

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month

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What is Teen Dating Violence and How Common is it?

Teen dating violence is very common and it requires a coordinated community response. Each year in the United States, at least 400,000 adolescents experience serious physical and/or sexual violence in a dating relationship. Teen dating violence occurs in relationships, both straight and same-sex. The violence can involve physical harm, emotional abuse and bullying, online harassment, such as using social media to embarrass or intimidate, and sexual violence. Sometimes the violence escalates beginning with jealous and controlling behavior, becoming emotional abuse, and then evolving into physical violence. Sometimes the physical violence is immediate. This violence can have both a short-term and long-term impact including depression, anxiety, unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, excessive drinking, drug use, disruptive behavior such as lying, stealing, fighting, and sometimes even suicide. Violence that occurs during teen dating can influence future relationships because foundation of trust and relationship has been damaged. Teen dating violence can lead to adult intimate partner violence and or sexual violence. Research indicates that youth who are victims of dating violence in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college. The trauma from teen dating violence is devastating to a teen's sense of self and safety and the impact can last a lifetime.

What can we do to prevent this violence?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has shared strategies for communities working to prevent teen dating violence. These strategies are anchored in best-practices and research. The strategies include teaching safe and healthy relationships. Understanding what a healthy relationship is requires dialogue and conversation. Teens receive many messages about relationships and some of this information is based on unhealthy gender-norms. To counter these harmful messages, it is important for schools, families and communities to actively engage teens in dialogue around healthy relationships. To be effective, the dialogue should include influential adults and men, such as fathers, coaches, teachers who can serve as prevention allies and role models. Schools should be safe places with plentiful information about healthy relationships and access to services for youth in need. Families need support, including financial help, to relieve the stress of economic insecurity that can underpin violence. The supports that strengthen a family empower healthy relationships.

What resources are available in Delaware?

Delaware has 24-hour hotlines for victims of dating and domestic violence; these hotlines help teens and adults by connecting individuals to local resources and supports:

- New Castle County (302) 762-6110
- Kent/Sussex Counties (302) 422-8058
- 24-hour Relationship Violence Hotline (en español) (302) 745-9874
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Delaware also has 24-hour Rape/Sexual Assault Hotlines for teens and adults:

- YWCA SARC (New Castle/Sussex Counties) (800) 773-8570
- Contact Lifeline Crisis Helpline (Kent/Sussex Counties) (800) 262-9800

A New Online Resource for Teens in Delaware:

The Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCADV) is also working with community advocates and programs to develop and host a healthy teen relationship website called *Safe & Respectful*. The website (www.safeandrespectful.org) will be launching in February 2019, during Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. *Safe & Respectful* will be a resource for teens, as well as adults working with teens.

What resources are available nationally?

There are a number of national resources that teens can access via phone or online:

LevelsRespect.org

- **24-hour Relationship Violence Hotline** (866) 331-9474
- **24-hour Relationship Violence Text Line** Text: LOVEIS to 22522
- **24-hour Relationship Violence Online Chat** www.loveisrespect.org
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline (operated by RAINN)**
- **24-hour Sexual Assault Hotline** (800) 656-HOPE
- **24-hour Sexual Assault Online Chat** www.online.rainn.org

Everyone deserves respect. Everyone deserves to be safe. If you or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, please contact a Delaware or National hotline for help and support.