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## February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Even though teen relationships are different than adult relationships in many ways, teens can experience the same physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse as adults. In fact, teens and young adults are often at the most risk for relationship violence. Anytime a person repeatedly asserts physical, sexual, or emotional control over their partner, it is relationship violence.

Dating violence isn't arguments every once in a while or being in a bad

mood sometimes. Dating violence can include any physical harm— hitting, slapping, kicking, shoving, and throwing objects. It can also be the force or coercion of performing sexual acts-not just sex. Jealousy, harassment, name calling, following, constantly needing to know where the other one is, and not letting the other see their friends are all forms of emotional abuse.

These actions are not normal for relationships, and people don't act this

way out of love. The truth is that no one deserves to be abused. No one has to put up with it.

Teen dating violence is also against the law. Personal protection orders are legal documents that can restrain a person from seeing, calling, or harming another person. In order for a teen to get a personal protection order, their parent must file on their behalf.

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### Teen Dating Bill of Rights

*From the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline  
[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)*

**You have the right:**

**To always be treated with respect** – In a respectful relationship, you should be treated as an equal.

**To be in a healthy relationship** – A healthy relationship is not controlling, manipulative, or jealous. A healthy relationship involves honesty, trust, and communication.

**To not be hurt physically or emotionally** – You should feel safe in your relationship at all times.

**Abuse is never deserved and is never your fault** – Conflicts should be resolved in a peaceful and rational way.

**To refuse sex or affection at anytime** – A healthy relationship involves making consensual sexual decisions.

**You have the right to not have sex** – Even if you have had sex before, you have the right to refuse sex for any reason.



**To have friends and activities apart from my boyfriend or girlfriend** – Spending time by yourself, with male or female friends, or with family is normal and healthy.

**To end a relationship** – You should not be harassed, threatened, or made to feel guilty for ending an unhealthy or healthy relationship. You have the right to end a relationship for any reason you choose.

## How to Talk to a Friend who you Think is Being Abused

**DO:** Listen to what they have to say and believe their stories of abuse.

**DO:** Let them know that you care about them and that you are there for them.

**DO:** Keep everything they have to say confidential and private. However, in instances of sexual abuse or heightened/life-threatening violence, tell a trusted adult.

**DO:** Let them know your concerns and why you feel that way. Be specific and use examples if you have seen the abuse. Let them know how the way they are being treated is affecting you.

**DON'T:** Be judgmental.

**DON'T:** Make your friend feel ashamed. No one deserves to be abused.

**DON'T:** Give ultimatums. Don't tell your friend that they have to leave the abuser or you can't be friends. They need friends and support at this time, so don't threaten to take it



## How to Talk to a Friend who Think is Abusive

**DO:** Be specific about what you saw and how it made you feel.

**DO:** Take a stand against the abuse. Tell them that you are not going to just sit by and let this happen.

**DO:** Tell your friend of the consequences of their actions. Tell them that it is a crime and they could be arrested.

**DO:** Encourage them to get help from a counselor, coach, older sibling, or any other trusted adult.

**DO:** Offer to get information for them from dating violence websites and hotlines.

**DON'T:** Make them feel ashamed. Let them know that you care and that you want their behavior to change.

## Ten Warning Signs of an Abusive Relationship

Most physical abuse occurs while the couple is alone. If you feel that your friend might be in danger, trust your instincts. Here are some signs that your friend might be in trouble in his/her relationship.

1. Your friend's boy/girlfriend calls them names and puts them down in front of others.
2. Your friend's boy/girlfriend acts extremely jealous when they talk to people of the opposite sex, even when it is innocent.
3. Your friend constantly apologizes for their boy/girlfriend's behavior and makes excuses for them.
4. Your friend frequently cancels plans at the last minute and sounds like they are making up excuses.
5. Your friend's boy/girlfriend is constantly checking up on them—texting, calling, etc— to know where they are and who they are with.
6. Your friend's boy/girlfriend loses their temper, and possibly breaks or hits things when they are mad.
7. Your friend is worried about upsetting their boy/girlfriend or making them angry.
8. Your friend is becoming more isolated from friends and family and is giving up things that are important to them to spend time with their boy/girlfriend.
9. Your friend's weight, appearance or grades have changed drastically.
10. Your friend has injuries they can't explain, or the explanations seem made up.

