

Understanding Teen Dating Violence

Fact Sheet

2012

Dating violence is a type of intimate partner violence. It occurs between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual.

- **Physical**—This occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, shoved, or kicked.
- **Emotional**—This means threatening a partner or harming his or her sense of self-worth. Examples include name calling, shaming, bullying, embarrassing on purpose, or keeping him/her away from friends and family.
- **Sexual**—This is forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent.
- **Stalking**—This refers to a pattern of harassing or threatening tactics used by a perpetrator that is both unwanted and causes fear in the victim.

Dating violence can take place in person or electronically, such as repeated texting or posting sexual pictures of a partner online. Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Dating violence often starts with teasing and name calling. These behaviors are often thought to be a “normal” part of a relationship. But these behaviors can lead to more serious violence like physical assault and rape.



Why is dating violence a public health problem?

Dating violence is a serious problem in the United States. Many teens do not report it because they are afraid to tell friends and family.

- Among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 22.4% of women and 15.0% of men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.¹

- Approximately 9% of high school students report being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the 12 months before surveyed.²



How does dating violence affect health?

Dating violence can have a negative effect on health throughout life. Teens who are victims are more likely to be depressed and do poorly in school.³ They may engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using drugs and alcohol³, and are more likely to have eating disorders.⁴ Some teens even think about or attempt suicide.⁵ Teens who are victims in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.⁶



Who is at risk for dating violence?

Studies show that people who harm their dating partners are more depressed and are more aggressive than peers. Other factors that increase risk for harming a dating partner include:⁷

- Trauma symptoms
- Alcohol use
- Having a friend involved in dating violence
- Having problem behaviors in other areas
- Belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Exposure to harsh parenting
- Exposure to inconsistent discipline
- Lack of parental supervision, monitoring, and warmth

Note: These are just some risk factors. To learn more, go to www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention.

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How can we prevent dating violence?

The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are vital. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.

Prevention programs change the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating violence. One example is Safe Dates, a school-based program that is designed to change social norms and improve problem solving skills.⁷



How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a four-step approach to address public health problems like dating violence.

Step 1: Define the problem

Before we can prevent dating violence, we need to know how big the problem is, where it is, and who it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data. These data are critical because they help us know where prevention is most needed.

Step 2: Identify risk and protective factors

It is not enough to know that dating violence is affecting a certain group of people in a certain area. We also need to know why. CDC conducts and supports research to answer this question. We can then develop programs to reduce or get rid of risk factors and increase protective factors.

Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies

Using information gathered in research, CDC develops and evaluates strategies to prevent violence.

Step 4: Ensure widespread adoption

In this final step, CDC shares the best prevention strategies. CDC may also provide funding or technical help so communities can adopt these strategies.

For a list of CDC activities, see www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ipv_sv_guide.html.



Where can I learn more?

CDC's Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters

National Dating Abuse Helpline:

1-866-331-9474 or text 77054

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

www.nsvrc.org

Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention

www.vetoviolence.org/datingmatters



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