

THE DATING SCENE!

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When our teens start to date there are a lot of emotions going on in parents and in our teens. It can be a happy time or a terrifying time.

Teenage relationships can be very intense. Teens have less experience and perspective. A first love can be the most important thing in the world.

Dating is a time when teens learn about themselves and other people. Dating is supposed to be a positive experience.

Teens want independence from parents, they want acceptance from peers. Teens are insecure about their own identities. They are prone to self doubt. Teens are also very vulnerable. Teenagers are inexperienced with dating. They aren't sure what is appropriate behavior from the person they are dating. Dating teenagers are not familiar with the difference between love & commitment versus jealousy and possessiveness; negotiation of differences versus intimidation & control; traditional gender roles versus individual qualities; legitimate expression of anger versus abuse; nor be able to clearly communicate limits on behavior that's not O.K. They have trouble equalizing the relationship so that both people have equal say in what is happening.

Teens are especially vulnerable to dating violence, because of their lack of experience and their immaturity. Teens are exposed to so much violence in the media on T.V., in the movies and from people around them. It is hard to not think violence is O.K. Teens are still gaining their individuality and peer acceptance. Teens are striving for independence, but yet are looking for approval and acceptance. Teen years are very difficult times, teens are not steady on their own feet. Dating violence in the teenage years is a very scary and confusing situation.

Dating violence is when physical, emotional and/or sexual force is used by another person to control and dominate the other. Violence occurs in more than ¼ of teen relationships.

Girls that are emotionally, physically or sexually violated are confused by what & why this is happening. There are a wide variety of feelings such as anger, sadness, depression, hate, anxiety and fear just to mention a few. Being involved in a violent dating relationship is complicated for the individual involved in that relationship. Equally complicated is getting out. There are so many factors that keep that individual "hooked" into that relationship. It is difficult to understand why someone would stay in a relationship such as this.

Individuals that are abused in a dating relationship are humiliated and ashamed. Being violated by someone who supposedly cares about you can quite easily make you feel at fault. It puts you into denial, "there is nothing wrong with this relationship."

The abused individual may feel they are causing the destructive behavior. The boyfriend is incredibly kind and sweet to everyone but his girlfriend. The girlfriend starts to wonder if she is doing something wrong. The assumption that " if I do what he says and stop disagreeing then he won't get so mad at me and call me names."

An abusive boyfriend might tell his girlfriend, "I will change, but I need your help." This commitment to helping the boyfriend change has now unknowingly committed the girlfriend to an abusive relationship. No one can change another person. The person has to want to change. An abuser has to seek help for their abusive behavior. Abuse is not a couples issue, it is an individual issue. When the individual acknowledges their abusive behavior, and seeks help for their abusive behavior, then they can work on their relationship with a partner. Love & commitment will not solve the abusive behavior.

Abusive relationships only get worse. The abusive episodes become more frequent & escalate in intensity. If there is abuse in a relationship, love will be replaced by fear. A relationship should be based on mutual respect, trust and an equal sharing of decisions.

Abuse during dating is a predictor of abuse in marriage. People die in violent dating relationships.

There are different forms of abuse in a relationship. Violating personal boundaries, such as reading their mail, going thru their purse, is abusive. Threats and manipulations are controlling behaviors and these are abusive.

Exerting male privilege, such as he is the boss, and you need to ask his permission and approval of what you do. The partner limits independence and attempts to isolate their partner from friends and activities. Another example of controlling behavior, is when the partner shows up places they were not invited. Equally harmful is when the partner makes degrading or humiliating comments.

Dating violence is an intentional sexual, physical, psychological attack by one person or another in a dating relationship. Sexual controls are any unwanted sexual touch, threats of violence if you don't have sex, not acknowledging that NO means NO, and forcing sex on an individual when they refuse. Physical controls include shoving, slapping, choking, punching, kicking, biting, burning, hair pulling and using a weapon or even threatening someone with a weapon. Physical intimidation and breaking personal things, are examples of physical abuse. Physical abuse is used to assert control, psychological controls refers to emotional/verbal abuse. They vary in intensity and consequences. Emotional abuse includes insults, swearing at your partner, belittling, threatening or terrorizing your partner, isolating from friends and activities, as well as displaying extreme jealousy and possessiveness of the other person. Emotional abuse is the partners way to gain control of the other persons behavior, by undermining the persons self confidence and limiting the partners ability to act independently. Name calling hurts, it lowers self esteem and chips away at self worth. In many cases name calling is the most damaging aspect of an abusive relationship. Then when words no longer achieve the affected results of control, the violence escalates to physical.

Some facts regarding dating violence:

25%-40% of teens have been assaulted by their date.

80% of assaults include pushing, shoving, slapping and grabbing.

60% of all rapes reported are committed by acquaintances and majority of victims are between 16-24 years old.

40% of teenage girls 14-17 know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by boyfriends.

30% of females 15-19 that die each year are killed by husbands or boyfriends.

60% of children that grow-up in abusive homes will be violent themselves.

20% of parents initiate conversations with their teens regarding sex. (Teens make better decisions when they are well informed.)

