Dating is the process in which you can get to know and understand the other person (your partner) better. It can be a casual relationship with no commitment, or it could demand more serious deliberation if the intention of dating is for courtship.

Dating in the beginning is irregular. There are no firm commitments. But when they find each other’s company enjoyable, dating becomes steady. At this stage, they have reached mutual understanding and expect further exploration and interaction. It is important now that one realizes the responsibilities involved. It is useful to discuss the issue of initiate sexual relationship during dating. People must seriously consider the consequences and do not act on impulse.

- **Before you start dating**

Before an adolescent decides to start dating going steady, he/she should be matured enough. This means the adolescent should have:

♥ Relatively stable personality.
♥ Psychological independence.
♥ Sensitive to the needs of others.
♥ Ability to care and respect others.
♥ Set clear expectations.

In going steady or dating, one must know his/her responsibilities. He/she should know how they want the relationship to be, and the limits as to what can and cannot be done. Simple actions of holding hands, putting your arms around each other, and kissing for fun, can easily lead to feelings which are difficult to control and may carry on to making love. It is important to talk to your parents when there are symptoms of liking the opposite sex. They may be able to help explain the values, choices and decisions in a boy-girl relationship.

- **Who asks?**

Shyness and fear of being rejected is a deterrent to dating. These are feelings adolescents experience when asking someone out on a date for the first time. Boys are expected to be the one to ask a girl out. At least this is what is expected. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to wait to be asked. Many will go on dates. Some, however, never get asked or if asked, reject the offer.

- **Lessons learnt from dating**
Dating someone from the opposite sex gives opportunities for social learning and serves as a practice for later and more mature bonds between 2 persons. Some of the skills learnt are:

♥ Cooperation, caring and not being selfish.
♥ Etiquette.
♥ Dealing with people on a wider range of situations.
♥ Enhancing sensitivity, empathy and identity development.
♥ Listening skill.

- **Going steady**

Dating that is repeatedly done with a special someone, usually leads to a more serious relationship or romance. Understanding is also enhanced. When going steady, begin with the end in mind. This means you need to explore yourself. What do you want in this relationship a best friend, a lover, or a marriage partner? Then work towards that end. But do not spoil it by doing something that will upset your plans.

- **What can go wrong?**

Going steady is not without its risks. Becoming emotionally glued and co-dependent have drawbacks. You can get very possessive and jealous. You constantly need to be together, to touch, to feel secure as if you own each other. This can be harmful and it can bring out the worst in both of you. You begin to argue and fight. In the end, you lose and your partner loses too.

If you focus your life on your steady partner, there is a tendency for you to always want to please him/her without regard to what you really want. This can be very taxing. Sooner or later, you are bound to blow up.

Sometimes, when you least expect it, your steady moves away, or falls in love with someone else. This leaves you feeling disappointed and heart broken. What should you do? Do not let your feelings overcome you. Never stay when you are not wanted. Talk to someone. You are still young and there are many other boys/girls to get acquainted with, and maybe start going steady again.

- **Remember:**

♥ Adolescence is the time to grow and mature to adulthood.
♥ Adolescence is the time to discover yourself.
♥ Make as many friends as you can and want.
♥ Be serious about your studies, your goals.
♥ You are not economically, emotionally, mentally independent/mature yet.
♥ First thing first, set your priorities right.