

## What is teen dating violence?

Teen dating violence is a pattern of controlling behaviors by one teenager over another teenager with whom they are in a dating relationship. That behavior can include physical violence but can also include emotional and/or verbal abuse. Twenty-four percent of 14 to 17-year-olds know at least one student who has been the victim of dating violence, yet 81% of parents either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it is an issue<sup>1</sup>. The violence can happen over time and one may not even realize the behavior is abusive.

### **The behavior may be:**

- Emotional abuse - Embarrassing the person in front of others, calling a person names
- Physical abuse – Physically hurting someone, preventing a person from leaving a location
- Sexual abuse – Forcing someone to have sex, not allowing someone to use birth control
- Limiting independence – Telling someone what to do, giving a person rules to follow
- Isolation – Not allowing someone to see their friends
- Threats – To leave someone or hurt them
- Intimidation – Making a person afraid with a look
- Harassment – Texting someone frequently, spying
- Minimization, denial & blame- Telling a person that their fears are all in their head

### Red flags that may show that your teen or friend may be experiencing abuse in her/his relationship:

- Unexplained injuries
- Boyfriend/girlfriend hurting self, others or pets
- Change in appearance or behavior
- Apologizing for boyfriend's/girlfriend's behavior
- Spending all their time with their boyfriend/girlfriend
- Boyfriend/girlfriend constantly checks up on the teen
- Name-calling, demeaning comments from boyfriend/girlfriend
- Giving up interests such as friends, school sports or other extra-curricular activities
- Technology can also be used by individuals to control their boyfriend's/girlfriend's actions by cell phones and spreading rumors thru social networking websites. It is important to be aware of your teen's possible changes in use of computers, cell phones, etc.

## **I think my daughter's/son's girlfriend/boyfriend is abusing her/him. What can I do?**

- Talk to your teen about dating and healthy relationships. Creating this open dialogue will help with future discussions.
- Avoid being judgmental. Your teen may not share any information with you if they feel like they have done something wrong.
- Just listen – Your teen may need to “vent” about what happened.
- Don’t try to provide explanations or solutions to what has happened, this may appear judgmental to your teen.
- Validate that you are sorry the abuse happened and it is not his/her fault.
- Be supportive of your teen reaching out to others like coaches, teachers, friends, etc. These people can be helpful.

You and your teen may also want to explore what services and options are available. Contact New Hope, Inc 1-800-323-4673, or the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline- 1-866-331-9474. If a criminal act has happened, contact your local police department. A local domestic violence provider or victim advocate at your local police department may be able to help you with this process.

## **I think my friend is being abused by his/her girlfriend/boyfriend. What should I do?**

If you think that a friend is in an unhealthy relationship or is being abused, you may want to talk with them to find out for certain.

Your friends are often more open to talking with you than with school counselors or parents about dating violence. Prepare yourself by learning about teen dating violence and then talk to your friend.

- Offer support and just listen
- Help her or him develop a plan to keep him or her safe
- Encourage them to do activities with friends and family
- It’s okay for you to tell her or him that you are afraid for their safety
- Respect the decisions that they make; this may include their staying in the relationship

## **Supportive things parents and friends can say:**

- I care about you.
- You are not alone.
- I'm glad you told me.
- How can I/we help you feel safer?
- It's not your fault that this happened to you.

### **Resources:**

- ["Teen Power and Control Wheel"](#)
- ["Equality Wheel for Teens"](#)
- [Safety plan:](#)
- ["Help for Parents"](#)
- ["Helping a Friend or Family Member Who is Being Abused"](#)

### **Additional helpful websites:**

- [www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)
- [www.loveisnotabuse.com](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com)
- <http://loveisrespect.org/>
- [www.seeitandstopit.org](http://www.seeitandstopit.org)

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1. Survey commissioned by the Empower Program, sponsored by Liz Claiborne Inc. and conducted by Knowledge Networks, Social Control, Verbal Abuse, and Violence Among Teenagers, December 2000.