



# Teenage Dating Violence & Abuse ADVICE FOR PARENTS

**1 in 10 teenagers experience violence and abuse in their dating relationships.** It might be hard to take their relationships seriously, particularly if they are under sixteen, but you should keep in mind that 1 in 10 teenagers experience physical violence in a dating relationship and 2-3 women are murdered every week in England and Wales by their boyfriend or ex-boyfriend and this includes young women and teenagers. Teenage boys also experience violence from their partners.

This dating violence is a form of "domestic abuse" although this might be hard for parents to come to terms with. Even if your teenager is not being physically hurt, domestic abuse can take many forms, including emotional abuse. All forms of abuse can have damaging short and long term effects on young people. Dating violence can happen to any teenager, regardless of their background, culture, religion, sexuality, family income and educational achievements. Teenagers do not need to have experienced abuse at home to be involved in an abusive relationship either as a victim or as a perpetrator of abuse.

## Teenage dating abuse can be:

- **Physical violence: slapping, hitting, punching**
- **Verbal: shouting, name-calling, put-downs**
- **Emotional: extreme jealousy, mind games, controlling behaviour, emotional blackmail, spreading rumours, sharing explicit texts, emails or photos**
- **Sexual: sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, degrading someone sexually, rape, getting someone drunk or drugged to get sex**

## Why Teenagers may keep the abuse secret

Many teenagers keep quiet about what is happening to them and often parents are the last to know. This isn't necessarily because your child mistrusts you - there are many reasons why they keep abuse secret and these can be complex and overlapping.

- **Teenagers are just beginning to gain some control over their own lives - if they tell you what is happening, you might take that control back.**
- **They might not be ready to end the relationship and still be hoping the abuse will stop - so they might worry that you will stop them seeing the abuser**
- **They are embarrassed and ashamed**
- **They are afraid you will intervene in an inappropriate way and make the situation worse - they may genuinely be frightened of repercussions against themselves and/or their family members.**
- **They think you will blame them, be disappointed in them or not trust them again in the future.**
- **They may have been seeing the abuser in secret because it is someone you disapprove of or have banned them from dating - if they tell you about the abuse, they will also have to tell you they have lied to you about the relationship.**
- **They may think the abuse is normal or they are to blame - especially if the abuser repeatedly tells them it is all their fault. Remember, your teenager may not have many other (or any other) relationships with which to compare.**
- **They may be worried about losing your trust and the privileges that come with that, such as staying out late, having boy/girlfriends etc.**

To order more leaflets or other CRUSH resources contact:  
West Mercia Women's Aid  
P O Box 74, Hereford HR4 9WB  
**01432 356146** (general enquiries)  
Email: [crush@westmerciawomensaid.org](mailto:crush@westmerciawomensaid.org)

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## Why teenagers are vulnerable to abuse

- Teens have little prior experience of relationships and therefore may not recognise what a healthy, caring relationship looks like.
- Teens may believe that having a girlfriend/boyfriend is more important than anything else in their lives.
- Teens often confuse extreme jealousy and possessiveness with love
- Teens often think no one will believe them or take them seriously
- Teens may become isolated (many stop seeing friends when they begin a new relationship) so they may not have anyone to talk to
- Abusive relationships are cyclical – going from “honeymoon” period to abusive period – this is confusing for adults, let alone teenagers who have not matured and have little life experience.
- Teens may see their girlfriend/boyfriend every day at school or college – this makes ending the relationship more difficult
- We have one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe, and a pregnancy can create additional problems and make an abusive relationship more difficult to end.

## Warning Signs

Many warning signs can also be common behaviour for teenagers, but you should be aware of:

- **Becoming withdrawn or irritable**
- **Being secretive about their dating life**
- **Suddenly not wanting to go to school or college**
- **Becoming scared to go out**
- **Loss of contact with friends**
- **Deleting parents from social networking sites**
- **Injuries such as bruises, scratches or cigarette burns – with unlikely causes.**
- **Changes in eating or sleeping patterns**
- **New or increased use of alcohol or drugs**
- **Always responding immediately to calls or texts from boy/girlfriend.**

## How you can help

### DO:

- **Make time for your teenager to talk or find another trusted adult they can talk to.**
- **Remind your teenagers they are loved – this can help them open up.**
- **Take their relationships seriously. Heartache can feel unbearable at any age and can feel even keener and sharper for teenagers.**
- **Involve other people if you think your teenager is at risk. Don't be scared to talk to the police – they understand domestic abuse.**
- **Make sure your teenager is safe – perhaps arranging lifts for them until things settle.**
- **Contact the numbers or use the websites on this leaflet for support and advice – this could be something you could do together.**
- **Tell your teenager that the abuse is not their fault, it is the abuser that has the problem and it is not your child's responsibility to help them change.**

### DON'T:

- **Get angry, this is likely to make your teenager clam up.**
- **Dismiss your teenager – they may be in real trouble.**
- **Intervene in anger – this can make the situation worse.**
- **Dish out punishments in the heat of the moment – if you need to change the rules, wait until this situation has been sorted.**
- **Demand the relationship ends immediately. Your teenager may need help and support to realise that abuse is unacceptable.**

## Why teenagers abuse their partners

You might be the parent of a teenager that is being abusive. This can be difficult to come to terms with. There are many reasons why teenagers behave this way, but everyone is different. They may have an unhealthy attitude to women and girls based on messages they have picked up from family, popular culture, magazines, films, music lyrics etc. Some people have a need to control and “own” things because they have struggled to get or keep belongings in the past, perhaps because of marauding siblings. Or they may be acting out behaviour they have witnessed between other adults. Like all abuse, teenage abuse is not about anger but power and control. Although alcohol, drugs or mental health problems may act as a trigger, these are never the root causes of abuse.

## USEFUL NUMBERS & LINKS

### National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247 [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**Forced Marriage Unit** 020 7008 0151

### Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327 [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

Advice and support for men in abusive relationships

**National Stalking Helpline** 0300 636 0300

### E-victims [www.e-victims.org](http://www.e-victims.org)

Provide advice to those who are affected by electronic crime such as malicious e-mails and cyber stalking.

### Get Connected

**[www.getconnected.org.uk](http://www.getconnected.org.uk)** Free email and telephone helpline that finds young people the best help whatever the problem.

### Respect not Fear

**[www.respectnotfear.co.uk](http://www.respectnotfear.co.uk)** Website for young people about healthy relationships, with games and activities.

### T.E.A.R. [www.teenagainstabuse.org](http://www.teenagainstabuse.org)

Website for teens experiencing dating abuse

### Parentline Plus

**0808 800 2222.** Advises parents dealing with complicated issues affecting their children.

**Rape Crisis [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk) 0808 802 9999**

The national helpline number can also be used by male victims or friends and family of the victim.

**Rights of Women** free Legal Advice Line

**020 7251 6577** or **020 7490 2562** (textphone)

**Victim Supportline** 0845 30 30 900

(Local support for male or female victims)

**Respect** 0845 122 8609

(For perpetrators seeking to address their behaviour)

### National Offender Management Service

**Victim Helpline** 0845 7585 112 (unwanted contact from a prisoner or worried about release)

**Broken Rainbow** 0300 999 5428

**[www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)**

### Government advice about teenage abuse

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Yourchildsh ealthandsafety/Worriedabout/DG\\_185031](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Yourchildsh ealthandsafety/Worriedabout/DG_185031)

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