



What is Teen Dating Violence?

Teen dating violence ("TDV") is a pattern of coercive, intimidating, or manipulative behaviors used to exert power and control over a current or former partner.[1] TDV can take place in person and online. It can take a variety of forms including, but not limited to:

Physical: hitting, kicking, or other types of physical force;

Sexual: forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in a sexual act without a partner's consent, posting or sharing explicit pictures of a partner without their consent, or sexting someone without their consent;

Verbal: calling a partner names or otherwise using language to torment or demean a partner;

Psychological: using verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm a partner mentally or emotionally and/or exert control over a partner;

Stalking: repeated, unwanted attention and contact by a partner;

In an abusive relationship, you may notice your partner checking your phone, email, or social media accounts without your permission. An abusive partner may put you down in front of others and/or isolate you from friends or family. This partner may exhibit extreme jealousy and/or explosive outbursts or mood swings.

It is important to recognize that violence can happen in all types of intimate relationships, and unhealthy relationships can start at a young age.

The statistics about TDV are alarming. 1 in 3 teenage girls is abused.[2] 20% of people age 11-14 say that they have friends who are victims of teen dating violence.[3] 44% of victims of sexual assault are under age 18.[4] However, only about 1/3 of the teens involved in an abusive relationship confide in someone about the violence.[5] Many teens who have been abused hesitate to seek help out of fear of exposing their experience or because they don't know what their rights are.

But, you can play a role in preventing TDV! Keep reading to find out more.



Understanding consent . . .

Consent is a cornerstone in every healthy relationship. Consent is an ongoing mutual agreement between partners about what they want to experience.

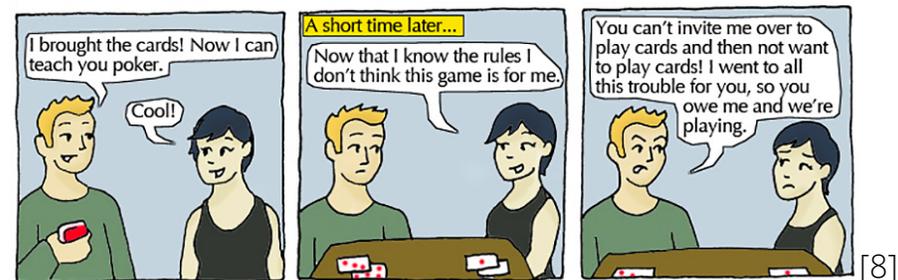
Consent means communication every step of the way.

Check with your partner before moving forward by asking "are you comfortable" or "is this okay." If you receive anything less than a clear and enthusiastic yes (meaning if someone seems unsure, stays silent, or says maybe), you should stop.



Remember that it's important to get consent every time.

Even if you've done something before or you're in a committed relationship. A person can decide to stop an activity at any time, even if they previously agreed to it.



What to do if you need help . . .

Identify someone you can trust. While it may feel uncomfortable at first, confiding in someone you trust can open up countless possibilities toward building a system of support. This can be a close friend, family member, teacher, school counselor, coach, or some other trusted adult.

When you are ready, start the conversation. Be transparent about what you want from your support system. If you want someone to talk to without dispensing advice, let them know kindly; if you want the details you share to be confidential, say so directly, and make sure they understand that breaking your trust could put you in danger. Know that you can always stop sharing if you no longer trust them with your experience. And, it is okay if you struggle to find the right words or get nervous; speaking up and asking for help is incredibly brave and commendable.

Know about mandated reporting. People who work in particular fields, including teachers, athletic coaches, school counselors, and social workers, are required by law to report abuse to an appropriate authority once they know about it. If you have concerns about speaking with someone who might be a mandated reporter, consider calling a national or local hotline to discuss what you're experiencing and to safety plan, consult with a legal clinic, or pose questions as hypotheticals, or confide in a trusted adult or professional, with knowledge of limits of confidentiality (i.e. "I have a friend who is dealing with abuse").

Using safe internet practices look at these additional resources. If your partner has access to your phone or computer or you are worried that they may track your internet history, you may want to consider using an incognito browser or another careful method to check out these additional resources.

- Love is Respect: <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>
 - Break the Cycle: <https://www.breakthecycle.org/>
 - RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network): <https://www.rainn.org/>
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline (Available 24/7): 800-656-4673
 - *Live chat also available on the website*
 - Local agencies
 - Human Options: <https://humanoptions.org/>
 - Laura's House Teen <http://www.laurashouse.org/lhteen/>
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What to do if you are worried about a friend . . .

