



Teen Dating Abuse Parent Resource Guide



Healthy relationship skills are not innate. They are learned. Youth deserve to have the skills and knowledge needed to engage in healthy dating relationships.

Parents are well-positioned to make a difference in their child's life. However, in a national on-line survey of parents with children 11-18 years old, nearly half, 45%, had not discussed dating violence with their children in the past year. Reasons parents did not discuss dating violence with their children included they thought their children were too young to talk about it, they would not know what to say, and their children would learn about it through experience. We hope this guide helps parents discuss their relationship values and healthy, non-violent relationships with their children. We hope this guide is useful and is another tool in your "parent toolbox" as you navigate life with your teenager. This resource guide includes the following:

- Important information on teen dating abuse, including statistics and dynamics of power and control
- Warning signs
- Conversation starters
- How to support a child if they disclose abuse
- A relationship assessment

To solve a problem as far-reaching and destructive as teen dating abuse, a community-wide effort is needed. It is up to each of us to educate ourselves in order to recognize the signs of teen dating abuse and know how to intervene to help a young person in crisis. If we work together, we can help teens pave the way to a future free from violence.

ABOUT DVCC

Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC) is here to support individuals on their journey to safety. DVCC advocates for individuals who are experiencing abuse in personal relationships. Our multiple services and professional staff help those experiencing any level of domestic violence and assist them in building a safer environment for the well-being of themselves and their families. All victim services are free and confidential and all services offered are multicultural/multilingual.

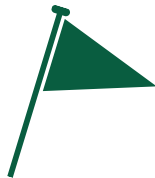
DVCC offers counseling and services to teens experiencing dating abuse or who witness domestic violence in their own families. For more information, go to the last page, "Resources".

THE RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in between. Abusive relationships don't happen overnight and often have a gradual escalation of unhealthy behaviors.

GREEN FLAGS & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

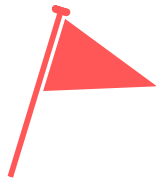
Healthy relationships consist of many different elements that make them strong and healthy. We like to call these characteristics green flags.



- Communication
- Support
- Independence
- Trust
- Respect
- Boundaries
- Honesty
- Equality
- Fun

RED FLAGS & UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Unhealthy relationships are based in attempts to control the other person. Often, the healthy characteristics start to go away and red flag behaviors develop. Red flags are warning signs that a relationship could turn abusive.



- Jealousy
- Possessiveness
- Dishonesty
- Isolation
- Breaks in communication
- Constantly checking in
- Controlling what you wear
- Playing head games

ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH POWER & CONTROL

In abusive relationships one person is making all of the decisions and there is an imbalance of power and control. Power and control are maintained through different forms of abuse, including:

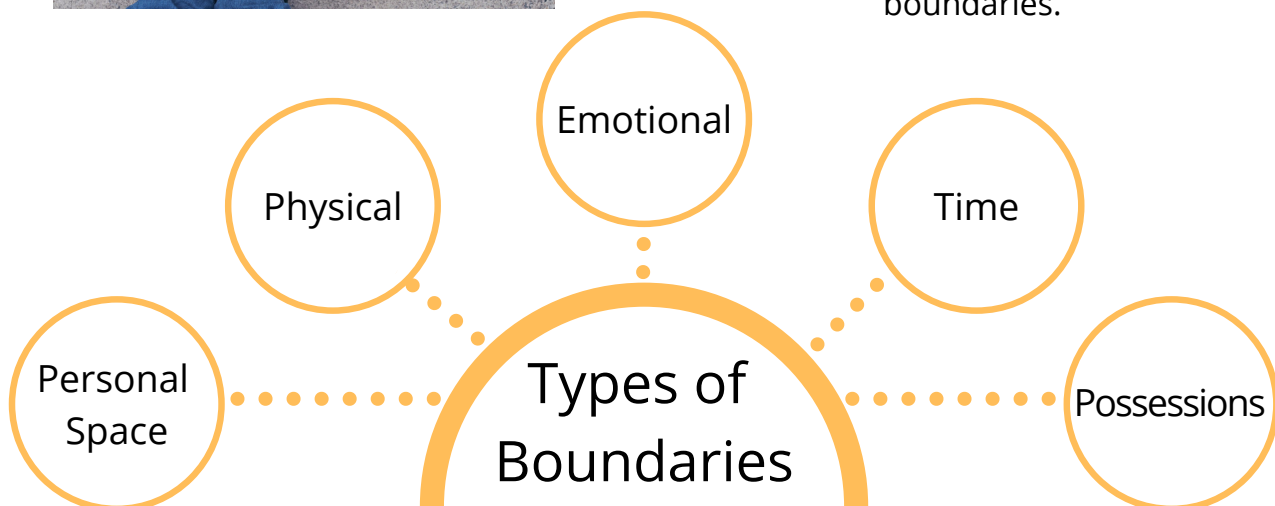
- Physical
- Emotional
- Digital
- Verbal
- Sexual
- Economic

