What Do Kisses Mean?

By John Bytheway


There’s an old nursery rhyme that begins, “Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry.” When you’ve heard that little poem, you may have wondered, “What made the girls cry?” Aren’t kisses nice things that anyone would appreciate? Perhaps it all depends on whether or not Georgie Porgie was an honest person or just a selfish young man who didn’t think about the consequences of his actions.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

An important part of dating is communicating. We communicate by sharing our thoughts, ideas, and feelings. We enjoy being with someone when we have an easy time communicating or when we have a lot to talk about. There’s another aspect of communication, however, that doesn’t involve talking—or using any words at all.

All of us know how to communicate without using words. Some of our nonverbal communication speaks loud and clear. With that idea in mind, let’s ask a few questions.

Suppose you are on a date, and you put your arm around your date’s shoulder. This is a common gesture of affection, but what does it communicate?

How about, “I like you”?

What if you hold hands with your date? That’s perhaps a stronger message, isn’t it? Maybe that’s like saying “I really like you.”

Finally, what if you kiss your date? Then what are you saying? What do kisses mean, anyway?

Expressions of affection, like putting your arm around someone’s shoulder, holding hands, or giving a kiss good night, involve the principle of honesty. Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy cautioned young adults to make sure their actions match their intent: “During the time of courtship, please be emotionally honest in the expression of affection. Sometimes you are not as careful as you might be about when, how, and to whom you express your feelings of affection. You must realize that the desire to express affection can be motivated by other things than true love.”

If you are emotionally honest you should mean what you say but also mean what you do. Because our expressions of affection send such powerful messages, they involve powerful feelings. Elder Hafen continued: “When any of you—men or women—are given entrance to the heart of a trusting young friend, you stand on holy ground. In such a
place you must be honest with yourself—and with your friend—about love and the expression of its symbols.” 1

One young woman allowed a young man to kiss her and later discovered that he had also kissed someone else he was dating. She felt betrayed. Why? Because his expressions of affection didn’t carry the level of commitment she thought they did. This kind of miscommunication often leads to hurt feelings and tears. President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, cautioned, “Men, take care not to make women weep, for God counts their tears.” 2

Had this couple communicated better in words what expressions of affection mean, they would have postponed the sharing of affection and avoided the heartache that comes when it appears that one has lied with his actions.

Likewise, young women should not put young men in awkward or uncomfortable situations by their actions. They have an equal obligation to keep affection within appropriate bounds.

Remember, before you are married, you will be more respected and more attractive for the affection you withhold than for the affection you give.

Save Your Kisses

While I am aware of no counsel on whether kissing should be reserved only for post-mission dating or courtship, I am aware of plenty of counsel concerning honesty in our actions and treating others with respect and kindness. Casual attitudes about expressions of affection such as kissing can cause much grief and heartache.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught: “Kissing has … degenerated to develop and express lust instead of affection, honor, and admiration. To kiss in casual dating is asking for trouble. What do kisses mean when given out like pretzels and robbed of sacredness?” 3

Notice the words President Kimball used to describe a kiss: affection, honor, admiration, sacredness. Kissing and other expressions of affection communicate powerful messages of commitment that others may believe and act on. If you don’t have a commitment, your actions are dishonest and likely harmful. Two thousand years ago, someone else’s actions didn’t match his words either. Listen to the stinging rebuke: “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48). Judas used a symbol of affection as a tool of betrayal. We should not leave others feeling betrayed by our actions.

Can We Talk?

Another reason for being careful with our physical expressions of affection is that they can interfere with the development of a healthy long-term relationship, even marriage. Brother Lowell Bennion, an LDS author, has written: “Once a couple begins to share
affection in a physical way, this activity tends to become the focus of interest. Often such a couple ceases to explore the other significant dimensions of personality: mind, character, maturity, religious faith, moral values, and goals.”

So when is the right time to share affection? Brother Bennion continues: “Affection should grow out of genuine friendship and brotherly love, not precede them, if one wishes to be sure of having real and lasting love in marriage. Kissing for the sake of kissing invites more affection, and many fine young people become more deeply involved than they actually wish to be.”

Too much sharing of physical affection can cloud thinking to the point that a couple doesn’t really know why they like to be together, other than the opportunity to share affection. A couple may even get married, and when the honeymoon is over and they’re back to everyday life, they may discover they have little to talk about. One wise bishop suggested that if young adults feel that their relationship is too physical, they should try spending the next two weeks without even holding hands to see if they still enjoy being together.

The desire to be with someone, to spend time together, and to share affection is natural and God-given. But the Lord has cautioned us to be careful, considerate, and honest not only in what we say but in what we do. When kisses are reserved only for those we respect, admire, and are committed to, they are much more meaningful and definitely worth waiting for.

Gospel topics: communication, dating, morality

Notes


Extra! Extra!

To learn more about dating, kissing, and showing love, read the following articles in the Gospel Library at www.lds.org: “That We May Touch Heaven” (Ensign, Nov. 1990) by President Thomas S. Monson, “Love Takes Time” (Ensign, Nov. 1975) by Elder Marvin J. Ashton, and “Speaking of Kissing” (New Era, June 2001) by Bruce Monson.

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