

Dating Violence Tips for Parents: How to Help Your Teen

- Let your child know it's not their fault and that they are not alone.
- Listen ... It is important for your teen to talk about the situation even if that means having to hear about the person that is abusing them.
- Don't judge them. Let them know that you are always available to them. Remind them that the most important thing is their safety, and that they can always call you for help with out being judged.
- Encourage them to talk to someone else if they indicate that they are not comfortable talking about the situation with you.
- Don't minimize your child's fear. (Their fear may be the motivating factor in seeing that the relationship is not healthy)
- Show respect... as they will respect your opinion and feedback in return.
- Don't say "I told you so" or "What do you know about love?" Even though the relationship may only be for a short time those feelings are real and intense for teens. (Remember your first high school sweetheart? We usually do!!!)
- Be supportive... but don't be afraid to address that abusive behavior is not and is never acceptable. For example, "I know you have a lot of feelings for him/her, and that this must be hard, but no one deserves to be abused"
- Don't force your teen to end the relationship. This may place them in greater danger, and create a "Romeo and Juliet" scenario.
- Provide options and resources. Empower them by encouraging them to see that they have the ability to make good decisions.
- Encourage a safety plan. This is a plan about how and when to end the relationship with the abuser so that he or she will be safe. (70% of severe injuries and deaths occur when the victim is attempting to leave the relationship or has already ended the relationship) ***It is always important to stress that their safety is the first priority. If you suspect that your teen is in imminent danger at the hands of their partner you must take immediate action...event if the child is upset with you....it might save their life. Imminent danger is when the victim has been threatened by the abuser that they will be hurt or killed and that the abuser has the means to do it such as weapons – Contact your local police department or local domestic violence agency.***

Sometimes relationship abuse starts with verbal and emotional abuse but can escalate quickly into physical or sexual violence. Emotional abuse may be difficult to recognize but it is equally as damaging. **Relationship abuse is a pattern of behavior that uses physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse to gain and maintain power and control over his or her partner.** Parents may want to look for signs such as:

- Attempts to keep partner from spending time with friends.
- Attempt to control what their partner is wearing.
- Excessive text messaging in an attempt to keep tabs on the partner
- Attempts to keep the partner from activities they enjoy such as sports, etc.