Teen Dating Violence

According to recent statistics, it is likely that you or someone you know have experienced violence in a dating relationship. Mild teasing and "making fun" is considered harmless. Many teens do not report abuse and/or violence. This is because they are afraid to tell family and friends. They also may be afraid of retaliation from the abuse. Dating violence can take many forms, including psychological and emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. It can occur in the context of casual dating or serious long-term relationships.

VERBAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

If a boyfriend or girlfriend humiliates, insults, or swears at you, you are experiencing psychological and emotional abuse. Other examples include:

Verbal Abuse:

- Verbal Threats.
- Bullying.
- Insults.
- Demeaning or belittling comments.

Emotional and Psychological Abuse:

- Attempting to control a boyfriend or girlfriend's activities.
- Trying to destroy his or her self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Isolating the person from other friends and family.
- Public embarrassment.
- Threats of violence are also abusive and should always be taken seriously.

Physical Abuse:

- Physical abuse includes such things as:
  - Hitting.
  - Kicking.
  - Shoving.
  - Throwing things at the victim.
  - Slapping.
  - Biting.
  - Pushing.
  - Arm twisting.
  - Bending back fingers.
  - Punching.
  - Hair-pulling.
  - Slamming against a wall
  - Use of a weapon against the victim.

- Both teenage boys and teenage girls report being victims of physical violence in relationships. Teenage boys and teenage girls use physical force for different reasons and with different results. While both tend to report acting violently because they were angry, teenage boys are much more likely to use force in order to control their girlfriends. Girls more often act violently in self-defense.
- Teenage girls suffer more from relationship violence, emotionally and physically. They are much more likely than teenage boys to have serious injuries and to report being terrified. Male victims seldom seem to fear violence by their dates or girlfriends, often saying that the attacks did not hurt and that they found the violence amusing.

SEXUAL ABUSE AND ASSAULT (OR RAPE)

- The term sexual abuse refers to forced or unwanted sexual activity or rape. It is also considered sexual abuse to coerce or pressure someone to engage in sexual activity or try to engage in sexual activity with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This includes:
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- Teenage girls in heterosexual relationships are much more likely than teenage boys to suffer from sexual abuse.

Types of Rape:

- Date rape is sexual intercourse within a relationship, but without consent.
- Acquaintance Rape: Involves individuals who know each other. This includes relatives, neighbors, or friends.

HOW FREQUENTLY DOES DATING VIOLENCE OCCUR?

- It is difficult to say because different studies and surveys ask about it in different ways and get very different results. Some studies only ask about physical abuse. Others include questions about psychological and emotional abuse and sexual violence.
- One recent national survey found that 1 in 11 high-school students said they had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the past year. 1 in 11 students also reported that they had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to.
- Far greater numbers of teens (as high as 96%) report emotional and psychological abuse in their dating relationships.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Know the early warning signs. You could be in a dating situation or relationship that has the potential to become violent if your boyfriend or girlfriend:

- Pressures you to have sex.
- Becomes extremely jealous and possessive, and thinks these destructive displays of emotion are signs of love.
- Tries to control you and to forcefully make all decisions.
- Tries to keep you from spending time with close friends or family.
- Verbally and emotionally abuses you by:
  - Yelling at you.
  - Spreading rumors about you.
  - Manipulating you.
  - Swearing at you.
  - Trying to make you feel guilty.
- Drinks too much or uses drugs and then later blames the alcohol and drugs for his/her behavior.
- Threatens physical violence.
- Has abused a previous boyfriend or girlfriend or accepts and defends the use of violence by others.

Remember:You have every right to say no. No boyfriend or girlfriend has the right to tell you what you can do, what you should wear, or what kind of friends you should have. If you are in a dating relationship that in any way feels uncomfortable or even frightening, trust your feelings and get out of it. It could become, or may already be, abusive.

Be on the lookout for friends that may be in violent dating situations or relationships.

- Do any of your friends' relationships show the warning signs listed above? Do your friends show signs that they have been physically abused or injured in some way?
- Friends in abusive relationships may also:
  - Change their style of clothing or makeup.
  - Seem to lose self-confidence and begin to have difficulty making decisions.
  - Stop spending time with you and other friends.
  - Begin to receive failing grades or quit school activities.
  - Turn to using alcohol or drugs.

If you suspect a friend is in a violent relationship, you might try to find out for sure by saying something like, "You do not seem as happy as usual" or asking in general terms, "Is there anything you want to talk about?" This non-confrontational and indirect approach may prompt your friend to reveal what is wrong. Listen without judging, condemning, or giving unwanted advice. If a friend wants help, suggest that he or she take the steps

listed above in order to be safe and find help.
If you believe your friend is in serious danger, immediately talk with an adult you trust about your friend's situation. Do not try to "rescue" your friend. Do not try to handle the situation on your own.

If you are in a violent, or potentially violent, relationship, take the following steps:

- Make a safety plan and get help. Talk with someone you trust (a teacher, guidance counselor, doctor, friend, or parent.). If you are in danger:
  - Contact your local police.
  - You also can contact your local domestic violence center. In the United States, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE.
- Realize that the violence will not stop or go away. You cannot change your boyfriend or girlfriend's behavior by changing your behavior. You are not in any way responsible for the abuse. The best strategy is to end an abusive relationship. Your boyfriend or girlfriend may need counseling or other outside help to change. You may need support so that you can begin to heal.

PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

The goal is to stop abuse and/or 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 address the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating abuse. Examples are:
  - One example is Safe Dates. this is a school-based program designed to change gender norms and improve problems solving skills.
  - Community based programs such as parenting support and mentoring programs also can help to prevent violence.

Educate other teens about dating violence.

- Become a peer counselor.
- Encourage your church or school to develop programs to educate teens about dating violence.
- Work to ensure that there are resources for teens who are being abused in your community.

This information is courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Federal partners working on youth violence. For more information contact the sites listed below.

HELPFUL LINKS

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center
http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens.asp

Violence Against Women Office Web site - U.S. Department of Justice
http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/teen_dating_violence.htm

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