

Teen Relationships and Dating Abuse

Our teenage years are a time we begin to explore new relationships. Often times, these are relationships with a boyfriend or girlfriend. It's an exciting time, but also a vulnerable time. As we are learning how to be in a relationship, we are also learning about what's normal and not normal behavior in relationships. All relationships have their ups and downs. It's normal and even healthy for couples to disagree and get upset with each other at times. It's never normal though to be treated poorly in a relationship or to be physically or emotionally abused.

Unfortunately, relationships can sometimes turn abusive and violent. Teen dating abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Young women, ages 16 to 24 years, have the highest rates of relationship abuse. In the U.S. today, a teenage girl is physically battered by someone she is in a relationship with... **every 9 seconds. That means 9,600 teenage girls are battered each day.** One in five teens report having been hit, slapped or pushed by a partner they were in a relationship with. Finally, 50-80% of teens know others who are or were involved in abusive relationships.

Since this type of situation is a reality for so many, it is important to ask- **Are you a victim of relationship abuse or do you know someone who is?** Answering the following questions will help you recognize some of the signs.

Does your partner....

Make you feel bad about yourself...

Make you feel insecure...

Prefer you stay home while he/she goes out...

Cheat on you...

Tell you what to wear or not wear...

Have to be with you or know where you are at all times...

Want you to do something illegal...

Call you names or tell you you're fat or unattractive...

Belittle you in front of others...

Make you afraid of their temper...

Call or text you numerous times to know what you are doing or who you are with...

Hit, punch, kick, slap or push you...

Tell you it's your fault for their anger...

Threaten to tell others your secrets if you were to break up with them...

Make you feel guilty or threaten to hurt themselves if you were to break up with them...

Hide information from you...

Force you to choose between the relationship and your family or friends...

Get angry when you do something on your own...

Get jealous when you are around other people...

Force or pressure you to have sex...

Accuse you of flirting or having sex with others...

Pressure you into using alcohol or drugs...

Make you feel you can't be yourself with them...

Scare you by being around them...

If you've answered, "Yes" to any of these questions, you may be or are a victim of teen dating abuse. You may also recognize that someone you know is in an abusive relationship. Being in this type of relationship is not the fault of the victim. Nothing we do or say gives anyone the right to hurt us physically, emotionally or sexually. It is important to trust your instincts and not keep your concerns to yourself. **Get help immediately!** Talk to someone you trust- a friend, a parent, your friend's parent, a relative, a teacher or your doctor. You can also call 1-800-799-SAFE to speak with a counselor at the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Violent and abusive or controlling behavior tends to get worse over time. It's crucial to find support to change or end these types of relationships.

Every teen (and every woman!) deserves to be valued and treated with respect in her relationships. Remember this for yourself and for others! It's the first step to building happy, healthy and strong relationships.

A great website to check out is www.loveisrespect.org

This site reviews safety, what and who to look out for, offers advice and so much more. You can online chat, call or even text them with questions and for help.

You can also reach out for help by contacting SERV (Services Empowering Rights of Victims) through the Center for Family Services. Their 24 hour toll free hotline is 1-866-295-SERV (7378) OR 856-881-3335. The Center for Family Services website also has extensive info about more than just SERV; www.centerffs.org