



February 8, 2012

Teen Dating Violence – Awareness and Prevention

Teen dating is common - about three out of every four high school seniors report that they have ever dated.¹ Unfortunately, nearly four in 10 adolescents (both male and female) have experienced physical or sexual dating violence.² Dating violence isn't always as obvious as a black eye. It is anytime an individual purposely hurts or scares someone they are dating, and includes physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.^{3,4}



During **National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month** and throughout the year, Vice President Biden's initiative, **1 is 2 Many**, draws attention to this important issue affecting millions of U.S. teens. **The Office of Adolescent Health** is proud to partner with the Vice President and other federal agencies to raise awareness about teen dating violence and promote **healthy relationships** among adolescents. Join us on Twitter **@TeenHealthGov** – during February, OAH will share key teen dating violence statistics; helpful resources for teens, their families, and those who work with them; and promising approaches and practices in the field of dating violence awareness and prevention. Follow the **#TDVAM** conversation!

Dating Violence: Prevalence and Related Risks for Teens

More than one in three women and more than one in four men experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime, according to a report released in December 2011 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁵ The CDC's **National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey** is the first national study of its kind to examine intimate partner violence across the United States.

Of all females who have ever been raped, physically abused, or stalked by an intimate partner, almost 70 percent first had those experiences before age 25.⁶ And, of all rape victims, about 40 percent reported that they were first raped before age 18. The prevalence of dating violence varies across the country; find out more about this problem in your state with **OAH's searchable map**.

Teens who experience intimate partner,* or dating, violence are at risk for a host of negative outcomes. They are four to six times more likely to become pregnant than their peers.⁷ And, in one study, they reported lower self-esteem and emotional well-being, more suicidal thoughts and attempts,⁸ and were more likely to have eating disorders than adolescents who did not experience dating violence.

Be on the lookout for warning signs

Parents, other caring adults and friends should watch for warning signs that a teen is **experiencing dating violence**: suspicious bruises or other injuries; failing grades; loss of interest in activities or hobbies that they once enjoyed; excusing their dating partner's behavior; needing to respond immediately to calls or texts from their partner; and/or fearfulness around their partner.⁹ Also, having a dating partner who is significantly (three or more years) older than the teen is a risk factor for experiencing forced sex.¹⁰

The following signs may suggest that a teen is, or is at risk of, **perpetrating dating violence**: insulting their partner; trying to control how their partner dresses and acts; constantly texting or sending instant messages (IMs) to monitor their partner; losing their temper and being unable to control their anger; and threatening to hurt themselves or their partner in the case of a break-up.^{11,12} Being exposed to relationship violence as a child is linked with perpetration of dating violence, especially among males, and experiences of dating

violence, especially among females.¹³

Act swiftly to help teens who may be experiencing dating violence

If you observe violent behavior or believe dating violence may be happening to someone you know, act swiftly. Here are some ways you can help.

- *Use available resources.* If you think that a teen is either experiencing or perpetrating dating violence, address the issue immediately. Teens, and the friends and families who care about them, can contact trained professionals at the **National Dating Abuse Helpline**: 1-866-331-9474; TTY 1-866-331-8453 for the hearing impaired. **Live chat** is also available, and **texting assistance** is accessible by texting “loveis” to 77054.
- *Be ready for excuses.* Dating violence can be a complicated matter. Teens may cling to **excuses** to justify their behavior and to stay in the relationship. Perpetrators may say that they are only joking, that they didn’t mean it, or that their behavior was provoked. Those experiencing violence may believe that they deserve to be treated negatively, or that they can change their partner’s behavior. Adolescents may also be afraid of the repercussions of admitting violence – fearing that they won’t be believed or that nothing will change. Professionals can help address these feelings and motivations, and can use the resources available in this e-update for help.
- *Know your rights.* To find your state’s laws on dating violence, visit Break the Cycle’s **searchable map**. Each report includes such details as how a state defines “abuse” and whether a minor can seek a protective order against another individual.

Did you know?

The United States adopted a **new definition of rape** in January 2012. As compared to the prior definition, the new definition is more inclusive to both males and females, better reflects state criminal codes, and is comprehensive to the various forms of sexual penetration understood to be rape.

