

Understanding Teen Dating Violence

Fact Sheet

2010

Dating violence is a type of intimate partner violence. It occurs between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual.

- **Physical**—this occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, shoved, or kicked.
- **Emotional**—this means threatening a partner or harming his or her sense of self-worth. Examples include name calling, shaming, bullying, embarrassing on purpose, or keeping him/her away from friends and family.
- **Sexual**—this is forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent.

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Dating violence often starts with teasing and name calling. These behaviors are often thought to be a “normal” part of a relationship. But these behaviors can lead to more serious violence like physical assault and rape.

How does dating violence affect health?

Dating violence can have a negative effect on health throughout life. Teens who are victims are more likely to be depressed and do poorly in school. They may engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using drugs and alcohol, and are more likely to have eating disorders. Some teens even think about or attempt suicide. Teens who are victims in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.

How can we prevent dating violence?

The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are vital. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.

Prevention programs change the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating violence. One example is Safe Dates, a school-based program that is designed to change social norms and improve problem solving skills.

Who is at risk for dating violence?

Studies show that people who harm their dating partners are more depressed and are more aggressive than peers. Other factors that increase risk for harming a dating partner include:

- Trauma symptoms
- Alcohol use
- Having a friend involved in dating violence
- Having problem behaviors in other areas
- Belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Exposure to harsh parenting
- Exposure to inconsistent discipline
- Lack of parental

Why is dating violence a public health problem?

Dating violence is a serious problem in the United States. Many teens do not report it because they are afraid to tell friends and family.

- 72% of 8th and 9th graders reportedly “date”.
- 1 in 4 adolescents report verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner each year .
- About 10% of students nationwide report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.

Where can I learn more?

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

For more information, please contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

1-800-CDC-INFO • www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

