

Facts About Dating Violence

It's very likely that you or someone you know has been abused in a relationship. Dating violence isn't just physical. It can include mental/emotional abuse and sexual abuse. It can occur in casual dating or serious long-term relationships.

MENTAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Mental/Emotional abuse includes:

- Embarrassing you
- Put-downs
- Cussing
- Controlling you
- Making you feel bad about yourself
- Keeping you away from other friends and family

Threats of violence are abuse and should always be taken seriously.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse includes:

- Hitting
- Slapping
- Punching
- Shoving
- Kicking
- Biting
- Hair-pulling
- Using a weapon against a boyfriend/girlfriend

Both teenage boys and girls report being victims of physical violence in relationships. Normally, boys and girls use physical force for different reasons and with different results. Teens usually act violently because they are angry; boys are much more likely to use force in order to control their girlfriends, while girls more often act violently in self-defense.

Teenage girls suffer more from relationship violence, emotional and physical. Teenage girls are more likely than boys to have serious injuries and to report being terrified. In contrast, boys seldom seem to fear violence by their girlfriends, often saying that the attacks did not hurt and that it was funny.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is forced or unwanted sexual activity or rape. It is sexual abuse to force or pressure someone to engage in sexual activity. Trying to engage in sexual activity with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol is also sexual abuse. Girls in opposite-sex relationships are much more likely than boys to suffer from sexual abuse.


HOW FREQUENTLY DOES DATING VIOLENCE OCCUR?

This is a difficult question to answer because some studies only ask about physical abuse, while others include questions about mental/emotional abuse and sexual violence. Past estimates of dating violence among middle school and high school students range from 28% to 96%.

One recent national survey found that 1 in 11 high school students said they had been hit, slapped, or physically abused in the past year. 1 in 11 students also reported that they had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. 96% of teens report mental/emotional abuse in their dating relationships.

What You Can Do

KNOW THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- You are pressured to make the relationship very serious or to have sex early in the relationship. 
- Extreme jealousy and possessiveness, saying these emotions are signs of love.
- Controlling you and forcefully making all decisions where the two of you are concerned.
- Refusing to consider your point of view or desires.
- Keeping you from spending time with close friends or family.
- Verbal abuse, including yelling, cussing, manipulation, spreading rumors and making you feel guilty.
- Drinking too much or using drugs and then blaming the alcohol and drugs for his/her behavior.
- Threatening physical violence. Previous abuse of a boyfriend/girlfriend or defending violence by others.

If you're in a relationship that in any way feels uncomfortable, awkward, tense or even scary, trust your feelings and get out. It could become, or may already be, abusive.

Always remember: You have every right to say no! No boyfriend or girlfriend has the right to tell you what you can or should do, what you can or should wear, or what kind of friends you should have.

IF YOU ARE IN A VIOLENT, OR POTENTIALLY VIOLENT, RELATIONSHIP, DO THIS:

Make a safety plan and get help. Talk with someone you trust: a teacher, guidance counselor, doctor, friend or parent. Contact the police or a local domestic violence center or call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE**. Realize that violence will not just stop or go away. You cannot change your boyfriend/girlfriend by changing your behavior. You are not responsible for the abuse. Your boyfriend/girlfriend may need counseling or other help to change.

WATCH FOR FRIENDS WHO ARE ABUSED




Friends in abusive relationships may:

- Change their clothing or makeup.
- Lose confidence in themselves.
- Have difficulty making decisions.
- Stop spending time with you and other friends.
- Receive failing grades or quit school activities; and
- Turn to using alcohol or drugs.

If you think a friend is in an abusive relationship, try asking them:

- "You don't seem as happy as usual – are you okay?"
- "Is there anything you want to talk about?"

This indirect approach may prompt your friend to reveal what's wrong. Listen without judging, condemning, or giving unwanted advice. If a friend wants help, suggest that he or she take the steps listed above in order to find help. If you believe your friend is in serious danger, tell an adult you trust immediately. Do not try to "rescue" your friend and try to handle the situation on your own. 

TAKE ACTION IF YOU SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS BEING ABUSIVE.

If you feel you are not in danger, talk to the person about his or her use of violence. Make sure that the person understands that it is both wrong and illegal. If the person is ready to make a change, help him/her get help.

IF YOU ARE HURTING SOMEONE ELSE, HAVE THE COURAGE TO GET HELP!

No matter what the other person does to provoke you. No matter how justified you feel. No matter what your friends do. It is never okay to harm someone else. Remember that violence is illegal and can land you in jail. You can learn new ways to:

- Deal with your anger
- Fight fair
- Communicate better
- Give and get love in relationships

Don't let shame or fear stop you. Talk to a parent, teacher, religious leader, doctor, nurse or guidance counselor immediately.

Or, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **(800) 799-SAFE**. They can direct you to individuals and groups in your community who can help you to make a change.



HELP EDUCATE OTHER TEENS ABOUT DATING VIOLENCE

Counsel peers, staff a hotline, or speak to classes about the signs of an abusive relationship and where to find help. Encourage your church or school to develop programs to educate teens about dating violence, and work to make sure that there are resources for abused teens in your community.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-SAFE



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Information provided by the Dibble Fund with permission from the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center. For additional information, please visit www.safeyouth.org.