Parent Tips for Preventing Teen Dating Violence



Each year, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide are physically abused by a dating partner* and Georgia leads the nation in teens reporting dating violence*. Unfortunately, many parents don't recognize the signs their teen is in an abusive relationship. The Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children put together the following tips to help parents identify and prevent teen dating violence.

1. Talk early and talk often.

Nearly 75 percent of 7^{th} and 8^{th} graders reportedly date. Talk with your kids about healthy relationships before they even think about dating. Many teens experience dating violence without realizing it because they confuse abusive behaviors with love. Young children should be taught how to treat others and how to expect to be treated, so that they are able to recognize the signs of unhealthy dating behaviors.

2. Make use of teachable moments.

Experiences of friends, TV, music and other media offer plenty of opportunities to strike up conversations about what constitutes a healthy relationship. Pay attention to current events and what's happening in your child's life. Share what behaviors you think are acceptable and normal and find out how they feel about relationships.

3. Understand and validate your teen's feelings.

Approximately 80 percent of adults do not believe that teen dating violence is a problem. Adults need to understand that just because teens are young that doesn't make their feelings any less real. Teens can and do feel genuine love for their partners; and therefore, do not think it is easy to simply "break up". Let them know that you understand and that you are a resource if they need help.

4. Set rules and boundaries.

Teens may not admit it, but they need rules. It helps them to understand that you care and are interested in their well-being. Get to know your teen's friends and when, where and who they are going out with. Set a limit on number of texts or time allowed to use their cell phone or tablet (e.g., no cell phone usage past 10:30 p.m.).

5. Look for warning signs and discuss them.

Victims of teen dating violence may make excuses for their partner's behavior; stop doing things they used to enjoy or change the way that they dress; stop spending time with family or friends; appear tense or angry if they are unable to contact their partner. Abusive teens may tell their partner what to wear or who to spend time with; constantly accuse their partner of lying or cheating; insist on always knowing what their partner is doing and who they are with; blame their partner for their own problems. If you notice any of these signs in your teen- talk about it! Let your teen know that the behavior you are seeing is not acceptable, but avoid criticizing their partner. This will help to keep communication lines open, and it may reduce your teen's sense of shame and increase their likelihood to reach out for help.

If your teen needs to end an abusive relationship, instruct them to avoid being alone with their partner and to always let someone know where they are. Remind teens to block their partner's access and change their passwords to social media outlets.

Visit these <u>additional resources</u> for more information on abuse prevention.

^{*}Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Physical Dating Violence Among High School Students—United States, 2003," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, May 19, 2006, Vol. 55, No. 19.

^{*}Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2011. MMWR 2012;61(4):1-161.