

Break the Silence: Stop the Violence

[Announcer] CDC-TV presents Health Matters.

[Announcer] Being a teenager can be difficult. The teenage years are confusing and present new situations and experiences that kids may not understand. Teenagers begin dating for the first time and may not know what to expect, how to interact, or how to develop a healthy relationship. Some kids end up in unhealthy relationships. Some relationships can become violent. One in eleven high school students reports being a victim of physical dating abuse. Abuse can come in many forms - verbal, emotional, and even sexual. Kids involved in abusive relationships are also more likely to have other problems such as fighting, binge drinking, sexual activity, and even suicide attempts.

For parents, this can be a tough time - trying to prepare kids for difficult situations, trying to know when there is a problem, and trying to provide guidance when their kids need it. However, there *are* things that parents can do to help.

[Parent #1] Of course, initially there was no outward signs that there was anything going on.

[Teen] If your boyfriend starts telling you that it's not important to hang out with your family anymore, and that it's more important hang out with him, that's the biggest warning sign ever.

[Announcer] Parents can learn to recognize the warning signs that a teen may be at risk. Kids may change their routine. They may give up activities or hobbies that they previously enjoyed. They may withdraw from friends and family or spend too much time with the person they are dating.

There are warning signs for parents to watch for: they may insult their boyfriend or girlfriend; try to control them; or check in on them constantly by calling, texting, or sending instant messages. Teens may threaten their boyfriend or girlfriend or lose their temper.

[Parent #2] If that child knows unconditionally that they are loved, that's when the respect comes in. Because 'If you love me enough, I know what love is -- and this is not part of love.' Love your child. Period.

[Announcer] It's important to prevent dating abuse before it ever starts. Parents have an important role. Communicate openly with your kids. Share your values and help ensure that they feel able to communicate back. Experts say it's never too early to start talking about tough topics. Don't wait for your child to come to you; you be the one to start the conversation. Prepare what you want to say in advance. Be honest, ask questions, and listen. And remember, it's always OK to say, 'I don't know.'

[Parent #3] And the only way you can have a conversation with your children is to just talk. Just talk.

[Announcer] Help kids have healthy relationships by serving as a good role model. They learn as

much from what we do as what we say. Show kids through your own relationships how to treat people with respect. You can also help by monitoring your kids. Know where they are, who they're with, what they're doing, and when they'll be home. Setting up boundaries and expectations for their activities will help guide them when they're making decisions for themselves. The teenage years can be a hard time for kids and parents alike. With care and attention, there are many things that parents can do to help their kids have healthy and rewarding relationships. The hope is to prevent teen dating abuse before it ever starts.