

What's Your Age Again?

Aubrey and Parker met on a dating website. They both registered on this website as 18 years old or over. However, since Parker looked young in her pictures, Aubrey (19 years old) made sure to ask about her age in their messages to each other. Parker replied that she was actually 17 years old. Since 17 and 19 are only two years apart and 17 is over the age of consent where Aubrey and Parker live, Aubrey was satisfied with this answer. The two arranged to meet for a date, and at the end of their date they kissed in his car for 20 minutes.

However, Aubrey soon learned that Parker was not actually 17 years old. Instead, she was a 14- year-old who was simply presenting herself as 18 or over on the website – and as 17 in their messages – so that she could meet older people. Aubrey learned her actual age through a friend who knew both parties, and who was upset to discover that Aubrey had gone on a date with someone so young.

Aubrey was upset to discover what he had done too. For moral as well as legal reasons, he never would have gone out with – much less made out with – Parker if he had known her actual age. And in retrospect, he realized that he did have reason to be skeptical: Parker did appear to be young in pictures, and the age that she listed on the website did conflict with the age that she disclosed in their messages. In light of these issues, Aubrey thought, maybe he should have asked Parker for I.D. to verify her age.

Then again, Aubrey also thought that, while Parker appeared to be young, she did not appear to be *that* young. Moreover, Aubrey had already asked for her age. Did he really have a moral responsibility to ask for proof as well? Finally, Aubrey thought, asking for I.D. might not have been fully effective either, since not all adults have a valid I.D. and many minors have a fake I.D.. So maybe Aubrey should have erred on the side of caution and not gone out with Parker at all. But would that be a reasonable or excessive amount of caution to take in his dating life?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Was it morally acceptable for Aubrey to not ask for I.D. in this case? Why or why not?
2. How, if at all, would the case be different if Aubrey was older than 19?
3. How, if at all, would the case be different if Aubrey and/or Parker had a different gender?