



ADVANCING WELLNESS and RESILIENCE in EDUCATION

# Information Brief

## Teen Dating Violence: What Schools, Parents, and Youth Need to Know

## TEEN DATING VIOLENCE STATISTICS

- 1 in 3 U.S. teens has been a victim of dating violence and about 1 in 3 has committed relationship violence.<sup>1</sup>
- 9.6% of high school students in a dating relationship have been physically hurt on purpose (being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon) by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>2</sup>
- 10.6% of high school students in a dating relationship have been forced to do sexual things (being kissed, touched, or physically forced to have sexual intercourse) by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>2</sup>
- Violent behavior in dating relationships often begins between the ages of 12 and 18.<sup>3</sup>
- Only 33% of teens who were in an abusive relationship ever told anyone about the abuse.<sup>4</sup>



## RECOGNIZING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, **teen dating violence** is controlling, abusive and aggressive behavior in a romantic relationship. It can happen in straight or gay relationships, and can include verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup>

- Examples of controlling behaviors include not letting a dating partner hang out with his/her friends; calling or paging frequently to find out where he/she is, who he/she is with, and what he/she is doing; telling him/her what to wear; and having to be with him/her all the time.
- Examples of verbal and emotional abuse include calling a dating partner names; jealousy; belittling him/her; threatening to hurt him/her or someone in his/her family; and threatening to hurt yourself if he/she does not do what you want.
- Examples of physical abuse include shoving, punching, slapping, pinching, hitting, kicking, hair pulling and strangling.
- Examples of sexual abuse include unwanted touching and kissing, forcing a dating partner to have sex, not letting him/her use birth control, and forcing him/her to other sexual things.<sup>5</sup>

Victims of teen dating violence are more likely to experience negative consequences such as doing poorly in school, not attending school due to feeling unsafe, abusing alcohol and drugs, feeling hopeless and sad, attempting suicide, developing a negative body image, taking diet pills/laxatives, becoming overly dependent on others, becoming pregnant, having a sexually transmitted disease and becoming uncomfortable with their sexuality. In addition, victims may find it difficult to establish intimacy with a romantic partner, become a positive member of society, develop a personal value system and establish an adult identity.<sup>6</sup>

## RISK FACTORS FOR TEEN DATING VIOLENCE VICTIMIZATION AND PERPETRATION<sup>6</sup>

### Risk Factors for Victims:

- Experience stressful life events
- Show symptoms of trauma
- Live in poverty
- Come from disadvantaged home
- Receive child protective services
- Exposed to community violence
- Participate in risky behaviors
- Begin dating at an early age
- Participate in sexual activity prior to age 16
- Have other problem behaviors
- Have a friend involved in dating violence
- Have violent friends
- Believe that dating violence is acceptable
- More accepting of rape myths and violence against women
- Been exposed to harsh parenting, inconsistent discipline, or lack supervision, monitoring, and warmth
- Have low self-esteem, anger or depressed mood
- Use emotional disengagement and confrontational blaming as coping mechanisms
- Exhibit maladaptive or antisocial behaviors
- Have aggressive conflict-management styles
- Have low help-seeking proclivities

### Risk Factors for Perpetrators:

- Believing that it is acceptable to use threats or violence to get one's way or to express frustration or anger
- Problems managing anger or frustration
- Association with violent peers
- Low self-esteem and depression
- Not having parental supervision and support
- Witnessing violence at home or in the community

On December 28, 2009, Governor Ted Strickland signed Tina's Law (House Bill 19) into Ohio law. The law requires all school districts in Ohio to take extra steps to prevent dating violence among teenagers in 7th through 12th grade.

House Bill 19 was called The Tina Croucher Act in memory of a Butler County 18-year-old murdered by her ex-high school boyfriend on December 21, 1992 in Middletown, Ohio. Her parents, Jim and Elsa Croucher of Monroe, founded Citizens Against Domestic Violence in response to Tina's murder.

The bill requires the Ohio Board of Education to develop a model dating-violence prevention policy, and requires Ohio public school districts to incorporate and address dating violence in their policies and programming.

House Bill 19 was sponsored by state Representative Sandra Harwood, a Democrat from Niles, and carried in the Senate by state Senator Gary Cates, R-West Chester. The law went into effect on March 29, 2010.

Source: Middletown Community News, Tuesday, Dec 29, 2009 - Middletown Ohio



Figure 1: Jim and Elsa Croucher holding photos of their daughter, Tina Croucher (photo credit: Piper, Reality Chatter).

