



Parent Resource Guide: Teen Dating Abuse



Healthy relationship skills are not innate. They are learned. Youth deserve to have the skills and knowledge needed to engage in healthy dating relationships.

Parents are well-positioned to make a difference in their child's life. However, in a national on-line survey of parents with children 11-18 years old, nearly half, 45%, had not discussed dating violence with their children in the past year. Reasons parents did not discuss dating violence with their children included they thought their children were too young to talk about it, they would not know what to say, and their children would learn about it through experience. We hope this guide helps parents discuss their relationship values and healthy, non-violent relationships with their children. We hope this guide is useful and is another tool in your "parent toolbox" as you navigate life with your teenager. This resource guide includes the following:

- Important information on teen dating abuse, including statistics and dynamics of power and control
- Warning signs
- Conversation starters
- How to support a child if they disclose abuse
- A relationship assessment
- A bonus movie discussion guide

To solve a problem as far-reaching and destructive as teen dating abuse, a community-wide effort is needed. It is up to each of us to educate ourselves in order to recognize the signs of teen dating abuse and know how to intervene to help a young person in crisis. If we work together, we can help teens pave the way to a future free from violence.

ABOUT DVCC

Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC) is here to support individuals on their journey to safety. DVCC advocates for individuals who are experiencing abuse in personal relationships. Our multiple services and professional staff help those experiencing any level of domestic violence and assist them in building a safer environment for the well-being of themselves and their families. All victim services are free and confidential and all services offered are multicultural/multilingual.

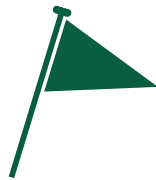
DVCC offers counseling and services to teens experiencing dating abuse or who witness domestic violence in their own families. For more information, go to the last page, "Resources".

THE RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in between. Abusive relationships don't happen overnight and often have a gradual escalation of unhealthy behaviors.

GREEN FLAGS & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

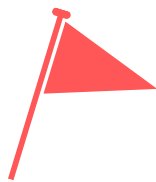
Healthy relationships consist of many different elements that make them strong and healthy. We like to call these characteristics green flags.



- Communication
- Trust
- Honesty
- Support
- Respect
- Equality
- Independence
- Boundaries
- Fun

RED FLAGS & UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Unhealthy relationships are based in attempts to control the other person. Often, the healthy characteristics start to go away and red flag behaviors develop. Red flags are warning signs that a relationship could turn abusive.



- Jealousy
- Dishonesty
- Breaks in communication
- Controlling what you wear
- Possessiveness
- Isolation
- Constantly checking in
- Playing head games

ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH POWER & CONTROL

In abusive relationships one person is making all of the decisions and there is an imbalance of power and control. Power and control are maintained through different forms of abuse, including:

- Physical
- Verbal
- Emotional
- Sexual
- Digital
- Economic

Adapted from loveisrespect.org

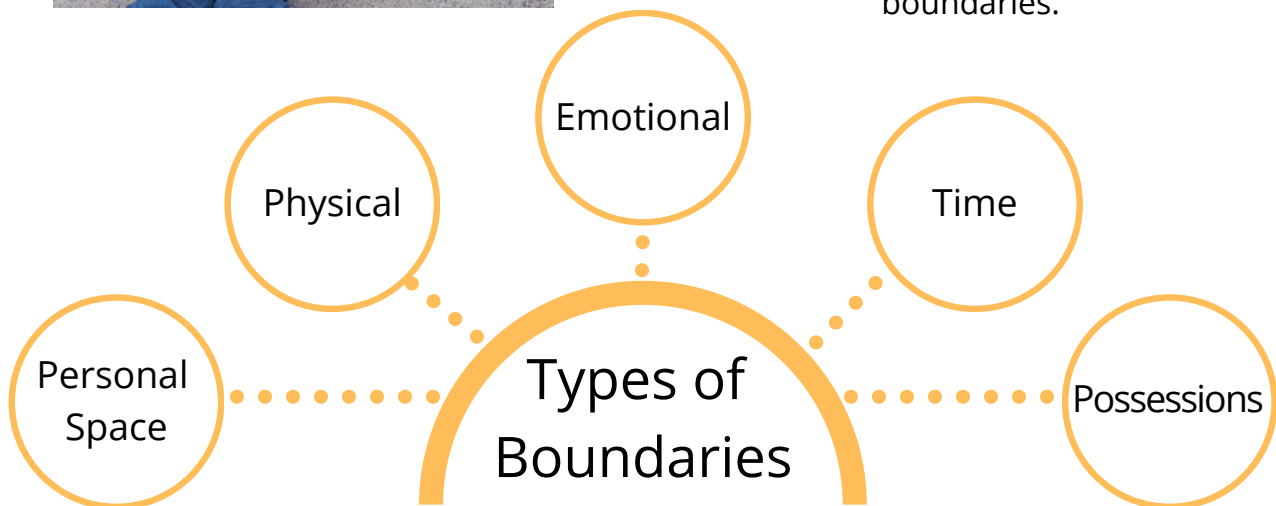
Domestic Violence Crisis Center
www.dvccct.org

