

Teen Dating Violence: An Overview for Educators

“Legislation (P.L. 2011, Chapter 64) (N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.23a, 18A:37-33 et.al) enacted on May 4, 2011 requires each school district/charter school to approve a policy to prevent, respond, and educate their students, as well as their school community on incidents of dating violence. A safe and civil school environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. A student who is a victim of dating violence suffers academically and the student’s safety at school is jeopardized.”



Teen dating violence is a highly prevalent issue. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in four adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner. To combat this statistic, in 2011, it became a NJ state law requirement for all NJ school districts to instate dating violence education in the health curriculum. In an effort to enforce compliance with this law, the NJ Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board, along with a number of leading agencies in NJ, has endorsed this series of fact sheets on teen dating violence that can guide administrators and educators in the implementation of dating violence education programs.



*Compiled by the
Center on Violence Against Women and Children
Rutgers University, School of Social Work, vawc.rutgers.edu
in collaboration with the NJ Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board*

What is Teen Dating Violence?

A pattern or series of abusive behaviors over a course of time that reflects the perpetrator's desire to control, dominate, and exert power over a dating partner.

Physical

- Hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, shoving
- Scratching, pinching, biting, choking, hair pulling
- Grabbing a dating partner's body parts or clothing to prevent partner from leaving or forcing him/her to go somewhere
- Grabbing a partner's face to make him/her look at them
- Throwing a foreign object at a dating partner
- Using a gun, knife, bat, mace, or other weapon

Sexual

- Unwanted kissing, touching, and sexual activity gained through force, pressure, threats, manipulation and/or intimidation
- Sexual assault or attempted sexual assault
- Getting a dating partner drunk/drugged for sex
- Sexual contact with a dating partner who is drunk, drugged, unconscious, or otherwise unable to give a clear and informed "yes" or "no"
- Keeping a dating partner from protecting him/herself from STIs or getting pregnant
- Sexual slurs or attacks on a dating partner's gender or sexual orientation
- Sending unwanted, explicit pictures/videos and/or demanding them in return

Psychological

Verbal and Emotional

- Yelling and screaming
- Name-calling, ridiculing, criticizing, humiliating
- Starting rumors about a dating partner
- Making a dating partner feel guilty or insecure
- Making a dating partner think s/he is irrational
- Emotional blackmailing
- Playing mind games

Threatening to...

- Harm a dating partner or his/her pet or loved ones
- Report a dating partner to police
- Have children taken away
- Expose a dating partner's secrets such as sexual orientation or immigration status
- Leave the dating partner
- Commit suicide

Controlling Behaviors

- Isolation
- Preventing a dating partner from interacting with friends/family
- Controlling what a dating partner does and who s/he sees and talks to

Includes telling the dating partner who he/she can and can't be friends with on social media and constantly checking and sending texts, emails, etc.

Intimidation

- Stalking
- Using looks, actions, gestures to scare a dating partner
- Smashing things/destroying personal property
- Displaying weapons

Manipulation

- Blaming dating partner's actions for perpetrator's abusive or unhealthy behavior
- Forcing a partner to drop charges/do illegal activities
- Using jealousy to justify actions
- Minimizing – making light of the abuse and not taking concerns about it seriously
- Denying the abuse happened
- Shifting responsibility for abusive behavior

Any of these behaviors can be perpetuated via electronic methods (i.e. phone calls, texts, emails, social media, etc.)

References

Break the Cycle: Empowering Youth to End Domestic Violence. (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/199Wex6>; Love is Respect. (2014). <http://bit.ly/1fyiQnT>; NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault. (2003). Factsheets: Teen dating violence. <http://bit.ly/1cix22h>; Roberts, S. (2001). *Bullying and dating violence: Effective intervention and prevention in Multnomah County*. (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/173xt30>

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What is the Impact of Teen Dating Violence?

Survivors of teen dating violence may experience a wide range of emotional, psychological, social, and health issues.

Emotional and Psychological Issues

- Depression and anxiety
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and difficulty concentrating
- Contemplated or attempted suicide
- Stress, anger, hurt, and/or fear.
- Lowered self-esteem
- For LGBTQ survivors, feelings of isolation due to discrimination, homophobia, and a lack of services available to this community

“Being abused in a relationship can shatter a teenager’s belief that she is a worthy, decent, and independent person who can cope with life in a mature, self-assertive fashion. For the teen victim, the world becomes a frightening, confusing place where understanding how things are supposed to work is called into question. The victim’s sense of her ability to protect herself and function autonomously is undermined.”¹

Evidence suggests that the consequences of TDV tend to be greater for girls compared to boys, but it affects students regardless of race, income, sexual identity, religion, and disability.

