

# teacher background information

Note: this information is not intended for distribution to students

## Teen dating abuse

### How Prevalent Is Teen Dating Abuse?

- > Girls and women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence.<sup>1</sup>
- > One in five high school girls is physically or sexually hurt by a dating partner.<sup>2</sup> As many as one-third of teens experience some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships, including verbal and emotional abuse.<sup>3</sup>
- > One in three teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, or physically hurt by a partner. Forty-five percent of teen girls know someone who has been pressured or forced into having intercourse or oral sex.<sup>4</sup>
- > One in ten teens who have been in a relationship claim they have been threatened physically via email, instant messages, text, chat or other technological tool.<sup>5</sup>
- > The vast majority of teens consider verbal and physical abuse to be serious issues in their age group.<sup>6</sup>
- > Only 33 percent of teens who have been in or known about an abusive dating relationship report having told anyone about it.<sup>7</sup> Even fewer teens report having told their parents about abuse or threats occurring via cell phones, IM, text or e-mails.<sup>8</sup>
- > Adolescent males—as well as females—experience dating abuse. For more information on males as targets and what males can do to end violence against females, see the bibliography at the front of this curriculum.
- > Depending on the school and community in which you work you may (or may not) choose to explain to students that teen dating abuse occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships.

<sup>1</sup> Callie Marie Rennison (2001). Intimate partner violence and age of victim, 1993-1999. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Tucker Halpern et al. (2001). Partner violence among adolescents in opposite-sex romantic relationships: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *American Journal of Public Health* 91: 1680

<sup>3</sup> Jay G. Silverman et al. (2001). Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance abuse, unhealthy weight control, sexual risky behavior, pregnancy and suicidality. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286: 572.

<sup>4</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. Teen Dating Violence Survey, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. Teen Dating Violence Survey, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. Teen Dating Violence Survey, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. Teen Dating Violence Survey, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study, 2007.

# handout

## What is teen dating abuse?

Teen dating abuse is a pattern of physically, sexually, verbally, and/or emotionally abusive or controlling behavior in a dating relationship.

### Physical Abuse

Any intentional unwanted contact with the other person's body. Physical abuse does not have to leave a mark or a bruise.

Examples:

- > Scratching
- > Punching
- > Biting
- > Kicking
- > Pinching
- > Burning
- > Pulling hair
- > Choking
- > Strangling
- > Pushing
- > Using a weapon
- > Slapping
- > Shoving

### Sexual Abuse

Any sexual behavior that is unwanted or interferes with the other person's right to say "no" to sexual advances.

Examples:

- > Unwanted kissing or touching
- > Date rape
- > Forcing someone to go further sexually than he or she wants to
- > Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
- > Not letting someone use birth control or protection against sexually transmitted infections

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## Verbal / Emotional Abuse

Saying or doing something to the other person that causes the person to be afraid and/or have lower self-esteem. Trying to manipulate or control the person's feelings or behaviors.

Examples that can occur either in real life or online:\*

- > Name-calling and put-downs
- > Insulting the person or his/her family or friends
- > Yelling and screaming
- > Threatening violence or harm
- > Making racial slurs about the person
- > Making unwanted comments/sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature to the person
- > Embarrassing the person in front of others
- > Intimidating the person
- > Spreading negative rumors about the person
- > Preventing the person from seeing or talking to friends and family
- > Telling the person what to do
- > Making the person feel responsible for the violence/abuse
- > Stalking
- > Harming (or threatening to harm) the person's pets or property
- > Making the person feel guilty about leaving the relationship by talking about the abuser's hard life and how alone and abandoned the abuser will feel if left
- > Threatening to commit suicide
- > Threatening to kill the target or a friend/family member of the target
- > Threatening to expose personal information about the person (e.g., sexual orientation, immigration status)
- > Threatening to take away the person's child or children

\*Verbal or emotional abuse may also be carried out through e-mails, instant messages, cell-phones, voice mails or text messages, or social networking web sites. Even though these attacks may seem less personal, they are still hurtful and abusive.

