

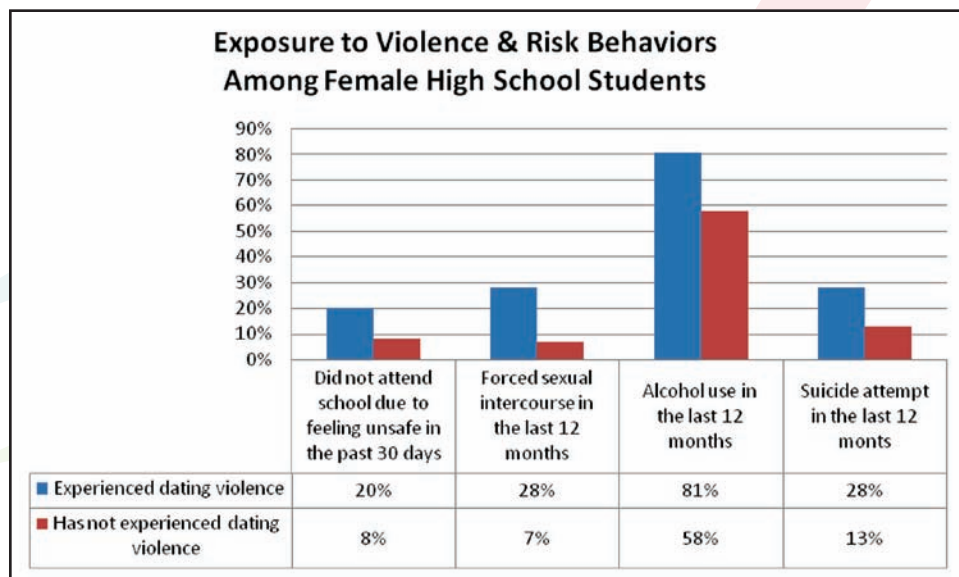
Teen Dating Violence: Keeping California Adolescents Safe in Their Relationships

Teen dating violence is a major adolescent health concern. Youth ages 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rate of intimate partner violence of any age group—a rate nearly triple the national average.ⁱ Younger adolescents are also at risk: a recent study found significant levels of abusive behavior in “tween” (ages 11 to 14) dating relationships, and teens report that abusive behavior increases dramatically in the later teen years.ⁱⁱ

Teen dating violence does not occur in a vacuum. It is the result of social attitudes and practices that normalize unhealthy behaviors in interpersonal relationships. Adolescents are often pressured to conform to masculine or feminine gender roles that reinforce unequal power and control between dating partners. Peers, family, adults, media, and personal experiences can directly or indirectly condone the use of abuse. Unfortunately, many teen dating behaviors, such as extreme jealousy or possessiveness, are considered normal.

Adolescence is a critical time in developing lifelong behaviors, attitudes, and expectations about intimate relationships. Teens who are in abusive relationships have a higher likelihood of being in abusive relationships as adults.ⁱⁱⁱ Teen dating violence is associated with increased risk of substance use, unhealthy weight control behaviors, sexual risk behaviors, pregnancy, and suicide.^{iv} (Graph 1) Without adequate information and support, teens are likely to continue the cycle of violence into their adult lives. By preventing and intervening in abusive relationships in adolescence, we can help ensure a healthier future for our youth. Adolescence is a crucial opportunity to reinforce attitudes about equality and respect in relationships.

Graph 1



SOURCE: 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) - San Francisco & Los Angeles

What is teen dating violence?

Intimate partner violence between adolescents is often referred to as teen dating violence. Teen dating violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors, perpetrated by one person in a relationship in order to gain power and maintain control over their partner. Teen dating violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse. (Table 1) Over time, the violence usually increases in severity and frequency.

- 8.2% of California’s 11th grade students report being “hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose” by their partner in the past twelve months
- Youth ages 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rate of intimate partner violence of any age group—a rate nearly triple the national average
- Adolescence is critical time in developing lifelong behaviors, attitudes, and expectations about intimate relationships. By preventing and intervening in abusive relationships during adolescence, we can help ensure a healthier future for our youth.
- Teen dating violence is a public health epidemic that requires a range of prevention and intervention strategies. Because teen dating violence is pervasive, it is critical to develop a comprehensive approach that includes the education and healthcare fields. The needs of the teens themselves, as well as their families and communities, must be considered.



Table 1

Physical	Sexual	Verbal and Emotional	Economic
Coercion, intimidation and threats	Unwanted sexual touching	Put downs, name calling and insults	Preventing partner from attending school or work
Hitting, shoving, slapping, hair pulling, etc.	Getting partner drugged or drunk to force sex	Shifting responsibility for abuse onto victim: "you made me do it"	Giving an allowance or gifts as a way of controlling partner
Restriction of clothing or activities	Demanding a "right" to and forcing sex	Isolating partner from family, friends and community	Destroying partner's property
Stalking	Birth control sabotage or refusing to use protection	Surveillance using cell phones, online networking, or through friends	Stealing or demanding money from partner

Nationwide, about 10% of high school students report being hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months^v, and in California 8.2% of 11th grade students report being "hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose" by their partner in the past twelve months.^{vi} A quarter (26%) of young women report repeated verbal abuse by a dating partner.^{vii} Studies suggest that many teens do not recognize negative consequences of dating violence in their friends' lives and that acceptance of dating violence among their friends is associated with future perpetration or victimization.^{viii ix}

