

Opinion: Relationship violence not just an adult problem

By Hannah Greenstreet and Ashley Yuill

When most of us hear the terms “domestic violence” or “relationship violence,” our minds immediately focus on adult relationships and marriages. The terms can often build the mental image of extreme attacks from one adult partner, stereotypically male, to another, a woman as the victim, but rarely do we consider that violence occurring between teens.

Sometimes we may even think that teen relationships aren't as serious as adult relationships, and therefore the circumstances that lead to violence don't exist. Unfortunately, this couldn't be further from the truth. In reality, teen-dating violence is a serious problem in the U.S.

Many teens do not report mistreatment in a dating relationship because they are too afraid to, or are too inexperienced in relationships to even recognize the violence.

February is National Teen Dating Violence Month and Live Violence Free is committed to raising awareness this month by educating about how teen dating violence actually looks and sounds like, and how adults can help protect or support teens.

Teen-dating violence includes mistreatment through forms of stalking, physical, sexual, emotional-verbal, and digital violence. Often, the small signs of emotional manipulation, intimidation, threatening, and cyber harassment can place teens in a position of being controlled and hurt without their friends and family knowing.

According to the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence,

nearly one in 10 high school students has been hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. In response to these facts, Live Violence Free is dedicated to providing education and support to South Lake Tahoe's middle and high school students in order to prevent further dating violence. Through six- to eight-week sessions, students receive skills and tools to address the types and warning signs of abusive behavior, whether minimal or severe, but also how to develop and expect respect, trust and healthy communication in any relationship.

As a parent or influential adult in a teen's life, there are many ways that you can also help in supporting our teens. If you suspect that your son/daughter or any teen is in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, discuss what you are observing with them in a calm and loving manner. Remind your child that you care for their safety and want to help. It is extremely important not to pressure the teen to end the relationship, as it may actually draw them closer to their partner. Saying things like, "You are not to blame", "No one deserves to be abused", or even "If you don't want to talk to me, please find someone you trust and talk to them", are excellent ways to keep open communication with the teen and let them know they are not alone.

To speak confidentially with a trained advocate on relationship abuse, call our 24-hour crisis line at 530.544.4444 to receive information and assistance.

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