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Is Your Dating Teen Safe?

Preventing Dating Violence

How to detect it before it's too late

Every parent tries to shield their teen from potentially dangerous situations. However, many parents miss one of the most common dangers, dating violence. One in 10 teens experiences dating abuse. Sadly, this statistic does not reflect all dating violence. Many teens are scared to come forward so many cases go unreported.

While physical abuse may leave visible marks, emotional and verbal abuse is harder to detect. Abuse usually progresses from mild to more severe over time. If not addressed, victims become isolated from family and friends, have lowered self-esteem, increased anxiety, and are at greater risk of life-threatening physical abuse. Warning signs might be:

- Controlling language that makes the partner feel inferior;
- Consistently putting down and insulting a partner's ideas or physical appearance;
- Threatening to harm a partner's reputation or loved ones;
- Constantly checking to see where the partner is and what s/he is doing;
- Ignoring phone calls or face-to-face conversations as a way to punish the partner;
- Making a partner feel dumb or incompetent;
- Coercing a partner into a sexual relationship before s/he is ready;
- Forcing a partner into activities or situations where s/he feels uncomfortable or scared



It is never too early to begin talking about what a healthy relationship looks like *and* what are signs of unhealthy and unsafe behaviors. Here are some questions to start that conversation:

- ***What is your partner like when around others compared to when s/he is alone with you?*** A partner should treat a teen with kindness and respect regardless of the environment or who is watching. Someone who makes fun of their partner around friends or ignores the partner when other people are around does not respect and value your teen the way s/he deserves.
- ***Do you feel the need to regularly apologize for your partner's behavior?*** Do not overlook warning signs like anger, resentment, lying, or degrading comments, even if not directed at your teen. This type of behavior can be redirected at the teen later in the relationship. Assuming the partner would never turn on the teen is a risky gamble.

Trust Your Gut! If Something Seems Off, It Probably Is.

Dating Violence Continues

- ***Do you ever feel nervous or scared when hanging out with your partner?*** While “feeling butterflies” is a common and normal part of getting to know someone special, it should not be confused with true anxiety or fear. Gut feelings can be your subconscious warning you that something is not right.
- ***Do you have a way to safely leave if you feel uncomfortable?*** Develop a system where teens tell at least one person their plans and anticipated return time. Be sure your teen can contact at least one person to pick her/him up if needed. Also have a back-up plan if the first option doesn't work.

If your teen is in an abusive relationship, support your teen in making a clean break. Teens should be prepared that the partner may react with extreme anger or aggression. Breaking up in a public place with a caring friend or adult ready to meet up with the victim can help them feel empowered and safe. Following a break up, support from loved ones, or a professional if needed, can help the victim move past an abusive relationship and avoid future ones.

For more resources about dating and relationships, visit www.gamarriages.org. If needed, call your County Extension Office to find local domestic violence services.

Other Helpful Online Resources

- Setting Health Boundaries in Relationships: <http://www.loveisrespect.org/setting-boundaries>
- Emotional/Verbal Abuse: <http://www.loveisrespect.org/is-this-abuse/types-of-abuse/what-is-emotional-verbal-abuse>
- Defining Domestic Violence: <http://www.caring-unlimited.org/what-is-domestic-violence/for-students-and-educators/teen-dating-violence-2>
- Signs of dating and Domestic Violence: <https://rainn.org/get-information/types-of-sexual-assault/d-and-domestic-violence>



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Ted Futris, PhD, Extension Family Life Specialist and Taylor Adams, MS, contributors
Connie Crawley, MS, RD, LD, Nutrition Specialist, editor

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