If you think your friend or classmate might be in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, **don't be afraid to reach out** to them to ask if they are okay. You can let them know that you are worried about them and offer your support but if they are not comfortable talking, don't push the situation.

If your friend is willing to talk, **be supportive, listen patiently, and honor their decisions**. It can be very difficult to leave an abusive relationship, so do not give up on a friend if they do not leave right away or go back to an abusive partner. Continue to be supportive of them even if you disagree with the choices that they make.

Depending on how your conversation with your friend goes, you may eventually want to help your friend **create a safety plan**. Ask them how they'd like you to respond in moments of crisis, including who to contact. Consider brainstorming code words or signals to help indicate if they need you to stick around or get help.

Encourage your friend to **practice self-care** and make sure to practice it yourself too! People who experience abuse often feel undeserving of love or care. Self-care is a healthy way to cope and reclaim that sense of self when dealing with traumatic situations. And, remember that you cannot pour from an empty cup. By taking care of your own emotional well-being, you enable yourself to continue being a source of support for others.



How to start a conversation with a friend . . .

Always approach the conversation from a point of compassion and concern. If your friend brings up their relationship, you may want to use this as a convenient transition to check in with them and their well-being. Here are some helpful questions that you may be able to use to launch the conversation:

- "How have things been with you two lately?"
- What is an argument between you and your partner usually like?
- What have you been doing to try to work things out?
- How does [partner's name] treat you when they're upset?
- What do you wish things between you guys were like?
- When is the last time you were truly safe and happy in your relationship?
- What do you want out of a partner?
- How do you see things playing out if nothing changes?
- What's keeping you in the relationship?
- What are you thinking about doing?
- How can I help?" [9]

Other helpful tips:

- When you are talking about your friend's relationship, focus on behaviors. For example, "It's concerning to hear that your partner is pressuring you to give up your social media or give them your passwords. In a healthy relationship, everyone has a right to privacy and can trust that their boundaries will be respected."
- Never blame them for getting into or staying in an unhealthy relationship. Abuse is not the survivor's fault.
- Listening is key. Your friend needs your support and abuse is a difficult dynamic to escape. Don't push them away or try to make them feel like what happened to them was their fault.



How to respond if your friend opens up about their abusive relationship . . .

If your friend starts the conversation themselves, don't be alarmed. Here is a helpful guide in how to respond:

Step 1: Acknowledge what they have said.

"Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me about this."

Step 2: Recognize how hard that must have been for them to say.

"It took a lot of courage to confide in someone about this, and I'm really proud of you for talking to me about this."

Step 3: Tell them you believe them and are here to support them.

"I need you to know that I believe you and I am here to support you in any way that I can."

Step 4: Let them tell you what they need.

"What do you need right now? How can I support you?"



[1] Matthew J. Breiding et al., Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements, CTR. DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION (2015), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv/intimatepartnerviolence.pdf>.

[2] Nearly One in Three Teenage Girls has Experienced Sexual Assault or Other Violence, New NWLC National Survey Shows, NAT'L WOMEN'S L. CTR., (Apr. 19, 2017), <https://nwlc.org/press-releases/nearly-one-in-three-teenage-girls-has-experienced-sexual-assault-or-other-violence-new-nwlc-national-survey-shows/>.

[3] Tween and Teen Dating Violence and Abuse Study, TEENAGE RESEARCH UNLIMITED LIZ CLAIBORNE INC. & NAT'L TEEN DATING ABUSE HELPLINE (Feb. 2008), <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/pdf/Tween%20Dating%20Abuse%20Full%20Report.pdf>.

[4] Sharon G. Smith et al., The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief—Updated Release, CTR. DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION (Nov. 2018) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>.

[5] Robin Hattersley-Gray, Dating Abuse Statistics, SCH. SAFETY (Dec. 10, 2012), <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/dating-abuse-statistics/>.

[6] Rape And Consent Explained In 7 Simple Comics By Alli Kirkham, BORED PANDA, https://www.boredpanda.com/consent-rape-comics-alli-kerkham/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic (last visited Dec. 20, 2021).

[7] Id.

[8] Id.

[9] Heather, What to ask if you're worried about your friend's relationship, LOVE IS RESPECT, <https://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/questions-to-ask-if-youre-worried-about-your-friends-relationship/> (last visited Jan. 29, 2022).