

# START TALKING

*Dating Abuse 101*



Illinois  
New Mexico  
Oklahoma  
Texas



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# Dynamics Of Teen Dating Abuse

## What is dating abuse?

**Dating abuse is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner.**

That definition seems simple at first but it is worth taking a closer look at:

First, notice that dating abuse is a *pattern* of behavior. This does not necessarily mean that the first instance of abuse is not dating violence, but merely that dating abuse usually involves a series of violent or abusive behaviors over a course of time. Relationship behaviors can alternate frequently from healthy to abusive.

This definition also points out that the core of dating violence is power and control. Abusive words and actions are the tools that an abusive partner uses to gain and maintain power and control over his/her partner.

## What does dating abuse look like?

Loveisrespect categorizes dating abuse within four types:

- **Physical abuse**
- **Verbal/Emotional abuse**
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Digital abuse**

*Refer to the information on pages 3 - 4 for more details on each type of abuse.*

## Who is affected by dating abuse?

The *target* of abusive behaviors is a dating partner, which might mean different things to different people, particularly across generations. The important thing to remember is that dating violence occurs within an intimate relationship. This can prove challenging, as young people often define “dating” and “relationship” differently than adults might. The relationship may be sexual, but it does not have to be. It may be serious or casual, monogamous or non-monogamous, short-term or long-term. Dating violence occurs equally in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Both boys and girls can be a victims or abusers.

### Talking points:

- One in three teens experience some form of abuse in their dating relationships.
- Both boys and girls can be victims and abusers.
- Loveisrespect believes every young person deserves a safe and healthy relationship, no matter who they are, where they live or who they love.

# the relationship spectrum

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in the middle.

## Healthy

relationships are based on equality and respect.

Respect  
Good communication  
Trust  
Honesty  
Equality

You make decisions together and can openly discuss whatever you're dealing with, like relationship problems and sexual choices. You enjoy spending time together but can be happy apart.

## Unhealthy

relationships are based on attempts to control the other person.

Breaks in communication  
Pressure  
Dishonesty  
Struggles for control  
Inconsiderate behavior

One person tries to make most of the decisions. He or she may pressure their partner about sex or refuse to see how their actions can hurt. In an unhealthy relationship, you feel like you should only spend time with your partner.

## Abusive

relationships are based on power and control.

Accusations  
Blame shifting  
Isolation  
Pressure  
Manipulation

One person is making all of the decisions -- about sexual choices, friend groups, boundaries, even what's true and what's not. You spend all of your time together and feel like you can't talk to other people, especially about what's really happening in your relationship.

For more information, visit [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

  
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# Types of Abuse



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## Physical

Any intentional, unwanted contact with your body by either the abusive partner or an object within their control. Physical abuse does not have to leave a mark or bruise. It doesn't even need to hurt.

### It can include:

- Scratching
- Pushing
- Kicking
- Holding you down
- Choking
- Biting
- Slapping
- Pulling hair
- Punching
- Using a weapon
- Throwing something at you

## Verbal / Emotional

Anything that the abusive partner says or does that causes you to be afraid, lowers your self-esteem or manipulates or controls your feelings or behavior. This can include non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking.

### Other examples include:

- Name-calling and put-downs
- Yelling and screaming
- Intentionally embarrassing you in front of other people
- Keeping you from seeing or talking with friends and family
- Telling you what to do
- Using online communities or cell phones to control, intimidate or humiliate you
- Making you feel responsible for the abuse
- Stalking
- Threatening to commit suicide in order to manipulate you
- Threats of violence and harm to you or people you care about
- Threats to expose your secrets (such as sexual orientation or immigration status), start rumors or to take away your children

## Sexual

Any action that impacts a person's ability to control whether or not sexual activity occurs or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs, including rape, coercion or restricting the use of birth control. Not all sexual assaults are violent "attacks."