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## When to Talk to an Adult

If a friend tells you of abuse they have suffered or if you suspect abuse, there is nothing wrong with talking to an adult about it. No one wants to admit that they need help with an issue, but sometimes it is too hard to deal with it on your own.

Attempt to talk to your friend about seeking help themselves. Make a list of all the possible adults—parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, older siblings, etc— to determine who would be best to talk to.

If you think your friend is in immediate danger, but they don't want to seek help, talk to an adult yourself. Tell your friend that you are worried and that you are going to talk to someone. They may not want you to, but you know that their safety is most important.

## Alcohol and Sex: Don't Mix!

Mallory Dowd, Sexual Assault Program Coordinator

*It's Friday night, and you and some friends are at a party. You decide not to drink and just go to have some fun. Your good friend Jasmine has spent the whole night talking to a guy you both know from English class. He's attractive, funny, and very polite – he's made sure that Jasmine has a comfy place to sit and that her cup is never empty. Jasmine feels great! This guy is really cute and popular. She's never gotten this kind of attention from someone like him. In fact, the more she drinks, the more confident she feels! This guy must really like her. Later on, you see Jasmine and her date leave the room together. You think to yourself that Jasmine looks pretty drunk. The guy's she with, on the other hand, seems okay and definitely isn't stumbling around like Jasmine is. You decide to stay and wait for Jasmine to make sure she gets home okay. After 30 minutes, Jasmine is nowhere to be seen, but you watch as her date walks back into the party, gets another drink, and starts talking with a group of friends. Several minutes later, you discover Jasmine passed out in a bedroom without any clothes on. The next day, Jasmine can't remember exactly what happened but has a horrible feeling inside.*

As a teen, you may go to parties where almost everyone is drinking. While many teens don't plan on getting so drunk that they forget what they are doing and where they are, unfortunately some teens *do* get this drunk. Besides alcohol poisoning or accidental injuries, partying has many other risks – including sexually assaulting or being sexually assaulted by someone. Michigan law states that a person who is under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs *cannot legally give consent to sex*. Therefore, if you and/or your date have been drinking and decide to make out, fool around, or have sex, one of you could face *serious legal consequences* and be charged with Criminal Sexual Conduct (CSC). If either of you is under the age of 16 (the legal age of consent), the consequences may be even worse!

So, how could Jasmine's sexual assault have been prevented? First of all, the person responsible for preventing the assault was Jasmine's date, who *chose* to get her drunk by feeding

her lots of drinks, to stay sober himself, and then to have sex with her without her consent (which, unfortunately, happens a lot). However, here are some tips for teens like you who plan to go to parties like this:

If your friends are going to drink, make plans before going – if they are not planning on spending the whole night with one person, keep an eye out for that one person who may be trying to spend the whole night with *them*. Jasmine's date intentionally isolated her from her friends and made sure she never got up off the couch by offering to get drinks for her. Keeping her sitting down also kept her from realizing how drunk she was getting!

If you notice a friend going off somewhere like a bedroom with another person, stop them before they leave the room. Jasmine was practically falling over when she left the party with her date – a person that drunk *is not* able to make decisions about sex and should *not* be left alone with one person, even if that person is a girlfriend or boyfriend. Unfortunately, no one stopped Jasmine's date from taking her into the bedroom. Like a good friend, however, you stayed and waited for Jasmine to make sure she got home – if you had not done this, who knows what else would have happened to her! Unless you are unsafe yourself, *never* leave a friend alone at someone else's house (party or not).