ASSERTING YOUR BOUNDARIES

WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?



Boundaries are like lines that we cannot cross. Everyone has different levels of boundaries that can change based on a number of factors. In a healthy relationship, both people clearly communicate their boundaries and respect the other's boundaries.



Check out the examples below to see how the characters assert their boundaries.

Manuel and Christina have been dating for a few weeks. They start joking around and Manuel pushes Christina pretty hard. Respectfully, but without smiling or laughing, Christina makes eye contact with Manuel and says, *"I know we are just playing around, but I don't like people putting their hands on me like that. Don't push me again."*

Naomi and Thomas are dating. Thomas has plans with his friends to go to the movies. While he is out, Naomi texts him asking where he is and who he is with. He steps away from his friends to call her. On the phone, he says, *"I trust you and don't constantly message you when you are out with your friends. I want to be able to enjoy my time with my friends and not be glued to my phone. You should trust me and not feel the need to keep checking in on me."*

Parents can be role models for supportive, healthy relationships in all of their relationships, with friends, romantic partners, or others.

When you assert your boundaries, communicate when your boundaries have been crossed, and respect when others communicate their boundaries, you are able to model this important relationship skill for your child.



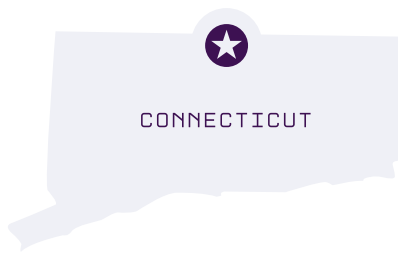
WARNING SIGNS OF TEEN DATING ABUSE FOR PARENTS

It is important that you recognize and address these warning signs early on in your child's relationship, as it will often escalate into more abusive, dangerous behaviors.

If you think your child is in a dangerous situation, trust your gut, and talk to your child.

- Your child drops extracurricular activities and hobbies that used to be important to them.
- Your child is put down and belittled by their partner, and it is masked as humor, especially in front of others.
- Your child is constantly apologizing for their partner's behavior and making excuses for them.
- Your child's partner says that they don't like your child's family and friends, or accuses the family and friends of not liking them.
- Your child receives excessive DMs, texts, or calls from their partner, masked as just checking in.
- Your child's partner checks their phone, email, or social media accounts without their permission, or your child is coerced into giving permission.
- Your child's partner exhibits extreme jealousy or possessiveness.
- As a result of their partner's action, your child is isolated from friends or family (physically, financially, or emotionally).
- Your child's partner has an extraordinary influence on their behavior and decisions.
- Your child's partner controls what they wear and their appearance.
- You notice sudden changes in your child's mood or personality since they began dating this person. Your child has a constant bad temper and emotional outbursts.

STATISTICS



In Connecticut, 26% of students surveyed, reported that someone they were dating or going out with, purposely tried to control them or emotionally hurt them. (1)



Emotional abuse is reported by 76% of all teens who report teen dating abuse. (2)



Over one quarter (28.1%) of teens who had been in a romantic relationship at some point in the previous year said they had been the victim of at least one form of digital dating abuse. (3)



81% of the students who had been the target of digital dating abuse had also been the target of traditional dating abuse (i.e., they were: pushed, grabbed or shoved; hit or threatened to be hit; called names or criticized, or prevented from doing something they wanted to do). (3)



Teens who suffer dating abuse are subject to long-term consequences like alcoholism, eating disorders, promiscuity, thoughts of suicide, & violent behavior.

(1) Connecticut Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019

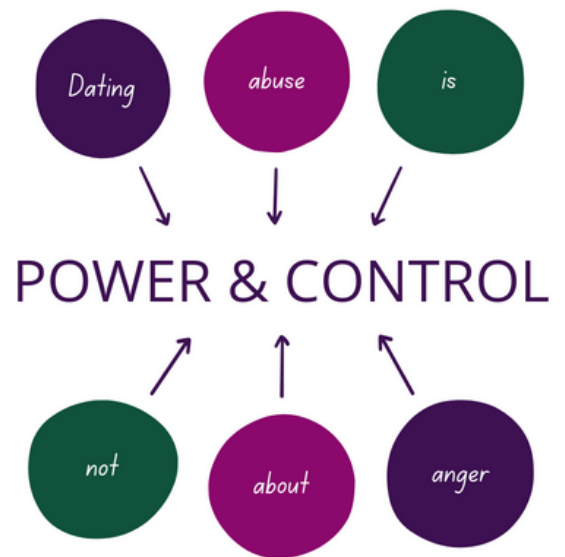
(2) Federal Research Division Library of Congress, Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography, 2011

(3) Hinduja, S., Patchin, J. 2020. Digital Dating Abuse Among a National Sample of U.S. Youth.

DATING ABUSE

A pattern of coercive and destructive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner.

- Teen dating abuse is a pattern of behaviors, not a single event or isolated incident. Rather, it is a series of events along a continuum.
- Teen dating abuse often will escalate over time. Abuse can happen at a very slow pace, so victims do not recognize that their relationship has gone from healthy to unhealthy to abusive.



FORMS/TYPES OF ABUSE/ METHODS OF CONTROL

PHYSICAL

Any use of physical force with the intent to control a partner through fear or injury.

- Restraining
- Object aggression
- Reckless driving

VERBAL

Using words to hurt someone.

- Mocking
- Belittling
- Name-calling
- Cursing
- Put-downs

EMOTIONAL

Breaking down someone's self-esteem and/or sense of self.

- Isolation
- Gaslighting/playing head games
- Blaming
- Manipulation & lying
- Jealousy

SEXUAL

Taking away a person's control over their sexual choices. Trying to pressure or force someone to do something sexually that they do not want to do.

DIGITAL

The use of technology or social media to intimidate, harass, bully, stalk, or threaten a partner.

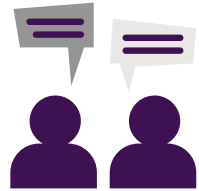
ECONOMIC

Using someone for their money, trying to make someone feel obligated or guilty by buying them things.

HOW TO HELP

How to help your child if you suspect abuse: start a conversation.

- Focus on their rights in the relationship and what they deserve.
- Discuss warning signs/"red flags."
- Spend time with them and talk about the abuse when you are spending time together.
- Use "I" statements to describe your feelings.
- Share specific examples of behaviors with your teen that concern you.



You deserve to be respected and to have your thoughts and opinions valued.

I have noticed that they always text you and want to know where you are. How does that make you feel? Do you feel like you have your own space and time?