ASSERTING YOUR BOUNDARIES

WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?



Boundaries are like lines that we cannot cross. Everyone has different levels of boundaries that can change based on a number of factors. In a healthy relationship, both people clearly communicate their boundaries and respect the other's boundaries.



Check out the examples below to see how the characters assert their boundaries.

Manuel and Christina have been dating for a few weeks. They start joking around and Manuel pushes Christina pretty hard. Respectfully, but without smiling or laughing, Christina makes eye contact with Manuel and says, *“I know we are just playing around, but I don’t like people putting their hands on me like that. Don’t push me again.”*

Naomi and Thomas are dating. Thomas has plans with his friends to go to the movies. While he is out, Naomi texts him asking where he is and who he is with. He steps away from his friends to call her. On the phone, he says, *“I trust you and don’t constantly message you when you are out with your friends. I want to be able to enjoy my time with my friends and not be glued to my phone. You should trust me and not feel the need to keep checking in on me.”*

Parents can be role models for supportive, healthy relationships in all of their relationships, with friends, romantic partners, or others.

When you assert your boundaries, communicate when your boundaries have been crossed, and respect when others communicate their boundaries, you are able to model this important relationship skill for your child.



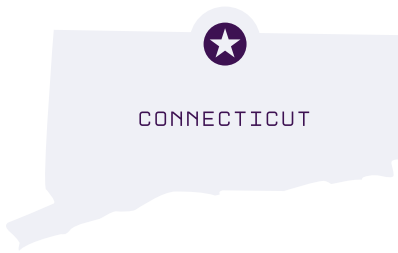
WARNING SIGNS OF TEEN DATING ABUSE FOR PARENTS

It is important that you recognize and address these warning signs early on in your child's relationship, as it will often escalate into more abusive, dangerous behaviors.

If you think your child is in a dangerous situation, trust your gut, and talk to your child.

- Your child drops extracurricular activities and hobbies that used to be important to them.
- Your child is put down and belittled by their partner, and it is masked as humor, especially in front of others.
- Your child is constantly apologizing for their partner's behavior and making excuses for them.
- Your child's partner says that they don't like your child's family and friends, or accuses the family and friends of not liking them.
- Your child receives excessive DMs, texts, or calls from their partner, masked as just checking in.
- Your child's partner checks their phone, email, or social media accounts without their permission, or your child is coerced into giving permission.
- Your child's partner exhibits extreme jealousy or possessiveness.
- As a result of their partner's action, your child is isolated from friends or family (physically, financially, or emotionally).
- Your child's partner has an extraordinary influence on their behavior and decisions.
- Your child's partner controls what they wear and their appearance.
- You notice sudden changes in your child's mood or personality since they began dating this person. Your child has a constant bad temper and emotional outbursts.

STATISTICS



In Connecticut, 26% of students surveyed, reported that someone they were dating or going out with, purposely tried to control them or emotionally hurt them. (1)



Emotional abuse is reported by 76% of all teens who report teen dating abuse. (2)



Over one quarter (28.1%) of teens who had been in a romantic relationship at some point in the previous year said they had been the victim of at least one form of digital dating abuse. (3)



81% of the students who had been the target of digital dating abuse had also been the target of traditional dating abuse (i.e., they were: pushed, grabbed or shoved; hit or threatened to be hit; called names or criticized, or prevented from doing something they wanted to do). (3)



Teens who suffer dating abuse are subject to long-term consequences like alcoholism, eating disorders, promiscuity, thoughts of suicide, & violent behavior.

(1) Connecticut Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019

(2) Federal Research Division Library of Congress, Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography, 2011

(3) Hinduja, S., Patchin, J. 2020. Digital Dating Abuse Among a National Sample of U.S. Youth.

