



teenage DATING VIOLENCE

Many young women and some men in high school report abuse in their relationships. Teenagers who are abusive use various tactics of control against their partners.* These tactics may include:

- Making all the decisions in the relationship – where to go, who to spend time with, what to do.
- Monitoring where their partner says s/he is going and getting angry if s/he goes somewhere else or following their partner around school or in the community.
- Pressuring their partner to stop seeing her/his friends, or using jealousy as an excuse to control who s/he sees or spends time with.
- Name calling, putdowns, making their partner feel bad about her/himself, telling a their partner that no one else would date him/her or that their partner is ugly, fat or stupid.
- Taking their partner's money, pressuring their partner to give up money or trying to keep their partner from getting a job.
- Making their partner do sexual things or have sex when s/he doesn't want to.
- Threatening to hurt their partner physically or emotionally, threatening to tell people that they've been sexual partners, threatening to break-up if their partner doesn't do what s/he wants or threatening to commit suicide if their partner ends the relationship.
- Slamming doors, punching walls, grabbing, shoving, slapping, hitting, punching.

Warning Signs

Physical abuse in relationships rarely starts out as severe violence. Some behaviors which show the possibility that a dating partner may eventually become physically violent include extreme jealousy, blaming others for all problems, never being able to admit to wrongdoing, cruelty to animals, and holding rigid beliefs about sex-roles for men and women. The following stories show some warning signs that a boyfriend or girlfriend may get more controlling and violent.

Jealousy

"My boyfriend is really crazy about me. He just hates it when I talk to other guys. I tell him they're just friends, but he says they're all after me. One time we got into a fight 'cause he saw me sitting with another guy in the cafeteria. I tried to tell him we were just studying for a math test, but he said I was lying and slapped me. I guess he just gets jealous 'cause he loves me so much."

If someone is jealous we often think it's a compliment – like it's their way of showing they care. It's normal to feel jealous now and then, but we can't keep someone from having other friends. No one has the right to control who we see or who we choose as friends. A slap (or any kind of violence) is not a sign of love and affection. It's a sign of control, and no one deserves it. We have no right to control what someone does by threatening or hurting them. When we get so mad we want to hit somebody, we should walk away from the situation. When we cool off we can try talking about what happened.

Using Anger and Control

"Last night I went out for pizza with my friend. He wanted to go to a party at this guy's house, but I really wasn't up for it. He said he was going no matter what I did, so I grabbed his arm and told her he couldn't leave me with nothing to do. He started walking away, so I pulled his hair and yanked him around. He ran away yelling he never wanted to see me again."

Anyone can get frustrated when things don't go their way, but abusing people we care about to get what we want is never okay. Being hurt by a friend's words or actions doesn't justify using physical force. If you can't handle the situation, walk away and talk it out at another time. Friends don't have the right to make decisions for each other. It's okay to end a friendship with someone who tries to control you with force.

Abuse at Home

"My dad expects my mom to be there when he gets home from work. The other night she had to work overtime, so when she came home she went straight to bed. Dad followed her, screaming that he's sick of her not doing what she's supposed to. Then he beat her up and stormed out. Later he apologized and promised it wouldn't happen again, but it always does. That's just the way he is."

It is normal for parents to get angry sometimes and argue. But hurting or hitting another adult, teenager, or child is wrong. In fact, it's against the law. Hitting people never makes problems go away, and someone can get seriously hurt. If your father or mother's partner uses violence they are **choosing** this behavior to try to control things because they think they have a right to. This is wrong. You can choose other ways to solve problems and negotiate in your relationships.

Healthy Relationships

Arguments in relationships are normal, but using physical violence is never okay. A healthy relationship is one in which partners treat each other with respect, support each other's goals in life and expect each other to have their own opinions, feelings, friends, and activities. In an equal relationship decisions are made together, both partners make compromises and admit mistakes, and communications are open and truthful.

Girls

Does your boyfriend strike out at you or make you feel afraid or uncomfortable? Do you change your behavior to try to keep him happy? Are you afraid you will get hurt if you try to end the relationship? It's important to know that no one has the right to hurt you as a way to control you. It's against the law for someone to hit you. If you get assaulted you can call the police. If you are being abused, talk to a trusted friend or family member, counselor, teacher or call a battered women's program in your area. It's also not okay for you to treat your boyfriend in abusive ways.

Boys

Do you have a problem controlling your anger? Have you hit or hurt someone you care about? Have you lost friends because of the abusive way you acted? It's important for you to reject the idea that physical abuse is okay – before it gets worse. If you are abusive to a girlfriend, stop it now. Talk to a school counselor and ask for help to change your behavior. It's also not okay for your girlfriend to treat you in abusive ways.

If someone is abusing you, call an advocate:

Domestic Abuse Project Advocates . . .612.673.3526
Toll-Free Crisis Line 1.866.223.1111

*This material addresses abuse in heterosexual relationships, but lesbian and gay teens can also be abused in dating relationships.

Adapted from a handout by Minnesota Coalition For Battered Women, 122 Bigelow Building, 450 North Syndicate, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55104, 612/646-6177.