



Dating Violence

Dating violence may involve various forms of abuse, including psychological and emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or a combination of these. It can occur in the context of casual dating or long-term relationships and is often used in an attempt to gain control and power over a partner. Dating violence may begin with insults and demeaning remarks and can escalate to pushing, shoving, and/or severe physical battering and rape. As a major source of violence for many young people, it is important to be able to identify the warning signs and effects of abuse among dating couples.

Warning Signs of an Abusive Dating Relationship

Some of the warning signs of being in an abusive dating situation include: quick involvement in the relationship, any physical harm, a history of abusing partners, trying to control different aspects of your life (including how you dress, who you socialize with, what you say, etc.), humiliating you, acting jealous and possessive but telling you that s/he loves you, threatening to harm you in any way at any time, making you feel that you are to blame for his/her actions, demanding to know where you are at all times, pressuring or forcing you to do anything sexually that you do not want to do, and controlling the decision-making in the relationship.

Impact of an Abusive Dating Relationship

The effects of and responses to dating violence vary greatly among individuals. These include but are not limited to: a loss in confidence, difficulty making decisions, falling grades, school truancy, alcohol and/or drug abuse, change in clothing style or makeup, a change in weight, lack of interest in things that used to be important to that person, unexplained bruises, marks, sprains, etc., expressing guilt for no apparent reason, secrecy or withdrawal from friends and family, and apologizing for partner's behavior. There are both immediate and long-term risks of being in an abusive relationship. Women are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers and engage in risky sexual behaviors. People in abusive relationships are also at significantly higher risk for drug and alcohol abuse, suicidality, and eating disorders than for people in non-abusive relationships ("Dating violence against adolescent girls linked with teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, and other health risk behaviors: First large-scale study to examine the association between health risks and young girls' history of violence from dating partners." 2001. Harvard School of Public Health). As adults, teen dating violence victims are more likely to become victims of domestic violence, a slippery slope that can lead to health, safety, and family problems (Cook, M. "Teen dating violence." Violence Prevention Program. Connecticut Children's Medical Center).

Cycle of Abuse

Whether you are the victim or the abuser in a violent dating situation, it is important to seek help. An important step is to recognize the cycle of abuse, which often manifests itself in three stages: the escalation stage, the explosion stage, and the honeymoon stage. During the escalation stage, tension builds and blame is placed on the victim. In the explosion stage, an attack occurs in which the victim is psychologically, physically, and/or sexually abused. The honeymoon stage involves making up after abuse has occurred. The perpetrator is apologetic, passionate, romantic, and often promises to change. Identifying this cycle is just one step in identifying, preventing, and treating abuse. (Scott, A. *When I love you turns violent*. and Levy, B. *In love and in danger*.) It is also advised that people create a dating safety plan and that perpetrators seek help with anger management, communication skills, and healthy relationship building ("Teen dating violence: What you can do." 2003. National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center).

Tips for Dating Safety:

- Consider double dating or going with a group of friends when you first begin dating.
- Before leaving on a date, know the exact plans for the evening and make sure a friend or parent knows these plans and when to expect you home. Let your date know that you are expected to check-in with someone at the end of the evening.
- Be aware of your decreased ability to react under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Trust your instincts. If a situation makes you uncomfortable, try to stay calm and think of a way to remove yourself from the situation. Carry a cell phone or bring money for a phone call or transportation to get away if necessary.

- Dating violence can occur in any kind of relationship. However, in 2000 the rate of violent victimization was highest among people ages 16-19 (64.3 in 1,000) and among people ages 12-15 (60.1 in 1,000). Rennison, C. 2001. *Criminal Victimization 2000 Changes 1999-2000 with Trends 1993-2000*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.
- Results of a recent national survey show that 1 in 11 high school students report that s/he has been forced to have sexual intercourse with the person s/he was dating. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 1999." *CDC Surveillance Summaries*. June 9, 2000.
- According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey administered in Massachusetts, 1 in 5 female public high school students experienced physical and/or sexual violence during a date. 1 in 25 experienced sexual violence exclusively. The survey did not assess the gender of the victims' dating partners. Silverman, J., Raj, A., Mucci, L., Hathaway, J. 2001. "Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidality." *JAMA* 286 (5): 572-579.
- In a study of high school students' responses to dating violence, 43% sought help informally, and 8% sought help formally. Watson, J., Cascardi, M., O'Leary, D. 2001. "High school students' responses to dating aggression." *Violence and Victims* (16) 3: 339-343.
- A study of nearly 2,000 8th and 9th grade students revealed that 35.5% of dating adolescents reported being a victim of at least one nonsexual dating violence act. This study also reported that 10.7% of these students had been a victim of at least one sexual dating violence act. Foshee, Vangie, et.al., 1996. "The Safe Dates Project: Theoretical Basis, Evaluation Design, and Selected Baseline Findings." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 12(5): 39-47.
- Witnessing violence between parents was a significant predictor of physical dating violence for a group of college males involved in a recent survey. Carr, J.L., & Van Deusen, K.M. (2002). "The Relationship Between Family of Origin Violence and Dating Violence in College Men" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* Vol. 17, No. 6, 630-646.
- Women who have experienced an abusive relationship are 4 to 6 times more likely to have been pregnant in the last year. People experiencing abuse are also 8 to 9 times more likely to have attempted suicide in the last year. "Dating violence against adolescent girls linked with teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, and other health risk behaviors: First large-scale study to examine the association between health risks and young girls' history of violence from dating partners." 2001. Harvard School of Public Health.

The prevalence of teen dating violence is estimated to range from 9%-60% including verbal, physical,

- and sexual violence. Female teens cause more minor injuries than male teens, but are also likely to receive more significant physical injuries and more likely to be sexually victimized. Cohall, Alwyn; Cohall, Rene; Bannister, Hope; Northridge, Mary, 1999. "A Love Shouldn't Hurt: Strategies for Health Care Providers to Address Adolescent Dating Violence." *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, 54 (3), Summer, 1999.

In a recent study of 635 U.S. Midwestern high school students, only 3% of those physically or sexually

- abused by a partner reported the abuse to an authority figure (police, counselor, or teacher, ect.); only 6% told a family member. 61% of the respondents indicated that they told a friend and 30% indicated that they told no one at all. Survey results also indicated that nearly 42% of both male and female students indicated that an abusive incident occurred on school grounds and that over 40% of the incidents took place when other people were present. Molidor, C., Tolman, R., Kober, J., 2000. "Gender and contextual factors in adolescent dating violence." *The Prevention Researcher*, 7(1).