

Women Are Safe, Inc.

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If You Are The Parent of a Teen

If you are the parent of a teenager, I'll bet you've already talked with them many times regarding the risks associated with sex, drugs, drinking and driving, and the use of tobacco products. There is another potentially life-threatening issue that those in this age group face that parents often neglect to talk with them about....dating violence.

Women Are Safe, Inc. provides teen dating violence prevention programs in our four county service area. During the presentation we ask for a show of hands of those who have either been in a violent dating relationship themselves or if someone close to them has. Most always at least half of the hands go up. Did one of these raised hands belong to your teen? Studies have shown that aspects of domestic violence can appear long before anyone is married. 89% of teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 say they have been in dating relationships. As pre-teens enter into more complex and intimate relationships, it is critical to help them define what constitutes a healthy versus an unhealthy relationship. No one is better positioned to make a difference in the lives of young people than parents. Your concerns about your child staying clear of abuse, being respectful of others, and finding healthy relationships need to be discussed. Your values are the ones that matter most.

A healthy relationship is one in which the partners have a commitment to making the relationship work, and at the same time they respect each other's individuality and personal boundaries. A healthy relationship is one in which you would not hurt or be hurt emotionally, physically, or sexually.

An unhealthy relationship has an imbalance in which one partner tries to exercise power and control over the other through threats, emotional and physical abuse. It can include name-calling and insults, isolating a person from friends and family, coercion, violent acts, stalking, and significant physical injury. It can also include sexual abuse. It can happen to anyone.

As a parent, would you be able to recognize the warning signs? Here are some to look for:

1. She apologizes for his behavior and makes excuses for him.
2. She loses interest in activities that she used to enjoy.
3. She stops seeing friends and family members and becomes more and more isolated.
4. When your daughter and her boyfriend are together, he calls her names and puts her down in front of other people.
5. He acts extremely jealous of others who pay attention to her; especially other guys.
6. He thinks or tells your daughter that you (her parents) don't like him.
7. He makes the relationship serious early on, rushing the involvement by telling her he loves her.
8. He controls her behavior, checking up on her constantly, calling and paging her, demanding to know who she has been with.
9. She casually mentions his violent behavior, but laughs it off as a joke.
10. You see him violently lose his temper, striking or breaking objects.

11. She often has unexplained injuries, or the explanation she offers doesn't make sense.

To encourage your kids to talk about difficult issues, keep an open environment, be available to listen, give them plenty of opportunities to talk and don't criticize them for having questions, even if they raise ideas that are disturbing to you. Talk often. Frequent chats are a great way of communicating, reinforcing your values and letting your kids know that you are interested in their lives.

If you are concerned that your child is in a violent relationship and would like more information, you can reach the Women Are Safe, Inc. Resource Office at (931) 729-9885 or 24/7 hotline at (931) 729-5730 or toll free at 1-800-470-1117.

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