

# Teaching Young People to Nurture Themselves

by Lucy Rimalower



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Young people just beginning to survey the world of romance experience a lot of firsts: first crushes, first dates, first kisses. With these firsts come the pressure to have a valentine and the corresponding insecurity and self-doubt: "Will anybody ever like me? Am I a loser if I don't have a sweetheart on Valentine's Day?" The treacherous waters of junior high and high school are loaded with the additional peer pressure to "hook-up," to participate sexually in the culture of romance. This pressure might be relieved for teens if their parents encourage them to define Valentine's Day as a holiday about love in a broader sense, to look beyond the malls instructing us what to wear and what to buy for our sweethearts.

## Start Simple

Suggesting your teen plan a "date" for themselves might be fun, liberating and an opportunity to identify new aspects of who they are.

Tell your teens they can do anything they want for themselves – it's their day. If they stare blankly at you, you can offer the following suggestions:

Watch a favorite movie

Indulge in special treats like foods or games

Write a "love" letter, naming their best qualities

Make a vision board, a collage that portrays all the things they want for their lives, or any other creative endeavor that focuses on free creativity rather than judgment

## Key Benefits

First, choosing activities that make them feel good that they can do by themselves supports the development of confidence, independence and a sense of self-efficacy.

Second, the process of selecting these activities can allow teens to know themselves better, deepening a connection to their own identities and reconnecting them with creative impulses that might be silenced under the pressure of adolescence and teenhood.

Third, learning how to spend positive time alone is a critical skill for well-being. I often see in my practice that teens are unsure how to appreciate downtime for themselves. They may feel pressure to be social constantly or even depressed if there is downtime without social opportunity. Sometimes, these moments lead teens to turn to their families for companionship and stimulation. However, while quality family time is integral to healthy development, adolescents and teens also benefit from learning to create positive alone time.

I came across an interesting proverb from Slovenia, "St Valentine brings the keys to roots," suggesting that February 14 is a day to celebrate the growth of flowers and plants. This seems especially apropos to our adolescents and teenagers, who are learning to nurture themselves. We are so rarely given the opportunity to listen carefully to ourselves, to value our own wants and needs. Help teens discover this practice sooner rather than later.

