

# Preventing Teen Dating Violence

## What is teen dating violence?

Teen dating violence, also called, “dating violence,” is an adverse childhood experience that affects millions of young people in the United States. Dating violence can take place in person, online, or through technology. It is a type of intimate partner violence that can include the following types of behavior:<sup>1</sup>

- **Physical violence** is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, or using another type of physical force.
- **Sexual violence** is forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in a sex act and or sexual touching when the partner does not consent or is unable to consent or refuse. It also includes non-physical sexual behaviors like posting or sharing sexual pictures of a partner without their consent, or sexting someone without their consent.
- **Psychological aggression** is the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm a partner mentally or emotionally and exert control over a partner.
- **Stalking** is a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact by a current or former partner that causes fear or safety concerns for an individual victim or someone close to the victim.

Teen dating violence profoundly impacts lifelong health, opportunity, and wellbeing. Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. The good news is violence is preventable, and we can all help young people grow up violence-free.

## How big is the problem?

Teens often think some behaviors, like teasing and name-calling, are a “normal” part of a relationship. However, these behaviors can become abusive and develop into serious forms of violence. Many teens do not report unhealthy behaviors because they are afraid to tell family and friends.

**Teen dating violence is common.** Data from CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicate that among U.S. high school students who reported dating during the 12 months before the survey:

- About 1 in 12 experienced physical dating violence.<sup>2</sup>
- About 1 in 12 experienced sexual dating violence.<sup>2</sup>

**Some teens are at greater risk than others.** Female students experienced higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence than male students. Students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) or those who were unsure of their gender identity experienced higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence compared to students who identified as heterosexual.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

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## What are the consequences?

Unhealthy, abusive, or violent relationships can have short- and long-term negative effects, including severe consequences, on a developing teen. Youth who are victims of dating violence are more likely to:<sup>5,6,7</sup>

- experience symptoms of depression and anxiety
- engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol
- exhibit antisocial behaviors, like lying, theft, bullying or hitting
- think about suicide

Violence in an adolescent relationship sets the stage for future relationship problems, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence perpetration and or victimization throughout life. For example, youth who are victims of dating violence in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.<sup>8</sup>

## How can we prevent teen dating violence?

Supporting healthy, nonviolent relationships could reduce teen dating violence and prevent its harmful, long-lasting effects on individuals, their families, and their communities. During the pre-teen and teen years, it is critical for youth to begin learning skills to create and maintain healthy relationships, including managing feelings and communicating in a healthy way. Research also highlights the need for prevention efforts that address the unique needs of teens who are at greater risk of experiencing teen dating violence.<sup>2</sup>

CDC developed *Dating Matters*<sup>®</sup>: *Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships* to stop teen dating violence before it starts. It focuses on 11-14-year-olds and includes multiple prevention components for individuals, peers, families, schools, and neighborhoods. All of the components work together to reinforce healthy relationship messages and reduce behaviors that increase the risk of dating violence. Please visit the Dating Matters website to learn more! [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters)

CDC also developed *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices* that describes strategies and approaches based on the best available evidence for preventing intimate partner violence, including teen dating violence.<sup>9</sup> The resource includes multiple strategies that can be used in combination to prevent intimate partner violence and teen dating violence.



### Teach safe and healthy relationship skills

- Social-emotional learning programs for youth
- Healthy relationship programs for couples



### Engage influential adults and peers

- Men and boys as allies in prevention
- Bystander empowerment and education
- Family-based programs



### Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence

- Early childhood home visitation
- Preschool enrichment with family engagement
- Parenting skill and family relationship programs
- Treatment for at-risk children, youth, and families



### Create protective environments

- Improve school climate and safety
- Improve organizational policies and workplace climate
- Modify the physical and social environments of neighborhoods



### Strengthen economic supports for families

- Strengthen household financial security
- Strengthen work-family supports



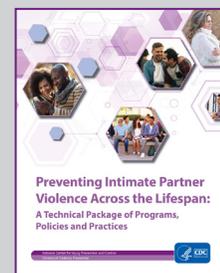
### Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms

- Victim-centered services
- Housing programs
- First responder and civil legal protections
- Patient-centered approaches
- Treatment and support for survivors of IPV, including teen dating violence

## Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan:

### A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices

A **technical package** is a collection of strategies based on the best available evidence to prevent or reduce public health problems. The **strategy** lays out the direction and actions to prevent intimate partner violence. The **approach** includes the specific ways to advance the strategy through programs, policies and practices. The **evidence** to support the approaches for preventing intimate partner violence and associated risk factors is also included.



## References

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