## ADDRESSING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

### What Schools Can Do

Based on U.S. Department of Education recommendations<sup>7</sup>, schools can work to prevent teen dating violence by:

- Educating young people about healthy relationships
- Educating their community about prevention and identification
- Developing locally tailored, appropriate responses to address teen dating violence
- Providing effective support to traumatized youth
- Addressing the behavior and needs of perpetrators
- Adopting a comprehensive approach that takes into account the unique challenges that these offenses present (e.g. victim reluctance to report and trauma from sexual violence)

*Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention* is a 60-minute, interactive training (developed by the Centers for Disease Control) designed to help educators and others working with teens understand the risk factors and warning signs associated with teen dating violence. It can be accessed here: <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/dating-matters>.

*Preventing, Assessing, and Intervening in Teenage Dating Abuse - A Training for Specialized Instructional Support Personnel* is a toolkit (from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments) designed to assist specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, social workers, school nurses, guidance counselors) in identifying, assessing, effectively intervening in and preventing teenage dating abuse. It can be accessed here: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/get-smart-get-help-get-safe-teenage-dating-abuse-training-specialized-instructional-support>.

The *Safe Place to Learn* resource package (from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments) provides a range of materials to support school efforts to prevent and eliminate peer-to-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is designed to help establish and maintain a safe, supportive learning environment and mitigate factors that interfere with learning. This resource includes guidance for administrators; e-learning modules for all school staff; a coordinated response team planning guide and training module; a trauma sensitivity training module; and action steps, discussion guides, bystander supports, and other resources. These can be accessed here: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-place-to-learn-k12>.

*Safe Dates: An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum*, published by Hazelden, is an evidence-based curriculum that prevents dating abuse among adolescents. *Safe Dates* helps teens recognize the difference between caring, supportive relationships and controlling, manipulative or abusive dating relationships. More information on Safe Dates can be found at: [http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/safe\\_dates.page](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/safe_dates.page).

## What Parents Can Do

The *Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness* has a *Parents' Guide to Teen Dating Violence* can be accessed at: <http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/professional-resources/teachers/parents-guide-to-teen-dating-violence/>. The guide includes information about how to tell if your teen is a victim of dating violence, things to keep in mind when helping your abused teen, things not to say or do, how to tell if your teen is an abuser, and information for parents of abusive teens.

*Futures without Violence* recommends that parents start talking with their children about healthy relationships before their children start dating. They have developed *Tips on Talking about Healthy Relationships with Teens* which recommend that parents encourage open, honest and thoughtful reflection; be sensitive and firm; understand teen development; understand the pressure and the risk teens face; take a clear stand; make the most of “teachable moments”; discuss how to be an ‘upstander’; accentuate the positive; be an active participant in your teen’s life; and be prepared to make mistakes. More information can be found at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/fwvcorp/wp-content/uploads/20160121110131/10Tips\\_healthyrelationships2.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/fwvcorp/wp-content/uploads/20160121110131/10Tips_healthyrelationships2.pdf).

*Break the Cycle* has developed *A Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence* that helps parents talk with their teenage children about violence that can occur within a relationship. The guide offers 10 questions that parents can use to start conversations with their teenage children, along with concrete suggestions, information and support on those specific topics so parents can have meaningful conversations with their teenage children. The guide can be accessed at: [https://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/files/hanbook\\_-\\_parents\\_of\\_teen\\_0.pdf](https://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/files/hanbook_-_parents_of_teen_0.pdf).

The *National Crime Prevention Council* provides 10 tips for parents to help their teenage children:

1. Educate yourself on teen dating violence and access resources that will help you begin the discussion with your teen. Articles and brochures can help you approach your teen in an effective manner.
2. Talk to your teen about dating violence early. If your teen seems already to be in a dangerous relationship, assure him or her that he or she is not to blame for his or her partner’s behavior and that you are there to help.
3. Listen to your teen when he or she approaches you about dating abuse. Explain that you are going to help him or her get out of the situation.
4. Emphasize that when he or she wants help, it is available. Let your child know that domestic violence tends to get worse, becomes more frequent with time and rarely goes away on its own.
5. Work with your teen to identify resources that will help him or her take care of his or herself, provide emotional support and build self-esteem.
6. Look for opportunities to increase your child’s self-esteem. Children who believe in themselves and their own worth are better able to choose good partners.
7. Be realistic when talking to your teen. Teenagers often have a false picture of romantic relationships. Explain that abuse is not love.
8. Share your standards. Talk to your teen about the way he or she should treat and respect others. Explain how you feel he or she should be treated in return.
9. Create an open environment. Be open to all of the questions that your child asks. Don’t criticize, judge or jump to conclusions when he or she asks about relationships.
10. Try not to criticize or “put down” the abusive partner when talking to your teen. Maintaining a neutral position may help your teen to open up about his or her situation, rather than feeling that you’re bashing the partner.