Social and Health Issues

- Limited contact with peers, family, and other organizations, resulting in social isolation
- Increased likelihood of engagement in unhealthy and antisocial behaviors such as...
 - Drug, alcohol, and/or tobacco use
 - Eating disorders
 - Unsafe sex
- Possibility of sustained injuries such as bruises, broken bones, cuts and lacerations, concussions, etc.
- Female high school survivors of TDV are...
 - 4 to 6 times more likely to get pregnant than non-survivors.
 - 3 times more likely to have been tested for STIs and HIV than non-survivors.
 - More than twice as likely to have an STI than non-survivors.

References

¹Button, D. M., and Miller, S. L. (2013). Teen dating relationships and outcomes of well-being: Examining gender differences in nonviolent and violent dating relationships. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 23(3), 247-265; Roberts, S. (2001). *Bullying and dating violence: Effective intervention and prevention in Multnomah County*. (n.d.). Multnomah County Domestic Violence Coordinator’s Office: Portland, OR. <http://bit.ly/173xt30>; Promote Prevent. (2011). *Teen dating violence: Prevention, identification, and intervention*. <http://bit.ly/173yyzy>; “Dating violence in LGBTQ communities.” (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/1DniCev>

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Teen Dating Violence Statistics

Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year.¹

The Victims/Survivors*

- **One in three adolescents** in the U.S. is a survivor of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.^{1,2}
- **Girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24** experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence – almost triple the national average.^{1,3}
- **Nearly one in four girls (23%) who have been in a relationship** reported going further sexually than they wanted as a result of pressure.²
- Only **33% of teens** who were in a violent relationship ever told anyone about the abuse, and **86%** said they would confide in a friend rather than a caring adult.^{1,4}
- **Hispanic immigrant girls have less than half** the risk of TDV as their non-immigrant Hispanic peers.⁶
- TDV is extremely common in LGBTQ relationships – **up to 50% of LGBTQ individuals** will be abused by a dating partner.⁷

*The terms victims and survivors are both used because sometimes individuals identify as one or the other.

1 in 5 high school female students are physically and/or sexually abused by their dating partner.⁴

The Perpetrators

- Violent behavior typically begins **between the ages of 12 and 18.**¹ **More than 50% of sexual assaults** are committed by a woman's romantic partner.⁹
- **Individuals with a history of physical violence against their partners are 13 times more likely** to commit future acts of physical aggression compared to persons who have never committed this form of physical abuse.⁹
- Youth who engaged in high rates of self-reported **bully perpetration during middle school were almost 7 times more likely** to engage in physical TDV perpetration four years later in high school.¹⁰

The Bystanders

- **81% of parents** believe TDV is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue for teens.^{1,4}
- **Over 80% of high school counselors** report feeling unprepared to address incidents of abuse on their school campus.²
- **50-80% of teens** have reported knowing others who were involved in violent relationships.³
- **57% of teens** say they know of a peer who has been physically, sexually, or verbally abusive to their dating partner. **33% of teens** have actually seen the abuse or violence themselves.⁴

Risks of Teen Dating Violence

- **Half of youth survivors** of both TDV and sexual assault attempt suicide, compared to **12.5% of non-abused girls** and **5.4% of non-abused boys.**¹
- Physical or sexual abuse makes **teen girls 6 times more likely** to become pregnant and **twice as likely** to get an STI.¹
- Survivors of TDV are significantly more likely to use drugs, smoke, or drink alcohol than those who did not experience abuse.⁵

References

¹Love is Respect. (2014). <http://bit.ly/1fyQnT>; ²Break the Cycle: Empowering Youth to End Domestic Violence. (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/199Wex6>; ³NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault. (2003). *Teen dating violence*. <http://bit.ly/1c1x22h>; ⁴Safe Horizon. (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/1HbBd0P>; ⁵Children's Safety Network. (2012). *Teen Dating Violence as a Public Health Issue*. Education Development Center: Waltham, MA.; ⁶Ramos, et al. (2011). Immigration status, acculturation, and dating violence risk for Hispanic adolescent girls in New Mexico. *Maternal Child Health Journal*, 15, 1076-1080.; ⁷Gallopin & Leigh. (2009). Teen perceptions of dating violence, help-seeking, and the role of schools. *The Prevention Resesarcher*, 16(1), 17-20.; ⁸Domestic violence statistics." (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/1ozDNrn>; ⁹Perpetrator risk factors for violence against women." (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/11J9Ow>; ¹⁰Espelage et al., L. (2013). Relation between bully and teen dating violence perpetration across early to late adolescence. <http://bit.ly/1F5Z8iz>

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Bullying vs. Teen Dating Violence

Bullying

Unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.¹

The Bully's Goal: *Abjection*

To psychologically, emotionally, and physically damage the victim.

