

# Understanding Teen Dating Violence

**Fact Sheet**

**2014**

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, slapped, punched, or kicked.
- **Psychological/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. This can be physical or nonphysical, like threatening to spread rumors if a partner refuses to have sex.
- **Stalking**—This refers to a pattern of harassing or threatening tactics that are unwanted and cause fear in the victim.

Dating violence can take place in person or electronically, such as repeated texting or posting sexual pictures of a partner online.

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Teens often think some behaviors, like teasing and name calling, are a “normal” part of a relationship. However, these behaviors can become abusive and develop into more serious forms of violence.



## Why is dating violence a public health problem?

Dating violence is a widespread issue that had serious long-term and short-term effects. Many teens do not report it because they are afraid to tell friends and family.

- Among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 22% of women and 15% of men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

- Approximately 9% of high school students report being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the 12 months before surveyed.<sup>2</sup>



## How does dating violence affect health?

Dating violence can have a negative effect on health throughout life. Youth who are victims are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol, or exhibit antisocial behaviors and think about suicide.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Youth who are victims of dating violence in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.<sup>6</sup>



## Who is at risk for dating violence?

Factors that increase risk for harming a dating partner include:<sup>7</sup>

- Belief that dating violence is acceptable
- Depression, anxiety, and other trauma symptoms
- Aggression towards peers and other aggressive behavior
- Substance use
- Early sexual activity and having multiple sexual partners
- Having a friend involved in dating violence
- Conflict with partner
- Witnessing or experiencing violence in the home

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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.

Many prevention strategies are proven to prevent or reduce dating violence. Some effective school-based programs change norms, improve problem-solving, and address dating violence in addition to other youth risk behaviors, such as substance use and sexual risk behaviors.<sup>8,9</sup> Other programs prevent dating violence through changes to the school environment or training influential adults, like parents/caregivers and coaches, to work with youth to prevent dating violence.<sup>10,11,12</sup>



## How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a four-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 who it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data.

### 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.

### Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies

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

### Step 4: Ensure widespread adoption

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



## Where can I learn more?

### CDC's Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships

[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters)

### National Dating Abuse Helpline and Love is Respect:

1-866-331-9474 or text 77054 or [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)

### 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)



## References

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