

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Teen Dating Violence: Are You Aware?

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Teens are the fastest growing population at risk for dating violence. Adolescent dating violence (ADV) can take the form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Physical abuse includes being hit, kicked, bitten, shoved, and hit with thrown objects. Emotional abuse includes name calling, verbal harassment, private and public humiliation, and threatening harm. Sexual abuse includes being forced to have sex and or being touched in inappropriate places against one's will.

How Serious is the Problem?

Dating violence among teens is an alarmingly common occurrence. It is estimated that 1 in 8 high school students and 1 in 5 college students will become involved in a violent relationship. These violent relationships have the potential to lead to death.

Risk Factors for Perpetrators

Adolescents who are at most risk for perpetrating dating violence have a history of the following:

- Sustained abuse or maltreatment as children
- Witnessed violence between their parents which encourages their belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Abuse of alcohol and drugs
- Exposure to community violence

Having aggressive peers also elevates the risk of perpetrating violence. Aggressors in intimate relationships perpetrate as a way of expressing anger and may use physical force, mental insults, and sexual

coercion because they may lack the skills necessary for conflict resolution.

Risk Factors for Victims

Although males and females are likely to sustain equal amounts of physical violence from their partners, studies of ADV have found that females are:

- More likely the victims of sexual dating violence
- More likely to experience sexual violence by their partners
- More likely to experience emotional abuse by partners
- More likely to receive more injuries than males as the result of partner violence

Adolescents who are at high risk for becoming a recipient of violence, on average tend to:

- Experience more conflict in relationships
- Feel that the relationship is very serious and too important to break up
- Abuse alcohol and drugs
- Have few social support systems
- Have peers who have been sexually victimized
- Attend church infrequently
- Have more past dating partners
- Have probably been sexually abused before

Another adolescent characteristic that may set the tone for abuse and victimization includes the victim's lack of experience in dating relationships. Teens may not know what is acceptable behavior in a dating relationship and what is not.

Is Your Teen Involved in a Violent Relationship?

Despite the startling statistics, many teens do not regard ADV as a significant problem. Instead, they view this behavior as normal because they believe it frequently occurs in many relationships. This perception may also prevent them from telling adults. Adults are also not told because they tend to discount or minimize the victims' accounts of abuse. Parents, along with teachers and coaches, need to learn to recognize the warning signs of a violent teen relationship, and adolescents need to know what to look for in a potentially abusive dating partner. Is your teen involved in a violent relationship? Here are some questions to ask:

- Does he or she come home with bruises that he or she cannot explain?
- Does your teen show fear for his or her partner?
- Has your teenager lost interest in things that he or she once enjoyed (ex: hobbies, hanging out with friends, extracurricular activities)?
- Does your teen apologize for his or her partner's behavior toward you and others?

Helping Your Teen

There are many things that you, as a parent, can do to both prevent and intervene in an adolescent violent relationship.

- Before your teen starts dating, help him or her set up guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
- Discuss with your teen some of the warning signs of potential abusers.
- Provide your teen with a list of local resources that may help him or her get help for themselves and the abuser. This may include toll free hotlines or local community center programs.
- Teach your teen effective conflict resolution skills

and show them other ways to resolve conflict besides physical force.

Finally, help your teen by validating what he or she is feeling by simply providing an understanding ear and time in meaningful conversation. You can also help the perpetrator by providing resources and encouraging him or her to seek help. Do not allow the perpetrator to play down the violence but help the offending teen to see that violence is not an acceptable way to solve conflicts and show him or her positive alternatives to solve problems.

References and Resources

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