulses. For this reason, education in dating ethics should integrate teaching on love, human dignity, responsibility, physical boundaries, and the consequences of decisions. Galatians 5:22–23 identifies self-control as part of the fruit of the Spirit; thus, purity should arise from character transformation rather than merely from social pressure or church rules.

Honesty and Faithfulness in Dating

Honesty and faithfulness are two fundamental principles for building healthy and responsible dating relationships. From the perspective of Christian ethics, dating is not merely an emotional relationship between two individuals, but a context for character formation that reflects the values of love, truth, and responsibility (Rantesalu, 2020). These principles are particularly important for adolescents aged 17–18 because they are in a stage of identity development and are learning to make independent decisions. Honesty is necessary so that a relationship is not built on manipulation, pretense, or image management (Fadhilah et al., 2025). Problems of honesty in adolescent dating often arise when a person

conceals information, gives untruthful explanations, or deliberately creates a particular impression in order to preserve the relationship. Such problems can become more complex through social-media communication, concealment of interactions with others, or the use of different identities and behaviors online and in real life. This shows that honesty concerns not only speech but also consistency among thoughts, words, actions, and responsibility.

Faithfulness should not be narrowly understood as an obligation to remain constantly with one's partner or to restrict social interaction with others. Healthy faithfulness is rooted in commitment, respect, and trust. Adolescents need to understand that faithfulness does not legitimize controlling a partner, forcibly checking a partner's phone, determining whom a partner may communicate with, or limiting personal freedom. Such behavior can develop into possessiveness and an unhealthy relationship. Honesty and faithfulness require openness while also respecting personal boundaries. This principle is consistent with the Christian calling to live in truth and love (Palit & Ratag, 2026). Thus, a healthy dating relationship is not one without problems, but one capable of addressing difficulties through honest communication, responsible commitment, and mutual respect.

Dating as a Process of Building Up, Not Controlling

Dating among adolescents aged 17–18 should be understood as a process of building a relationship that enables both persons to develop in healthy ways, rather than as a context for dominating, controlling, or possessing a partner absolutely. At this developmental stage, possessive tendencies may arise from emotional immaturity, fear of loss, jealousy, or the mistaken belief that love is demonstrated through control over a partner's life. In practice, such attitudes may appear in demands for constant updates, restrictions on friendships with particular people, checking a partner's phone or social media, determining how a partner should dress, or imposing particular decisions (Mulyani et al., 2024). Although such actions are sometimes framed as expressions of care and affection, ethically they can undermine a partner's personal freedom and dignity.

In Christian ethics, love is not synonymous with ownership. Christian love regards a partner as a person with will, responsibility, and dignity that must be respected. The principle of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–5 emphasizes that love is not self-seeking and does not readily act in ways that harm others (Wahyudi, 2020). A dating relationship should therefore become a context for mutual support, listening, respect for differences, and the development of character. A healthy relationship does not require a person to lose their identity in order to preserve the relationship.

Adolescents need to understand that trust is a fundamental foundation of a relationship. Trust does not mean neglecting responsibility; rather, it gives one's partner room to grow without pressure or manipulation. Thus, a healthy dating relationship is not one that becomes increasingly restrictive, but one that increasingly fosters maturity, responsibility, respect, and love centered on the will of God.

A Christian-Ethics-Based Model of Adolescent Dating: A New Proposal

Dating during adolescence, particularly at ages 17–18, is part of social and emotional development toward adulthood. At this stage, adolescents begin to experience stronger attraction to the opposite sex and to learn the meaning of closeness, affection, trust, and

responsibility within a relationship. However, such development can also generate various problems when dating relationships are built solely on feelings, peer pressure, the desire to have a partner, or the influence of social media. Christian adolescents therefore need a relational model grounded not only in feelings but also in the values of faith and Christian ethics. A Christian-ethics-based model of dating can be formulated through the processes of getting to know one another, respecting one another, establishing boundaries, communicating, growing in faith, and taking responsibility.

