

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

What is relationship abuse?

Dating violence or relationship abuse is a pattern of violent behavior that someone uses against a girlfriend or boyfriend. Abuse can cause injury and even death, but it doesn't have to be physical. It can take many forms, including threats, emotional abuse, insults, isolation from friends and family, name-calling and controlling what someone wears or with whom they socialize. It can also include sexual abuse.

It can happen to anyone, at any age, no matter what their race, religion, level of education or economic background. It can happen in couples that are married, living together or just dating, and it can happen in heterosexual or same-sex relationships.

Source: texasadvocacyproject.org

Warning Signs...

Many of these signs are viewed as part of being a teenager. If the changes happen suddenly or without explanation, there might be cause for concern.

- Sudden changes in clothes or make-up
- Bruises, scratches or other injuries
- Failing grades, skipping class or dropping out of school activities
- Avoiding friends
- Difficulty making decisions or always relying on the decisions of others
- Sudden changes in mood or personality; becoming anxious or depressed, acting out or being secretive
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits, avoiding eye contact
- Constantly thinking or worrying about their dating partner
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Emotional outbursts and "crying fits"

Adapted from: *"A Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence"* www.stoprelationshipabuse.org

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that more than 90% of all relationship abuse victims are female and most abusers are male. For that reason, this handbook uses "she" when referring to victims and "he" when referring to abusers. Whether the victim is male or female, violence of any kind is unacceptable in relationships.

RESOURCES...

Futures Without Violence
futureswithoutviolence.org

Love is Respect
loveisrespect.org

Love is Not Abuse
loveisnotabuse.com

Partnership Against Domestic Violence
padv.org

Stop Relationship Abuse
stoprelationshipabuse.org

Texas Advocacy Project
texasadvocacyproject.org

Other Signs to Look for...

It's not always easy to recognize if a teen is in a violent relationship. Surprisingly, abusers are often charming in public, especially to parents — so pay more attention to how he treats your daughter and less to how polite he may be to you.

She (the victim):

- Apologizes for his behavior and makes excuses for him
- Loses interest in activities that she used to enjoy
- Stops seeing friends and family members and becomes more and more isolated
- Casually mentions his violent behavior, but laughs it off as a joke
- Has unexplained injuries, or the explanations she offers don't make sense

He (the perpetrator):

- Calls her names and puts her down in front of other people
- Acts extremely jealous of others, especially other guys
- Thinks or tells your daughter that you (her parents) don't like him
- Controls her behavior, checking up on her constantly, calling and texting her, demanding to know where she has been
- Violently loses his temper striking or breaking objects

- Nearly one quarter of the 14–17 year-olds surveyed know at least one student who has been the victim of dating violence, while 11 percent know multiple victims of dating violence. Thirty percent of these teens have actually witnessed such an event.
- Eighty-one percent of the parents surveyed either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it is an issue.
- A majority of parents (54 percent) admit they have not spoken to their child about dating violence.

“Social Control, Verbal Abuse and Violence Among Teenagers: Teen and Parent Opinion” survey, commissioned by The Empower Program, sponsored by Liz Claiborne Inc. and conducted by Knowledge Networks.

How Can I Tell if My Teen is an Abuser?

- Is your son or daughter jealous or possessive?
- Does your teen have an explosive temper?
- Does he/she consistently ridicule, criticize or insult his/her partner?
- Does your teen blame others when he/she gets angry?
- Does your teen exhibit any abusive behaviors toward you, family or friends?

Helping the Abusive Teens

- Recognize and confront the abusive behavior using specific examples.
- Use the communication tips provided in “THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN HELPING YOUR ABUSED TEEN.”
- Let him/her know what is not acceptable. While being supportive of your teen as a person and his/her efforts to overcome the abusive behavior, you may have to make the difficult decision to report your teen's violence to law enforcement.
- Role model supportive, healthy relationships with your own partner.