The bully often has little personal or emotional attachment to the victim, and as a result, there are generally few instances in which the bully will have positive interactions with the victim. Also, because there are mostly negative feelings toward the victim, the aim isn't necessarily to dominate and control, but to harm.

Teen Dating Violence

Occurs when one partner uses violence or threats of violence to gain and maintain power and control over the other. The behaviors are repeated and intentional over time.²

The perpetrator and victim typically have a close, intimate relationship, and as a result, there are instances in which the perpetrator will have positive interactions with the victim, making the abuse more difficult to pinpoint and define. The aim is not necessarily to cause harm, but rather to assert dominance and control.

The Perpetrator's Goal: *Subjection*
To subordinate and control the victim.

Although there are notable contrasts between bullying and TDV, it is also important to understand how they are interrelated.

Bullying and TDV Overlap

Violence against peers and early antisocial behavior and aggression have been correlated with using sexual and physical violence in dating relationships. Similarly, students who reported bullying their peers also reported more violence victimization in their dating relationships (both physical and social) than non-bullies. Bullying and TDV often co-occur.

Development of Bullying and TDV from Childhood through Adolescence

Risk factors for TDV perpetration include exposure to trauma, abuse, and/or violence as well as family conflict and/or aggression in early life. These risk factors may lead to deviancy and bullying when students are developing personal identity in grades 6-8. As these students develop sexual identity and attitudes, they become more susceptible to TDV, sexual harassment, and health risk behavior (i.e. substance abuse and risky sex) in grades 9-11.

References

¹"Bullying Definition." (n.d.). <http://1.usa.gov/19f4a02>; Roberts, S. (2001). ²*Bullying and dating violence: Effective intervention and prevention in Multnomah County.* (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/173xt30>; Sercombe, H. and Donnelly, B. (2013). Bullying and agency: Definition, intervention and ethics. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(4), 491-502.; Espelage et al., L. (2013). Relation between bully and teen dating violence perpetration across early to late adolescence. <http://bit.ly/1F5Z8jz>

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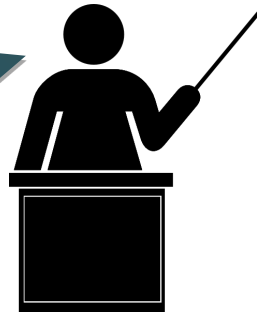
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Responding to Teen Dating Violence for Educators

Educators are often in the position to first notice TDV. Teachers, staff and administrators may be one of the first to respond to a survivor, perpetrator, or friend of a survivor disclosing experiences of TDV. The first response a survivor receives can have a tremendous impact on his/her healing and recovery. Responding in a supportive and empowering way is critical.

Be Prepared!

Learn to recognize the psychological and physical warning signs associated with TDV. Stay informed of the school's policies and protocol on TDV.



General Guidelines

- Listen to what the student, family member, or friend is saying without interrupting.
- Do not talk to the victim and perpetrator together.
- Be aware of your body language and respect the student's right to privacy and personal space.
- Help the student become informed of available resources.
- Maintain confidentiality while following school protocol on reporting and making sure the student is aware of this.

"By addressing abusive behaviors when they happen, particularly in school, youth service providers can make an impact on every teen who believes that adults do not take the issue seriously. In doing this, providers can also communicate an important message to teens experiencing dating violence—that adults will believe and care for them if they seek help for an abusive relationship."¹

References

¹Gallopín & Leigh. (2009). Teen perceptions of dating violence, help-seeking, and the role of schools. *The Prevention Resesarcher*, 16(1), 17-20.; "Teen Dating Violence: Information for Teachers." (n.d.) <http://bit.ly/17tcqzB>; Teen Dating Violence Prevention." (n.d.) <http://bit.ly/1FHc7pb>; "A Guide to Addressing Dating Violence in Texas Schools." (2007). <http://bit.ly/1G3Cvlg>; McKenry & Price. (2005). *Families and change: Coping with stressful events and transitions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

If someone shares that s/he is experiencing TDV...