If your child says they are being abused:

- Listening is crucial. You are not there to make judgments, you are there to listen.
- Believe them, even if you are surprised or have a hard time accepting that their partner could be an abuser.
- Tell them you are glad they felt safe telling you.
- Tell them it is not their fault. Focus on resolving the problem/behavior of the partner rather than criticizing your teen.
- Do not interrogate or ask "why" questions. The details are not important at this time and why questions can come off as judgmental, even with the best intentions.
- Offer unconditional support, care, and love.
- Ask them what they need (How can I help you right now?).
- Let your teen have some control in making decisions about next steps and don't pressure them into quick decisions. Don't assume that leaving the relationship is the safest option. Connect your teen with a domestic violence advocate to safety plan and ensure their safety.
- Contact your local domestic violence agency about obtaining a restraining order. Domestic violence advocates can discuss the safety considerations of restraining orders.

TALKING WITH TEENS



- Prevention work focuses on healthy behaviors and skills that youth will engage in their entire lives.
- Conversations about healthy relationships need to be started early in a child's life. Children have relationships with friends, parents, siblings, etc.
- Integrate healthy behaviors into your daily life:
 - Respecting boundaries
 - Healthy communication
 - Consent
 - Honesty
- Ask your child what is important to them in a dating relationship before they start dating.
- Use current events as a teachable moment.
- Use media and deconstruct messages about relationships.
- Frame behaviors around elements of healthy relationships. It is helpful to compare and contrast the red flags (unhealthy behaviors/characteristics) to the green flags (healthy behaviors/characteristics).

Jealousy is an unhealthy behavior because there is often a lack of trust and equality. It is often accompanied with isolating the person.

What do you think about him showing up at her house uninvited? She told him she wasn't interested. Is that romantic or unhealthy?

Do you want a hug? If not, I will respect that. Would you like a high five instead?

CONVERSATION STARTERS



- What are your friends' dating relationships like?
- What qualities do you want someone you date or go out with to have?
- What makes a relationship healthy and unhealthy?
- What does respect look like in a relationship?
- Have you ever seen any kind of abusive behavior between two people who are going out? How did you feel? What would you do if you were in that situation?
- Do you know what you would do if one of your friends was in an unhealthy relationship?
- What would you want your friends to do if you were in an unhealthy relationship?
- What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your boundaries?
- How do you know if you've crossed someone else's boundaries?
- When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun?
- What can you say and do to communicate your boundaries?
- What's a healthy way to argue? What's an unhealthy way to argue?

Source: Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence, RESPOND, Inc.

Put it into practice! How would you respond?

When you're with your child they are very concerned about having their phone near them at all times and responding immediately to text messages. You see that they are getting repeated, back-to-back texts from their partner. They seem stressed and say, "If I don't respond right away they will get mad and think I am cheating."

Your child is talking about a movie they saw this weekend. They say, "The couple ended up happily together in the end, but at first the guy was putting notes in her locker, and sending her unwanted gifts. Initially, she thought it was creepy and told him she didn't like it, but then she realized how romantic these gestures were and they ended up together."

Your child says that they saw someone in the hallway touch their partner inappropriately after they already told them to stop. Your child seems upset about watching this encounter.

HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Everyone deserves a healthy relationship, one where they feel safe and respected. Do you know if your relationship is healthy? Answer yes or no to the following questions to find out.

- Your partner is very supportive of the things that you do.
- Your partner encourages you to try new things.
- Your partner likes to listen when you have something on your mind.
- Your partner understands that you have your own life too.
- Your partner is well liked by your friends.
- Your partner accepts and appreciates you for who you are.
- Your partner gives you space when you need it.
- Your partner respects your privacy (phone calls, computer, texts, etc.).
- Your partner accepts responsibility for their actions and admits when they are wrong.
- Your partner calls you by the correct pronoun and name.
- Your partner gets extremely jealous or possessive.
- Your partner accuses you of flirting or cheating.
- Your partner constantly checks up on you or makes you check in with them.
- Your partner controls what you wear or how you look.
- Your partner threatens to 'out' you as a method of control.
- Your partner tries to keep you from seeing or talking to your family and friends.
- Your partner has big mood swings. They get angry and yell at you one minute, but are sweet and apologetic the next.
- Your partner makes you feel like you can't do anything right, or they blame you for problems.
- Your partner makes you feel like no one else would want you.
- Your partner threatens to harm themselves because of you.
- Your partner threatens to destroy your things.
- Your partner makes you feel nervous or like you're "walking on eggshells."
- Your partner breaks or throws things to intimidate you.
- Your partner pressures or forces you into having sex or going further than you want to.



