

HELP YOUR CHILD

PRODUCED BY

Break the Cycle

WITH SUPPORT FROM


loveisrespect.org





Knowing that your child is in an unhealthy relationship can be both frustrating and frightening. However, as a parent it's critical that you help them develop healthy relationships, and offer life-saving support if they ever experience dating abuse. Dating abuse can happen to anyone in any relationship, whether it's casual or serious. Regardless, of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic standing, ethnicity, religion or culture. It does not discriminate.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Early warning signs of abuse can help you identify if your child is in an abusive relationship before it's too late. Some of the signs to look for include:

- Your child's partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- You notice unexplained marks or bruises.
- Your child's partner emails or texts excessively.
- You notice that your son or daughter is depressed or anxious.
- Your son or daughter stops participating in extracurricular activities or other interests.
- Your child stops spending time with other friends and family.
- Your child's partner abuses other people or animals.
- Your child begins to dress differently.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Tell your child that you are concerned for their safety, and point out that what's happening isn't "normal." Offer to connect them with a professional, like a counselor or an attorney who they can talk to confidentially.
 - Model healthy behaviors in your relationships with: friends, family, and partners. It is important for young people to see healthy and equitable relationships.
 - Be supportive and understanding. Provide information and non-judgmental support. Let your son or daughter know that it is not their fault and no one "deserves" to be abused. Make it clear you're on their side and you respect their choices.
 - Believe them and take them seriously. Your child may be reluctant to share their experiences in fear of no one believing what they say. As you validate their feelings and show your support, they can become more comfortable and trust you with more information. Be careful not to minimize your child's situation due to age, inexperience, or the length of their relationship.
 - Help them develop a safety plan. One of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship is when the victim decides to leave. Be especially supportive during this time and try to connect your child to support groups, or professionals that can help keep them safe.
 - Remember that ultimately your child must be the one who decides to leave the relationship. There are many complex reasons why victims stay in unhealthy relationships, but your support can make a critical difference in helping your child find their own way out.



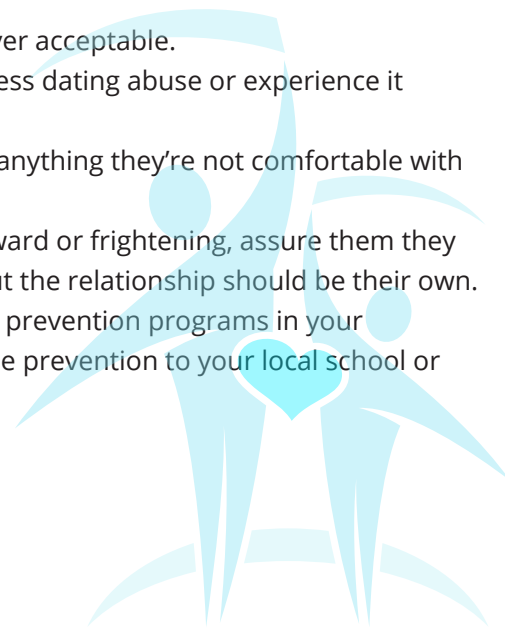
BUT MY CHILD ISN'T IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

It's never too early to talk to your child about healthy relationships and dating violence. Starting conversations -- even if you don't think your child is dating -- is one of the most important steps you can take to help prevent dating violence. Here are some sample questions to start the conversation:

- Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like? What would you want in a partner?
- Have you witnessed unhealthy relationships or dating abuse at school? How does it make you feel?
- Were you scared?
- Do you know what you would do if you witnessed or experienced abuse?
- Has anyone you know posted anything bad about a friend online? What happened afterwards?
- Would it be weird if someone you were dating texted you all day to ask you what you're doing?

Need more tips to get started? Here are some other ways you can prepare to talk to your child about healthy and unhealthy relationships:

- Do your own research on dating abuse to get the facts before talking to your child. Start with the information and resources on loveisrespect.org.
- Try to have a conversation while consuming media. Ask your child what they think about a particular relationship they see on T.V. or in a movie. Media literacy is very important, as many of the messages young people are getting about relationships are through the media they consume.
 - Provide your child with examples of healthy relationships, and use examples from your own life, television, movies or music.
 - Ask questions and encourage open discussion. Make sure you listen to your son or daughter, giving them a chance to speak, and avoid analyzing, interrupting, lecturing or accusing them.
 - Keep it low key. Don't push it if your child is not ready to talk. Just try again another time.
 - Be supportive and nonjudgmental so they know they can come to you if they ever experience abuse.
 - Admit when you don't know the answer to every question. This response builds trust, but you can even take this a step further and try to find the answer together!
 - Reinforce that dating should be fun! Stress that violence is never acceptable.
 - Discuss different options with your child just in case they witness dating abuse or experience it themselves.
 - Remind your son or daughter they have the right to say no to anything they're not comfortable with or ready for, and that they also must respect the rights of others.
 - If your child is in a relationship that feels uncomfortable, awkward or frightening, assure them they can come to you. And remember -- any decisions they make about the relationship should be their own.
 - Contact Break the Cycle to find out if there are dating violence prevention programs in your community. If not, work with Break the Cycle to bring dating abuse prevention to your local school or community.



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