

TEEN Turning Points



Healthy Dating Relationships

When teens begin dating, it's a chance to explore them-selves and to develop maturity in relationships.

However, if teens become involved in unhealthy relationships, they can be harmed emotionally and physically. Their emotional development may be affected, and they may not learn to build emotionally healthy relationships.

How to build healthy relationships

Building healthy relationships can prevent dating violence. The following tips may help.

Communicate clearly. Make clear to your partner how you expect to be treated and that you will not tolerate abuse.

Avoid dangerous situations. Avoid places where you'll be alone until you get to know your partner. Double-date or go to public places.

Be in control. Try not to be helpless or "in debt" to a dating partner. Have your own way to get home. Pay your own way. Don't use alcohol or drugs, which can hamper your ability to think clearly and act quickly in a dangerous situation.

Trust your instincts. If you're concerned about someone you're dating or want to date, trust your feelings. Get to know the person before you go out. Talk on the phone; write notes to each other; meet in groups. If the person is impatient or refuses to discuss your concerns, that's a sign to stop the relationship.

Recognize unhealthy relationships

Be selective and think twice about going out with someone who:

- often puts men or women down with such comments as, "Girls are so stupid ..."
- uses alcohol or other drugs.
- enjoys pornography.
- wants to be in control of where you go, what you do.
- shows angry, aggressive outbursts or extreme jealousy.
- uses physical force (pushing or grabbing).
- drives recklessly - especially with you in the car.

If you're already dating someone who has these traits, discuss your concerns with your partner. It's never too late to make your feelings clear. If this leads to more abuse, get help.

If you are a victim or an abuser, seek counseling right away. Whether it's emotional or physical abuse, find safety. Don't let small problems turn into larger ones.

Admit that violence is a problem. Realize that violence is not an acceptable way to solve problems. And seek help to find few

guidelines to help determine whether you're in a nurturing, healthy relationship or in an addictive, unhealthy relationship.

Nurturing love:

- You wish for the other person to grow and be happy.
- You want him or her to be everything he or she is capable of being.
- You encourage him or her to have friends and to enjoy activities apart from you as well as with you.
- You support each other to do well in school and at work.
- You feel safe to express your feelings.
- You can argue without fear of his or her temper.
- You can be yourself.
- You work out your differences through talking and negotiating, not through violence or emotional abuse.

Addictive love:

- You believe you can't live without him or her.
- You have fewer and fewer happy times together and more and more time spent on apologies, promises, anger, guilt and fear.
- You feel worse about yourself.
- You feel you have less and less self-control.
- You don't make decisions or plans without him or her, and you wait to find out what he or she is going to do.
- You enjoy time away from him or her less and less, as if you are killing time until you can be together again.
- You keep breaking your promises to yourself to be less desperate ("I won't call him," "I won't make her tell me everything she did since I last saw her.")
- You feel you can never get enough of her or him.
- You try more and more to control her or him.

Where to get help

If you have been physically harmed, get medical attention. If you fear you'll be harmed, seek safe shelter and call the police.

Talk to a friend, member of the clergy, or call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. You may also call the Flint YWCA domestic violence shelter at (810) 238-SAFE. ©