Some boys act in abusive ways because they think they are "supposed to" as a sign of caring. Others are abusive because they are bullies. Bullies enjoy pushing other people around because it makes them feel powerful. 1 out of 4 teens will be in an abusive relationship. There are warning signs that red flag a relationship as an abusive controlling relationship. Be aware when your wishes are ignored. Be aware of attempts to make you feel guilty. Be aware when your personal boundaries are disregarded. Be aware when he playfully wrestles with you and you don't want to & he hurts you. Be aware when your with your partner and your partner gets hostile. Be aware when your partner makes a scene if you express an opposite opinion, humiliates you in public or embarrasses you, or if you are the butt of a humiliating joke, and your partner doesn't take others opinions seriously.

Jealousy is the most common reason for assault in a relationship. Be careful of a partner that continually accuses their partner of flirting or having an affair and is suspicious of everyone he sees his partner with, this is possessive & controlling.

Possessiveness and controlling behavior are not signs of caring or affection. Jealousy is not a sign of love. Teenagers often confuse jealousy & possessiveness with love and is seen as romantic.

Be careful of the partner that blames you for their problems. Be aware of those partners that try & control your behavior and tell you how to dress. Be careful of the person that needs to know where you are at all times and wants to be with you every moment. Be careful of the person that gets intense & involved in a relationship to quickly. Be careful of those that anger quickly and try to make you responsible for their anger. Be careful of someone who has unpredictable mood swings, has a Jekyll & Hyde personality, has a history of past abusive relationships.

Dating Violence is often part of a continuing pattern of behavior. If your partner was abusive in earlier relationships then the risk is very high that he will be abusive in this relationship. If there is domestic violence in your partners home or your partner has been abused, there is a red flag that abuse may be perpetuated. Apologizing for violent behavior doesn't excuse it or make it go away. Making excuses or covering up your partners behavior is a red flag for an unhealthy relationship.

Watch how your partner relates to animals & children, this will be a good predictor of what type of person they are.

If your partner makes you afraid, you need to end your relationship. If your partner enjoys guns and likes to watch violence, uses & abuses alcohol or drugs, you need to end the relationship. Be careful of the partner that believes in definitive male/female roles. (Men are strong, Women are passive.)

Adolescents unfortunately hope that the relationship will get better, but once violence has begun, it usually progressively gets worse. The added social pressure to stick it out adds to the difficulty of leaving a bad

relationship. Sadly enough there is also the extra guilt that the abusive partner puts in "I'll kill myself if you leave me", "I can't live without you", "I promise I'll never hit you again", just don't leave me". Unfortunately for some teens, it is better to have a bad girl/boyfriend than not to have a girl/boy friend at all.

EFFECTS OF DATING ABUSE:

What are the effects of dating violence on teens?

- Depression/suicidal
- Abuses substances (alcohol & drugs)
- Disconnected from others, give up social and/or school activities
- Feels poorly about self
- Changes dressing style from stylish to conservative
- Failing grades
- Truancy from school
- Is indecisive
- Mood/personality changes
- Emotional outbursts
- Isolates self
- Avoids eye contact
- Becomes secretive
- Lacks emotion, has no affect

Teens that have been in violent dating situations may express:

- Low self esteem
- Lack of self worth
- Accept abuse as their fault
- Act unpredictably
- Risky behaviors – may become pregnant
- Become anorexic and/or bulimic
- Becomes self mutilating
- Shows signs of physical injury
- Needs constant validation & reassurance

Safety plan for teens as they begin the big "D".

Dating is fun, there are guidelines to follow to ensure safety and to be alert to possible dating violence. Trust in yourself, listen to your inner voice regarding a relationship. Double date the first few times you go out with a new person. Before leaving on a date, know exact plans make sure a parent or friend knows these plans and what time to expect you home. Let your date know that you are expected to call and what time your expected to call or be home. Always have money to pay your own way or to get home. Introduce your date to your parents. Don't use alcohol or drugs, they compromise your clear thought process. If you leave a party with someone, make sure a friend knows and that that friend calls to make sure you got home.

Assert yourself when necessary. Trust your instincts, if your uncomfortable, remove yourself. If abuse happens, talk to someone. If your date or partner becomes abusive, don't be alone with them & don't isolate from friends. If you find yourself in an abusive relationship, BREAK-UP! Seek the help of parents or other trusted adults. There are measures to protect yourself from abusive relations.

TIPS FOR PARENTS: Help teens understand they do not have to accept violence. Listen to your teen, establish open communication. Let your teen know you are there to help – not judge. Focus on your teen, put downs & berating the abusive partner is not helpful. Let your teen know that you see that they are unhappy in this relationship and you want to be supportive and help. If your teen decides to break off the relationship, advise it be definite and final. Help your teen take whatever safety steps are necessary. Encourage community education to teach kids to say no to inappropriate, unwelcome behavior. Be a role model. Model respectful non-violent action and communication.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?

It is compromise and satisfying resolution to conflict. Each person allows their partner to feel comfortable and safe. Couples value each other's opinion and listen to each other. A healthy relationship provides emotional support and consideration to each other. Each person is supportive of the others goals. Each person in a healthy relationship respects the others rights and the freedom to pursue their friends and activities. A healthy relationship is honest and each person is accountable for their actions. Individuality is respected & supported. Decisions are not gender driven and work is divided equal. A healthy relationship does not include rude talk, meanness, disrespect, telling people what to do or exhibiting jealousy & possessiveness.