Special considerations for adolescents

- **Teen pregnancy:** Teens in abusive dating relationships are four to six times more likely to become pregnant than non-abused teens.^x Once pregnant, they are at a higher risk of abuse during pregnancy than adult women: 21.7 percent of teens experience abuse as opposed to 15.9 percent of adults.^{xi}
- **Use of technology:** Cell phones, instant messaging, and social networking websites are increasingly being used to monitor, threaten, and harass dating partners. One in three teens in dating relationships have been text messaged up to 30 times an hour by a partner to find out where they are, what they're doing, or who they're with.^{xii}
- **LGBTQ youth:** Teens identifying as gay, lesbian and bisexual are as likely to experience violence in same-sex dating relationships as youths involved in opposite sex dating.^{xiii}
- **Out of home youth:** Adolescents in foster care^{xiv}, teens that are involved in the juvenile justice system^{xv}, and homeless youth^{xvi} are all at higher risk of being victims or perpetrators of dating violence.
- **Adolescents are unlikely to disclose dating violence to adults:** A key developmental task of adolescence is increasing independence from parents, and increased reliance on peers for support. Teens may be reluctant to tell adults that they are in abusive relationships for fear of punishment, especially if parents did not know about or disapprove of the dating relationship, or of losing newly earned privileges and freedoms. 83% of 10th graders report that they would disclose dating violence to a friend for help rather than talk to a teacher, counselor, parent or other caring adult.^{xvii} However, peers may lack the experience, knowledge, and access to resources to assist them.
- **Lack of community awareness of teen dating violence:** Everyone has a role in preventing and intervening in teen dating violence. However, there is a lack of information and resources:
 - 81% of parents either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it is an issue.^{xviii}
 - Less than 10% of pediatricians screen for dating violence.^{xix}

Myths about teen dating violence

MYTH: “Violence in teen relationships is not as serious a problem as domestic violence among adults.”

FACT: 22% of all murders of females ages 16 to 19 are committed by a current or former dating partner^{xx}, and teen dating violence is a major cause of injuries among young women.^{xxi} Adolescent girls are more likely than adult women to be victims of interpersonal violence, and to incur both minor and severe injuries as a result.^{xxii}

MYTH: “Today’s young women are just as violent as young men—there is a lot of mutual abuse in teen relationships.”

FACT: While both females and males can both be perpetrators or victims of dating violence, young women in heterosexual relationships are more likely to be injured, more likely to be sexually assaulted, and more likely to suffer emotionally than young men.^{xxiii}

MYTH: “Young women ‘cry wolf’ and claim abuse in order to get attention.”

FACT: Young women have much to lose and very little to gain by falsely alleging dating violence. Because adolescent relationships often occur in the school environment, they risk being ostracized by peers and retaliation by the abuser on a daily basis. Teens are also more likely to blame the victims than to hold the perpetrator accountable.^{xxiv} Teen dating violence is greatly underreported, with only 7% of high school students saying they would talk to the police.^{xxv}

MYTH: “The real problem is sexual predators. It is usually older partners taking advantage of young women.”

FACT: While a large age difference is a risk factor for intimate partner violence, most teenage victims of dating violence report that their offender was close in age. Only 10% of abused young women ages 15-17 have partners over the age of 21.^{xxvi}

Action Steps to Support Healthy Teen Relationships and Reduce Teen Dating Violence

Teen dating violence is a public health epidemic that requires a range of prevention and intervention strategies. Adolescence is a critical time in developing healthy intimate relationships. Caring adults have the responsibility of helping them develop healthy attitudes and behaviors. By promoting social norms that support healthy relationships free from violence, giving teens the tools to identify unhealthy relationships, and supporting teens who are involved in abusive relationships, we are playing a key role in keeping California adolescents safe.

Because teen dating violence is pervasive, it is critical to develop a comprehensive approach that includes the educators, healthcare professionals, and the community. The needs of the teens themselves, as well as their families and communities, must be considered.

- **Schools:** Although the California constitution requires schools to provide a safe campus for students^{xxvii}, nearly half of teen dating violence victims report incidents occurring on school campuses.^{xxviii} Creating a school environment of non-violence and respect is a key component in keeping adolescents safe. When teen dating violence does occur in schools, victims should be supported and perpetrators held accountable.
 - Develop a comprehensive school wide plan to prevent and respond to teen dating violence, including definitions of dating violence, sanctions for perpetrators, and supports for victims.
 - Provide training for faculty and staff on teen dating violence to enable them to identify and respond to teen dating violence.
 - Provide education in the classroom to give teens the tools to have healthy relationships, prevent abuse in their relationships, as well as support their peers.
 - Create a school environment that acknowledges a commitment to promoting equality and respect and to fighting teen dating violence by displaying posters, flyers, and brochures.
- **Healthcare providers:** Victims of teen dating violence visit health care providers for routine medical care, as well as care for treatment of injuries. Nationally, it is estimated that health and mental health costs of intimate partner violence exceeds \$4 billion.^{xxvix} Healthcare providers play a critical role in intervening in teen dating violence.
 - Provide training on detecting and responding to teen dating violence.



- Integrate routine screening for teen dating violence into primary care.
- Create a clinical environment that acknowledges a commitment to fighting teen dating violence by displaying posters, flyers, and brochures.
- Community: Teen dating violence occurs within a larger social context that normalizes violence and perpetuates traditional gender roles. In order to prevent and intervene in teen dating violence, families and community members must acknowledge that it occurs, educate themselves on the warning signs, and take an active role in changing the social norms that enable relationship to flourish.

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- ^{xiii} Liz Claiborne, Inc. (2008) Tween and Teen Dating Violence and Abuse Study. Available at: <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/pdf/Tween%20and%20Teen%20Dating%20Abuse%20Survey.pdf>.
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