What is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month?

Your Love is Unique ... with Consent is a reminder that each relationship has its individual traits, and everyone deserves to have their boundaries respected!

It’s a national effort supported by activists, community leaders, and national and local organizations, to raise awareness about dating abuse among teens, promote programs that support young people, and encourage communities to prevent teen dating violence. The goal is to decrease the prevalence of dating abuse among young people.

TDVAM has always been driven by young people, and this year was no different. The activists in Let’s Be Real, Break the Cycle’s youth movement, wanted a theme that spoke to the importance of the differences in relationships, young love, and boundaries. Members expressed that, your first loves sets you up for the rest of your life, and it’s how you learn to define relationships.

Visit [www.breakthecycle.org/teenDVmonth](http://www.breakthecycle.org/teenDVmonth) for more information on TDVAM 2019.
Warning Sign Spotlight

Isolation

What it looks like:
Abusive partners use isolation as a way to cut off access to support systems in order to make the partner feel entirely dependent on them.
- "Us vs. the world"
- Belittle friends or family
- Threats
- Create physical barrier or distance from others
- Call or text constantly
- Show up to "check in"
- Controlling what the other partner does, including who they see, talk to, read, go, etc.
- Use jealousy to justify actions

What you can ask:
- What does your partner think of your friends? Do you all hang out together?
- What’s something that you get from your best friendship that you can’t get from your partner?
- I’ve noticed that you’ve been at your partner’s house a lot and I was hoping that we could get to know them better, just like you’ve gotten to know their parents. Do you think we could have dinner together?

The Problem

Dating abuse is a public health issue that impacts people from all ages, backgrounds, and identities.

Teen dating violence is defined as the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional abuse within a dating relationship. It can occur in person or electronically. It can also occur between a current or former dating partner.

Several different words are used to describe teen dating violence, including:
- relationship abuse
- intimate partner violence
- relationship violence
- dating abuse
- domestic abuse
- domestic violence

Among people who experience sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking, most experience that violence for the first time before the age of 25. For high school students, 1 in 3 experience physical or sexual violence or both from a dating partner. It is crucial that we speak to and understand the statistics surrounding abuse in young people’s relationships. These statistics show how prevalent dating abuse is in their lives.
Among female victims of intimate partner violence, 94% of those age 16-19 were victimized by a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend.  

Among male high school students who have experienced sexual and physical abuse by a dating partner, more than 1 in 4 have seriously contemplated suicide, and more than 1 in 4 have attempted suicide. 

Among female high school students who have experienced sexual and physical abuse by a dating partner, nearly half have seriously contemplated suicide, and more than 1 in 4 have attempted suicide.
Warning Sign

What it looks like:
It is common for partners to go through the ‘puppy love’ phase during the beginning of a relationship. However, it is important for each partner to set boundaries and discuss these with each other. Pushing for quick involvement among teens is the abusive partner pressuring the other to commit to the relationship, which frequently involves breaking down boundaries. The victim may be made to feel guilty for wanting to slow the pace or end the relationship.

Create an open environment
Offer the young people in your life plenty of opportunities to talk to you about relationships. Avoid criticizing them for having questions, even if they raise ideas that are disturbing to you. Be available to listen. For some, it can be difficult to open up to an adult, so think about what would make you more comfortable if you were in their shoes.

Start the talk
‘What do I say first?’ ‘Will this make sense?’ ‘I don’t want to offend my child or student.’ These are all common thoughts that we may have when starting a difficult conversation with a teen. When you feel ready, start the talk in the way that you think is best. Don’t get discouraged if it doesn’t go well the first time. Consistently open the door for conversation and most importantly, be patient!

Make sure location and timing are appropriate
Always make sure that your teen is comfortable with the time and place to have these difficult discussions. While we want to keep the lines of communication with them open, sometimes the perception that others may hear your discussion can prevent a youth from opening up and talking to you.
Having conversations about healthy relationships with an open mind, honesty, and kindness can model healthy ways to work through difficult conversations in the future.

**Give your undivided attention**

When you begin to talk, always focus your attention on the conversation. This lets teens know what they have to say is important and valued, and that you are available. If it’s a really bad time to talk, schedule another time, but first make sure that waiting is okay with them.

**Think of relevant examples**

When possible, use examples that you know teens will understand to illustrate your points. These examples can come from TV, from movies, songs, and other media, or from your own experiences with relationships. Keep your ideas clear and be sure that they relate directly back to your example.

**Check in often**

Frequent talks are a great way of communicating, reinforcing your support, and letting teens know that you are interested in their lives. This can also take the pressure off both of you because there will be other opportunities to ask important questions.

**Understand the question and answer honestly**

If you’re not sure what they are asking, it’s okay to say, “Help me understand.” Once you understand the question, answer honestly and assure them that you can come up with a solution together. Let them guide the conversation to the questions and ideas they would like to discuss.
For Parents

Knowing that your teen is in an unhealthy relationship can be both frustrating and frightening...