### Some examples include:

- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
- Keeping someone from protecting themselves from unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Sexual contact with someone who is very drunk, drugged, unconscious or is otherwise unable to give a clear and informed yes or no
- Threatening or pressuring someone into unwanted sexual activity
- Rape or attempted rape

### Things to keep in mind:

- Most victims of sexual assault know the assaulter
- Both men and women can be the victims of sexual assault
- Both men and women can be the perpetrators of sexual assault
- Sexual assault can occur in same sex and opposite-sex relationships
- Sexual assault can occur between two people who have been sexual with each other before, including people who are married or dating

# What Is Digital Abuse?

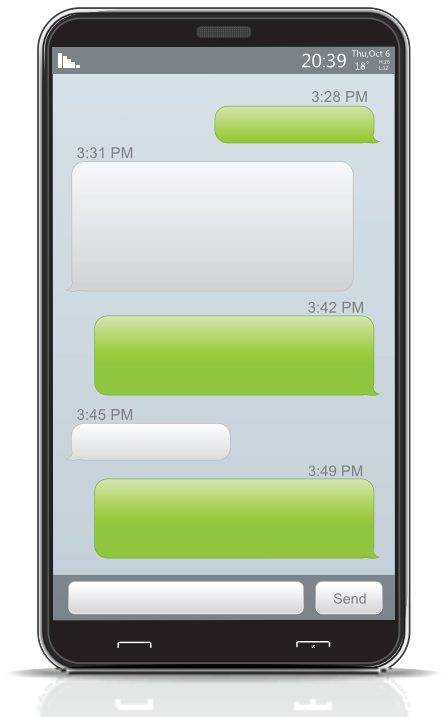
Digital abuse is the use of digital communication to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. Digital abuse occurs every day on mobile phones, tablets and computers through texting, calls, chat, email, photo/video social networks and popular social media sites.

## Examples of digital abuse include:

- Checking the mobile phone, tablet or other device of the person they are dating to see who they are talking to or messaging.
- Excessive texting and calling, making someone feel like they can't be separated from their phone, sometimes in fear of being punished.
- Demanding or stealing passwords to email or social networking sites.
- Telling the person they are dating who they can and cannot be friends with on social networking sites.
- Sending negative or degrading tweets and/or personal messages on social media, email, etc.
- Insulting the person they are dating in their own status updates.
- Using social networking sites to keep track of the whereabouts and activities of the person they are dating.
- Requiring the person they are dating to only post pictures as a couple.
- Sending unwanted messages, photos or videos (explicit or otherwise) or pressuring the person they are dating to send the same in return.
- Posting explicit messages, photos or videos of the person they are dating without their permission.

## Helpful tips and reminders for teens:

- Sexting may have legal consequences. Nude photos of individuals under 18 years of age may be considered child pornography - which is always illegal - even if the subject sent or posed for the photos willingly.
- Update privacy settings. Social network sites allow you to control who can see your posts, check-ins and what you are tagged in. Dating someone doesn't mean you have to share passwords or only post couple photos.
- Don't respond to hostile, harassing, abusive or inappropriate texts or messages. Responding can encourage the person who sent the message and won't get them to stop. Messages sent in response might also make it difficult for a young person to get a restraining order or file a criminal report.
- Save or document troublesome texts. As much as someone might want to delete them right away, these messages may be needed as evidence in case someone wishes to file a criminal report or ask for a restraining order.







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If you know what to look for,  
you might be able to identify  
an abusive relationship before  
it becomes dangerous.

## Helping Your Students

How do I know if one of my students is experiencing violence in a relationship?

The warning signs of dating violence will not always be dramatic, but if you know what to look for you might be able to identify an abusive relationship before it becomes dangerous. You can also help your students identify warning signs of dating violence in their own relationships.

Look for these red flags:

- Problems with school attendance, particularly if this is a new problem.
- Lack of interest in former extracurricular activities.
- Sudden request for a change in schedule.
- Unexplained changes in behavior, grades or quality of schoolwork.
- Noticeable change in weight, demeanor or physical appearance.
- Isolation from former friends.
- Little social contact with anyone but the dating partner.
- Making excuses or apologizing for the dating partner's inappropriate behavior.
- New disciplinary problems at school, such as bullying other students or acting out.
- Name-calling or belittling from a dating partner.
- Constant, unexplained or severe bruises and/or other injuries.
- Arguments with other students or school employees that are uncharacteristic of the teen.
- Teen is quick to deny suggestions of abuse or becomes protective of dating partner on the suggestion of abuse.