- Find out what they would like to do and support them regardless of their decision.
- Be culturally sensitive. For instance, certain cultural groups typically do not seek help and depend on family relationships to cope, which may cause reluctance in confiding. LGBTQ populations face unique obstacles due to discrimination.
- Be non-judgmental and let the individual know you take the issue seriously. Students are most likely to not report because of the fear that adults will make the situation worse, cast blame, or make them feel guilty.
- Let the individual know that abuse usually gets worse over time.
- Reassure the student that you will be there for him/her.
- Expect survivors to be confused about their feelings and what to do. Also, know that they may change their mind.
- Talk to the survivor in a place where s/he feels safe.
- Connect the student with resources that can help provide support and safety. It is important for the victim to consider safety needs and to work with someone trained in developing a safety plan. See njcbw.org for a domestic violence program available in your county.

If you suspect someone is a perpetrator...

- Although you may feel that you want to address the accused perpetrator, do not confront the individual. It may put the victim at increased risk.
- Based on your school's policies and protocols, decide how you should proceed with informing any other persons, especially if the survivor's safety may be in danger.

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Creating Safe School Communities Free of Teen Dating Violence

Teenagers are learning about forming relationships within many different settings including the school environment. It is critical not only to give students individual skills for creating positive relationships, but also to shape their experiences by creating a safe, empowering school wide culture that reinforces the importance of building relationships built on respect.

Prevention



- Incorporate lesson plans addressing TDV and related issues such as healthy relationships and bystander intervention.
- Teach students how to recognize the signs that tell them whether they are at risk of entering an abusive relationship or are already involved in one, and how to intervene safely and effectively when they know of something going on with their peers.
- Model respectful behavior.
- Create a school environment where responsibility, safety, and respect for all regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation are promoted.



“Creating safe and orderly schools is about commitment and community will. Accomplishing such a goal requires families, schools, and community leaders to articulate the quality of the educational environment they want to provide for youth and to collaboratively develop the strategies that will produce the desired results. Achieving this objective requires school and community leaders to assess where they are, plan where they want to be, implement a series of comprehensive strategies to bridge the difference, and evaluate their progress.”¹

Policies and Programs



- Set clear policies about reporting teen dating abuse or violence of any kind. (i.e. documentation, protocol, etc.)
- Implement awareness education for students and parents about TDV.
- Provide counseling services for affected students.
- Enforce protective and restraining orders and use “Stay-Away Agreements” (School-based alternatives to protective orders. See example on pg. 15 of source.)²
- Hold staff trainings on how to recognize signs of teen dating violence and how to intervene.
- Identify local community resources and make these available to students in a safe, accessible place.
- Find creative ways to make the school community aware of policies.



References

¹“Creating safe and drug-free schools.” (n.d.). <http://1.usa.gov/1Fi4yJn>. ²“Model policy and guidance for incidents involving dating violence.” (n.d.). <http://bit.ly/1F1JMfk>; “Teen Dating Violence: Information for Teachers.” (n.d.) <http://bit.ly/17tcg2B>; Teen Dating Violence Prevention.” (n.d.) <http://bit.ly/1FHc7pb>; “A Guide to Addressing Dating Violence in Texas Schools.” (2007). <http://bit.ly/1G3Cvlg>

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Teen Dating Violence Resources

There are various resources for dating violence victims and perpetrators that offer prevention, intervention, and advocacy efforts on the local, state, and national levels.



NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence



<http://www.njcedv.org/>

The NJCEDV, formerly NJCBW, is a statewide association that provides leadership, support and resources on the prevention of domestic violence in New Jersey through advocacy, education and training, technical assistance and community awareness.



Break the Cycle



<http://www.breakthecycle.org/>

Break the Cycle is an organization that inspires and supports young people to create healthy relationships by providing comprehensive dating abuse and violence prevention programs, hosting public campaigns, and championing effecting laws and policies.



Veto Violence



<http://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/>

Created by the CDC, Veto Violence was created to educate and empower communities to stop violence before it happens. The website provides violence education resources as well as training, tips, and tools designed specifically for prevention practitioners.



NO MORE



<http://nomore.org/>

NO MORE is a public awareness and engagement campaign focused on ending domestic violence and sexual assault by breaking social stigmas, normalizing the conversation, and increasing resources to address these issues on the local, state, and national levels.



That's Not Cool



<http://www.thatnotcool.com/>

Geared toward a young audience, this website is part of a national public education campaign that uses digital examples of controlling, pressuring, and threatening behavior to raise awareness about and prevent teen dating abuse.



Hotlines



National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE <http://www.thehotline.org/>
National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline: 1-866-331-9474 <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>
National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE <https://www.rainn.org/>