The first stage is getting to know one another. Dating should provide an opportunity for two people to learn about each other's character, personality, habits, life values, and goals. Knowing one's partner involves not only pleasant aspects but also weaknesses, ways of dealing with problems, family relationships, social life, and life of faith. From a Christian perspective, genuine knowledge helps adolescents avoid making decisions solely on the basis of appearance or momentary feelings. Adolescents need to understand that physical attractiveness does not necessarily indicate the character required for a healthy relationship. The process of getting to know one another should therefore proceed gradually, honestly, and realistically.

The second stage is respect. A healthy relationship should treat one's partner as a person with dignity and value. A partner is not a possession to be controlled or treated according to personal wishes. Respect is expressed through listening, accepting differences, honoring opinions, and refraining from imposing one's will. In adolescent relationships, respect is important because conflict often arises when one person believes they have the right to regulate every aspect of the partner's life. Christian ethics rejects relationships based on domination, manipulation, threats, or violence. Christian love should lead a person to treat their partner respectfully and never demean their dignity.

The third stage is establishing boundaries. Adolescents need to understand that dating relationships require clear boundaries. These boundaries concern not only physical contact but also emotional limits, communication, social-media use, and privacy. Boundaries are necessary because adolescents are still in the process of character formation and developing self-control. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, believers are called to live in holiness and self-control. This principle can be applied to dating by avoiding actions that may harm oneself or one's partner. Establishing boundaries does not make a relationship rigid; rather, it is a form of responsibility that safeguards the dignity and future of both parties.

The fourth stage is communication. Communication is a crucial foundation for a healthy relationship. Many adolescent dating problems arise from insufficient or unhealthy communication. Misunderstanding, jealousy, suspicion, and conflict can develop when partners are unable to express their feelings openly. In Christian ethics, communication should be grounded in honesty, love, and mutual listening. Adolescents need to learn to express disagreement without insulting, communicate feelings without threatening, and resolve conflict without verbal or emotional violence. Social-media use also requires wisdom because brief messages can easily generate misunderstanding when they lack clear context and expression.

The fifth stage is growing in faith. Christian dating relationships should not draw a person farther away from God. Instead, they can become a context in which both partners

support one another's character development and spiritual life. Growth in faith does not mean that partners must always engage in religious activities together; rather, it is evident in the way they practice love, faithfulness, honesty, forgiveness, and self-control. The principle of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, especially love and self-control, can provide a foundation for the relationship. Adolescents also need to maintain a healthy balance between dating and education, family, friendships, ministry, and personal life.

The sixth stage is taking responsibility. Dating should not be understood as a relationship without direction or consequences. Every decision within a relationship can affect an adolescent's emotional, social, educational, and spiritual life. Responsibility therefore means having the courage to consider the consequences of each action and not making decisions solely under emotional pressure. It also means being able to acknowledge mistakes, apologize, preserve trust, and resolve problems maturely. When a relationship proves unhealthy, responsibility also means having the courage to end it appropriately, without humiliation or retaliation.

Accordingly, a Christian-ethics-based model of dating can be understood as a process that moves adolescents from merely having a partner toward the capacity to build healthy and responsible relationships. Getting to know one another enables adolescents to understand their partners more realistically; respect safeguards the dignity of each person; establishing boundaries protects holiness and self-control; communication creates openness; growth in faith keeps the relationship oriented toward God; and responsibility helps adolescents consider the future and the consequences of each decision. This model shows that Christian dating is not primarily about how long a person has a partner, but about how the relationship is lived out in love, respect, holiness, maturity, and responsibility. With this approach, dating can become part of the character formation of Christian adolescents who are able to build relationships in healthy, wise, and faith-consistent ways.