DATING ABUSE

A pattern of coercive and destructive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner.

- Teen dating abuse is a pattern of behaviors, not a single event or isolated incident. Rather, it is a series of events along a continuum.
- Teen dating abuse often will escalate over time. Abuse can happen at a very slow pace, so victims do not recognize that their relationship has gone from healthy to unhealthy to abusive.

IMPACT OF COVID

- With in-person communication being limited, teens are using technology, even more, to communicate in their relationships. This puts teens at an increased risk for digital abuse in dating relationships whether that comes in the form of teens being put down by a partner in a phone call, text, or on a social networking site or coerced into sexting.
- Being cut off from friends and teachers because of social distancing has left teen victims further isolated from support systems, a tactic abusers often use to maintain power and control.

FORMS/TYPES OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL

Any use of physical force with the intent to control a partner through fear or injury.

- Restraining
- Object aggression
- Reckless driving

VERBAL

Using words to hurt someone.

- Mocking
- Belittling
- Name-calling
- Cursing
- Put-downs

EMOTIONAL

Breaking down someone's self-esteem and/or sense of self.

- Isolation
- Gaslighting/playing head games
- Blaming
- Manipulation & lying
- Jealousy

SEXUAL

Taking away a person's control over their sexual choices. Trying to pressure or force someone to do something sexually that they do not want to do.

DIGITAL

The use of technology or social media to intimidate, harass, bully, stalk, or threaten a partner.

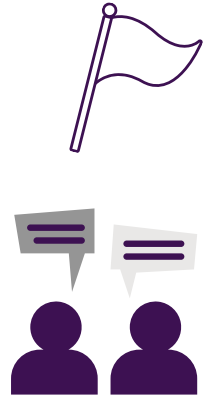
ECONOMIC

Using someone for their money, trying to make someone feel obligated or guilty by buying them things.

HOW TO HELP

How to help your child if you suspect abuse: start a conversation.

- Focus on their rights in the relationship and what they deserve.
- Discuss warning signs/"red flags."
- Spend time with them and talk about the abuse when you are spending time together.
- Use "I" statements to describe your feelings.
- Share specific examples of behaviors with your teen that concern you.



You deserve to be respected and to have your thoughts and opinions valued.

I have noticed that they always text you and want to know where you are. How does that make you feel? Do you feel like you have your own space and time?

If your child says they are being abused:

- Listening is crucial. You are not there to make judgments, you are there to listen.
- Believe them, even if you are surprised or have a hard time accepting that their partner could be an abuser.
- Tell them you are glad they felt safe telling you.
- Tell them it is not their fault. Focus on resolving the problem/behavior of the partner rather than criticizing your teen.
- Do not interrogate or ask "why" questions. The details are not important at this time and why questions can come off as judgmental, even with the best intentions.
- Offer unconditional support, care, and love.
- Ask them what they need (How can I help you right now?).
- Let your teen have some control in making decisions about next steps and don't pressure them into quick decisions. Don't assume that leaving the relationship is the safest option. Connect your teen with a domestic violence advocate to safety plan and ensure their safety.
- Contact your local domestic violence agency about obtaining a restraining order. Domestic violence advocates can discuss the safety considerations of restraining orders.

TALKING WITH TEENS



- Prevention work focuses on healthy behaviors and skills that youth will engage in their entire lives.
- Conversations about healthy relationships need to be started early in a child's life. Children have relationships with friends, parents, siblings, etc.
- Integrate healthy behaviors into your daily life:
 - Respecting boundaries
 - Healthy communication
 - Consent
 - Honesty
- Ask your child what is important to them in a dating relationship before they start dating.
- Use current events as a teachable moment.
- Use media and deconstruct messages about relationships.
- Frame behaviors around elements of healthy relationships. It is helpful to compare and contrast the red flags (unhealthy behaviors/characteristics) to the green flags (healthy behaviors/characteristics).

Jealousy is an unhealthy behavior because there is often a lack of trust and equality. It is often accompanied with isolating the person.

What do you think about him showing up at her house uninvited? She told him she wasn't interested. Is that romantic or unhealthy?

Do you want a hug? If not, I will respect that. Would you like a high five instead?

