February 13, 2014

February is National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention month. Accompanying this is Respect Week, February 10th-14th hosted by [http://loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org). With Valentines Day this week it’s a perfect week to talk about love. And especially to teach teens that love is respect.

Love is not a feeling, it is an action. Love builds people up and energizes them. It gives them support and joy. This isn’t the way that many teens see it. They get faulty messages from music, videos, movies, and from watching the adults in their lives. One improper message they see is sex is love. Unfortunately they may also be learning that love can be abusive. Children learn from what is modeled in the home. Are you modeling a respectful relationship?

- Has your partner called you degrading names in front of your teen?
- Has your teen witnessed any violence from you partner against you?
- Has your teen seen your partner break things when they are angry with you?
- Is there an uneven balance of power in your relationship?

Opening the door of communication with teens can be tricky. If they feel they are being pushed
or pressured into learning a lesson they will shut down. It’s helpful to ask questions and listen to their answer. Follow their lead from their responses. If a teen senses a lecture they will get defensive and stop hearing what you have to say. You might consider the following questions to start with:

- Do the actions of the person you are dating make you feel safe?
- Do the words they use make you feel encouraged and happy?
- Would you support a friend to stay in a relationship if their partner treated them this way?

Since faulty thinking can be caused by manipulation it’s good to ask these questions to help the teen think more clearly. Denial can be difficult to break. When trying to help someone in an abusive or controlling relationship tread lightly. If they feel you are threatening the relationship you run the risk of becoming the enemy. The more patient you are with your teen during conversation the better.

Pointing the teen towards positive peer support is empowering for them. Teens draw most of their information from others their age. A great resource is [Loveisrespect.org](http://Loveisrespect.org) because it’s comprised of young people ages 15-24. This is the age group most likely to influence teens.

Suggested by the author

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