



Consumer Corner

by Illinois Attorney General LISA MADIGAN



TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PROTECT YOUR KIDS

Unfortunately, too many teens experience domestic violence at an early age, during their dating years. As parents, it is vital that we recognize the signs of teen dating violence and teach our children that this behavior is wrong.

Q. My daughter is a freshman in high school. While I allowed her to go to the movies with groups of friends—including boys—during middle school, I know she will soon ask to go on a “real date.” When she does start dating, what can I do to ensure that she will be safe and on the path to a healthy, non-violent relationship?

A. You are off to a great start by simply asking this question. Most parents do not believe that teen dating violence is an issue for their children, yet a recent national study found that 31 percent of teens said they or a friend had experienced dating violence. To help keep your daughter safe, familiarize yourself with the following important information, including the warning signs of dating violence and how to help a victim of dating violence. Then, have a talk with your daughter about dating violence. Afterward, keep the lines of communication open, so she will feel comfortable coming to you if she needs help down the road.

It is important to know that dating violence is not just physical abuse, but can include threatening behavior, extreme jealousy, or verbal abuse. And remember, dating violence can and does happen to young men too, with both female and male abusers.

Warning Signs: Is Your Teen a Victim of Dating Violence?

Has your teen:

- Withdrawn from the family?
- Stopped seeing friends or given up favorite activities?
- Started spending all her time with her boyfriend?
- Fallen behind in school?

Does your teen:

- Seem afraid to break up with her boyfriend?
- Exhibit unusual or extreme moodiness?
- Receive constant phone calls or text messages from her boyfriend?
- Have unexplained injuries?

How To Help a Teen Victim of Dating Violence

- **Listen and believe her.** Don't ask blaming questions. Remind her that the violence is not her fault.
- **Talk openly and without judgment.** Don't ask, “why don't you just break up with him?” Forbidding her to see the abuser may put her in more danger, so follow the other tips to help her get out of the relationship safely.
- **Support her efforts to control her own life.** Don't expect her to follow all of your advice.
- **Take her seriously and try to understand what she is saying.** Saying “forget him, there are plenty of other guys out there” doesn't acknowledge her feelings or the danger.
- **Offer to go with her to a counselor, to the police, etc., for help.**
- **Set limits and make a safety plan together.** Even if she doesn't admit she's in danger, let her know what to do in an emergency (e.g., tell her that you will pick her up anytime, anywhere).
- **Support your teen's feelings and strengths.** Don't yell or give ultimatums.
- **Be patient.** Ending the relationship may take time. Don't give up on your teen even if there is a setback.
- **Talk with her in private and don't tell others her story unless she asks you to tell it.**
- **Gather information, such as your local domestic violence hotline number, to help take effective action.**

For more information on teen dating violence, including information geared directly to teens, their friends and educators, please visit www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov.