

TEEN Turning Points



Safe Dating

Dating violence can take many forms and can have long-term consequences. Victims of abuse can suffer emotional and physical problems, and sometimes the results are fatal. It's important to learn about relationships early to prevent problems later and to learn to build emotionally healthy relationships.

What is dating violence?

Dating violence – the abuse of one partner in a dating relationship by the other partner – is abusive behavior, including harmful words or actions. Abuse is an act by one partner designed to hurt or control the other.

While males and females are capable of abusing each other, women are far more likely than men to be victims of dating violence. Dating violence occurs not only between adults but also between teens.

Forms of dating violence

In an unhealthy relationship, partners can hurt one another in a number of ways.

Emotional abuse harms a person's self-esteem or causes shame. Examples are: lying and breaking promises, withholding affection, showing extreme jealousy that keeps a partner away from friends or interests, putting down a person, threatening a person's safety, and controlling a person's every move.

Physical abuse causes physical pain or injury. Examples are punching, kicking or slapping; shaking, punching or grabbing hard enough to cause discomfort; attacking with a weapon; or any physical act that is unwanted or hurtful – even if it's tickling or hugging. Emotional harm also results, as in lowered self-esteem, shame and confusion.

Sexual abuse is any unwanted sexual advance or contact, such as unwelcome sexual comments, kissing or intercourse. Forced sexual intercourse between two people who know each other is called "date rape". Such abuse also causes emotional problems, as in fear, lowered self-esteem, shame, confusion, rage and a feeling of vulnerability.

Family patterns

Sometimes, young adults find themselves in violent dating situations if they have witnessed or experienced violence at home. Since children model their behavior on the behavior of the adults around them, they may think that hitting or being hit is normal – if that's what they have seen while growing up.

Boys, particularly, are at risk if their fathers are violent. Research shows they may model themselves after their fathers and become violent also – possibly at an early age – or they may exhibit emotional or behavioral problems. For example,

when they begin dating, they start the cycle by seizing power and control in the relationship and act violently with their girlfriends, in effect, behaving as their fathers behave.

Girls who witness violence may form unhealthy male female relationships similar to the violent relationship between their own parent and his or her partner.

A healthy parental bond is necessary to emotional growth. Children without a healthy emotional bond may lose self-esteem and feel as if they have no control over their lives. They may learn not to trust the opposite sex, adults or anyone.

Unless adults and teen-agers take steps now to prevent future violence, the pattern may repeat itself in the next generations. Abusers and victims can benefit from counseling.

After the incident

After dating violence occurs, abusers may feel remorse. In some cases, they may try to make up for treatment – only to abuse again later. A cycle of abuse and apology develops. In other cases, abuse is continuous.

Victims of dating violence can suffer broken bones or bruised self-esteem or even permanent injury or death. If dating violence occurs, a young person may miss out on the emotional growth and learning that takes place in healthy relationships.

If you need 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 ways to communicate feelings resolve conflict and express anger without resorting to violence.
- If you have been physically harmed, get medical attention, and call police. If you fear you'll be harmed, seek safe shelter and call police.
- Get counseling, even if the abuse happened long ago. Getting emotional help through counseling is essential to understanding how and why the violence occurred – and how to avoid it in the future.
- Talk to a friend, member of the clergy, or call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available. You may also call Flint YWCA domestic violence shelter at (810) 238-SAFE (810-238-7233). ©