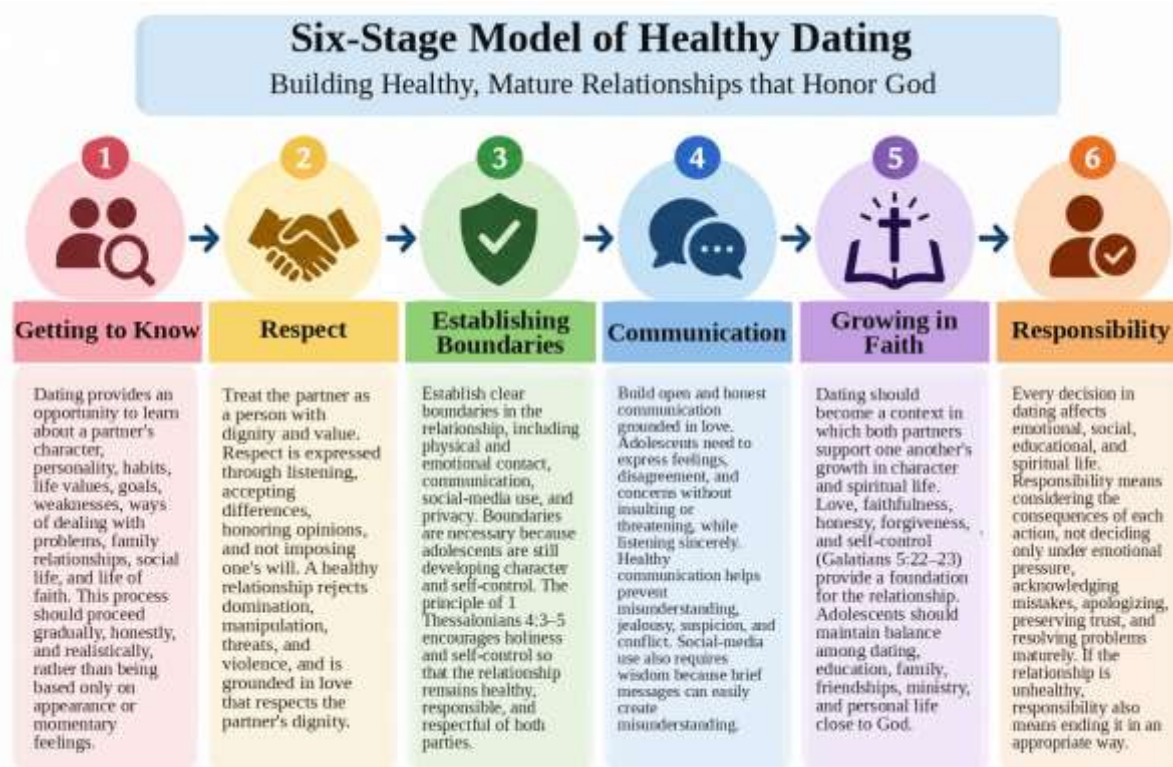


Figure 1 presents a proposed six-stage model for healthy dating relationships

CONCLUSION

Adolescence at ages 17–18 is a transitional period toward adulthood marked by identity formation and emotional development, making adolescents relatively vulnerable to a range of problems in dating relationships, including unhealthy relationships, sexual pressure, violence, and emotional dependency. Therefore, from the perspective of Christian ethics, dating should be built on biblical values, love, responsibility, mutual respect, sound communication, and the preservation of holiness within the relationship. Dating can also provide a means for adolescents to grow in faith by supporting one another and placing God at the center of the relationship. In this regard, parents play an important role through example, communication, attention, and guidance, enabling adolescents to engage in relationships that are healthy, responsible, and consistent with Christian ethical values.

Theoretically, this study shows that dating should not be understood solely as an emotional relationship between two individuals, but also as a context for character formation, responsibility, self-control, respect for others, and growth in faith. Practically, the study has implications for the church. Churches need to develop adolescent formation that does not merely impose prohibitions on dating behavior, but also equips adolescents to understand healthy relationships, establish boundaries, manage emotions, resolve conflict, respect their partner's body and dignity, and make decisions based on Christian faith values.

This study is limited by the absence of empirical validation of the proposed ethical framework for dating. Principles such as getting to know one another, communication, respect, responsibility, self-control, conflict resolution, and growth in faith still need to be examined through field data to determine how adolescents understand and apply them. The

study therefore recommends that future research employ field-based approaches involving Christian adolescents aged 17–18 from several church communities. In-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, observation of adolescent formation activities, and questionnaires could be used to obtain data on experiences, understandings, challenges, and practices related to dating ethics.

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