What Is Dating Violence?

DATING VIOLENCE IS CONTROLLING, ABUSIVE, AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP. IT OCCURS IN BOTH HETEROSEXUAL AND HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CAN INCLUDE VERBAL, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, OR SEXUAL ABUSE, OR A COMBINATION OF THESE BEHAVIORS.

Violent Behavior in Teen Relationships

- One of five teens in a serious relationship reports having been hit, slapped, or pushed by a partner.\(^a\)
- Young women, ages 16-24, experience the highest rates of relationship violence.\(^b\)
- Roughly one in 10 (9%) teens has been verbally or physically abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend who was drunk or high.\(^a\)
- Fourteen percent of teens report having been threatened with physical harm—either to them or self-inflicted by their partner—to avoid a breakup.\(^a\)
- Teens identifying as gay, lesbian, and bisexual are as likely to experience violence in same-sex dating relationships as youths involved in opposite sex dating.\(^c\)
- Among older teens, the percentage of violent crime involving an intimate partner was 10 times higher for females than males (9% versus 0.6%).\(^d\)
- Many studies indicate that as a dating relationship becomes more serious, the potential for and nature of violent behavior also escalates.\(^e\)

Dating Violence and the Law

- All 50 states and the District of Columbia have laws against dating violence-associated crimes such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. However, the specific term “dating violence” is rarely used in these laws.
- Thirty-five states allow minors to obtain civil protection orders against dating partners, with various restrictions depending upon the age of the minor.

Links to Other Forms of Violence

- In 2001, more than 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.\(^f\)
- Twelve percent of respondents in a study on violence against women reported having been stalked before the age of 18.\(^g\)
- There is a connection between using violence against peers and using sexual and physical violence against dates, with stronger correlations for boys than girls.\(^h\)
- Several studies have found that child maltreatment, defined by a combination of family violence indicators such as child abuse, corporal punishment, child sexual abuse, and exposure to domestic violence, is positively correlated with dating abuse perpetration.\(^i\)

Who Can Help

- Crisis hotlines and helplines can provide immediate assistance and referrals to sexual assault or domestic violence programs that provide advocacy, counseling, safety planning, legal assistance, emergency shelter, and support groups.
- School-based student assistance programs, guidance offices, and school resource officers can provide referrals for help and guidance on school policies and sanctions for violent behaviors by students or on campus.
- Legal options include calling the police, seeking protective orders, and cooperating with criminal prosecution.