



## **ADOLESCENTS IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

Once considered an adult's experience exclusively, violence between adolescent dating partners is now widely recognized as a serious problem with the potential for short and long-term detrimental effects to a child's and adolescent's social, emotional, mental and physical functioning and development.

### **DEFINITIONS**

Adolescent dating violence (also known as teen dating violence) is a pattern of acts of physical, sexual, verbal/emotional abuse, and tech stalking perpetrated by an adolescent against a current or former dating partner. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and/or coercive behavior—either in a heterosexual or homosexual dating relationship—in order to gain and maintain power and control over the dating partner.

### **PREVALENCE**

- It is estimated that nearly 20.9% of female high school students and 13.4% of male high school students are physically or sexually abused by a dating partner (4).
- Youth 18 to 19 years of age experience the highest rates of stalking (1).
- LGBTQ youth may be particularly vulnerable. A recent study of LGBT youth found that 43% of respondents experienced physical dating violence, compared to 29% of heterosexual youth respondents. This study also revealed that 23.2 percent of respondents reported sexual abuse by a dating partner; nearly double that of heterosexual youth (2).
- A 2011 nationwide phone survey conducted by CDC demonstrated that 22% of females and 14% of males who ever experienced physical or sexual violence or stalking by a partner, first experienced some form of dating violence between 11 and 17 years of age (3, 5).

### **EFFECTS**

- Teen dating violence is highly correlated with several outcomes related to poor physical and mental health.
- Young victims are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and suicidality, exhibit antisocial behaviors and engage in unhealthy and risky behaviors, including tobacco, drug and alcohol use.

Female victims are also at a heightened risk for experiencing unintended pregnancies and acquiring STIs when their partners practice tactics of reproductive abuse, including birth control sabotage and pregnancy coercion. These outcomes can lead to hospitalization, disability or death (3).

### **INTERVENTIONS**

Because medical practitioners are often the first, and sometimes the only, professionals to whom a victim of abuse turns to for help, pediatric and adolescent healthcare providers must:

- Be aware of teen dating violence risk factors and potential repercussions
- Screen each patient in private, using recommended screening questions
- Educate teens about dating violence and healthy relationships



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- Support and connect those who screen positive to community resources
- Facilitate disclosures to others only when an adolescent patient consents

*A word about mandated reporting and the limits of confidentiality:* By law, child abuse involves a victim under the age of 18 who is abused by a parent, guardian or another person in a custodial role. In cases involving dating violence for youth ages 13 and up, there is no mandated reporting requirement in Maryland. Further, it could be a breach of confidentiality to share information without the victim's knowledge and consent, even if the patient is an adolescent. Refer to the Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence's brochure on 'Confidentiality and Reporting Requirements.'

### **RESOURCES**

Break the Cycle: 1-866-331-9474 or [www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org) or text "loveis" to 22522 to chat with a peer advocate

One Love Foundation's My Plan App [http://www.joinonelove.org/my\\_plan\\_app](http://www.joinonelove.org/my_plan_app)

CDC's Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters/>

Love is Respect /National Dating Abuse Helpline 1-866-331-9474 or [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

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