




Dating Violence

*What Parents Need
to Know*





Adolescence is when sexual feelings typically become strong. It is a time when dating starts and preteens and teenagers are experimenting with different types of relationships. These are the years when it is fun and exciting to meet someone new — and sad and difficult to break up. Abuse has no place in a healthy relationship.

Myths and Facts

MYTH “It only happens to kids from broken or violent families.”

FACT Dating violence can happen to anyone, from all cultures, income levels, and educational backgrounds. Dating violence is NOT limited to families with a history of violence. It can occur on a first date or in a long-lasting relationship.

MYTH “It can’t happen to my child!”

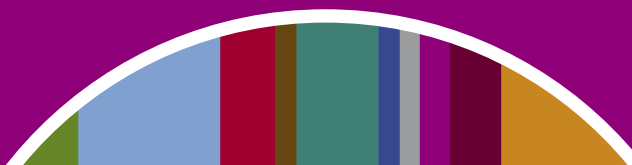
FACT Both boys and girls can be victims of dating violence. It can occur in any type of relationship — straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.



Warning Signs of Being a Victim of Violence

Some of the following signs are just part of being an adolescent. But, when these changes happen suddenly, or without an explanation, there may be cause for concern.

- ▶ Sudden changes in clothes or make-up
- ▶ Bruises, scratches, or other injuries
- ▶ Failing grades or dropping out of school activities
- ▶ Avoiding friends
- ▶ Difficulty making decisions
- ▶ Sudden changes in mood or personality; becoming anxious or depressed, acting out, or being secretive
- ▶ Changes in eating or sleeping habits, avoiding eye contact, having “crying jags” or becoming hysterical
- ▶ Constantly thinking about dating partner
- ▶ Using alcohol or drugs
- ▶ Pregnancy. Some teenagers believe that having a baby will help make things better; some girls are forced to have sex.



Warning Signs of a Partner Who May Become Violent

- ▶ Wants to get serious quickly — won't take "no" for an answer
- ▶ Is jealous and possessive — wants to pick the partner's friends and activities
- ▶ Is controlling and bossy — makes all the decisions, doesn't take others' opinions seriously, uses put-downs when alone or with friends, may pressure for sex.
- ▶ Uses guilt trips — "If you really loved me, you would ..."
- ▶ Blames the victim for what is wrong — "It's because of you that I get so mad."
- ▶ Frequently calls, instant messages, or uses other means to constantly track the partner
- ▶ Apologizes for violent behavior — "I promise I'll never do it again."



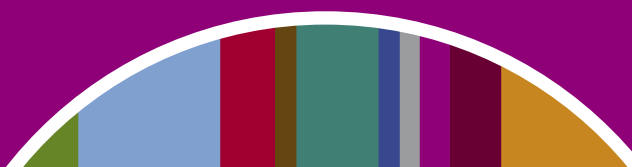
Why Teens Don't Tell Parents or Friends About the Violence

Those in an unhealthy relationship may be:

- ▶ Afraid their parents will make them break up
- ▶ Embarrassed and ashamed
- ▶ Afraid of getting hurt
- ▶ Convinced that it's their fault or that their parents will blame them or be disappointed
- ▶ Confused; they may think this is what a relationship is all about
- ▶ Afraid of losing privileges, like being able to stay out late or use the car

Teens may also:

- ▶ Have little or no experience with healthy dating relationships
- ▶ Lack self-esteem and "need" the relationship to feel loved, valued, or cared for
- ▶ Believe being involved with someone is the most important thing in his or her life
- ▶ Confuse jealousy with love
- ▶ Not realize they are being abused
- ▶ Not think friends and others would believe this is happening
- ▶ Have lost touch with friends
- ▶ Feel the abuser acts nice — sometimes
- ▶ Become so overly attached that it becomes too hard to be apart





Tips for Parents

TIP It's never too early to teach self-respect. No one has the right to tell your pre-teen or teenager who to see, what to do, or what to wear. No one has the right to hit or control anyone else.

TIP If you suspect that your child is already involved with an abusive partner, you can help in the following ways:

- Tell your pre-teen or teen you are there to help — not to judge.
- If your child does not want to talk with you, help find another trusted person with whom to talk.
- Focus on your child — do not put down the abusive partner. Point out how unhappy your pre-teen or teen seems to be while with this person.

TIP If your child tries to break up with an abusive partner, advise that the break be definitive and final. Support their decision and be ready to help.

TIP Ask that dating violence prevention and intervention programs are made available at your child's school.

TIP Take whatever safety measures are necessary:

- Have friends available so your child doesn't have to walk or drive alone.

- Be sure they carry a charged cell phone or have a way to communicate in an emergency.
- Consider changing class schedules or getting help from the guidance counselor, school principal, or the police if necessary.
- If your teen is older, know about date rape drugs and be sure your child knows about these as well.

TIP Give your pre-teen or teenager a chance to talk. Listen quietly to the whole story.

What You Can Say to Your Teen

"I care about what happens to you. I love you and I want to help."

"If you feel afraid, it may be abuse. Sometimes people behave in ways that are scary and make you feel threatened — even without using physical violence. Pay attention to your gut feelings."

"The abuse is not your fault. You are not to blame, no matter how guilty the person is trying to make you feel. Your partner should not be doing this to you."

"It is the abuser who has a problem, not you. It is not your responsibility to help this person change."

"It's important to talk about this. If you don't want to talk with me, let's find someone you trust and talk to them."

For additional copies:

**Massachusetts Medical Society
Public Health and Education
860 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451-1411**

www.massmed.org/violence

(800) 322-2303, x7373

dph@mms.org



**CAMPAIGN AGAINST
VIOLENCE**

**MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY
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This tip card is part of a series originated by Robert Sege, MD, PhD, Boston, MA, and developed with the Massachusetts Medical Society's Committee on Violence Intervention and Prevention.

Author: Carole A. Sousa

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