

AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Know the emotional, physical signs of teen dating violence

Dating can be an exciting milestone for teens. But when the smartphone is constantly buzzing with messages from a significant other, it could be a sign of dating violence. The best solution is prevention, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).



Dating violence can be physical or emotional. Violent partners can be boys or girls. They often have an explosive temper, are jealous, put their partner down, isolate their date from friends and families, make false accusations, have mood swings, seem possessive or bossy, and will pressure their date to do things against his or her will.

Social media can complicate the situation. Jealous partners might text, call or email constantly or ask for their partner's passwords and look over their date's shoulder to view who is sending messages. A survey found that more than one of every three middle-school students has been a victim of this type of psychological dating violence.

Kids who are victims of dating violence are more likely to have problems with school, substance abuse, depression and social experiences, according to a recent study. Patterns of dating violence often start early.

The AAP urges parents to talk to their children about healthy relationships in middle school, before dating starts. This is particularly important for preteens who see intimate partner violence at home. They have a greater risk of becoming involved in an abusive act and traumatized in their own relationships, according to the AAP.

Parents can play a key role in prevention by being a positive role model. When children understand what a healthy relationship is, they are less likely to accept dating violence and are more likely to have positive attitudes toward gender equality, according to a recent study. Healthy parent-child relationships also lead to more satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Signs of a healthy relationship include:

- respecting each other,
- knowing that you make each other better people,
- sharing common interests but also having outside activities and friends, and
- settling disagreements peacefully, with respect.

Teens in violent relationships often are afraid to seek help. A hotline is available, as well as a website that offers solutions on how to handle abusive teen dating relationships. For details, call 866-331-9474, text "loveis" to 22522 or visit www.loveisrespect.org/.

— Trisha Koriath

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