



DATING VIOLENCE

Did you know:

40% of girls aged 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.

Nearly 1 in 5 teenage girls who have been in a relationship said a boyfriend had threatened violence or self-harm if the couple were to break up.

1 in 3 teenage girls has feared for her safety in a dating relationship.

It's important that parents as well as teenagers understand what a healthy relationship looks like and are able to identify the first signs that the dating relationship may be unhealthy and potentially abusive.

People usually put their best foot forward in dating relationships. It's not always easy to tell whether a dating relationship is healthy. However, there are three essential ingredients for any relationship to flourish. They are mutuality, reciprocity and freedom (see last's week's blog for more definitions of them). Often a young girl is totally swept off her feet by an intense young man's obsessive love for her. It feels so intoxicating that she believes it is true love. But over time, it feels smothering and can become abusive.

It's important to teach your daughter how to say "no" and to be willing to say "no" early in a dating relationship. For example, when she says "No, I can't talk on the phone right now, I have a test to study for or home work to do," his response will help her see how she is respected and cared for. She needs to pay attention to what happens when she says "no" or doesn't want to do something her boyfriend wants her to do. Is there respect? Does he care about what's important to her or is their relationship all about making him happy and doing what he wants? Is she free to express her different opinions as well as her own thoughts and feelings without fear? Honestly answering these simple questions can give her a good read as to the health of the relationship even after only a few dates.

In addition, the following characteristics are warning signs that your daughter's boyfriend may not be capable of a healthy relationship:

- His description of his parents' (especially his father's) rejecting or shaming behavior.
- His recollections of physical assault directed at him or at his mother.

- His personality indicators such as frequent anger and jealousy or an intense fear of abandonment.
- His trauma symptoms such as constant sleep disturbances and nightmares, memory losses for specific events, panic attacks, crying, and depression.
- His alcohol or drug abuse to numb himself to his internal pain.
- His blaming orientation. Does he hold her responsible for his actions or feelings? Does he insist that everything is always her fault.
- His cyclical mood swings that seem to have nothing to do with her but incorporate a theme of her being all good or all bad (i.e. you're wonderful or terrible).

If you suspect your daughter or someone you know is being abused, ask the following questions:

- Does he seem like two people, showing one face to his friends and the public and another to you in private?
- Does he go through a cycle of buildup, explosion, and contrition?
- Has he been violent with you once? Twice? Have these been isolated events tied to a particular triggering situation or does his abusiveness seem to occur for no apparent reason?
- Is his physical attack accompanied by verbal assaults such as calling you names or swearing at you?
- Have there been circumstances (such as separations or jealousies) that might have triggered the violence? How did he act?
- Have you ever missed school or work from the effects of abuse?
- Have you ever used makeup or dark glasses to hide bruises or have you covered up by making excuses to a doctor or coworker for injuries sustained during an attack?

If she's answered yes to any of these questions, she may need some professional help to break free from the abuse. Here are some websites to go to for additional help and information. Don't ignore these warning signs. Your daughter is at risk and she needs your help. You can also take my free test *Are You in a Destructive Relationship* at www.leslievernick.com.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800 799 7233

www.faithtrustinstitute.org

www.focusministries1.org

www.peaceandsafety.com