

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS: How to Help Teens Build Healthy Relationships

Preventive Actions

- ✓ Teach teens self-respect! Help your teenager feel good about who s/he sees, what s/he does, or what s/he wears. Tell him/her no one has the right to hit or control anyone else.
- ✓ Challenge and discuss negative images in the media that promote violence in relationships. Point out that violence is never justified.
- ✓ Teach teens to protect themselves! Make them aware of issues involving dating violence and brainstorm with them ways of handling different situations to ensure their safety.
- ✓ Teach teens to stand up for themselves while respecting the rights of others. Practice things to say.
- ✓ Highlight healthy relationships in which partners respect, support and trust one another. Point out the healthy behaviors in these relationships. For example: couples communicating, making shared decisions, or supporting each other's independent interests.

Some Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

- ☛ **Isolation.** Is s/he disconnected from friends or family? Has s/he lost interest or abandoned interests that were once important?
- ☛ **Emotional and Physical Changes.** Have you seen sudden changes in mood or personality? Does s/he seem afraid of the partner? Constantly nervous or anxious, depressed, acting out, or secretive? Does s/he have unexplained bruises, scratches or injuries?
- ☛ **Constant Monitoring.** Does your teen seem upset or anxious when s/he misses the partner's phone calls? Does it seem like the partner is always checking up on your teen?
- ☛ **The Partner's Behavior.** Does the partner control your teen's behavior, make his/her decisions, act extremely jealous or possessive and demand to know where your teen is and who s/he is with?
- ☛ **Making Excuses for Partner's Behavior.** Does your teen apologize for the partner's behavior towards you or others? Has s/he casually mentioned the partner's temper or violent behavior and then laughed it off as a joke?
- ✓ If you are struggling to communicate with your teen, try: *" Sometimes people behave in ways that are scary and make you feel threatened – even without using physical violence. Pay attention to your gut feelings. If you feel afraid, it's important to talk about it."* OR, *"It is important to talk about this. If you don't want to talk with me, find someone you trust and talk with that person. You can also talk to someone at a confidential hotline that can help you sort things out."*

- ▶ If you suspect **your teen is abusing others**, get him or her to think about the behavior and why s/he feel they need to act out that way. Expose any myths about the way that guys and girls are supposed to act and talk about the serious consequences of abusive behavior for both partners. Contact The Door at 212-941-9090 or STEPS To End Family Violence (Youthline) at 800-246-4699 to help your teen.

For help or more information contact DAY ONE at 800.214.4150 or www.dayoneny.org

The above is adapted from information.eap.partners.org; youtheastsideseervices.org; edvp.org; safeyouth.org; and "The Teen Relationship Workbook" by Kerry Moles

If Your Teen Comes To You for Help

- **Be calm and take positive steps.** Deal with your anger in a reasoned and constructive way.
- **Actively listen to your teen.** Ask him/her questions, but don't judge. Make sure to keep the lines of communication open. If your teen believes s/he will be listened to and not yelled at or given restrictions, s/he will be more likely to be honest with you and let you help.
- **Don't blame or punish your teen.** Avoid questions like "*What did you do to make him/her hit you?*" or "*Why did you let this happen?*" Instead, let your teen know that s/he does not deserve to be hurt. Try: "*It's that person who has a problem, not you. It's not your responsibility to help him/her change.*"
- **Don't put down your teen.** Don't give the message that you think s/he is stupid or senseless for being in the relationship. Try: "*This isn't your fault. You're not to blame; no matter how guilty the person makes you feel. Your partner shouldn't be doing this to you.*"
- **Reassure your teen of your love and concern.** Reinforce your wish to help do what's best for him/her. Try: "*I care about what happens to you. I love you and I want to help.*"
- **Take your teen's feelings seriously.** Acknowledge your teen's feelings about the partner--both the good and the bad--are real. Don't tell your teen that s/he can't understand love yet or expect him/her to "get over" the person. It is possible to love someone who hurts you.
- **Don't threaten violence against the abuser!** Threats reinforce the idea that problems are solved with violence, because if it's okay for you, then it's okay for the abuser. Instead, let your teen and his/her partner know that you will call the police if you ever witness violence.
- **Respect your teen's choices.** Forbidding your teen from seeing the abusive partner may cause him/her to go behind your back. Your teen may be less likely to come to you for help. If you offer patient support, your teen will be more likely to come to the decision to end the relationship, and learn how to have healthier relationships in the future.
- **Create a safety plan.** Role play what to do if different circumstances get violent. If the abusive partner goes to the same school, help your teen figure out who at the school s/he can talk to and make a part of the safety plan. A plan can include arranging a safe way to see the partner. For example, allow them to spend private time in your home, where you are within earshot but not in the room.
- **Allow your teen as much control as possible.** Empower him/her to make healthy decisions. Even though safety is your first concern, it is important to allow your teen to make decisions whenever it is safe because the abuser has taken away your teen's power and control. If you do the same, it might make matters worse.
- **Call a domestic violence agency or hotline.** You can get information about relationship abuse, advice on how to help your teen and emotional support.
- **The break-up period is the most dangerous part of a relationship.** If your teen breaks up with the abusive partner, ask a domestic violence agency about how to get an order of protection and other ways to protect your teen.
- **Get your teen counseling.** Contact a counselor or agency that specializes in domestic violence and teen relationship abuse. Counseling will help your teen work through the emotional damage caused by the abuse and learn to avoid abusive relationships in the future.

Validate your teen's strengths and focus on positive behavior!

Manage your frustration so it does not affect your teen.

Teens can call **DAY ONE** for help at 800.214.4150. For help 24 hours a day, contact the *New York City Domestic Violence Hotline* at 800-621-HOPE (4673).

For help or more information contact DAY ONE at 800.214.4150 or www.dayoneny.org

The above is adapted from information.eap.partners.org; youtheastsideseervices.org; edvp.org; safeyouth.org; and "The Teen Relationship Workbook" by Kerry Moles