



SIGNS OF ABUSE

Teens who are victims of abuse are more likely to develop low self-esteem, issues of depression and anxiety, and turn to drugs and alcohol for an escape. The best way to help teens who are victims of emotional abuse is to understand what the signs look like.

Signs of emotional abuse in teen dating relationships include:

- Teens withdrawn from normal activities or interests
- Random outbursts or mood swings
- Expressing immense fear of upsetting their partner
- Reluctance to engage in activities without their partner, for fear of retribution
- Rather low self-esteem and self-worth
- Drug and alcohol use
- Self-harming and/or suicidal behaviors.



CONSEQUENCES

Many teens are jumping into very intimate relationships while still learning about the compromise, patience, communication, and trust required to maintain a balanced relationship. Relationships are more likely to fail when the partners are young and immature. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a surplus of teens who experience teen dating violence in a romantic relationship. Each year, one in ten teenagers reports being the victim of teen dating violence.

DATING VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Teen dating violence can be prevented, especially when teens are empowered through family, friends, and others (including teachers, coaches, mentors, and youth group leaders) who exemplify the importance of a healthy relationship. It is important to create safe spaces, where abuse in a relationship is not tolerated. Send the message that abuse will not be accepted in any form. Do not be afraid to reach out to those you can confide in. Preventing future cases of abuse starts with addressing it in the first place.



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TEEN DATING VIOLENCE



LOVE SHOULDN'T HURT



DATING CHALLENGES

While dating can be a way for the youth to learn vital relationship skills such as communication, trust, honesty and compromise, it can also bring forth many challenges. Teen dating violence is the sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse within an adolescent dating relationship.

A youthful relationship consisting of the following qualities may be dangerous:

- **Dating at an early age.** More susceptible than older adolescents to peer pressure, it is common for younger adolescents to be easily influenced by their peers. Peers are a key component in influencing adolescent decisions about risky behaviors like having sex.
- **Dating an older partner.** Before an adolescent is developmentally or emotionally ready, some older partners may push the younger partner to have sex, pressuring the younger one into undergoing the act. This age difference can carry legal consequences when brought to authorities. An adolescent has many stages of learning, for if one isn't fully educated on the repercussions of having sex, there is a higher risk of pregnancy or contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease.
- **Having unrealistic expectations.** There is often a false sense of reality in youth relationships. Their expectations may force progress, causing an unhealthy connection. Often times, the more relationships advance differently than expected, the more adolescents experience poor mental health and overall misperception of their worth.

WHAT IS DATING ABUSE?

Dating abuse (commonly known as dating violence,) is a pattern of derogatory behavior used to exert control over a dating partner.

While every relationship has differing qualities, the over arching theme in an abusive relationship stems from the common issues of power and control. Using violent actions and words in a relationship, an abusive partner uses these tactics to get the upper hand.

Teen dating violence is more common than you may believe. Below are warning signs and examples that can help you understand if your relationship is harmful.

- **Physical Abuse:** Intentional force with the intent to cause injury or fear. Examples include: shoving, hitting, biting, choking, or causing harm with a weapon.

Julia wants to say, "Hi" to Chris, but Mike, her boyfriend, won't let her. When Julia laughs off the jealousy, Mike, whose hand she is holding, squeezes her hand – hard and says, "You should listen when I tell you something."

- **Verbal or Emotional Abuse:** These are non-physical behaviors such as micromanaging, constant monitoring, threats, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking.

Every time Mila sees her boyfriend TJ, she makes hurtful comments about his weight and eating habits like, "Are you sure you want to eat that?" or "Why don't you stop being a lazy slob and exercise? You're lucky to have someone as hot as me."

- **Sexual Abuse:** These are actions that impact the ability for one to control their sexual circumstances. This forced form of sexual activity includes rape, coercion or restricting access to birth control.

Jen is concerned about getting pregnant so she starts taking birth control. Her boyfriend Jerry says she doesn't need her pills and that if she loves him, she would just trust him. He makes a habit of flushing her birth control down the toilet.



- **Digital Abuse:** Use of social media networking to bully, harass or threaten a current or ex-dating partner. Demanding passwords, secretly checking cell phones, cyber bullying, non-consensual sexting, excessive or threatening texts or stalking on social media are all forms of digital abuse.

After Becca and Maddy broke up, Becca isn't taking it too well. She starts publicly posting the private pictures Maddy sent to her phone because she wants Maddy to hurt as much as she does.

- **Stalking:** Unknowingly being analyzed, watched, followed, monitored or harassed. Stalking can occur online or in person.

Meg isn't interested in an exclusive "dating" relationship and suggests to Dominic that they should take a break. Dominic begins following Meg between classes, repeatedly insisting that they should be together. After being told to back off, Dominic keeps following Meg, and begins tracking Meg's online check-ins.

- **Financial Abuse:** Demanding control over a partner through their finances. This includes taking or withholding money from a partner, prohibiting a partner from earning, or spending their money to show dominance over them.

Elle and Jon share custody over their infant son. Jon regularly takes Elle's credit card without her permission and charges items until her card is maxed out. When confronted, he says, "Don't you want me to be happy so I can be a good dad to our son?"

Any young person can experience dating abuse or unhealthy relationship behaviors, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic standing, ethnicity, religion or culture. It does not discriminate and can happen to anyone in any relationship, whether it's one that is casual or serious.