If you are hoping to meet someone at a party, consider this: real connections don't happen when you're drunk. If that special someone is really special, they're worth getting to know sober. Avoid the risks and spend some time together, away from parties and drinking. Even then, if you are going on a date or spending time alone with someone, always make sure that a friend or family member knows where you are at all times and have a plan ready for if you need to leave somewhere fast! Remember, good relationships are based on equality and respect, not on sex. Loving someone means respecting their boundaries, waiting until they say they are ready for any and all sexual activities, and talking honestly about wants and needs (*yours and theirs*). **If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, get help immediately. Call 1-800-828-2023 (*anytime*) to talk with a trained professional about what happened.**

## The Numbers of Teen dating Violence

- 62% of adolescents ages 1-14 who have been in a relationship say they know friends who have been verbally abused (called stupid, worthless, ugly, etc) by a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- 1 in 3 teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked or physically hurt by their partner.
- 1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse.
- More than 1 in 4 teenage girls in a relationship (26%) report enduring repeated verbal abuse.
- Only 33% of teens who have been in an abusive relationship told someone. A large majority would turn to a friend for help if they were trapped in a relationship.
- 24% of 14-17-year-olds know at least one student who has been the victim of dating violence. However, 81% of parents either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it is an issue.

Statistics from [www.loveisnotabuse.org](http://www.loveisnotabuse.org)



## Setting Appropriate Boundaries

There are many ways to set and maintain appropriate boundaries.

The following tips can help you set good boundaries:

- Identify teens and adults you can trust and build relationships with them.
- Avoid people who are selfish, disrespectful, manipulative or abusive. Such people will likely disrespect you and your boundaries.
- Learn to say “no” when you’re being pressured to do something wrong. Anyone who pressures or invites you to do something wrong doesn’t respect you or your boundaries.
- Trust your sense of safety or danger. These are good indicators of right and wrong. If someone or something seems

dangerous or threatening, stay away!

- Learn how to think through and solve problems before reacting. Problem-solving and critical thinking skills can help you maintain your boundaries and respect others.
- Think about times when your personal boundaries were violated. Who was involved? What was the situation? Think of a better way to handle boundary violations in the future.
- Speak up when someone or something bothers you. Talk to adults you can trust.
- Set limits about where you will go, what you will do, and how long you will be there. Having and sticking to a plan helps you keep and respect boundaries.
- Find ways to tell (or show) others what your personal boundaries are.

## Resources

The following websites have information on teen dating violence, how to get help or help someone else, and how to stay safe.

[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)  
[www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org)  
[www.loveisnotabuse.com](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com)  
[www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org)  
[www.stayteen.org](http://www.stayteen.org)  
[www.athinline.org](http://www.athinline.org)  
[www.thesafeplace.org](http://www.thesafeplace.org)  
[www.respect2all.com](http://www.respect2all.com)



Other resources:  
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:  
1-866-331-9474

National Domestic  
Violence Hotline:  
1-800-799-7233

Rape, Abuse, Incest,  
National Network:  
1-800-656-4673

### Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services

Kate Bathon, MSW  
Community & Law Enforcement  
Liaison  
P.O. Box 402

Phone: 269-273-6154 x104  
Fax: 269-273-9465  
E-mail: [caitlinb@dasasmi.org](mailto:caitlinb@dasasmi.org)

**No one deserves to be abused.**

## About Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services

### DASAS Mission:

Domestic And Sexual Abuse Services will lead efforts to end domestic violence and sexual assault in southwest Michigan. DASAS will assist domestic violence and sexual assault survivors in clarifying their options, accessing community services that support personal choice, and will provide a safe place for survivors and their children.

### DASAS Philosophy:

Domestic And Sexual Abuse Services shall promote the empowerment of survivors by providing information, resources, and advocacy. DASAS will treat survivors with dignity and respect, and will value their right to self-determination. DASAS is committed to improving community systems' response to domestic violence and sexual assault by focusing on enhanced protection, empowerment, and support for survivors and their children and on increased accountability for abusers. DASAS will lead prevention efforts by providing accurate information on domestic violence and sexual assault issues to the community and to youth through school based initiatives.

### Programs:

From community education and prevention programs to supportive counseling services and assisting survivors in crisis situations. DASAS provides comprehensive services to those impacted by sexual assault and domestic violence.

- 24-hour Toll-free Help Line 1-800-828-2023
- Advocacy/Supportive counseling
- Sexual Assault Program
- Domestic Violence Program
- Weekly Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence support groups
- Assistance in obtaining a personal protection order
- Legal advocacy and accompaniment to court proceedings
- Information and referral to other services in the community, including obtaining clothing, emergency medical services, financial assistance, transportation and child care
- Assistance developing parenting skills
- Safe Shelter– Available 24/7