*Love is Respect* encourages parents to look for the following warning signs (<http://www.loveisrespect.org/is-this-abuse/>) that your child’s dating partner is abusing your child. These include when a partner checks cell phone or email without permission; constantly puts your child down; is extremely jealous or insecure; has an explosive temper; isolates your child from family or friends; makes false accusations; has mood swings; physically hurts your child in any way; is possessive; tells your child what to do; or pressures/forces your child to have sex.

The *Love is Not Abuse iPhone app* is an educational resource for parents that demonstrates the dangers of digital dating abuse and provides much needed information on the growing problem of teen dating violence and abuse. The app provides a rare insight for parents of what it feels like for their teen to be a victim of digital dating abuse. Teen dating abuse comes in many forms, making it difficult for parents to recognize. Dating abuse does not always leaves scratches or bruises, so parents need also to be aware of subtle signs that their teen may be under attack through technology, including cell phones, online and social networking. The app is free and can be downloaded from: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lina/id443740581?mt=8>.

## What Youth Can Do

It is important for youth to understand what healthy dating relationships look and feel like.

*Love Is Respect's* purpose is to engage, educate and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships. They host the *National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline*, a national helpline serving victims and survivors of teen dating abuse.

You can contact the *National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline*  
by phoning **1-866-331-9474**  
texting **LOVEIS** to **22522**  
or chatting 24/7 at <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>

In addition, *Love is Respect* provides 'Relationship 101' education and information of a variety of teen relationship topics including *Dating Basics*, *What is a Healthy Relationship*, and *Is This Abuse?* which can be found at <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>.

*Love Is Respect* outlines the following healthy relationship signs and things to look for in a healthy partner:

- Treats you with respect
- Doesn't make fun of things you like or want to do
- Never puts you down
- Doesn't get angry if you spend time with your friends or family
- Listens to your ideas and compromises sometimes
- Isn't excessively negative
- Shares some of your interests such as movies, sports, reading, dancing or music
- Isn't afraid to share their thoughts and feelings
- Is comfortable around your friends and family
- Is proud of your accomplishments and successes
- Respects your boundaries and does not abuse technology.
- Doesn't require you to "check in" or need to know where you are all the time
- Is caring and honest
- Doesn't pressure you to do things that you don't want to do
- Doesn't constantly accuse you of cheating or being unfaithful
- Encourages you to do well in school or at work
- Doesn't threaten you or make you feel scared
- Understands the importance of healthy relationships

*Break the Cycle* is a national nonprofit organization providing comprehensive dating abuse programs for young people ages 12 to 24. They provide youth leadership and education programs including *Let's Be Real* and *Start Talking*, education and information about dating abuse, and capacity-building for professionals who work with victims. *Break the Cycle* resources can be found at: <https://www.breakthecycle.org/>.

*That's Not Cool* focuses on digital forms of dating abuse. Their resources include a *Cool, Not Cool* app where youth choose what is cool and not cool about friends and relationships, an *Ambassadors Program* for individuals who want to raise awareness of digital dating abuse, an Adult Allies section, and speak up/social hub sections. The website can be accessed at: <https://thatsnotcool.com/>.

*Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships*, developed by the Centers for Disease Control, is a teen dating violence prevention initiative that seeks to reduce dating violence and increase healthy relationships among 11- to 14-year-olds in high-risk urban communities through comprehensive, multisector prevention. This tool can be accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/DatingMatters/index.html>.

*National Sexual Assault Hotline* provides a range of free services including confidential support from a trained staff member, information about local resources, information about laws in your community, basic information about medical concerns, and referrals for long-term support in your area. **The hotline can be accessed by calling 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673).**



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*This brief was developed [in part] under grant number CFDA 93.243 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.*

*We also would like to acknowledge the Ohio Department of Education for their support of this work.  
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