

ENDING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Teaching Teens About Healthy Relationships

BY MICHELLE KELLEY, LCSW

local expert



THE EXPERT:
Michelle Kelley

HER EXPERTISE:
Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Michelle Kelley, LCSW, is owner of Warrenton Women's Counseling Center. "My passion is helping girls and women to thrive in their life and personal relationships. Together we can find balance between caring for yourself and others." For more information go to www.WarrentonWomensCounselingCenter.com or call 540.316.6362



No parent wants to see their teen in an unhealthy relationship, much less an abusive one. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 21% of high school girls who date and 10% of high school boys who date stated they had experienced some form of dating violence within the last 12 months. Teen dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual, and includes stalking.

Through my counseling experience I have concluded that teen girls and women have more lax relationship standards than boys and men do. I am concerned for our teen girls. I want them to be able to overcome the "people pleaser" inside of them, learn how to say "No", and know when and how to end a bad relationship. Teens today are more likely to say they "hang out" rather than date. This broad definition of being in a relationship is rather confusing for us parents as well as our teenagers. The hook-up culture is rampant and it creates an environment where relationship boundaries do not exist. I suspect relationship violence statistics are even higher due to the changing definition of being in a relationship. It makes me sad to see our youth succumb to a culture where relationships are not valued and boundaries do not exist.

It's important for parents to model healthy relationships and have frequent discussions with their teens about what a healthy relationship looks and feels like. Yes, I'm giving you permission to annoy your teen because this is very important. It's the parent's job to help them to set their own relationship standards and empower them to clearly articulate their relationship "deal breakers." Even many adults do not have these skills.

Raising a teen is not easy, especially in today's world where social media can hide their relationships and activities from parents. Trust your intuition. You know your child better than anyone. Be present and connected in their lives. You want to be their shield that protects them from abuse. ❖

Characteristics of a healthy relationship include:

Good communication:

This means the ability to speak one's mind respectfully.

Compromise:

All relationships require an element of compromise but it's also imperative to set limits and know subjects about which you will not compromise (tolerating abuse or dealing with substance abuse).

Anger control:

Everyone gets angry, but it needs to be expressed properly. When one partner feels afraid of their partner's anger, this is a problem.

Kindness:

No explanation needed.

Fighting fair:

Everyone argues, but learning to disagree without slinging insults or flying off the handle is critical.

Characteristics of an unhealthy relationship include:

Rage: When one partner's anger turns scary.

Control issues: When one partner tells the other what to wear, what to do, and who to talk with.

Jealousy: When unreasonable, it can be a real problem.

Dependence and insecurity: When one partner feels they cannot live without the other.

Physical violence: Hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving.

Sexual violence:

When one partner pressures the other into sexual activity without their consent.

Substance abuse: Any form of abusing alcohol or drugs should be a deal breaker.

LoveisRespect.org is a 24-hour support hotline for teens who are experiencing any form of relationship violence. It is a national organization whose purpose is to engage, educate, and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships.