

# WORKING WITH TEEN VICTIMS OF DATING VIOLENCE



## What Law Enforcement Should Know Before Working With Teen Victims of Dating Violence.

### WHAT DOES DATING VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE?

Teens experience the same types of abuse in relationships as adults – *physical abuse, emotional/verbal abuse, and sexual abuse*. In most cases, the abuse escalates over time, becoming more frequent and more severe.

Technology can play a significant role in dating violence. Cell phones, text messages, and social media can all become tools of power and control in the hands of an abusive partner.

Teens have the right  
to a safe and  
healthy relationship...  
free from violence  
and free from fear

### WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

Dating violence is a **pattern of abusive behaviors** used to exert **power and control** over a dating partner. The core of dating violence is power and control. Abusive words and actions are the tools that an abusive partner uses to gain and maintain power and control over their partner.

While the meaning of “**dating partner**” differs across generations and communities and the words used to describe intimate relationships change frequently, dating violence happens in all kinds of relationships – gay or straight, serious or casual, sexual or nonsexual, monogamous or non-monogamous, short-term or long-term.

### WHO IS AFFECTED BY DATING VIOLENCE?

Teens of all ages, genders, and sexualities can experience abuse in a relationship. It cuts across all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic groups.

### RESPONDING TO A DATING VIOLENCE CALL

Use your domestic violence training to guide your response and consider how your response will impact a teen victim.

- Take the victim seriously and reassure them that you are there to help.
- Recognize that an uncooperative or angry teen may be reacting out of fear and confusion. This does not mean that abuse has not occurred.

- Do NOT make a dual arrest -- arresting both is ineffective and dangerous. In most cases, one party is using violence, coercion and intimidation while the other is reacting to the violence. Arresting a victim only serves to re-victimize them, causing distrust and alienation, especially among youth who may already be distrustful of adult authorities.
- Explain the utility and availability of a civil protection order, including whether dating relationships are included, whether a minor victim's parent must be involved, and if same sex relationships are covered.
- If a protection order is in place, explain to the victim about filing charges for violations.
- If the victim's parent/guardian is not at the scene of the incident, ask if they would like them to be contacted. Respect the teen's decision to the extent the law allows.
- Explain the basics of safety planning and offer to connect the youth with a dating violence advocate.
- Refer the teen victim to community organization that can help them with next steps. Educate yourself on your community's resources for dating violence, sexual violence, LGBTQ youth, homeless/runaway youth, and non-English speaking youth.

Think about the parties that are present when you respond to a call and how the presence of others impacts a teen victim's willingness to be candid.

# DO'S AND DON'TS **LAW ENFORCEMENT** SHOULD KNOW BEFORE INTERVIEWING TEEN VICTIMS OF DATING VIOLENCE

## DOCUMENTING TECH ABUSE

Teens experiencing dating violence frequently report receiving threats, admissions of abuse, or controlling behavior in text messages or over the internet. Evidence of tech-based abuse can be invaluable for your case. Ask youth victims to preserve this evidence by:

- Printing out all emails that contain any evidence or information about the incident. Make sure the printout includes the sender, recipient, date, and time.
- Printing out text messages. If that's not possible, take a picture of the cell phone displaying the message and contact information.
- Printing screen shots of social media that contain evidence, such as admissions of abuse, threats of violence, or pictures of the victim that were not consented to. Remember to check both the victim's and the alleged perpetrator's sites.
- Recording voicemails onto a digital voice recorder and include the time/date stamp.

Suggest that the teen victim change any online passwords that may have been discovered by the perpetrator and monitor email accounts and social media closely.

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[www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)

## DO:

- Encourage and support their choice to get help.
- Mirror the teen's choice of words, tone and body language.
- Use age- and developmentally-appropriate language when asking about the incident, evidence, or injuries.
- Be honest about your ability to keep information confidential.
- Be direct about your legal responsibilities, especially regarding parental involvement.
- Help the teen be in control and make their own decisions as much as possible.
- Provide information on local resources and encourage the teen to seek help

## DON'T:

- Don't be judgmental about the teen's relationship or choices.
- Don't show shock or disapproval if the teen tells you about his/her sexual activities.
- Don't minimize the abuse or the importance of the relationship.
- Don't assume that abuse in a new or casual relationship is not severe.
- Don't assume that the youth is heterosexual.
- Don't assume that the abusive partner is also a teen.
- Don't share a youth's private information unnecessarily.

## WORKING WITH PARENTS

When referring or transporting a minor victim to receive additional services (e.g., forensic exams), the minor's parent/guardian may need to consent to the services. Educate yourself on your state's laws so that you will know in advance if the teen's parent/guardian must be involved and not risk violating either the minor's or the parent/guardian's rights. If you must seek the minor's parent/guardian's consent, first let the teen know and give them the opportunity to contact their parent/guardian first. If you have questions about your state's laws on minor consent, call the local State's Attorney's Office.

## BEING AN ALLY

Teen victims need to feel that the police take their experiences of abuse seriously. Youth depend a great deal on their peer group and are likely to share their experiences with one another. Taking the extra time to be supportive and compassionate with teen victims will encourage more teens to seek out the help they need in the future.

Law enforcement officers are allies in a community response to dating violence. Make sure the schools in your precinct know who you are, particularly the names of officers who have specialized training in teen dating violence. Be sure to include the colleges and universities! Partner with community organizations and local schools to implement education programs with middle school, high school, and college students and collaborate with local community organizations to cross-train staff and officers on teen dating violence and police response.