



PROTECTING TEEN-AGE TEXANS FROM DATING VIOLENCE

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

DATING VIOLENCE IS FAR TOO COMMON AMONG teenagers across the nation. According to a recent survey, one in five teens who have been in a serious relationship say they have been hit, slapped or pushed by their partner. Even more disturbing: 30 percent of all murders involving females ages 15 to 19 are committed by their romantic interest.

This month, the Office of Attorney General (OAG) is joining with crime victim advocates across the country to observe the fourth annual National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week. The week-long observance is intended to educate teens about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships. It is also intended to help adults and teens recognize when a friend or loved one is being abused.

The National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline provides many tips for recognizing and responding to teen dating violence, as does its Web site, www.loveisrespect.org. Abuse most likely exists if teens' dating partners:

- Look at them or act in ways that scare them
- Seem jealous or possessive
- Criticize them
- Try to control where they go, what they wear or what they do

- Text or IM them excessively
- Threaten to kill or hurt themselves or their partners if they leave
- Try to stop them from seeing or talking to friends and family
- Hit, slap, push or kick them

Young Texans who find themselves in abusive relationships should first consider talking to a friend or an adult about the situation. Anyone who does not feel safe should avoid being alone with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Teenagers who have witnessed or experienced potential dating violence are encouraged to call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at (866) 331-9474. The helpline offers real-time, one-on-one support 24 hours a day. Through the helpline, trained volunteers advise teenagers to recognize unhealthy behavior and explain how to leave abusive relationships in the safest way possible.

Parental involvement can be a powerful tool that prevents teen dating violence. By talking with their teenage children and staying aware of developments in their child's life, parents can show that they care – and are approachable when problems arise. Setting boundaries and simultaneously entrusting kids to conduct themselves responsibly may feel like a

balancing act, but it can really help protect teens from harmful relationships.

The OAG has long been involved in the fight against domestic violence. Recently, the OAG joined the Texas Council on Family Violence to launch the "LOVE" campaign, which was created to heighten public awareness about teen dating violence.

The OAG Web site, www.texasattorneygeneral.gov, contains information about victims' rights, protective orders, and the OAG's Address Confidentiality Program, which provides a post office box and mail forwarding at no charge to victims who want to prevent an abuser from knowing where to find them. Abuse victims seeking information about the OAG's Crime Victims' Compensation Program, which reimburses out-of-pocket expenses to victims of violent crime and their families, can also find it on the Web site.

All Texans have the right to live violence-free lives, but some may need help getting out of violent relationships. The OAG is committed to working with victim groups and others to ensure that Texas teenagers have access to the resources they need to end a dangerous or harmful relationship.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Teen Dating Bill of Rights
(From www.loveisrespect.org)

I have the right:

- To always be treated with respect.
- To be in a healthy relationship.
- To not be hurt physically or emotionally.
- To refuse sex or affection at anytime.
- To have friends and activities apart from my boyfriend or girlfriend.
- To end a relationship.

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline
(866) 331-9474 or (866) 331-8453 TTY
Or live chat at www.loveisrespect.org

Crime Victim Services
Office of the Attorney General
(800) 983-9933
www.texasattorneygeneral.gov



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