What you should know:

You can look for some early warning signs of abuse that can help you identify if your child is in an abusive relationship before it is too late.

Some of these signs include:

- Your child’s partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- You notice unexplained marks or bruises.
- Your child’s partner emails or texts excessively.
- You notice that your son or daughter is depressed or anxious.
- Your son or daughter stops participating in extracurricular activities or other interests.
- Your child stops spending time with other friends and family.
- Your child’s partner abuses other people or animals.
- Your child begins to dress differently.

What you can do:

- Tell your child you’re concerned for their safety
- Be supportive and understanding
- Believe them and take them seriously
- Help develop a safety plan
- Talk about the behaviors, not the person
- Avoid ultimatums
- Remember that ultimately your child must be the one who decides to leave the relationship

In a national on-line survey of parents with children 11-18 years old, reasons parents did not discuss dating violence with their children included they thought their children were too young to talk about it, they would not know what to say, and their children would learn about it through experience. 

Though 82% of parents feel confident that they could recognize the signs if their child was experiencing dating abuse 58% could not correctly identify all the warning signs of abuse.

81% percent of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don’t know if it’s an issue.
For Teachers, School Staff, and Coaches

As an educator, you are in a unique position to influence, motivate and lead children and youth.

As an educator, a mentor, and role model to your students, you play a vital role in shaping their attitudes and behaviors. You have the ability to help them gain an understanding of healthy relationships and learn to recognize the signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationship. By utilizing classroom discussion, special projects, and modeling appropriate behaviors through your own words and actions, you can have a tremendous impact on how your students grow to understand and appreciate safe, healthy and respectful relationships.

Not sure if one of your students or athletes is in trouble?

You might not see dramatic warning signs like black eyes and broken bones, so it may be difficult to know for sure if they are experiencing abuse in their relationship. However, if you know what to look for, you might be able to recognize an abusive relationship before it escalates. To start, listen to your instincts— you probably wouldn’t be worried without good reason in the first place.

Also, look for these red flags:

- Problems with school attendance
- Lack of interest in extracurricular activities
- Sudden request for a change in schedule
- Unexplained changes in behavior, grades or quality of schoolwork
- Noticeable change in weight, demeanor or physical appearance
- Isolation from friends
- Little social contact with anyone but their dating partner
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Making excuses or apologizing for their dating partner’s inappropriate behavior
- New disciplinary problems at school, such as bullying other students or acting out
- Name-calling or belittling from a dating partner
Blaming involves an abusive partner blaming others for their own problems or feelings. It may appear that someone else is always at fault or out to get the abuser. The abuser will use feelings to manipulate the victim who will frequently be blamed for almost anything.

- Phrases such as, "You're hurting me by not doing what I want," or "If you would have just listened to me, I wouldn't have to yell at you."
- Making light of the abuse or saying it didn't happen
- Shifting responsibility for abusive behavior
- Saying the other partner caused it

**What you can ask:**
- Asking if the teen's partner owned up to or took responsibility for an action or behavior
- What did your partner say after the action, behavior, or event? Were you able to share how you felt as well?

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**Break the Silence Tours**
Contact Jamie at CVIC if you are interested in attending a free, one-hour tour of CVIC, where you will see the Safer Tomorrows Road Map in action. Find out more about this innovative community-wide initiative to virtually end local violence in two generations.

**Future Tour Dates:**
- Thursday, March 14th
- Thursday, April 18th
- Thursday, May 23rd

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**School Presentations**
Every year CVIC staff visits rural Grand Forks County schools and Grand Forks Public Schools to talk about healthy relationships and break-ups. These presentations are designed for middle school and high school students. They include discussion among students as well as interactive activities.

If you are interested in scheduling a presentation for your class, contact Brittany or Chris at CVIC.
Resources

National Resources

- Break the Cycle
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline
  Call: 1-800-799-7233
- Loveisrespect
  Call: 1-866-331-9474
  Text: loveis to 22522
- Futures Without Violence

Fact Sheets

- The Respect Challenge: Know the Warning Signs for an Abusive Relationship
- The Respect Challenge: 10 Tips on Talking about Healthy Relationships with Teens
- The Respect Challenge: Conversation Starters for Digital Dating Abuse
- The Respect Challenge: Conversation Starters for Respectful Relationships
- Futures Without Violence: The Facts on Tweens, Teens, and Dating Violence
- Loveisrespect: Parent Toolkit
- Loveisrespect: Help Your Child
- A Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence

Local Resources

- Community Violence Intervention Center (CVIC)
  Call: 1-866-746-8900 or 701-746-0405
- Grand Forks Police Department
  Call: 701-787-8000
- CVIC at UND
  Call: 701-777-6550
- University Counseling Center at UND
  Call: 701-777-2127
- School counselors, principal, or other staff at your teen’s school
- School resource officers
- Grand Forks Public Health Department
  Call: 701-787-8100

Quizzes

- Are you modeling respect at home?
- How do you know if your teen is in an unhealthy relationship?