

# WORKING WITH TEEN SURVIVORS OF DATING VIOLENCE



## WHAT DOES DATING VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE?

*Teens experience the same types of abuse in relationships as adults – physical abuse, emotional/verbal abuse, and sexual abuse. In most cases, the abuse escalates over time, becoming more frequent and more severe.*

## WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

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

While the meaning of “**dating partner**” differs across generations and communities and the words used to describe intimate relationships change frequently, dating violence happens in all kinds of relationships – gay or straight, serious or casual, sexual or nonsexual, monogamous or non-monogamous, short-term or long-term.

## WHO IS AFFECTED BY DATING VIOLENCE?

Youth of all ages, genders, and sexualities can experience abuse in a relationship. It cuts across all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic groups.

## TECH ABUSE

Technology can play a significant role in dating violence. Teens live their lives through technology and dating violence is no exception. Cell phones, text messages, and social media can all become tools of power and control in the hands of an abusive partner. Some common examples of abuse through technology are:

- Persistent phone calls, text messages, or other monitoring

- Threats or controlling behavior via text message or social media
- Taking and/or sharing pictures of a sexual or intimate nature without consent
- Stalking using GPS or spyware
- Violating privacy of survivor’s cell phone, email, or social media
- Impersonating the survivor online

Evidence of tech abuse is particularly vulnerable to being lost or deleted. If your teen client is experiencing tech abuse, encourage them to document it by:

- Printing out all emails that contain any evidence or information about the incident. Make sure the printout includes the sender, recipient, date, and time.
- Printing out text messages. If that’s not possible, take a picture of the cell phone displaying the message and contact information.
- Printing screen shots of social media that contain evidence, such as admissions of abuse, threats of violence, or pictures of the survivor that were not consented to. Remember to check both the survivor’s and the alleged perpetrator’s sites.
- Recording voicemails onto a digital voice recorder and include the time/date stamp.

These steps can ensure that evidence is available if your teen client ever chooses to pursue a criminal or civil case. Make sure that your client’s safety plan includes their online activities and safety.

**TEEN  
DATING  
VIOLENCE  
AWARENESS  
MONTH**

# WHAT **ADVOCATES** SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WORKING WITH TEEN SURVIVORS OF DATING VIOLENCE

## SAFETY PLANNING

*A teen's safety needs are always changing, so a good safety plan should be a living document, frequently reevaluated and updated. Ask your youth client:*

- Which other adults can you tell about the abuse?
- Which friends can you turn to for support? What activities make you feel good about yourself?
- Where could you go quickly if you had to get away from your partner in an emergency?
- Who could you call to pick you up if you are stranded?
- Do you have a few phone numbers memorized in case your partner takes or breaks your cell phone?
- Who can walk with you between classes and to/from school?
- Who can stay with you if you have to be home alone?
- Can you change your schedule or routine to limit your interaction with your partner?
- Does your partner know your passwords or have access to your online accounts?
- Do you want to report the abuse to the police?
- Do you want to apply for a civil protection order?

**REMEMBER:** Safety planning with tech-savvy youth must include a discussion about how your teen client's friends can support (or undermine) their safety online by not revealing their location, tagging them in photos, or posting private information.

## DO:

- Be honest about your ability to keep information confidential. Educate yourself on your state's parental consent laws and organization's policies. Tell youth survivors what you must disclose and to whom before they begin sharing their story with you.
- Educate yourself on your state's mandated reporting laws. Tell teen clients if you are a mandated reporter of child abuse and which types of abuse you are required to report.
- If you must disclose a youth survivor's information (and it is safe to do so), let the teen know first and involve her/him in making the report. Whenever possible, give the teen the opportunity to make the report her/himself.
- If you cannot promise the level of confidentiality that a teen survivor needs, refer them to someone who can.
- Allow the youth to make their own decisions about the relationship, but encourage them to make a safety plan and help them to see warning signs of escalating abuse.
- Use age- and developmentally-appropriate language, especially when requiring teen clients to sign legal forms.
- Explain the utility and availability of a civil protection order, including whether dating relationships are included, whether a minor survivor's parent must be involved, and if same sex relationships are covered.
- Speak first and directly to the youth before talking to any accompanying adult. Address all your questions to the teen, including how they would like to move forward and when they would like to schedule the next meeting.

## DON'T:

- Don't be judgmental about the youth's relationship or choices.
- Don't show shock or disapproval if the teen tells you about their sexual activities.
- Don't make assumptions about how the teen wants to handle their situation.
- Don't minimize the importance of the relationship.
- Don't assume that abuse in a new or casual relationship is not severe.
- Don't assume that the youth is heterosexual.
- Don't assume the abusive partner is also a teen.

## MAKE YOUR OFFICE YOUTH-FRIENDLY

- Greet teen clients and let them know the time frame and process for receiving services at your organization.
- Have teen-friendly magazines available for them to read while waiting.
- Hang posters and pictures of youth in the waiting area, both about dating violence and teens in general.
- Have other youth you have worked with write brief statements about their experiences and compile them in a scrapbook, so that new teen clients can read them and feel more at ease.
- Keep small toys – like stress balls or Play-Doh – available that teens can play with to keep their hands occupied while they are talking.

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