

What Every Parent Must Know About Teen Dating Violence

A Parents' Guide Prepared In Observance of February's National Teen Dating Violence Awareness And Prevention Month

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Introduction

Each year millions of people are affected by domestic violence. Girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence – nearly triple the national average. Teens from all types of homes, families, cultures, and backgrounds experience teen dating violence. Victims include both males and females. Violence can occur in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Victims of teen dating violence are at higher risk for depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, STIs, and further domestic violence.

Teen dating violence is no small problem. Yet many parents remain uninformed. Over 80% of parents reportedly either don't know if teen dating violence is a concern or believe that it is not an issue. This report was prepared to educate parents on what teen dating violence is, how to recognize the warning signs, and what parents can do if you suspect your child is experiencing teen dating violence.

Understanding Teen Dating Violence

Teen dating violence consists of a variety of behaviors used to exercise power and control over the victim. Teen dating violence generally follows a typical abuse cycle including a tension building phase, an explosion, and a honeymoon phase. Dating violence can consist of physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, and digital abuse.

Physical violence is the intentional use of physical force to cause fear or injury. This can include hitting, shoving, punching, and physically restraining the victim. Physical violence is what most people think about when it comes to dating violence.

Verbal, emotional, and psychological violence includes abusive behaviors such as yelling, name-calling, insults, spreading rumors, stalking, monitoring, manipulation, and isolating from friends and family. This type of violence can be just as damaging as physical violence. Sexual violence can include unwanted touching, coercing or pressuring the victim for sex, and in some instances results in rape.

Digital abuse involves abusive behaviors through the use of technology such as cell phones, email, and social media. Digital abuse can include using social media to monitor where the victim is and who they are with or controlling who they are friends with; sending insults and threats through text messages, email, and Facebook; and sending or demanding sexually explicit pictures or video.

5 Facts About Teen Dating Violence

1. Roughly **72%** of eighth and ninth graders are in a dating relationship.
2. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, an estimated **1 in 3** high school relationships involve some sort of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
3. Each year nearly **1.5 million** high school students in the United States experience physical abuse from a dating partner.
4. Approximately **two-thirds** of teens in an abusive relationship never tell anyone about the abuse.
5. Nearly **4 out of 5** girls who have been physically abused continue to date their abuser.

Warning Signs of Teen Dating Violence

Since teen dating violence is often kept a secret, it is important to be able to recognize the warning signs. While some of these signs may also indicate other problems, or even 'typical' teenage hormonal changes, the following is a list of the most common warning signs of teen dating violence. Parents and others close to teenager should become familiar with these warning signs.

Warning Signs Expressed By The Victim of Teen Dating Violence

- Sudden changes in appearance, diet, or sleeping habits
- Failing grades or dropping out of school activities
- Sudden changes in mood or personality
- Avoiding friends and family
- Becoming secretive or withdrawn
- Apologizing and/or making excuses for the dating partner
- Constantly checking cell phone or email. Responding immediately when contacted by dating partner. Gets upset when unable to respond.
- Unexplained bruises, scratches, or marks

Warning Signs of a Violent Dating Partner

- Is jealous and possessive
- Is controlling and demanding
- Uses guilt to get his/her way
- Blames the victim for what is wrong
- Is extremely insecure
- Has an explosive temper
- Experiences violent outbursts including breaking or hitting things
- Insults and calls the victim names
- Constantly calls, texts, or checks up on the victim. Demands to know who he/she has been with and what they have been doing
- Checks the victim's email or cell phone without permission
- Isolates the victim from friends and family
- Is abusive towards other people and/or violent towards animals
- Threatens violence

What Parents Can Do About Teen Dating Violence

Parents should start talking to their children about healthy relationships well before they start dating. Provide your children with examples of healthy relationships in your own life. Point out healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors in television, movies, and music and take an opportunity to talk to your child about what is appropriate and what is not.

It is never too early to teach self-respect. Teach your children to respect themselves. No one has the right to make your child feel bad about himself or herself. No one has the right to insult, control, or hit another.

Always keep the lines of communication open. Encourage your child to come to you. Take the opportunity to talk to your child anytime the opportunity presents itself. Be open, understanding, and non-judgmental. Listen to your child and refrain from lecturing.

Ask your child questions to encourage conversations about healthy relationships and awareness of dating violence, such as:

- What makes a healthy relationship? What do you want in a relationship?
- What are the relationships like that you have witnessed at school or among friends? Have you witnessed any acts of violence?
- Have you seen someone using Facebook or text messages to insult, monitor, or control any of your friends?
- What would you do if you witnessed or experienced dating violence? How could you help someone in an abusive relationship?

If you suspect your teen is the victim of dating violence, make sure your teen knows you are there to help. Express your concern for your teen – keep the focus on your teen, not the abuser. Be clear that you do not blame your teen and that you are, and always will be, supportive of your teen. Understand that your teen must be one who decides to end the relationship – you can not do that for your teen. When your teen does end the relationship, help your teen develop a safety plan to stay safe during and after the break-up. Get advice and resources from a domestic violence agency.

Where To Go For Help

- **Love Is Respect:** www.loveisrespect.org
- <http://www.breakthecycle.org>/**Break The Cycle:** www.breakthecycle.org
 - Break The Cycle's A Teen's Guide to Safety Planning
<http://www.thesafespace.org/pdf/handout-safety-plan-workbook-teens.pdf>
 - Break The Cycle's A College Student's Guide to Safety Planning
<http://www.thesafespace.org/pdf/handout-safety-plan-workbook-college.pdf>
- **Love Is Respect's Power and Control Wheel**
<http://www.loveisrespect.org/is-this-abuse/power-and-control-wheel/>
- **National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence's Teen Power and Control Wheel**
<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Teen%20P&C%20wheel%20NO%20SHADING.pdf>
- **Domestic Violence Resources Page by Lewis Kannegieter Law, Ltd.**
<http://www.lewisklaw.com/resources/domestic-violence-resources/>