

Teen Dating Violence Discussion points - 2016

For use after teen dating violence prevention video

Dating violence is when one person purposely hurts someone they are dating with physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Dating violence happens to people of all races, cultures, incomes, and education levels. It can happen on a first date or the one hundredth date. Dating violence may start with emotional abuse and/or controlling behaviors but may escalate to physical abuse.

It doesn't matter your age, your gender, or your sexual orientation. Dating violence is always wrong and should not be tolerated. There is help for both the aggressor and the victim.

It is important to understand and recognize dating abuse in order to prevent it.

Discussion point 1: What might dating violence include?

Abusive behavior generally falls into one of three categories: Physical, Emotional, or Sexual. What are some of the different abusive behaviors and what are the appropriate category / categories? Examples include:

- **Physical abuse.** Examples include like hitting, shoving, kicking, biting, restraining somebody, or throwing things.
- **Emotional abuse.** Examples include yelling, name-calling, bullying, coercing, keeping you away from your friends, blaming you for the abuse, or threatening to hurt themselves.
- **Sexual abuse.** Examples include forcing you to do something sexual (such as kissing or touching), doing something sexual when you cannot agree to it (like when you are very drunk), or sabotaging birth control.

Discussion point 2: How can you identify emotional abuse?

Although physical abuse is easier to identify and more likely to leave a noticeable mark, emotional abuse can be every bit as dangerous. In some ways it can be even more dangerous because it can be much harder to identify. Some behavior could be either healthy or unhealthy depending on the context.

Some of these behaviors might be acceptable or might be unhealthy given the context; other behaviors are always unacceptable. What are some examples of "never acceptable" situations?

- Monitors what you're doing all the time
- Unfairly accuses you of being unfaithful all the time
- Prevents or discourages you from seeing friends or family
- Tries to stop you from going to work or school
- Gets angry in a way that is frightening to you
- Controls how you spend your money
- Humiliates you in front of others
- Threatens to hurt you or people you care about
- Threatens to harm themselves when upset with you
- Says things like, "If I can't have you then no one can"
- Decides things for you that you should decide (like what to wear or eat)
- Constantly texting or sending instant messages to monitor you
- Insisting on getting serious very quickly

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- Acting very jealous or bossy
- Pressuring you to do sexual things
- Posting sexual photos of you online without permission
- Threatening to hurt you or themselves if you break up
- Blaming you for the abuse
- Not taking responsibility for their actions

Discussion point 3: What might someone say to excuse their abusive behavior?

In the United States, teens and young women experience the highest rates of relationship violence. If you haven't dated much, it can be hard to know when a relationship is unhealthy. This is even harder when myths or misunderstandings try to excuse the abusive behavior. Here are some myths:

- "Alcohol or drugs make a partner abusive."
 - Those things may increase the chances of abuse, but they never excuse it.
- "It is your fault."
 - You don't control how your partner acts and can't make someone mistreat you.
- You hit your partner first so further abuse or retaliation is okay.
 - You can get help learning how to stop your own abusive behavior but regardless of your actions, retaliating with abuse is never acceptable.
- Fatigue, hunger, or being ill makes a partner abusive.
 - These things may increase the chances of abuse, but still it is not okay.

There are no excuses!

Discussion point 4: What safety tips should be considered in leaving an abusive dating relationship?

Often the most dangerous point in a relationship is when it has ended and the abuser feels that they have nothing more to lose. What can students do if they need to leave a relationship and fear how the abuser might respond?

- Have a safety plan – a place you can go quickly if you are in danger. Just like a fire drill, if you wait until you are in danger to figure this out it might be too late!
- Make sure you have a phone available if you need to call for help. Have important numbers memorized because it is very common for an abuser to take your phone from you.
- Create a code word with people you trust. You can use that word if you are in danger and need help but cannot speak freely.
- If you're breaking up with someone that you see at your school or work, you may be able to get help from a school official or law enforcement. You may be able to change your class or work schedules or even transfer to another school.
- Try to avoid walking or riding alone.
- Be smart about technology. *Never* share your passwords! Don't post your schedule online and keep your settings private.

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Discussion point 5: What should you do if you believe your friend is in an abusive relationship?

Teens are more likely to turn to their peers than to anybody else for relationship questions and problems. Because of this, it is important that teen:

1. Can identify an abusive relationship.
 2. Know how to respond to a friend in an abusive relationship.
 3. Feel empowered to act.
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- Have the students observed abusive behavior in their friends' relationships?
 - What are some things that teens should – and shouldn't do if they witness abuse?
 - Do they have any concerns about saying something to their friends if they believe their friend's relationship is abusive?

Note: The video game “Grace’s Diary” deals with this subject and is available for free from Jennifer Ann’s Group.

In “Grace’s Diary” Grace is worried about her friend Natalie. Natalie has been acting differently since she started dating Ken. Although Grace wants to talk about the abuse with Natalie she knows that she needs to have some concrete examples in order for Natalie to listen to her. In the game you explore Grace’s room to find items which are associated with an abusive incident. After Grace has sufficiently explored these incidents only then is she confident to call Natalie and tell her about her concerns. Depending on what Grace has remembered and what she says during the phone call with Natalie the game will lead to one of three possible outcomes.

<https://JAGga.me/gracesdiary> for more info about “Grace’s Diary” and links to download the game to smartphones and tablets (Android).