# handout

## Patterns of Dating Abuse

Many people who are the target of dating abuse and violence find that the abuse occurs in a distinct pattern that is repeated over and over again: tension building, explosion, and honeymoon. Each phase can be as short as a few seconds or as long as several years.

**Phase 1: Tension Building:** Things start to get tense between the two people. In this phase:

- The two people argue a lot.
- The abuser yells at the target for no reason.
- The abuser makes false accusations about the target.
- The target feels that she or he can't do anything right.
- The atmosphere is tense, as if things could blow up at any moment.

**Phase 2: Explosion:** The tension is released in a burst of physical, sexual, and/or verbal/emotional abuse. The abuser may:

- Scream and yell in a way that is frightening and/or humiliating.
- Hit, grab, shove, kick, slam the other person against the wall, etc.
- Throw objects.
- Threaten to hurt the other person or someone he or she cares about.
- Rape the other person or force him or her to go further sexually than he or she wants to.

**Phase 3: Honeymoon:** The abuser tries to make the target stay in the relationship by apologizing and/or trying to shift the blame for the abuse onto someone or something else. The abuser may:

- Apologize and promise that the abuse will never happen again.
- Say "I love you."
- Buy the other person flowers or gifts.
- Accuse the other person of doing something to cause the abuse.
- Blame the abuse on other things such as alcohol or other drug use or stress.

After the honeymoon phase, the tension starts to build again, leading to another explosion. Over time, the honeymoon phase may get shorter and gradually disappear, and the explosions may become more violent and dangerous. Some targets of dating abuse never experience the honeymoon phase—just the tension building and explosion phases.

# handout

## **The Cycle of My Life\***

*by Pamela, age 16*

It all starts out wonderful until he strikes  
Constantly hearing I'm sorry  
Until it doesn't matter anymore  
Forgiving every time, forgetting never  
Calling out for him to stop  
Never stopping until it is almost too late  
Never thinking about the consequences of his actions  
Just making me think out every possible consequence of mine  
Hearing I'm sorry all over again  
Meeting him with open eyes  
Awaiting the gifts I know will pour forward  
Until it all stops—  
And the cycle begins all over again

**Directions:** List below signs that Pamela is experiencing phases two and three of the typical pattern of abuse in dating violence. Refer to “Patterns of Dating Abuse” for examples of behaviors that occur in these phases.

**Phase 2: Signs of Explosion:**

**Phase 3: Signs of Honeymoon:**

\*From [www.teenrelationships.org/teenssay/teensay.htm](http://www.teenrelationships.org/teenssay/teensay.htm).

# homework

## Possible Warning Signs in Dating Relationships

If you are in an intimate relationship with someone, is it as healthy as you deserve? Put a check next to any of the responses below that apply to this relationship.

Note: It is important to remember that sometimes there are *no* signs that an intimate relationship may become abusive.

Does the person I am with:

- Get extremely jealous or possessive?
- Accuse me of flirting or cheating?
- Constantly check up on me or make me check in?
- Tell me how to dress or how much makeup to wear?
- Try to control what I do and whom I see?
- Try to keep me from seeing or talking to my family and friends?
- Have big mood swings—getting angry and yelling at me one minute, and being sweet and apologetic the next?
- Make me feel nervous or as if I'm walking on eggshells?
- Put me down or criticize me?
- Make me feel that I can't do anything right?
- Make me feel that no one else would want me?
- Threaten to hurt me?
- Threaten to hurt my friends or family?
- Threaten to commit suicide?
- Threaten to hurt him- or herself because of me?
- Threaten to hurt my pet(s)?
- Threaten to destroy my things?
- Hurt me physically? (includes yelling, grabbing, pushing shoving, shaking, punching, slapping, holding me down, etc.)
- Break or throw things when we argue?
- Pressure or force me into having sex or going further sexually than I want to?

If you checked any of these responses, you may be in an abusive relationship. There are resources out there. [Loveisrespect.org](http://Loveisrespect.org) or [Break the Cycle](http://Break the Cycle) can help. For more information, visit [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org) or [www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org).