

Teen Dating Violence

Many teens begin to date and to experiment with different types of relationships. These are the years when it can be fun and exciting to meet someone new, and sad and difficult to break up. But violence and abuse have no place in a healthy relationship.

Dating violence can happen to young people from families of all cultures, income levels, and educational backgrounds. More than 1 in 10 teenagers experience physical violence in a dating relationship.

FORMS OF DATING VIOLENCE

Dating violence can take many forms:

- **Physical:** Shoving, hitting, punching
- **Verbal:** Yelling, screaming, put-downs
- **Emotional:** Spreading rumors, lying, possessiveness
- **Sexual:** Unwanted touching
- **Psychological:** Manipulation, mind games, guilt tripping, controlling



In its most extreme forms, dating violence can even lead to stalking, rape, and murder.

Teens often won't tell their parents or friends that dating violence is occurring. They may be embarrassed, ashamed, and confused. It is important that teens know that a partner does not have the right to tell him or her whom to see, what to do, or what to wear. No one has the right to hit or control anyone else.

WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs of a partner who may become violent include a partner who

- Wants to get serious quickly
- Will not take "no" for an answer
- Is jealous and possessive, wants to pick his or her partner's friends and activities
- Is controlling and bossy—makes all the decisions, does not take others' opinions seriously, uses put-downs when alone or with friends
- Uses guilt trips (e.g., "If you really loved me, you would . . .")
- Blames the victim for what is wrong (e.g., "It's because of you that I get so mad")
- Apologizes for violent behavior (e.g., "I promise I'll never do it again")

**AS A PARENT, IF YOU
SUSPECT THAT YOUR
TEENAGER IS INVOLVED
IN AN ABUSIVE
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP**

- Give your teenager a chance to talk. Listen quietly to the whole story.
- Tell your teenager you are there to help, not to judge.
- If your teenager does not want to talk with you, help her find another trusted person to talk with.
- Focus on your teenager; do not put down the abusive partner. Point out how unhappy your teenager seems to be while with the partner.
- If your teenager wants to break up with an abusive partner, advise that the break be definite and final. Support your teenager's decision and be ready to help.
- Take whatever safety measures are necessary. Have friends available so your teenager does not have to walk alone. Consider changing class schedules or getting help from the guidance counselor, school principal, or the police if necessary.
- Ask your teen's school to offer teen dating violence prevention and intervention programs.

This tool was modeled on: Sousa C. 2000. Teen dating violence: What every parent needs to know. In Sege R, ed. *Violence Prevention for Children and Youth: Parent Education Cards* (2nd ed.). Waltham, MA: Massachusetts Medical Society. Available from the Massachusetts Medical Society, Department of Public Health and Education, P.O. Box 549080, Waltham, MA 02454-9080. Phone: (800) 843-6356; e-mail: dph@mms.org.

Cite as: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health. 2002. Teen dating violence. In Jellinek M, Patel BP, Froehle MC, eds., *Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health—Volume II. Tool Kit*. Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.