

Women Are Safe, Inc.

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Flowers Don't Fix It

David brings me flowers
And tells me he loves me
And I want to believe him
My friends say I'm stupid
But they don't know David

David brings me flowers
And tells me he's sorry
When he loses his temper
And accidentally hits me
My friends say I'm stupid
But they don't know David

David hit me last night
And I thought he wouldn't stop
It all seems like a blur
And my friends, they were right
But David brings me flowers

Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, 1992

This poem brings to our attention the startling fact of teen dating violence. Statistics from the Bureau of Justice Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence (May 2000) tells us about one in three high school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship. Forty percent of teenage girls ages 14 to 17 say they know someone their age that has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend. And in one study from 30 to 50 percent of female high school students reported having already experienced teen dating violence.

Teen dating violence is often hidden because teenagers typically are inexperienced with dating relationships and want independence from parents. They often have "romantic" views of love. Many get the message from peers and media that "any boyfriend is better than no boyfriend." Teenage girls, like battered women, often want the violence but not the relationship to end. That means they are often reluctant to tell adults, who may impose restrictions to protect them.

What can parents, teachers, and friends do to help? Know the signs that indicate a teenager may be experiencing dating violence or other problems:

- Physical signs of injury
- Truancy, dropping out of school
- Failing grades
- Indecision
- Changes in mood or personality

- Use of drugs/alcohol
- Pregnancy
- Emotional outburst
- Isolation

Although these clues may not indicate dating violence, they do indicate a problem that should be addressed. Talk to your children –both boys and girls – about their relationships. And help your daughters be aware of warning signs that a relationship may become abusive. Advise her to talk to you or an adult she trusts if she notices these signs in her boyfriend:

- Extreme jealousy
- Controlling behavior
- Quick involvement
- Unpredictable mood swings
- Alcohol and drug use
- Explosive anger
- Isolates you from friends and family
- Uses force during an argument
- Shows hypersensitivity
- Believes in rigid sex roles
- Blames others for his problems or feelings
- Cruel to animals or children
- Verbally abusive
- Abused former partners
- Threatens violence
- Lying

Discuss these safety precautions with your teens.

- Consider double-dating the first few times you go out with a new person
- Before leaving on a date, know the exact plans for the evening and make sure a parent or friend knows these plans and what time to expect you home. Let your date know that you are expected to call or tell that person when you get in
- Be aware of your decreased ability to react under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- If you leave a party with someone you do not know well, make sure you tell another person you are leaving and with whom. Ask a friend to call and make sure you arrived home safely.
- Assert yourself when necessary. Be firm and straightforward in your relationships
- Trust your instincts. If a situation makes you uncomfortable, try to be calm and think of a way to remove yourself from the situation.

Teenagers can choose better relationships when they learn to identify the early warning signs of an abusive relationship. Understand that they have choices, and believe they are valuable people who deserve to be treated with respect. Create opportunities to talk and listen.

Mary Fox
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