

When teen dating violence hits your family



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IS YOUR DAUGHTER'S BOYFRIEND ABUSING HER?

Dating violence can be physical, emotional, psychological or sexual in nature. It can include forceful, abusive acts, as well as harassing, threatening and stalking. Unfortunately, dating violence among teens is more common than you might imagine. In a nationwide survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 9.8 percent of high school students reported being hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the previous 12 months.

Beyond bruising

Dating violence can do much more than physical damage. It can leave emotional scars and have negative effects on health in the future. Teens who are victims of violence are more likely to become depressed, do poorly in school, develop eating disorders, use drugs and alcohol and become victims later in life. Among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 22 percent of women and 15 percent of men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.

Risk factors for dating violence

Though you can't always spot an abuser before the violence happens, research shows that people who inflict harm on their dating partners are more depressed and aggressive than their peers. They may use alcohol and drugs, be unable to manage frustration or anger, have multiple sex partners, hang out with violent friends, have behavioral problems and learning difficulties, lack parental supervision or witness violence at home.

[Read about domestic abuse -- help for the batterer >>](#)

Is your teen a victim?

Obvious signs of abuse include bruises, injuries and damaged property. However, your daughter or son may be experiencing dating violence and not display any physical signs. If your teen shows sudden changes in behavior, becomes more secretive or stops hanging out with their friends, he/she may be going through some serious issues. If his/her partner seems threatening, jealous or hostile, or you have other reasons to suspect dating violence, don't hesitate to confront your teen.

Signs of abuse

Physical: bruises, injuries, damaged property

Emotional: sudden changes in behavior, increased secretivity, ceases hanging out with friends

Choose a comfortable time and setting to approach the subject. Have specific examples to express your concern. Listen with an open mind, offering support and care without being accusatory or laying guilt and blame. If your teen does admit to being a victim of dating violence, call your local police department or a battered women's shelter for more help. If your child denies abuse, continue monitoring your teen closely while providing as much support and understanding as you can.

[Read 10 tips to avoid dating abuse >>](#)

Online help

A number of online sources are available with information about dating violence. Sites such as [loveisnotabuse.com](#) offer information about dating violence and other abuse, including educational tips and tools on how to help end the epidemic. Another website, [loveisrespect.org](#), is a fabulous source of information and support for teens and their parents. It features information about unhealthy and abusive relationships, communication, safety planning and more. They also have peer advocates available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for assistance and support. You can contact the advocates through their live online chat, via text message or by phone.

Giving back

Encourage your teens to take action against dating violence. UHopeLine is one of the many programs set up where teens can give back to those in need. UHopeLine, an extension of Verizon Wireless' HopeLine from Verizon, encourages students to give back to victims of domestic violence by hosting phone drives to collect no-longer-used wireless devices from the people in their communities. The donated devices are recycled and turned into support for victims of domestic violence. Refurbished phones are provided to local domestic violence organizations, or turned into cash grants that are then used to support the organizations.



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