



## Teen Dating Violence – What Parents Need to Know

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The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center reports that nearly 33% of teens will experience dating violence. Some blame the increasing use of drugs and alcohol; others cite movies, video games and the media as being the reason for increasing violence among youth. Whatever the underlying cause, parents will likely be surprised by the following statistics:

- About one in five female high school students are physically or sexually abused by their boyfriends
- Almost 80% of those who are abused choose to remain in the relationship
- Among all teenage girls who are killed, nearly one-third are killed by a boyfriend or former boyfriend

Violence among teenagers in romantic relationships is distressingly common, yet parents are typically unaware that their teen is involved in an abusive situation. Relationship violence includes emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and it usually takes the form of extreme jealousy, possessiveness or manipulation. However, it can be severe and include physical violence and forced sexual activity.

### **Warning Signs of Violence in Teen Relationships**

Following are some of the behaviors parents should watch for in their youth or her partner. Some of these behaviors are normal for most teens at one time or another. However, if they occur suddenly and without any apparent explanation, parents should take note.

*Note: For simplicity, this information was written with the abuser being male and the victim as female. However, violence from girls against boys also occurs, as does same-sex dating violence.*

- Teen frequently apologizes for the behavior of her partner, or casually talks about his hot temper but then laughs it off
- She rarely spends time with friends or family, and might say that she "has to" be with her boyfriend
- Often, the victim's personality will change slightly; she might become depressed, nervous, secretive or uncharacteristically emotional, even hysterical
- The teen seems to be giving up activities or hobbies that used to be important
- She has lost interest in school and her grades are dropping

- There might be bruises, scratches or other injuries; she will attempt to change the subject if she is questioned and will likely not make eye contact
- Her appearance changes; she might be dressing differently, with less attention to personal grooming, or she might instead be dressing much more provocatively and wearing more makeup
- She behaves timidly or even fearfully when around her boyfriend
- She has begun drinking or using drugs

It is also cause for concern if parents notice any of the behaviors listed below in their youth's partner:

- He is unusually impatient, or criticizes or insults her in front of others
- He makes her decisions, checks up on her, follows her or demands to know what she has been doing
- When she tries to end the relationship, the boyfriend threatens self-harm or even suicide
- He blames her for his behavior ("I wouldn't get so mad at you if you didn't do that.")

### **Girls Aren't the Only Victims of Teen Relationship Violence**

Although less common, boys can also be victimized by their girlfriends. Because of embarrassment or humiliation, they are less likely to report it or they might go to great lengths to hide any physical or emotional signs of abuse.

### **What Parents Can Do**

Teens usually have mixed feelings when they are questioned about whether they are being emotionally, sexually or physically abused by their boyfriend or girlfriend. They might experience relief due to finally being able to share their story, but their fear could likely intensify. Will the boyfriend retaliate because she divulged their secret?

First, parents need to quietly listen to their teen without interrupting, judging or reacting excessively. They should express support and caring without making harsh statements about the abuser. If the teen chooses not to confide in parents, help should be sought out from a trusted family member, teacher, counselor or clergy member. If violence escalates, parents should not hesitate to inform school officials and contact the police, and if necessary, obtain a restraining order.

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### ***“Supporting Relationships ~ Strengthening Families!”***

*If you recognize any of the behaviors listed above in your son or daughter, free and confidential counseling and support is available from the Healthy Relationships for Healthy Families/Healthy Marriages Program/YESS Department. Please call 384-2373.*