IF YOU CHECKED MULTIPLE PROMPTS IN THIS COLUMN, YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS MANY HEALTHY BEHAVIORS!

IF YOU CHECKED MULTIPLE PROMPTS IN THIS COLUMN, YOU MIGHT BE IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP. DVCC IS HERE TO HELP. CONTACT US TO TALK TO ONE OF OUR COUNSELORS.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS CENTER (DVCC)
is here to help and support individuals on
their journey to safety.

Adapted from loveisrespect.org

Movie Discussion Guide



***Grease* is one of those classic movies that almost everyone has seen at least once in their lifetime. And though it is filled with catchy songs and iconic outfits, it also depicts unhealthy messages of relationships and gender stereotypes. Watch this famous movie with your family, and use some of the questions below to start a conversation about healthy and unhealthy relationships.**

- Why do you think Danny acts one way with Sandy and another way in front of his friends? How would you feel if your partner treated you differently when they were around their friends?
- How did the accounts of Sandy & Danny's summer romance differ? Which account do you think was more accurate?
- Can you point out the scenes where Sandy felt pressured into doing something she didn't want to do? Have you ever experienced peer pressure before? Did you feel comfortable saying no? If not, why?
- In the final scene, who do you think changed the most? Do you think it's ok to change how you look and act to make another person happy?

Movie Discussion Guide



***Beauty and the Beast* is another classic movie, and whether you watch the 1991 animated version or the 2017 live-action version, the same message is presented loud and clear: “Even though someone is mean to you, it is possible to love them into changing into a better person.” Watch this movie with your family and use the following discussion questions to start a conversation about healthy and unhealthy relationships.**

- Besides her beauty, why else does Gaston like Belle more than the other women in the village?
- Did Beast ever apologize to Belle for his mean behavior?
- Towards the end of the movie, Belle asks the question, “Can anybody be happy here if they aren’t free?” Do you think the movie is sending a realistic message that Belle can fall in love with Beast while she is his prisoner? Do you think you could fall in love with somebody that didn’t allow you to see your friends and family?
- In the beginning, Beast is very aggressive and controlling, but through Belle’s love for him, he eventually transforms back into a prince. Is it our responsibility to change someone and try to make them a better person? Is trying to change someone in a relationship a healthy behavior, why or why not?

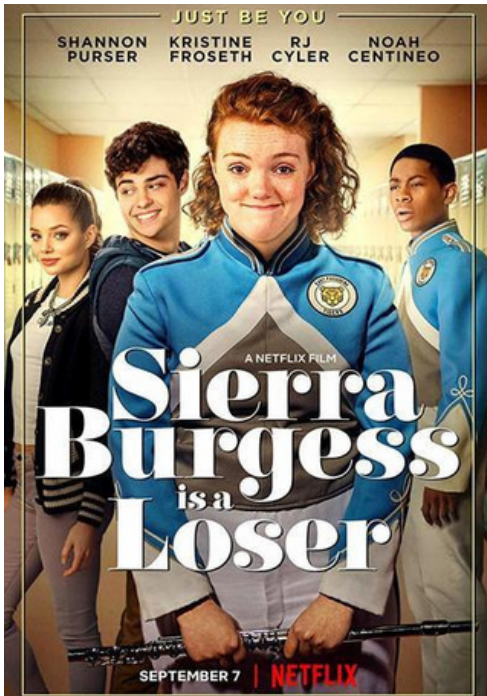
Movie Discussion Guide



This romantic comedy has become a recent favorite among teenagers, and it was so successful that Netflix created two more movies including *To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You* (2020) and *To All the Boys: Always and Forever* (2021). Watch this film with the teen or pre-teen in your life and use the questions below to start a conversation about boundaries, consent, and jealousy in a relationship.

