



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

# TEEN DATING ABUSE

*Brief Guide: What Service Providers &  
Educators need to know*

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# WHAT IS TEEN DATING ABUSE?

A pattern of controlling, abusive, or aggressive behavior towards a current or former dating partner, either in person or using social media or texting. Abuse does not always have to be physical. There is also emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and sexual abuse.

**1** IN **3**

**teens experience some form of dating abuse. Teens experiencing online abuse are also likely to be experiencing offline abuse.**



# TALK ABOUT IT

Only 33% of teens tell someone about dating abuse (most tell a friend)

81% of parents believe teen dating abuse is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue

Service providers & educators play an important role as adult allies



# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## Before a conversation goes too far...

Before teens disclose abuse, always remember to inform them that you are a mandated reporter. Let them know what you are allowed to keep confidential and what you are required to report. Empower teens to make an informed choice about disclosure. Offer alternative confidential services (like national hotlines, see pg. 12 of this guide).

## What is unique about *teen* dating abuse?

It is developmentally normal for teens to distrust adults and resist counseling or adults' advice. Their reputation among their peers is likely to be extremely important, and this makes them vulnerable to manipulation from a partner. Teen abuse differs from adult domestic violence because teens are constantly connected online, and being in school each day often requires them to be in contact with their abusive partner in places like the school bus, classroom, or lunchroom. Their access to money and transportation may be limited. These things need to be considered when trying to keep teens safe.



# WHICH TEENS ARE MORE AT RISK?

Teen dating abuse is a pattern of behavior, not something that happens once.

Often abuse will get worse over time. **Abuse is never the victim's fault**, and there is nothing the victim can do to make their partner stop being abusive. Abuse happens to people of all genders and identities. Girls, people of color, and LGBTQ teens are more likely to experience abuse because abuse is about power. Those who are given more power in society can use abuse to try and keep their power. Even when teens are part of a group (for example, a LGBTQ youth), we must be aware that **every teen is different**. We all have many identities (age, race/ethnicity, class, education level) and experiences (language ability, financial stress, strained family relationships).

These identities and experiences influence how a teen might respond to, experience, or cause harm to a dating partner. Ask questions before making assumptions, and remember that the teen is the expert of their own experience- even if we do not understand or relate to their feelings or decisions.





# RED FLAGS THAT MAY SIGNAL TEEN DATING ABUSE

- Inconsistent school attendance (especially if a student usually has regular attendance)
- New disciplinary problems such as bullying or acting out
- Sudden request to change class schedule or lunch hour
- Change in personality and/or appearance
- Unexplained changes in behavior and grades



- Unexplained injuries, or explanations that do not make sense
- Constant worry about making their partner angry
- Casually mentioning their partner's violent behavior or temper, but may laugh it off as a joke





# HOW TO BE AN ADULT ALLY FOR A TEEN EXPERIENCING ABUSE

Start a conversation with a teen who might be experiencing abuse...

...and be prepared that their first response might be to shut down. Begin the conversation with your role as a mandated reporter. Teens need to be ready to talk, and it might not happen the first time. On average, it takes a person leaving an abusive partner **seven times** before they leave a relationship for good. So it is not surprising if a teen goes back to their partner after abuse.



# SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

## DO...

...Believe teens

- Start a conversation
- Listen
- Be supportive
- Express concern for their safety
- Keep it low key
- Tell them you're here to talk anytime
- Focus on how the teen is feeling
- Encourage them to seek out support
- Keep their privacy and confidentiality
- Support any choice they want to make

## DO NOT...

...Question them

- Wait for them to come to you
- Try to fix the problem
- Make it about you and your life
- Tell them what they should do
- Pressure a teen to talk
- Give an ultimatum
- Focus on the abuse
- Try and solve the issue
- Go and talk to their partner
- Judge them for their choices

## Phrases to say...

..."I am sorry this is happening to you"  
"Here are the resources when you are ready"  
"I am worried about you"  
"This isn't your fault"

## Phrases not to say...

..."You should..."  
"You shouldn't..."  
"You have to..."  
"Maybe if you...this wouldn't happen."



# QUESTIONS

to assess severity of abuse  
without judgement:

1. "Can you tell me about your relationship?"
2. "Has anything happened recently that you are concerned about?"
3. "Can you tell me more about what communication looks like in your relationship?"
4. "What makes you feel like you can't talk to your partner about this behavior?"
5. "Is this the first time this has happened?"
6. "Is this how your partner usually responds in an argument?"
7. "Do you ever feel afraid?"





# CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

for teens experiencing abuse

## A SAFETY PLAN DOES NOT PREVENT ABUSE

A safety plan is a practical plan to lower the risk of harm. A safety plan does not prevent abuse, because a teen cannot control their partners' behavior and abuse is not their fault. However, they can take steps to keep themselves as safe as possible.

This website walks you through how to create a

**Teen Safety Plan:** <https://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Teen-Safety-Plan.pdf>.





# RESOURCES

National Resource with  
Confidential Chat and  
Phone Line options:

Love is Respect,

<https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

## Arizona Local Resources:

- A New Leaf (Mesa, AZ): If you are in need of housing:  
<https://www.turnanewleaf.org/>
- Arizona Child and Adolescent Survivor Initiative (Northern AZ): <https://nau.edu/family-violence-institute/welcome-acasi/>
- BLOOM365 (Maricopa County, AZ),  
<https://www.bloom365.org/>
- Chicanos Por La Causa (CPLC) Advocate Program (Phoenix, AZ), <https://www.cplc.org/hhs/behavioral-health.php>
- Kaity's Way (Maricopa County, AZ), <https://kaitysway.org/>
- One n ten for LGBTQ youth-focused services based in Phoenix with programs, events, and satellite centers throughout Arizona, <https://onenten.org/>
- 2-1-1 Arizona for a comprehensive list of services, <https://211arizona.org/>
- Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV) for a list of national and statewide