

Conifer Counseling Informational Page

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Preventing Teen Dating Violence

The National Survey of Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence found approximately two thirds of the teens surveyed reported having been victimized by an intimate partner within the year prior to the survey. While teen dating violence includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence such as seen in adult Domestic Violence; there are some behaviors unique to the culture of this age group. This may allow teen dating violence to go unnoticed but more easily executed due to social media and the increased social pressure in a school setting.

Prevention and Intervention

Ask questions, don't lecture.

There is a big difference between "I don't like the way he talks to you." vs "Wow, how do you feel about the way he said that?" Follow up your teen's answers with even more questions! Questions allow the teen to feel as though you are not taking their decision making away or trying to tell them what to do. Asking questions allows you to express concerns, and prompts their brain to process the information and think about the situation.

Talk about relationships before they start dating.

Ask what your teen believes a healthy relationship looks like. If you feel there are pieces of that picture which are concerning, ask clarifying questions... Again, you are guiding them in making decisions for themselves about the relationship and building the neural pathways of thinking about relationships. This can help them examine their own relationships now and in the future.

Do you want to be there for your teen if things get bad OR do you want to be right?

If you want to be "right", you may push your teen away, further isolating them. This conflict may create a standoff in which your child sticks with a relationship to save face and not be "wrong". Avoiding this conflict keeps an open door for your child to come to you when they need help and reduce the level to which the abuse can escalate.

Know what you can control and what you can't.

Forbidding teens from spending time with someone rarely works. It increases secrecy around who they spend time with and where they go. Guess what- when a youth says they are not allowed to date yet, they still can usually answer the question "so who is your boyfriend/girlfriend?" with a name. So again, guiding healthy decisions versus making demands is usually the most effective intervention with teens.

Don't present sex as shameful or icky.

If healthy intimacy is shameful or icky and abusive intimacy feels icky and shameful, how is a teen (running on emotions and feelings) supposed to distinguish between the two? Openly discuss healthy sexual interactions vs abusive and don't leave out healthy emotions and feelings about sex.

Model a healthy and non-abusive relationship in the home.

This includes how you treat your partner and your child. This includes your expectations of how other family members treat each other and how siblings treat each other. Provide your teen a guideline and reference point for their own relationships through actions and experience.

Increase your knowledge and presence by involving their partner in your family life.

Allow your teen and their partner the opportunity to directly compare their relationship to a healthy family relationship. This may increase any discomfort of experiencing abusive behavior because it will be in direct conflict with family values.

***To be very clear, allowing a relationship in which a teen is in physical danger is never the answer. Immediate intervention when faced with direct harm is the best approach. Reporting abuse to authorities is something to consider. There is a time when their safety trumps everything else.

***Not sure if your teen is in a violent relationship? See our Teen Dating Violence Checklist