



FACTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP ABUSE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT:

Relationship abuse is a pattern of abusive behavior in a relationship that is used by one person to gain power and control over another person. Relationship abuse can be physical (e.g., hitting), sexual (e.g., verbal pressure and manipulation for sex), and psychological (e.g., name calling), as well as stalking and controlling behaviors (e.g., monitoring social media accounts). Relationship abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender (female, male, and transgender) or sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual).

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual experience ranging from exposure of private parts to another undesiring person, unwanted touching of genitals, use of sexual pressure or verbal threats for sex, and forced vaginal, anal, or oral sex that happens due to physical force, the threat of physical force, or because the victim is unconscious due to alcohol or drugs.

Teens and young adults experience relationship abuse and sexual assault at rates higher than any other age group!

WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR TEEN MIGHT BE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP:

- Your teen's dating partner is very jealous and/or controlling (e.g., wanting their social media passwords, not letting them hang out with friends).
- Your teen has unexplained marks or bruises on his/her body. Explanations of the cause of the injury may be inconsistent.
- Your teen is always doing whatever his/her boyfriend/girlfriend says to do.
- Your teen is being isolated from friends/family
- Your teen becomes consistently upset after spending time with or talking on the phone with his/her boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Your teen may use alcohol or drugs as a means of escape.
- You may notice a decrease in your teen's feelings of self-esteem or self-worth.

PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:

Model Healthy Relationships and Talk to your Teen about What Makes Relationships Healthy: Talk to your teen about the importance of respect, trust, safety, honesty, support, and cooperation in relationships and model these for your teen in all your friendships and other relationships.

Healthy Communication: Talk to your teen about the role healthy ongoing communication plays in any type of relationship. They should feel comfortable and able to talk with their friends and potential dating partners about themselves, their wants, needs, desires, and limitations within a friendship and dating relationship.

Health Sexuality and Consent: If your teen is in a dating relationship, sexual activity may or may not be part of that relationship. Talk to your teen about how to get and receive expressed permission for sexual consent. It is important for teens to know and understand how to receive and give expressed verbal permission for any sexual activity they may be engaging in with another person. Let your teen know that coercion, threats, physical force, and alcohol and drugs are never ok when seeking sexual activity with another person. Each person in the relationship needs to remain open to and respect the other person's expression of agreement or disagreement to engage in any sexual activity.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR TEEN WHO HAS BEEN VICTIMIZED:

If your teen tells you that they have experienced relationship abuse or sexual assault here are some things you can say:

- “I believe you.”
- “It’s not your fault.”
- “I’m here to help.”
- “Thank you for sharing this with me.”
- “Let’s talk with someone that can help us.”

It is important to listen and be non-judgmental when your teen shares their feelings and concerns with you. Try to avoid asking too many questions even if they are fact-finding questions. When our child or a love one is hurt or upset, it is normal to want to find out what happened or is happening. However, fact-finding questions can sometimes make a teen victim feel like the abuse is their fault or they are not believed. It might also make them feel worse and less likely to open up again in the future.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR TEEN WHO HAS BEEN AGGRESSIVE:

If you have noticed any of the above signs and you think your teen is has experienced or is currently experiencing relationship abuse or sexual assault, you can seek the assistance of a health care professional in your area or at your teen’s school.

Sometimes parents find out that their teen is engaging in aggressive behavior towards another teen. This can be a tough realization, but there are a lot of ways that you can help your teen to stop this behavior:

- Let your teen know the behavior is not OK and help them understand why their behavior is not OK.
- Model for your teen how to manage anger and conflicts in ways that are not aggressive.
- Ask your teen questions to help them think about their behavior...
 - ✓ *Why do you think this happened?*
 - ✓ *What can I do to help you figure out ways to make this not happen anymore?*
 - ✓ *How do you think this made the person you did this to feel?*
 - ✓ *How else might you have been able to handle that situation?*

HOW TO GET HELP FOR A TEEN OR TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE TOPICS:

- Let your teen know that you are confident in them and that they have the ability to change this behavior.
- Help your teen to understand the consequences of their use of aggression. For example, their boyfriend/girlfriend will not want to date them if they are mean to them; they could get expelled from school or even arrested.
- Support your teen in getting help from a professional at their school or in the community.

You can contact the guidance department of your teen’s high school or other local agencies.

NHCS Bringing in the Bystander Facilitators:

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