

## VIEWING GUIDE: Dating Violence

### Healthy Relationships

CWK Network

The Indiana legislature was the first to pass “Heather’s Law,” a bill that encourages schools to address the issue of dating violence. Many other states have introduced similar legislation, and others plan to follow.

Recent studies show that dating violence has been on the rise among teens over the past decade. How do you know if your kids are affected? How can you talk with your kids about relationships and respect?

Many teens, so swept up in the excitement of their first love, often fail to see the signs that their relationship may be on thin ice.

Young people often romanticize relationships, with a notion that everything is always wonderful. They don’t stop to think how they are being treated – until something doesn’t feel right. And even then, many teens don’t have the experience to recognize when a relationship has turned abusive, whether verbally, emotionally or physically.

“I never felt like I was being hurt or anything, it was just a back and forth kind of yelling, nothing more than that,” says 14-year-old Cameron.

But experts say many teens who tolerate verbal abuse later discover that abuse turns physical.

“He slammed me on the bed, that’s the only thing he did, he had me pinned down...I’m just punching, kicking him in his stomach, groin, whatever,” describes 17-year-old Brittany.

Studies show that violence is an element of about 10 percent of all dating relationships. Some reports indicate an increase that may be tied to the bullying, name-calling and ridicule that takes place on the Internet.

#### What can parents do?

Jasmine Willis, a dating violence expert, says that parents need to teach their kids how to communicate in a dating relationship.

“Sit down and talk with the child about what is communication and what it means to be in a healthy relationship,” says Willis.

The problem, says Willis, is that many young people don’t have clearly defined limits, and don’t know what to do when things in a relationship turn sour.

“The first you need to do is come to terms with what is going on in your relationship,” says Willis. “And the second thing that I would suggest you do is talk to a friend, a family member or someone in your school you can really trust.”

Perhaps with those lessons in mind, when kids do fall in love, it won’t be a fall that hurts.

#### What Parents Need to Know About Teen Dating Violence

Dating violence is defined as the physical, sexual or psychological/emotional violence that occurs within a dating relationship. Destructive relationships during the teen years can lead to lifelong unhealthy relationship practices. These experiences may disrupt your child’s emotional development, and can contribute to unhealthy behaviors in teens that can lead to chronic mental and physical health conditions in adulthood.

According to the Centers for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, one in 10 adolescents reports being a victim of physical dating violence; one in 4 adolescents report verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse each year; and about 72 percent of 8th and 9th graders report that dating abuse most often takes place in the home of one of the partners.

Another fact parents need to know: teens who report being physically hurt by a dating partner were more likely to say they engage in risky sexual behavior, binge drink, use drugs, attempt suicide, and participate in physical fights.

Dating violence is not just abuse by young men against young women. The bullying, verbal abuse, and physical violence works both ways. It often happens when one of the people in a relationship has a lack of self-esteem; and/or when one of the people feels the need to control the other.

#### Facts and Advice from Experts

- 20 percent of teen girls exposed to physical dating violence did not attend school because they felt unsafe at school or on the way to or from school. This absence occurred on one or more occasions in a 30-day period.
- Digital abuse and “sexting” is a growing aspect of teen dating abuse, with one in four teens in a relationship reporting that they have been called names, harassed, or put down by their partner through social media or texting. 61 percent of young people who have “sexted” report being pressured to do so at least once.
- Targets of digital abuse are nearly three times as likely to contemplate suicide as those who have not encountered such abuse. And, targets of digital abuse are nearly three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school.
- Teen girls who are physically and/or sexually abused are up to six times more likely to become pregnant and more than twice as likely to report a sexually transmitted disease.

How can parents and teachers help prevent teen dating violence? According to a survey of teens by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy, teens say that parents have the most influence on their decisions about dating and relationships. Parents should:

- Talk with their teens about the characteristics of a healthy relationship
- Explain clearly and frequently that any type of violence or exertion of control within a relationship is not healthy.
- Teens need to learn about dating violence before they start dating. Parents, grandparents and other caregivers should model healthy, respectful relationships at home.

#### Resources:

- National Conference of State Legislatures
- The Library of Congress
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy