

# Understanding

## Teen Dating Violence

### Fact Sheet

2010

Dating violence is a type of intimate partner violence. It occurs between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual.

- **Physical**—This occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, shoved, or kicked.
- **Emotional**—This means threatening a partner or harming his or her sense of self-worth. Examples include name calling, shaming, bullying, embarrassing on purpose, or keeping him/her away from friends and family.
- **Sexual**—This is forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent.

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Dating violence often starts with teasing and name calling. These behaviors are often thought to be a “normal” part of a relationship. But these behaviors can lead to more serious violence like physical assault and rape.



### Why is dating violence a public health problem?

Dating violence is a serious problem in the United States. Many teens do not report it because they are afraid to tell friends and family.

- 72% of 8th and 9th graders reportedly “date”.<sup>1</sup>
- 1 in 4 adolescents report verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner each year.<sup>1</sup>
- About 10% of students nationwide report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.<sup>2</sup>



### How does dating violence affect health?

Dating violence can have a negative effect on health throughout life. Teens who are victims are more likely to be depressed and do poorly in school.<sup>3</sup> They may engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using drugs and alcohol<sup>3</sup>, and are more likely to have eating disorders.<sup>4</sup> Some teens even think about or attempt suicide.<sup>5</sup> Teens who are victims in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.<sup>6</sup>



### Who is at risk for dating violence?

Studies show that people who harm their dating partners are more depressed and are more aggressive than peers. Other factors that increase risk for harming a dating partner include:<sup>7</sup>

- Trauma symptoms
- Alcohol use
- Having a friend involved in dating violence
- Having problem behaviors in other areas
- Belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Exposure to harsh parenting
- Exposure to inconsistent discipline
- Lack of parental supervision, monitoring, and warmth



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## How can we prevent dating violence?

The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are vital. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.

Prevention programs change the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating violence. One example is Safe Dates, a school-based program that is designed to change social norms and improve problem solving skills.



## How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a 4-step approach to address public health problems like dating violence.

### Step 1: Define the problem

Before we can prevent dating violence, we need to know how big the problem is, where it is, and whom it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data. These data are critical because they help decision makers send resources where they are needed most.

### Step 2: Identify risk and protective factors

It is not enough to know that dating violence is affecting a certain group of people in a certain area. We also need to know why. CDC conducts and supports research to answer this question. We can then develop programs to reduce or get rid of risk factors.

### Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies

Using information gathered in research, CDC develops and evaluates strategies to prevent violence.

### Step 4: Assure widespread adoption

In this final step, CDC shares the best prevention strategies. CDC may also provide funding or technical help so communities can adopt these strategies.

For a list of CDC activities, see [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ipv\\_sv\\_guide.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ipv_sv_guide.html).



## Where can I learn more?

**Choose Respect Initiative**  
[www.cdc.gov/chooserespect](http://www.cdc.gov/chooserespect)

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**  
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

**National Sexual Assault Hotline**  
1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

**National Sexual Violence Resource Center**  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

**Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention**  
[www.vetoviolence.org/datingmatters](http://www.vetoviolence.org/datingmatters)



## References

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For more information, please contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control  
1-800-CDC-INFO • [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention) • [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)