**Loveisrespect** is the ultimate source of support for young people to prevent and end dating abuse, inspiring them to create a culture of healthy relationships.

Peer advocates are available 24/7 to talk, answer questions and connect you to local resources.

live  
chat

get information & help  
at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

sms

text "LOVEIS"  
to 22522



call 866.331.9474 or  
866.331.8453 TTY

# Talking to Teens About Dating Violence

## What to say:

- I'm glad that you told me about this.
- This is important.
- I want you to be safe.
- Let's make sure you get the help you need right now.
- It's not your fault.
- You deserve to be treated with respect in your relationship.
- I am here if you ever need help or want to talk.

## Do:

- Listen.
- Be honest about your ability to keep information confidential or not.
- Be specific in your concerns (especially if you have witnessed abusive behaviors).
- Ask questions.
- Challenge your student to see the warning signs in his/her relationship.
- Allow your student to make his/her own decisions about the relationship.
- Tell your student what you are required to do under the law or school policy.
- Provide information on local resources.
- Reach out to community organizations to educate yourself on the issue.
- Urge your student to seek help.
- Familiarize yourself with your school's dating violence policy. If your school does not have one, organize a group to write one.
- Educate all your students about dating violence.
- Continue to check in with the student throughout the school year and beyond.

## Don't:

- Be judgmental about your student's relationship or choices.
- Try to take control of the situation, unless an emergency requires you to.
- Ignore the red flags you see – say something.
- Make assumptions about how your student wants to handle an abusive relationship.
- Minimize the abuse or the importance of the relationship.
- Assume that because the relationship is new or casual the abuse is minor.
- Assume that the student is heterosexual.
- Share a student's private information with unnecessary people or talk about students in public areas of the school.
- Assume that younger teens are not dating.
- Show shock or disapproval if your student tells you about his/her sexual activities.
- Blame your student for remaining in the relationship.



# SAFETY PLANNING

A safety plan is an individualized set of actions, strategies and resources that addresses a student's safety with regard to dating violence or sexual violence. The purpose of a safety plan is to empower a teen to make safe choices during and after an unhealthy or abusive relationship. The safety plan takes into account a teen's entire life - home, school, activities, jobs and social life. If you are working with a teen who appears to be in need of a safety plan, encourage them to complete loveisrespect's Interactive Guide to Safety Planning found at: [Loveisrespect.org/get-help/safety-planning](http://Loveisrespect.org/get-help/safety-planning)

## Teens Face a Variety of Obstacles

Asking for help with an abusive relationship may be difficult. Here's why:

### Relationship with parents

- Teens may be worried that their parents will react negatively or even abusively, if they find out that they are dating or sexually active. They may be in a same sex relationship and fear consequences if their parents find out.

### Fear of social consequences

- They might be afraid of losing their social standing if they accuse a classmate of abuse. They might believe that their popularity is dependent upon staying in the relationship. They might worry that their peers will not believe them and label them a liar.

### Embarrassment

- They might be embarrassed to admit that they are a victim of dating violence. They might be worried that they'll be thought of as weak or unable to take care of themselves.

### Loss of independence

- They might be scared that their parents will take away their privileges and keep them under stricter control if they find out he/she is experiencing abuse. They might worry that their parents won't trust them to make decisions about their life and relationships anymore.

### Isolation

- Their abusive partner might have isolated them from his friends, family and his support network. They might believe that no one really cares about them and that no one is able to help them. They might have internalized their partner's abusive words and believe that they doesn't deserve help.

### Desire to stay in the relationship

- They might believe that an adult will try to convince them to end the relationship. They might still love their abusive partner and want the abuse to stop, but for the relationship to continue. They might believe that they are safer staying in the relationship than ending it.

### Protecting the abuser

- They might not want to see Their partner get in trouble with the school or the criminal justice system. They might fear retaliation from their partner or their partner's friends. They might rely on their partner for financial support, housing or co-parenting.



## UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL SYSTEM

### **What is a civil protection order or stay away order?**

A civil protection order/stay away order is a judicial order restricting a person's movements and activities towards another person(s). These orders prohibit an individual from stalking, harassing and communicating (in any form) to the other individual. If they violate it, the restricted person can face criminal penalties, including jail time. Depending on where you live, these orders can be called a restraining order, protection order, peace order or protection from abuse order. A protection order is given by a judge in civil or family court, whereas a stay-away order is given by a judge in criminal court. Both of the orders have these same restrictions on the individual.

### **Can a teenager get a civil protection order or stay away order?**

Each state has its own standard on how teens can obtain a civil protection order or stay-away order. In some states, minors cannot file for a protection order without parental involvement. In other states, the minor has to be a certain age to file on their own. If a teenager is asking you about getting a restraining order, please refer the student to a community-based organization working with teens on teen dating violence. In many states, domestic violence laws are vague as to how minors can access civil protection orders, leaving it open to judicial interpretation. Sometimes, the judge wants the parent to file on behalf of the minor child, other times they do not.

### **What is parental notification and does it apply to me?**

When working with a minor on legal issues, depending on the state and/or issue, the minor may need to have a parent or legal guardian involved in the process. In other words, the parent or legal guardian would be filing any legal documents on behalf of their child. If you are unclear if a parent needs to be involved, please contact a local community-based organization who works on youth-related issues.

### **When a teen talks to me about their dating violence issues, must it remain confidential?**

Depending on your role in the school, different confidentiality rules apply. In general, if a student is talking to you as a teacher about abuse you may have to report what the student told you to a government authority like Child Protective Services. Every state has a rule on the scope of confidentiality in a school setting. You should contact your school's principal to determine what the policy is and make it clear to every school employee. Regardless of what the policy is, you should state it upfront before working with a student who might reveal dating violence or sexual violence.

### **Can a teen file criminal charges against another minor who is perpetrating violence?**

Each state has its own criminal codes addressing how minors can be charged for domestic abuse. Some states charge minors for domestic abuse through the state's juvenile justice system, and others go through the family court system. If a teen is interested in going through the criminal justice system, please refer the teen to the local legal aid's family law unit to discuss the pros and cons of filing in the criminal courts.



Loveisrespect is a project of Break the Cycle and the National Dating Abuse Helpline, the leading voices in dating violence prevention. Loveisrespect reaches more than 1.5 million young people annually through educational programs, online resources, public campaigns and a 24/7 peer-advocate led help service.



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Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC) is the country's largest customer-owned health insurer and fourth largest health insurer overall with nearly 14 million members in its Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) plans in Illinois, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Healthy Kids, Healthy Families (HKHF) began as a three-year initiative designed to improve the health and wellness of at least one million children through community investments by HCSC and its BCBS plans in Illinois, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Reaching nearly three million children within the first two years, HKHF is now a signature program of the organization and part of an ongoing commitment to invest in and partner with nonprofit organizations that offer sustainable, measurable programs to reach children and their families in areas of nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention and management and supporting safe environments.

To learn more about Healthy Kids, Healthy Families, please visit [www.healthykidshealthyfamilies.org](http://www.healthykidshealthyfamilies.org).

## Credits

### Authors:

Eric Anderson  
Jasmine Ceja  
Dr. Andrea Brown-Thirston  
Elecia James

### Additional Content:

Christina-Marie Santillan  
Rebecca Lancaster  
the staff at Loveisrespect

Graphic Design: Double Vision Inc.

Web Design: Creative Suitcase

### For the National Youth Advisory Board

Melissa Siegel  
Jacob Bricker  
Nikki Desario  
Kristen Herman  
Sara Skavroneck

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