



Things to Know and Do About Teen Dating Violence

By City Attorney Mara W. Elliott

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. As a mother of two teenagers, I'm hoping to shine a light on this important topic.

Protecting teens from dangerous behaviors today is a proven way to prevent them from being the victims of domestic violence, or abusers themselves, once they are adults. Through education and support, we can break the cycle, stop intimate partner violence before it begins, and teach our children how to have healthy and respectful relationships.

My office runs [Your Safe Place — A Family Justice Center](#), which provides free, confidential services to victims of domestic abuse and teen dating violence. Families and victims impacted by abusive relationships can receive counseling, help obtaining restraining orders, legal advice and many other services. Most important, Your Safe Place provides a welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere.

Fast facts and statistics

- One in five San Diego students has experienced emotional violence in a relationship.
- One in 10 has experienced sexual violence within an intimate relationship.
- One in 16 has been subjected to physical violence by a partner.
- These rates are more than double for LGBTQ+ youths.

— *San Diego Unified School District youth risk behavior survey*

- Teenagers who experience dating violence are at higher risk of being in abusive relationships as adults.
- 26 percent of women who are victims of violence or stalking by an intimate partner first experienced sexual or physical violence before age 18.
- 15 percent of men who reported being in an abusive relationship first experienced sexual or physical violence before age 18.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Warning signs of a teen involved in an abusive dating relationship

- Changes in appearance
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Unexplained or concerning change in weight

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- Dressing out of character
- Changes in interactions with others
- Isolation from former friends
- Little social contact with anyone but a partner
- Making excuses or apologizing for a partner's behavior
- Changes in demeanor
- Unexplained changes in behavior
- New problems such as bullying or acting out
- An increase in negative self-talk
- Unhealthy sexual behavior

How to talk to your teenager about dating violence

- Build rapport. Teenagers may open up about their relationships as they are comfortable. If they don't want to talk to you, ask if there is someone else they feel comfortable talking to.
- The goal isn't disclosure. It is OK if they don't want to talk about it. The goal is to ensure they know they can talk to you without judgment.
- Ask open-ended questions. Create opportunities to check in with them and ask questions like, "I've noticed you seem to be struggling lately. What's on your mind?"
- Validate their experiences. Let them know they did not deserve to experience abuse and that it is not their fault. Don't minimize the effect the abuse is having on your teen.
- Involve them. If they do disclose to you, share what local resources are available to them and support them in their choices. Ask them how they want to move forward.

— *Teen Dating Violence Committee of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council*

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