Prevent dating violence from ever starting

- *Be proactive.* Parents can address issues early by creating open lines of communication with their adolescent. For tips and strategies for how to start this or any important (but sensitive) conversation with your teen, visit **Conversation Generation, a section of OAH’s site especially for parents**.
- *Spread the word.* If a teen’s friends are accepting of dating violence, an adolescent is more likely to be involved in a violent relationship in the future.¹⁴ Make sure that peer groups are educated on the significant negative effects of dating violence and the fact that it is *never* acceptable.
- *Raise awareness in your schools and community.* States and communities are taking steps to stop teen dating violence. To support these efforts, the CDC developed **Dating Matters™**, a comprehensive teen dating violence prevention initiative based on current evidence about what works. Focused on 11– to 14–year–olds in high-risk, urban communities, it includes preventive strategies for individuals, peers, families, schools and neighborhoods. Also, **Safe Dates** is a school-based program designed to stop or prevent psychological, physical, and sexual dating violence. The program has been rigorously evaluated and proven to make a long-term difference in reducing rates of dating violence experienced by participants.¹⁵



Learn More about How to Prevent and Stop Dating Violence in Your Community

- With **1 is 2 Many**, the White House and Vice President’s office are undertaking innovative ways to

prevent dating violence before it starts, including [engaging young men](#) to help end violence and, with HHS, holding the [Apps Against Abuse Technology Challenge](#). The winning apps ([Circle of 6](#) and [On Watch](#)) will be available early this year – each makes it quick, easy, and discreet for teens to get help if they are in danger.

- One purpose of the Office of Adolescent Health's [Pregnancy Assistance Fund](#) grants is to improve services for pregnant and parenting teens who are experiencing or at risk of domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- First enacted in 1994, [the Violence Against Women Act](#) provides funding to states and communities to develop specialized law enforcement units, provide services to men and women who encounter abuse or violence, and improve prosecution of these crimes. The Act seeks to protect both males and females who experience dating violence. Since its passage, the annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped by more than half.^{16,17}
- Access [more resources](#) on teen dating violence awareness and prevention!

**Note: In this e-update, we refer to intimate partner violence among teens as “dating violence”; however, in some cases, older teens may be experiencing violence in their marriage.*

¹ Murphy, D. (2009). *Child Trends' analysis of Monitoring the Future data*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

² Halpern, et al. (2009). *Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence Victimization from Adolescence to Young Adulthood in a Nationally Representative Sample*. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 45(5): 508–516.

³ Office on Women's Health, *Dating Violence*. Available [here](#).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Dating Violence Facts*. Available [here](#).

⁵ Black, M., Basile, K., Breiding, M., Smith, S., Walters, M., Merrick, M., Chen, J., & Stevens, M. (2011). (2011). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available [here](#).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Silverman, J., Raj, A., Mucci, L., & Hathaway, J. (2001). *Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality*. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 286(5): 572-279.

⁸ Ackard, D. M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2002). *Date violence and date rape among adolescents: associations with disordered eating behaviors and psychological health*. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 26. 455-473.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Warning Signs and Excuses*. Available [here](#).

¹⁰ Manlove, J., Moore, K., Liechty, J., Ikamullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2005). *Sex Between Young Teens and Older Individuals: A Demographic Portrait*. Available [here](#).

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Warning Signs and Excuses*. Available [here](#).

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Warning Signs and Excuses*. Available [here](#).

¹³ Holt, S., Buckley, H., & Whelan, S. (2008). *The impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: A review of the literature*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32, 797–810.

¹⁴ Arriaga, X., Foshee, V. (2004). *Adolescent dating violence. Do adolescents follow in their friends' or their parents' footsteps?* *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*;19(2):162-84.

¹⁵ Foshee, V., Bauman, K., Ennett, S., Linder, G., Benefield, T., & Suchindran, C. (2004). *Assessing the Long-Term Effects of the Safe Dates Program and a Booster in Preventing and Reducing Adolescent Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration*. *American Journal of Public Health* 94(4):619–24.

¹⁶ Rennison, C. (2003). *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available [here](#).

¹⁷ Rand, M. (2009). *Criminal Victimization, 2008*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available [here](#).