

Healthy Relationships Toolkit

Empowering Teens to Build Safe & Supportive Relationships

UNDERSTANDING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE PREVENTION TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS HANDBOOK



Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention Training Handbook

The following material summarizes key points from each training module of Healthy Relationships Toolkit (HeaRT) – Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention. Use the reflection questions at the end of each module to promote critical thought and discussion about how you may handle or prevent a potential teen dating violence (TDV) situation.

When this training refers to teens, keep in mind that we mean young people from pre-teen (age 11) throughout adolescence (to early 20s). Educators include anyone who works with teens in a learning capacity and/or setting, from teachers, administrators, and counselors to coaches, youth mentors, and other school and after-school personnel.

MODULE ONE

This training module contains the following chapters:

1. Welcome (video)
2. Opportunities for Healthy Relationships (interactive)
3. Module 1 Takeaways and Reflections (interactive)
4. What to Expect Next (video)

KEY POINTS:

- Adolescence is a time of enormous physical, emotional, and social change. During this time, youth seek greater independence and may try new roles and identities.
- Throughout adolescence, there is a gradual transition from sex-segregated peer groups (girls hanging out with girls, boys hanging out with boys) to mixed-sex peer groups (while also maintaining same-sex ties). Dating typically unfolds in this context.
- Friendships and dating relationships provide an opportunity for youth to learn and practice healthy communication, social skills, and managing strong feelings.
- Giving youth room to develop independence is important during this process. However, it's also our job as adults to make sure this time of exploration and discovery remains safe and productive.
- Opportunities are everywhere to redirect, empower, and help teens make healthy choices about how they communicate and connect.
- Positive relationships with friends, family members, educators, and other trusted adults can both support the development of healthy dating relationships and lower the risk of violence in adolescents.

See the chart below to learn more about the various social connections in a teen's life, how these exchanges can be beneficial to their development, and where you might observe these interactions take place:

Opportunities for Healthy Relationships

RELATIONSHIP TYPE	DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP	POTENTIAL BENEFIT(S)	OPPORTUNITIES FOR OBSERVATION/INTERACTION
Peers	These individuals are better known as friends.	Learning to make and keep friendships also builds skills needed for healthy dating relationships. A strong network of healthy friendships is linked to lower rates of dating violence.	In hallways, at lunch, and during other times when teens are together, you can see how they interact with each other and encourage positive social skills and behaviors.
Parents	For many teens, this is the first example of an intimate relationship they observe.	If they have conversations with a teen around how to build healthy, respectful relationships and model those behaviors, this connection can impact how a teen communicates and deals with conflict/stress in a dating relationship.	Learning about a student's home life and family bonds can give you valuable insight. Coordination between school and home is also linked to better school performance.
Educators	These individuals help teens learn how to navigate the world beyond their home and family in school and other learning environments.	Students engaged at school tend to have more positive outcomes later in life.	Besides the classroom, other learning environments where these individuals can be observed include sites where teens participate in extracurricular activities and/or school-sponsored programs. This may be your chance to see what successfully engages a teen and what does not.
Dating Partners	Adolescents may spend a great deal of time thinking about these relationships, even if they don't have one. Teens will have the least experience with this relationship type.	This relationship type can be another source of support for a teen, if it is healthy.	Teens don't always have private spaces to be alone with other teens. Unfortunately, this may mean more private behavior happening in public. You may be in a position to guide healthier behavior.
Other Trusted Adults	These individuals are mentors and family friends who may not have an official role in the lives of teens, but they have taken the time to show interest and build trust.	When problems arise with parents, friends, or dating partners, having someone who is not as closely involved can be helpful. The outsider status of these individuals can make it easier for teens to share concerns and accept advice.	If you know a teen is struggling but you are not close to the teen, you may want to look for these connections in their neighborhoods or communities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What changes have you noticed as youth move from childhood to adolescence? At what point have you noticed youth start to be interested in dating?
- What do you hope to learn about your ability to influence the health of teens' relationships?

MODULE TWO: Dating and Adolescent Development

This training module contains the following chapters:

1. Dating and Adolescent Development (video)
2. Brandon and Gabi (graphic novel)
3. Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship (interactive)
4. Teen Culture & Environment (video)
5. Welcome to Gabi's Room (interactive)
6. Module 2 Takeaways and Reflections
7. An Educator's Influence and What to Expect Next (video)

KEY POINTS:

- Youth learn a lot about how to communicate by watching family members, teachers, coaches, and other important adults in their lives.
- School may be one of the first places youth learn to navigate the world beyond their home and family.
- Educators have a responsibility to both model and teach youth the skills needed to form and maintain healthy relationships.
- Healthy and unhealthy behaviors can happen in any relationship, between male and female students, same sex students – even friends.
- Cultural and environmental factors that influence each of us individually—in our relationships, in our communities, and throughout our society—tend to affect how we respond to certain situations and what we each feel is “normal.”

Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship

The following characteristics are associated with a lower risk for dating violence:

- Belief in non-violent conflict resolution
- Effective communication skills
- Ability to negotiate and adjust to stress
- Belief in a partner's right to autonomy
- Shared decision-making
- Trust in one's partner

In a healthy and safe relationship, each partner:

- **Keeps their individuality.** Each partner feels free to spend time apart, enjoy other friends, and keep the activities and interests that are important to them. Each person feels like they can be themselves.

- **Respects boundaries.** Partners give each other physical and emotional space and respect each other's privacy.
- **Listens.** Each partner takes the time to get to know the other person and what they value.
- **Points out the positive.** Each partner is respectful and encouraging toward the other person, including pointing out positive qualities and giving compliments.
- **Can agree to disagree.** It is expected that dating partners (like friends and other types of relationships) will not always share the same point of view or feelings about the same situations. The key to a healthy and safe relationship is how those disagreements or conflicts are handled.
- **Uses healthy communication.** It is important that each partner communicates in a healthy way. This includes being honest with each other and expressing thoughts and feelings by using respectful words.
- **Is an equal partner.** Each partner treats the other as an equal, and both make decisions in the relationship.
- **Has fun!**

Four Level Social – Ecological Model:

This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to address that factors that put people at risk for experiencing or engaging in violence.

INDIVIDUAL	RELATIONSHIP	COMMUNITY	SOCIETY
This level identifies personal characteristics or biological factors like age and sex. Each individual has a unique personal history—experiences they have been through, such as witnessing violence—that influence how they think and act.	This level is about how the people in your life affect how you act. It could be a close relationship between two people or interaction among a larger group, like a circle of friends. As outlined in Module 1, key relationships that can influence how a teen behaves and communicates include peers, parents, dating partners, educators, and other trusted adults.	This level explores the settings in which social relationships occur. For at least six to eight hours a day, five days a week, school is a significant community for young people. A school's policies, culture, expectations of students, level of discipline, and even its physical layout can impact teen behavior. Other communities of influence include neighborhoods, social hangouts, and workplaces.	This level looks at the broader world that we live in and how it influences our level of acceptance or tolerance for violence. Often, we don't spend much time thinking about it or we may not be aware of it, because it helps define what we consider normal. For example, young people don't always think critically about the messages in TV, music, movies, and other media that make violence or other controlling behaviors seem glamorous.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- As an educator, you are a relationship level influencer. How might you be able to support healthy relationship behaviors in teens?
- What could your school or organization do to support healthy teen relationships?

MODULE THREE: Prevalence & Consequences of Teen Dating Violence

This training module contains the following chapters:

1. Prevalence and Consequences of Teen Dating Violence (video)
2. Devon and Rachel (graphic novel)
3. Types of Dating Violence (interactive)
4. Prevalence of Teen Dating Violence (interactive)
5. Devon and Rachel - A Closer Look (video)
6. Consequences of Teen Dating Violence (interactive)
7. Broader Risks of Teen Dating Violence (interactive + slides)
8. Module 3 Takeaways and Reflections (interactive)
9. From Understanding to Application (video)

KEY POINTS:

- Teens often think that some behaviors, like teasing or name-calling, are a “normal” part of a relationship. However, these behaviors can often become abusive and even develop into more serious forms of violence.
- It is sometimes hard to tell when a behavior has crossed the line and is not only unhealthy, but also unsafe. Educators can help youth explore and understand when this line has been crossed and connect youth with resources and support.
- TDV is defined as any physical, sexual, and/or emotional/psychological violence within a dating relationship, including stalking. Dating violence can take place both in person and electronically.
- Involvement in dating violence can lead to potentially severe and long-lasting consequences.
- The impact of violent behaviors has been shown to reach far beyond just those involved in the relationship. Evidence suggests that other students or bystanders to a conflict are impacted as well. Any kind of violence among youth affects all kids in the school.
- Teens who feel unsafe or unhappy have difficulty focusing on learning.

Types of Teen Dating Violence:

- **Physical** – When a partner is physically attacked such as pinched, hit, shoved, or kicked.
- **Emotional/Psychological** – Threatening a partner or harming their sense of self-worth. Examples include name-calling, coercion, shaming, bullying, embarrassing on purpose, or keeping them away from friends and family. This form of TDV can happen in person or online, such as through email or social media.

- **Sexual** – Forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when they do not or cannot consent. Sexual violence is not just rape. It includes forcing any type of sexual act, including touching or kissing. People can force others into sexual contact by using physical force, or by using words—such as threats or pressure. Some forms of sexual violence do not involve physical contact and include acts like exposing sexual body parts to someone else.

Prevalence of Teen Dating Violence:

- A survey of U.S. high school students suggests that 1 in 5 female students and 1 in 10 male students who date have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual TDV during the past 12 months. [Source: Vagi, Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor (2015); <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2173573>]
- Among adults who experience of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 1 in 5 women and nearly 1 in 7 men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 & 17 years of age. [Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/>]
- We know that emotional/psychological violence is the most common type of dating violence. Numbers range depending on the survey and type of population surveyed (e.g. just girls or just boys), but about a third to three quarters of youth who date report perpetrating this type of violence against a dating partner at least once. [Source: Nilon et al (2015); [http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(14\)00314-0/pdf](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(14)00314-0/pdf)]
- Sexual dating violence is often reported at lower rates than the other types of dating violence. [Source: Miller et al (2015); [http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(14\)00712-5/pdf](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(14)00712-5/pdf)]

Consequences for People Who Experience Teen Dating Violence:

- Increased absenteeism
- Problems in non-dating relationships
- Decline in well-being
- Failure to participate in school activities
- Poor academic performance
- Thoughts of suicide
- Fear
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use
- Injury
- Delinquent behavior
- Experiencing violence in subsequent relationships

Consequences of Engaging in Teen Dating Violence:

- Loss of friend's respect
- Poor academic performance
- Alienation from friends and family
- Physical and health problems
- Juvenile or criminal record/confinement
- Loneliness
- Expulsion from school
- Loss of job

Broader Risks of Teen Dating Violence:

- A recent study evaluated the relationship between dating violence and suicide attempts among urban teens aged 14 and older. According to this study, teen girls who experienced recent dating violence were 60% more likely to report at least one suicide attempt in the past year than those who did not experience recent dating violence.

[Source: Olshen et al (2007); <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=570505>]

- Students who report experiencing multiple forms of TDV may be at more risk for negative outcomes vs. youth who report experiencing one type of TDV.

For example, female students who experienced both physical and sexual TDV were twice as likely to attempt suicide as students who reported experiencing one type of TDV. In this same study, male individuals who experience both types were about 3 times as likely to attempt suicide as male students who experienced one form of victimization.

[Source: Vagi et al (2015) <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2173573>]

- Both male and female students who say they have experienced TDV are more likely than their peers to experience a range of health-risk behaviors, including:
 - using alcohol
 - binge drinking
 - using marijuana
 - thinking about suicide and attempting suicide
 - carrying a weapon
 - having more sexual partners

[Source: Vagi et al (2015) <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2173573>]

- Dating violence victimization has been linked to:
 - academic underachievement
 - negative views of school
 - drop-out

[Source: Vagi et al (2015) <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2173573>]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Emotional/psychological violence involves threatening a partner or harming their sense of self-worth.

- Have you noticed any emotionally/psychologically unhealthy behaviors between youth in a dating relationship? If so, what types of behaviors have you seen or heard?
- How do you think a teen's reaction to dating violence might look and feel different for boys and girls?

MODULE FOUR: Recognizing Unhealthy Relationships

This training module contains the following chapters:

1. Recognizing Unhealthy Relationships (video)
2. Marissa and Jason (graphic novel)
3. Risk Factors and Warning Signs (interactive)
4. Seeking Help (video)
5. Emotion Regulation and Healthy Communication (interactive)
6. Feeling Safe (video)
7. Module 4 Takeaways and Reflections
8. Training Wrap-Up and Challenge (video)

KEY POINTS:

- Educators are in a unique position to spot unhealthy relationship behaviors (in the hallway, classroom, basketball court, etc.) and connect youth with resources and support as needed.
- Not speaking up when you are around one teen hurting another is the equivalent, in youth eyes, of endorsing behavior. Do not wait for a student to ask for help.
- Seeking help can be difficult, even for adults, and this is especially true when it comes to relationships. You may need to be the one to offer to connect the teen to a resource or get a professional involved.
- Some people who experience violence in adolescence don't seek help because they think their partner will change, they feel responsible for or embarrassed by the abuse, they fear retaliation, or they don't realize that they're in an unhealthy relationship.

Risk Factors for Teen Dating Violence:

- Belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Symptoms of anxiety and/or depression
- Aggression toward peers or other aggressive behaviors
- Drug or alcohol use
- Early sexual activity and multiple sex partners
- Conflicts with a partner
- Exposure to violence in the home

Warning Signs for Teen Dating Violence:

- Problems at school
 - Consistent school attendance problems
 - A noticeable drop in grades
 - A sudden request for class schedule changes
- A noticeable weight change
- Changes in behavior
 - Passive or quieter than usual
 - Drop in self-confidence
- Isolation from social group
- Regular bruising or other injuries
- Alcohol or drug use
- One teen seems to be controlling the other
 - **Physically** – one person's arm is always firmly around the other person
 - **Socially** – one person monopolizes the other person's time
 - **Electronically** – one person is repeatedly calling, texting, e-mailing, messaging online, etc., when communication is unwanted.

Warning Signs for Engaging in Teen Dating Violence:

- Insists on walking a dating partner to class
- Threatens to hurt others
- Threatens to hurt self if dating partner breaks up with them
- Insults a dating partner in public or private
- Damages or destroys a dating partner's personal belongings
- Attempts to control what a dating partner wears

Suggested Adult Responses:

Model and teach healthy behaviors.

When you became an educator, you became a role model. Teens take notes on more than just the subject matter or activity or sport you teach. They watch how you handle your emotions and interact with other youth and adults. Think about how you would like teens to communicate and relate to one another and model that. You can also teach these same skills to youth.

Want to learn more? Go to the resource center to download information about teaching youth positive self-talk, deep breathing, and mindfulness - three skills that help us stay in control of our feelings and build healthy relationships with others.

- Positive Self-Talk
- Deep Breathing
- Mindfulness

Model and teach healthy behaviors.

“Use your words” isn’t just for kindergarteners. The simple act of naming something decreases its power. Calmly expressing difficult feelings, or emotions, and using healthy communication skills provides a positive example for teens. You can also teach these same skills to youth.

Want to learn more? Go to the resource center to download information about teaching youth some steps for staying calm and other tips for effective and healthy communication.

- 4 Steps for Staying Calm
- Tips for Effective & Healthy Communication

Be aware and take action.

Remember that seeking help, even for adults, can be difficult when it comes to anything about a relationship, including unhealthy or violent behaviors. You may need to be the one to offer to connect the teen to a resource or get a professional involved.

Want to learn more? Go to the resource center to download information about potential resources for teens.

- Resources for Teens

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some resources in your community for helping teens navigate dating relationships?
- What steps would you take if you knew a teen who had been experiencing abuse by someone they were taking?