- Why do you think Lara Jean & Margot's mother told them that they shouldn't start college with a boyfriend?
- In the movie, Lara Jean kisses Peter Kavinsky in front of Josh to avoid talking to him about the love letter. Do you think it was okay that she forcibly kissed Peter in front of everyone? Do you think the audience would have a different reaction if the gender roles were reversed?
- Peter suggests that Lara Jean and he should pretend to date so that he can get back together with Gen by making her jealous. How do you think Gen would feel if she knew Peter was manipulating her emotions so that she would fall for him again? Do you think that is a healthy thing to do in a relationship?
- After Lara Jean agrees to the fake relationship, she sits down with Peter to create a contract because she says, "It's important to know where we stand on certain issues." This is a great example of setting boundaries or personal limits in a relationship, and though theirs was not real, can you think of any boundaries that you would want to set in a real relationship?
- In the final scene, Lara Jean asks Peter, "What do you put in a contract for a real relationship?" Peter replies by saying, "Nothing, you gotta trust." Do you think there is anything else important to a healthy relationship besides trust?

Movie Discussion Guide



***Sierra Burgess is a Loser* is another Netflix romantic comedy starring the teen heartthrob, Noah Centineo. Use the following questions to discuss issues such as “catfishing,” insecurities, consent, and jealousy.**

- The main plot of the story involves Sierra “catfishing” Jamey by pretending to be Veronica (“catfishing” is the process of luring someone into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona). However, in the end, after discovering Sierra’s real identity, Jamey takes her to the dance. If this movie took place in the real life, do you think it would have the same ending?
- Think back to the parking lot scene when Jamey thinks that he is kissing Veronica, but is actually kissing Sierra. What do you think about that scene? How do you think Jamey would feel if he knew he was not kissing Veronica?
- Even though Sierra isn’t dating Jamey, she forbids Veronica from kissing him. Do you think she had a right to do that? What happened in the movie when Sierra acted jealous after seeing Veronica and Jamey kiss?
- In Sierra’s song, “Sunflower,” she expresses her insecurities by explaining how she is not conventionally beautiful like Veronica and therefore out of Jamey’s league. Do you think her feeling that way made it okay to lie to Jamey?
- Do you think it is possible to build a healthy relationship when it begins with a person being dishonest?



Movie Discussion Guide



Didn't watch these movies? That's OK! Any movie or TV show can be used to start a conversation about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Below, are some general questions to ask, to help you look at any form of media through a more critical lens.

- If you have seen this movie/ TV show before, did you notice anything different this time?
- What do you think of the movie/ TV show's overall message? Do you agree with it?
- Did any relationship dynamic make you feel uncomfortable? If so, which scenes and why did it make you feel this way?
- What kind of relationships did the character have? Do you think they were healthy or unhealthy? Explain why.
- Could you identify red flags or unhealthy behaviors within a character's relationship?

RESOURCES

Domestic Violence Crisis Center



Stamford Office & Mailing Address

1111 Summer Street
Suite 203
Stamford, CT 06905



Main Business Line:
203-588-9100

24/7 Hotline:
203-588-9097



Norwalk Office

CT Safe Connect Hotline:
888-774-2900 (call/text)



www.dvccct.org



Serving the communities of
Stamford, Norwalk, Darien,
New Canaan, Weston,
Westport, and Wilton.

Youth & Family Counselors available to support teens and youth.



Love Is Respect

- www.loveisrespect.org
- Live interactive chat support
- Interactive Safety Planning:
<https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/safety-planning/interactive-safety-plan/>
- 1-866-331-9474
- Text "loveis" to 22522 (24/7)



One Love Foundation

- An organization empowering young people with the tools and resources they need to see the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- www.joinonelove.org



Anti-Violence Project

- Counseling and advocacy organization for LGBTQ+ victims of violence
- www.avp.org
- Hotline: 212-714-1141



That's Not cool

- Resource for digital and technology abuse
- www.thatshotcool.com/