

7 to 8

Puppy Love

The word *crush* at this stage doesn't necessarily mean what you think it does

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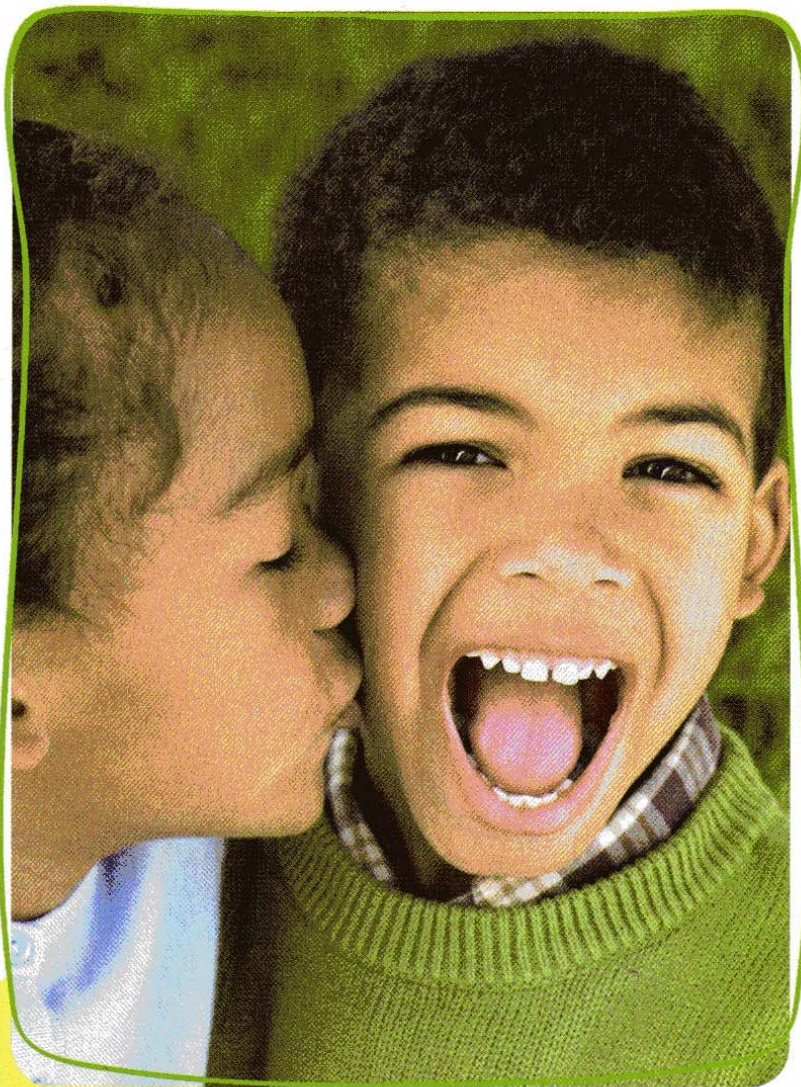
MATTHEW HAS a crush on Maya!" Hearing these words chanted by your child's peers may make you cringe—these are 7- and 8-year-olds, after all. What exactly does it mean for this age to have a crush, and what should you do about it?

We adults are often uncomfortable talking about or acknowledging crushes in the 7 to 8 age group because we ascribe sexuality to them. But the truth is that it's just not there. That day will come in a few years, but at this point, crushes are simply an outpouring of affection—for a friend, a classmate, or even a teacher. Think of crushes as merely innocent drives for attention; thus, children can have crushes on same-sex or opposite-sex peers, and these feelings have nothing to do with a child's sexual orientation.

MIXED MESSAGES

Children can be confused by their strong emotions and have trouble putting words to them. As a result, crushes are often expressed in group gang-up games or through negative behaviors. Children may lead or take part in chasing games that involve the crush, such as chase-and-kiss games ("Catch Trevor and try to kiss him!"), which are especially common among girls. Boys, on the other hand, often act meanly or in an annoying way toward their crush to protect against being teased about it.

When your child talks excitedly about group gang-up games or complains about an annoying classmate, do a little probing. Help



* tips

* For same-sex crushes, invite the other child over, and support the friendship the way you would any friendship. Your child is learning social roles and limits.

* Do the same for opposite-sex crushes: Think of having both families meet up at an informal kid-friendly restaurant, especially one with a play zone. Or invite the child with your family to a neutral venue, such as a sports game or state fair.

your child develop language to talk about and better understand crushes, whether you use this term or not. Doing so allows her to act on her feelings in more socially acceptable ways or to understand why a classmate is acting oddly toward her. You might explain that affection is a wonderful thing.

Try to keep the door open for your child to talk with you about all her emotions. Coming to you will serve her better than sharing her feelings with a friend who understands only as much about her emotions as she does. Plus, children this age are rarely able to keep information private, which may lead to her being embarrassed or teased. As your child's needs for affection are met with appropriate interaction, the crush will evolve into friendship or will subside or dissolve on its own. **P&C**

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