

What You May Not Know About Dating Violence

The Problem

- Teen dating violence consists of abusive and violent behavior.
- It often reflects the perpetrator's desire to control and dominate the victim.
- It covers a wide range of behavior that includes verbal and emotional, physical and sexual abuse.
- Several studies have shown that 20-30% of teens have experienced physical or sexual violence in a dating relationship. Verbal or emotional abuse is often found in higher percentages. *(Missouri Families.org)*
- One survey found that over 40% of male and female high school students said they had been victims of dating violence, at least once.
- Fifteen percent of teen girls and boys reported they had been victims of severe dating violence (being hit, kicked, thrown down or attacked with a weapon) in the past year.
(National Center for Victims of Crime)

Types of Teen Dating Violence

- Emotional or psychological abuse involves humiliation, insults and swearing. Other examples include attempting to control a boyfriend or girlfriend's activities, isolating the person from their family and friends, or trying to destroy their self-esteem.
- Verbal abuse includes name-calling, threats, screaming, yelling, ridiculing and criticizing as examples of verbal abuse. Verbal abuse can also include threats directed towards a boyfriend or girlfriend, or towards their family.
- Physical abuse can include hitting, slapping, shoving, pushing, punching, kicking, biting, pinching, hair pulling and choking. It can also include use of a weapon, such as a knife, bat, club or gun.
- Sexual abuse occurs when there is forced or unwanted sexual activity or rape. It is also considered sexual abuse to coerce or pressure someone to have sex, or try to engage in sexual activity with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
(The National Center for Victims of Crime, National Youth Prevention Resource Center)

Warning Signs Teens Are In Violent Relationships

- A boyfriend or girlfriend may apply pressure soon after dating begins, to make the relationship very serious, or pressure their girlfriend/boyfriend to have sex.
- A girlfriend or boyfriend becomes extremely jealous and possessive, and thinks these destructive displays of emotion are signs of love.
- A boyfriend or girlfriend tries to control their dating partner and forcefully make all decisions where the two are concerned, refusing to take the other person's views or desires seriously.
- A girlfriend or boyfriend verbally abuses their dating partner by yelling, swearing, manipulating, spreading false and degrading rumors, and tries to make the other person feel guilty.
- A boyfriend or girlfriend may drink too much or use drugs, then later blames the alcohol and drugs on the behavior of their dating partner.
- A girlfriend or boyfriend may try to keep their dating partner from spending time with their family and friends.
- A boyfriend or girlfriend may threaten physical violence.
(National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center)

Ways Teens Handle Violent Relationships

- Anxiety about what will happen to them
- Confusion
- Shame
- Depression
- Denial - some teens will deny or minimize the violence
- Defense of the abuser
- Fear of being seriously hurt or becoming pregnant
- Low self-esteem - may feel they don't deserve to be treated well

(National Center for Victims of Crime)

Why Do Teens Stay in Abusive Relationships?

- Emotional attachment and feeling that they are in love with the other person.
- Fear the abuser will harm, hurt or kill them, if they leave.
- Lack of experience in healthy relationships.
- Social pressure to have and to keep a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.
- Isolation or alienation from friends and family.

(National Center for Victims of Crime)

Why Teens Do Not Disclose Abuse

- Fear that peers will lose respect for them.
- May fear telling an adult. Teens may fear telling a school counselor or teacher, because they are required to report abuse of minors and may notify the teen's parents. Teens are afraid of telling their parents about the abuse, because the violence may have occurred while they were doing something they are not allowed to do.
- Teens may fear their abuser will retaliate if they tell of the abuse. Teens can sometimes be at risk of harm or danger, when they try to leave an abusive relationship.
- Some teens have an emotional attachment to their abuser and don't want to leave the relationship.

(Missouri Families.org)

Guidelines to Keep Teens Safe

- They need to know they're not alone. Teens from across the country have been involved in abusive relationships.
- They need to know that the longer they stay in an abusive relationship, the more intense the violence will become.
- Teens should talk with parents, a friend, counselor, faith leader or someone else they trust. The more isolated they are from others, the more control the abuser will have over them.
- They should keep a daily log of the abuse for evidence.
- They should not be meeting their abuser alone, nor let their abuser be in their home or car, when they are alone.
- Teens should always tell someone where they are going and when they plan on being back.

(National Crime Prevention Council)

How Can Parents Help Their Teens

- Be comforting and supportive, and control emotions. It will be normal to feel shock, anxious or angry, but a negative reaction can frighten teens.
- Be educated about teen dating violence; know the abuser exerts control and power over the victim.
- Understand that teens do not often tell their parents of the abuse, due to the fear that parents will question their judgment, try to take charge, or take away privileges or independence.
- Help teens explore their options and reach their own decisions. It is important to know state laws, civil law and what orders of protection are.
- Help teens recognize their strengths and remind them they are not responsible for the abuse.
- Help their teen come up with a safety plan and discuss how they can stay safer.

(National Center for Victims of Crime)

Resources

- Missouri Families.org,
www.missourifamilies.org/features/adolescentarticles/adolesfeature10.htm
- A Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence from Liz Claiborne, Inc.,
http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/handbooks_teendating.htm
- National Crime Prevention Council, www.ncpc.org
- The National Center for Victims of Crime,
<http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentAction=ViewProperties&DocumentID=32370&UrlToReturn=http%3a%2f%2fwww.ncvc.org%2fncvc%2fmain.aspx%3fdbName%3dAdvancedSearch>
- National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center,
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/dating.asp>
- Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services,
www.dhss.mo.gov/ViolenceAgainstWomen/