

What is Dating Violence?

Dating violence is a pattern of behaviors whereby one person uses intimidation, confusion, isolation and fear to control the relationship.

This definition can be applied to both adult domestic violence and teen dating violence. However, **teen dating violence occurs in ways that are often overlooked by parents, siblings and friends.** Many people believe the stereotype that violence only occurs in adult relationships.

Some parents and other adults underestimate the significance of dating pressure and resign relationships to “young love” or “puppy love.”

People can't imagine a middle or high school student being abusive to a partner because young people in school are not living together. Domestic violence is thought of as something that happens behind closed doors, where a victim is not allowed to leave the home and is treated like a prisoner. And when physical violence occurs, the victim stays in the home until healed.

Dating violence and abusive relationships are defined by a pattern of behaviors in which one person uses **intimidation, confusion, isolation and fear** to control the relationship.

Teen dating violence is different. The couple doesn't live together. They are in a school for the majority of their days, surrounded by hundreds or thousands of other students and school staff. They are not physically isolated, although emotionally can be completely withdrawn from friends and family.

Students deal with pressure and expectations from friends and other students about dating. **Students will often feel more popular, more secure, and more important if they are dating or liked romantically by another person.**

When a relationship becomes abusive, **many victims are worried about the perception of other students:**

- **“What will happen to all my friends if they find out?”**
- **“Who will believe me?”**
- **“My group of friends will break apart if it gets out that he/she hurts me.”**

They are also afraid of rumors that might start. They feel they will be harassed relentlessly by non-friend students about the abuse.

Even more difficult is the victim's sense that someone will retaliate against their abusive partner:

- **“What will the school do to him/her?”**
- **“Will my friends go after him/her when they find out?”**

The victim knows this retaliation by their friends might put them back into an even more dangerous situation. The abuser will know that he/she told about the abuse. These pressures all amount to a situation that scares victims into keeping silent about the abuse. If the victims of abuse are confronted, many will get upset that people are thinking their boyfriend or girlfriend is abusive. Couples can become more isolated as they feel nobody else knows their relationship the way they do. There are a couple things to think about if you are concerned about a family member or friend in an abusive relationship. It can be very difficult to leave an

abusive partner while in school, unlike adult domestic violence where people can pack themselves and their kids up and flee the situation-perhaps going into a shelter (which is an extremely difficult task to undertake and requires its own unique support system to be successful.) **Teen dating violence has the added stress of having to see the person you are trying to leave every day. A person may have third hour English or the same lunch period with a person that is abusing you.**

It can be difficult for a young person to come forward about what is happening to them. **Many families have rules about the appropriate age to begin dating.** For some it is becoming a teenager at 13, for others it is freshman year at age 14, others 16 or 18, and some kids have grown up hearing that they won't be dating until they are age 35. Although 35 is really given as a humorous explanation, the reality is that many kids have been told that there is a family rule about the appropriate age to begin dating.

However, many young people are influenced by friends and culture to not follow their family's rule. The experience of having a daughter or son in an abusive relationship often comes as overwhelming news to a **parent that was not looking for the warning signs of abuse because they believed the family had discussed the issue and their child was not dating.** Unfortunately, this can make it that much more difficult for a young person to talk about the abuse. **Many young people are so worried about getting in trouble for dating when it has been forbidden that they are even more afraid to ask friends or adults for help.**