

# WHAT ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DATING ABUSE

Teens and young adults are the most at-risk age groups for dating and domestic violence. Girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence, almost triple the national average (LoveIsRespect.org).

Dating violence can be especially concerning because young people are often new to relationships, they may be more trusting or impulsive and may not have learned what healthy relationships look like. This vulnerability may end up being exploited by an abusive partner, which is why it's so important for teens to learn about relationships and have supportive adults who they can trust when they need help!

## Modeling Healthy Relationships in Youth-Serving Organizations

Working with children, teens or young adults, there are many ways that you can model characteristics of healthy relationships. You may have a code of conduct or program guidelines that already address some of these characteristics, like respect and kindness. Having these expectations in place when a young person is at your facility is a great first step, but it is as important that young people know they are worthy of healthy relationships with everyone in their life, including friends, siblings, teammates or dating partners.

**Here are a few ideas for bringing awareness about healthy relationships to young people in your programs:**

- Incorporate activities, programs or games that highlight healthy relationship characteristics like trust, communication, respect and boundaries.
- Create an organizational culture where everyone feels valued and deserving of healthy relationships, no matter what.
- Work with a local domestic violence service provider to speak with your youth, train your staff or identify supportive programs that may address specific needs at your organization.

## RED FLAGS YOU MIGHT SEE

Unfortunately, teen dating abuse is all too common. You may become aware of a young person in your program experiencing unhealthy or abusive behaviors in their relationship. The signs could look like...

- An extremely jealous or possessive partner
- Unexplained marks, bruises or injuries
- Constant messaging or checking in by their partner
- Increased or onset depression or anxiety
- Decreased interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Isolating from friend, family and social groups
- Changes in appearance or hygiene

**1 in 3 teens will experience some form of abuse by a dating partner.**

## Supporting a Young Person

If you suspect that a youth in your program is in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, you may be upset, frightened or frustrated. You may feel unprepared to provide support or not sure what to do for them.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Try getting more information about the situation by asking open ended questions.
- Connect them to resources that may be able to help them, let them know that they are not alone.
- Tell them that you support them and that they deserve a safe, healthy and fun relationship.

If you have questions about support strategies to help a young person you are working with, or are unsure of your organization's policy regarding suspected abuse, consult with your supervisor (you may have duties as a mandated reporter).

**Visit [LovelsRespect.org](https://www.LovelsRespect.org) or [TheHotline.org](https://www.TheHotline.org) for more information!**



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