



# Parenting for Prevention: *Healthy Relationships in High School*

## WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW TO RECOGNIZE TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND TO HELP PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Teens often think some behaviors, like teasing and name calling, are a "normal" part of a relationship. However, these behaviors can become abusive and develop into more serious forms of violence.

### What is dating violence?

Teen dating violence is defined as the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a dating relationship, including stalking. It can occur in person or electronically and might occur between a current or former dating partner. Perpetrators can be male or female. Dating violence can occur in same-sex relationships. Teen dating violence may also be described as: Relationship abuse, Intimate partner violence, Relationship violence, or Dating abuse.

PHYSICAL ABUSE	EMOTIONAL ABUSE	SEXUAL ABUSE
Hitting, shaking, pushing, biting, throwing things, using a weapon	Ignoring your date's/partner's feelings, Insulting their beliefs or values, Isolating date/partner from others, Threatening to hurt oneself, Name calling	Forcing a date/partner to have sex, Have sex without protection, or Other sexual things he or she does not want to do

### What are the consequences of dating violence?

As teens develop emotionally, they are heavily influenced by experiences in their relationships. Healthy relationship behaviors can have a positive effect on a teen's emotional development. Unhealthy or abusive relationships can have severe consequences and short- and long-term negative effects on a developing teen. Youth who experience dating violence are more likely to experience the following:

- Symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Engagement in unhealthy behaviors, such as tobacco, alcohol and other drug use
- Involvement in antisocial behaviors
- Thoughts about suicide

### Why does dating violence happen?

Teens receive messages about how to behave in relationships from peers, adults in their lives, and the media. All too often these examples suggest that violence in a relationship is normal, but violence is never acceptable. The risks of having unhealthy relationships increase for teens who:

- Believe that dating violence is acceptable
- Are depressed, anxious, or have other symptoms of trauma
- Display aggression towards peers or display other aggressive behaviors
- Use alcohol, drugs or illegal substances
- Engage in early sexual activity and have multiple sexual partners
- Have a friend involved in dating violence
- Have conflicts with a partner
- Witness or experience violence in the home

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships are important. Our bonds with family members, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, and others affect our mental, emotional, and physical health. The teen years are defined by increased independence and exploration – this growth often impacts existing relationships, as well as the establishment of new relationships. Regardless of whether our teen's connection is old or new, a healthy relationship should be the goal.

### Here are some signs of a healthy relationship:

- Feeling good about yourself around the other person
- Feeling safe talking about how you feel
- Feeling physically safe around the other person
- Being able to listen to each other, feel valued, and trusting one another
- Conflicts, which are normal, don't turn into personal attacks
- The other person motivates you to do positive things like succeed in school and be involved in extracurricular activities
- The other person doesn't encourage you to engage in risky behaviors. In fact, having healthy relationships can reduce the risk of substance use.

# WARNING SIGNS OF DATING VIOLENCE

## For the target:

- Intense jealousy or possessiveness from dating partner
- Change in mood or character
- Often checks in with partner
- Unexplained marks on the body (bruises, scratches, burns)
- Deferring to the partner's every wish
- Often apologizing for the partner's behavior
- Poorer academic performance
- Isolation from friends and family
- Visibly upset after phone calls or dates with dating partner
- Is afraid of making partner angry
- Describes being "punished" by an angry partner (through silence, humiliation, or force)

## For the perpetrator:

- Gets violent when angry
- Talks disrespectfully about dating partner
- Brags about having total control over partner
- Dates other people but doesn't allow partner to do so
- Gets angry after phone calls or dates with partner
- Is obsessed with partner's actions
- Tries to exert control over family members
- Discusses violent behavior as normal
- Gets in fights with others
- Acts out violence toward pets or inanimate objects
- Talks about getting even with others
- Blames problems on others/outside circumstances
- Believes jealousy is a sign of love

## What Parents Need Know

Adapted from: [www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/dating\\_violence\\_info\\_for\\_parents.page](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/dating_violence_info_for_parents.page)

Knowing the early warning signs of abuse can help you identify whether your teen is in an unhealthy relationship. Signs may include:

- Your teen's partner behaves in a way that is overly jealous or possessive, such as checking in on your daughter or son often
- You observe verbal abuse, such as name-calling or demeaning comments
- Your teen gives up things that are important, such as time with friends and family, activities or other interests
- Your teen has unexplained injuries
- Your teen's partner abuses other people or animals

## Start the Conversation – Parent Tips & Starter Questions

Adapted from [www.Breakthecycle.org](http://www.Breakthecycle.org)

- Provide your teen with examples of healthy relationships, pointing out unhealthy behavior.
- Encourage open discussion. Listen. Give them a chance to speak. Avoid analyzing, interruptions, or lecturing.
- Do not push if your teen is not ready to talk. Try again another time.
- Be supportive & nonjudgmental so they know they can come to you for help if their relationship becomes unhealthy in the future.
- Reinforce that dating should be fun. Stress that violence is never acceptable.
- Ask your teen: Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like? What would you want in a relationship?
- Ask your teen: Have you witnessed dating violence at school or among friends? How does it make you feel? Were you scared?

Be supportive and understanding. Stress to your teen that you are on his or her side. Provide information and non-judgmental support. Let your teen know that the abuse is not his or her fault and that no one deserves to be abused. Make it clear that you don't blame your teen and that you respect his or her choices. Read and download [Love Is Not Abuse Parent's Handbook: How to Talk to Youth about Healthy Relationships](#) to talk with your teen about healthy dating relationships.

## RESOURCES

### Break the Cycle

<https://www.breakthecycle.org/>

### National Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/yvpc/index.html>

### The Safe Space

<http://www.safespaceonline.org/>

### Violence Prevention Works

<http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/index.page>

*Portions of this tip sheet were adapted from the listed resources*

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

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