CONVERSATION STARTERS



- What are your friends' dating relationships like?
- What qualities do you want someone you date or go out with to have?
- What makes a relationship healthy and unhealthy?
- What does respect look like in a relationship?
- Have you ever seen any kind of abusive behavior between two people who are going out? How did you feel? What would you do if you were in that situation?
- Do you know what you would do if one of your friends was in an unhealthy relationship?
- What would you want your friends to do if you were in an unhealthy relationship?
- What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your boundaries?
- How do you know if you've crossed someone else's boundaries?
- When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun?
- What can you say and do to communicate your boundaries?
- What's a healthy way to argue? What's an unhealthy way to argue?

Source: Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence, RESPOND, Inc.

Put it into practice! How would you respond?

When you're with your child they are very concerned about having their phone near them at all times and responding immediately to text messages. You see that they are getting repeated, back-to-back texts from their partner. They seem stressed and say, "If I don't respond right away they will get mad and think I am cheating."

Your child is talking about a movie they saw this weekend. They say, "The couple ended up happily together in the end, but at first the guy was putting notes in her locker, and sending her unwanted gifts. Initially, she thought it was creepy and told him she didn't like it, but then she realized how romantic these gestures were and they ended up together."

Your child says that they saw someone in the hallway touch their partner inappropriately after they already told them to stop. Your child seems upset about watching this encounter.

HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Everyone deserves a healthy relationship, one where they feel safe and respected. Do you know if your relationship is healthy? Answer yes or no to the following questions to find out.

- Your partner is very supportive of the things that you do.
- Your partner encourages you to try new things.
- Your partner likes to listen when you have something on your mind.
- Your partner understands that you have your own life too.
- Your partner is well liked by your friends.
- Your partner accepts and appreciates you for who you are.
- Your partner gives you space when you need it.
- Your partner respects your privacy (phone calls, computer, texts, etc.).
- Your partner accepts responsibility for their actions and admits when they are wrong.
- Your partner calls you by the correct pronoun and name.
- Your partner gets extremely jealous or possessive.
- Your partner accuses you of flirting or cheating.
- Your partner constantly checks up on you or makes you check in with them.
- Your partner controls what you wear or how you look.
- Your partner threatens to 'out' you as a method of control.
- Your partner tries to keep you from seeing or talking to your family and friends.
- Your partner has big mood swings. They get angry and yell at you one minute, but are sweet and apologetic the next.
- Your partner makes you feel like you can't do anything right, or they blame you for problems.
- Your partner makes you feel like no one else would want you.
- Your partner threatens to harm themselves because of you.
- Your partner threatens to destroy your things.
- Your partner makes you feel nervous or like you're "walking on eggshells."
- Your partner breaks or throws things to intimidate you.
- Your partner pressures or forces you into having sex or going further than you want to.



IF YOU CHECKED MULTIPLE PROMPTS IN THIS COLUMN, YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS MANY HEALTHY BEHAVIORS!

IF YOU CHECKED MULTIPLE PROMPTS IN THIS COLUMN, YOU MIGHT BE IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP. DVCC IS HERE TO HELP. CONTACT US TO TALK TO ONE OF OUR COUNSELORS.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS CENTER (DVCC)
is here to help and support individuals on
their journey to safety.**

Source: loveisrespect.org

RESOURCES

Domestic Violence Crisis Center



Stamford Office & Mailing Address

1111 Summer Street
Suite 203
Stamford, CT 06905



www.dvccct.org



Office:

203-588-9100

24/7 Hotline: (call/text)

888-774-2900

Teen Appointments:

203-517-5140



Norwalk Office

16 River Street
1st Floor
Norwalk, CT 06850

Serving the communities of Stamford, Norwalk, Darien, New Canaan,
Weston, Westport, and Wilton.



Love Is Respect

- www.loveisrespect.org
- Live interactive chat support
- Interactive Safety Planning:
<https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/safety-planning/interactive-safety-plan/>
- 24/7 Support
 - Call 866-331-9474
 - Text "loveis" to 22522 (24/7)



One Love Foundation

- A resource working to build healthy relationships
- www.joinonelove.org



Anti-Violence Project

- Counseling and advocacy organization for LGBTQ+ victims of violence
- www.avp.org
- Hotline: 212-714-1141



That's Not cool

- Resource for digital and technology abuse
- www.thatsnotcool.com/