**Talking to Your Teens about Dating Violence**

Studies show that teens are having issues with dating violence as early as middle school. Nearly 1 in 3 teens who have been in relationships have experienced dating violence, such as extreme jealousy or insecurity, threatening or humiliating emails or text messages, physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, isolation from family or friends and much more. Keep in mind that dating violence can happen to anyone, at any age, no matter what their race, religion, sexual orientation, level of education or economic background.

**What are some of the warning signs?** Please keep in mind that while the following, non-specific warning signs could indicate other concerning things such as depression or drug use, these should also raise a red flag for parents and caregivers that their teenager may be part of an unhealthy relationship.



Your Teen:

* Apologizes and/or makes excuses for his/her partner’s behavior
* Loses interest in activities that he/she used to enjoy
* Stops seeing friends and family members and becomes more and more isolated
* Casually mentions the partner’s violent behavior, but laughs it off as a joke
* Often has unexplained injuries, or the explanations often don’t make sense
* Distracted when spoken to
* Constantly checking their cell phone and gets extremely upset when asked to turn the phone off
* Angry, irritable when asked how they are doing
* Showering immediately after getting home
* Wearing the same clothing

Their Partner:

* Calls your teen names and puts him/her down in front of others
* Acts extremely jealous of others who pay attention to your teen
* Tells your teen that you, the parent(s), don’t like them
* Controls your teens behavior, checking up constantly, calling or texting, and demanding to know who he/she has been with

You:

* See the partner violently lose their temper, striking or breaking objects

**How to have a conversation with your teen(s) about abuse:** Choose a setting in a comfortable environment for both of you, free of distractions, and try asking some of the following questions:

* *******How are things going?*
* *What are your friends dating relationships like? How long do your friends in relationships usually stay together? Are there certain things that boys want that girls don’t or vice versa?*
* *Have you seen any kind of abusive behavior between two people who are going out?*
  + This is your chance to define “abusive behaviors” or “violence” and compare your definition to your teenager’s.
* *Why do you think one person would abuse the other when dating?*
* *Why might a person stay in an abusive relationship?*
* *What makes a relationship healthy?*
  + A healthy relationship is one in which the partners have a commitment to making the relationship work, and at the same time they respect each other’s individuality and personal boundaries. A healthy relationship is also one in which you would not hurt the other person emotionally, physically or sexually.
  + Look out for the warning signs listed above!
* *What can you do if you have a friend who is threatened, or a friend who is abusive?*
  + Friend who is threatened: Talking to a friend dealing with dating violence can make an enormous difference. The friend is probably feeling very isolated and alone. Listen, do not be judgmental and let them know that you are there whenever they need to talk and that you are worried about them. Be specific about why you are concerned and give examples.
  + Friend who is abusive: Be specific about the behavior you saw and that you won’t stand by and let the behavior continue. Make sure that they realize that their behavior has consequences and that they could get into serious trouble. Urge them to get help from a counselor, coach or any trusted adult, and offer to go with them if they want support. Let them know that you care about them and that you know that they have it in them to change.
* *What kind of messages about dating abuse and relationships do we see in the media?*
* *If your teen is dating someone, ask: “How is your relationship going?”*

**Why Talk About Dating Violence?**

Talking to your teenager(s) about dating violence can be uncomfortable, but your teens need all the information they can get, from a reputable source. At this age, most of the information teens get is from their peers and the media, and it’s important to show them that you are also a source of information for them, as well as a non-judgmental, safe part of their support system. Teach them about healthy relationships, continue to talk to them about their relationships, and support them if they come to you and tell you that they need help.