

## Understanding Dating Violence

### “What are some early warning signs that my teenager might be in an abusive relationship?”

Sometimes it is difficult to recognize signs of potential abuse early in a relationship. Many early warning signs do not give cause for alarm until later when things start to go downhill. However there are early indications that a relationship may be or become abusive. Here is a list of things that should raise red flags:

- ▶ Unexplained injuries.
- ▶ Your teen fears their partner.
- ▶ Partner checks up on your teen.
- ▶ Verbal abuse by the partner, such as name-calling and demeaning comments.
- ▶ Your teen gives up things that are important such as school, friends, time with family, activities, and other interests.
- ▶ Your teen apologizes for their partner's behavior.
- ▶ Partner abuses other people, animals, or things.
- ▶ Change in appearance or behavior of your teen or their partner.
- ▶ Your teen and their partner spend most of their time together.

### “Why do teen relationships become abusive and why doesn't my teen listen to me when I suggest that the relationship is not good and needs to end?”

Abuse in teen relationships is about control, just like in adult relationships. There are many things that trigger the abuse and many reasons why it is not easy to end the relationship. Some of the dynamics underlying an abusive relationship include:

<b>Reasons for abuse</b>		<b>Why a victim stays</b>
Power and control	<==>	Bonds with abuser
Abuse during childhood	<==>	Hope that things will get better
Jealousy	<==>	Romantic ideal that love conquers all
Feels trapped	<==>	Fear that partner will not let go
Peer pressure and gender roles	<==>	Lack of resources
Insecurity	<==>	Low self confidence
Uncontrollable anger	<==>	Feels trapped
Low self confidence	<==>	Does not understand the consequences

## **“I believe my teen may be the victim in an abusive relationship. What can I do?”**

There are a number of ways to approach and assist your teen if you think your teen is the victim in an abusive relationship. You know your teen and should be able to decide what approach will be best. Here are some ideas:

- › Ask questions and listen with an open mind.
- › Set limits where appropriate.
- › Respect your teen's choices.
- › Keep channels of communication open.
- › Be calm and take positive action.
- › Avoid power struggles with your teen.
- › Help set up a safety plan if your teen is trying to end the relationship.
- › Deal with your anger in calm, reasoned and constructive ways.
- › Resolve conflicts with your teen early.
- › Manage your frustration so it does not affect your teen.

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## **“I believe my teen may be abusing their partner in a dating relationship. What can I do to help my teen break this pattern of abusive behavior?”**

Once you recognize your teen might be the abuser in a relationship, it is essential that you address the issue in a way that will break the cycle of violence. There are things you can do to help your teen and others recognize the abuse, understand the dynamics behind it and get help to stop the behavior before it becomes a life-long pattern. Here are some ideas:

- › Recognize controlling and abusive behavior.
- › Acknowledge your awareness of controlling and abusive behavior.
- › Confront your teen's controlling and abusive behavior.
- › Communicate your concerns to the parents of your teen's partner.
- › Consult with community programs and mental health professionals for ideas.
- › Accept help and support for your efforts from friends, family and others in the community.
- › Seek help for your teen through community and mental health programs.
- › Support your teen's efforts to stop the pattern of abuse.

Source: Washington State Office of the Attorney General