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Video Short

Dating Violence

By CWK Network Producer

The Indiana legislature recently passed "Heather's Law," a new bill that encourages schools to address the issue of dating violence. At least four other states have introduced similar legislation this year – and others plan to follow.

Recent studies show dating violence is on the rise among teens, taking a slight upturn during this recession.

How can we talk with our kids about love... and hurt?

Many teens, so swept up in the hot romance of their first love, often fail to see the signs that their relationship may be on thin ice.

Growing up we often romanticize relationships, with a notion that everything is always wonderful and fine...a fairy tale and men and women treat each other equally.

"I never felt like I was being hurt or anything, it was just a back and forth kind of yelling, nothing more than that," says 14-year-old Cameron.

But experts say many teens who tolerate verbal abuse later discover that abuse turns physical.

"He slammed me on the bed, that's the only thing he did, he had me pinned down...I'm just punching, kicking him all in his stomach, groin, whatever," describes 17-year-old Brittany.

Studies show that violence is an element of about 10 percent of all dating relationships. Some reports indicate an increase that may be tied to the harassment, name calling and ridicule that takes place on the Internet.

What can parents do?

Jasmine Willis, a dating violence expert, says that parents need to teach their kids how to communicate in a dating relationship.

"Sit down and talk with the child about what is communication and what it means to be in a healthy relationship," says Willis.

The problem, says Willis, is that many young lovers don't have clearly defined limits, and don't know what to do when things in a relationship turn sour.

"...the first you need to do in coming to terms with what is going on in this relationship and the second thing that I would suggest you do is talk to a friend, a family member or someone in your school you can really trust."

Perhaps with those lessons in mind, when kids do fall in love, it won't be a fall that hurts.

What Parents Need to Know

Dating violence is defined as the physical, sexual or psychological/emotional violence that occurs within a dating relationship. Destructive relationships during the teen years can lead to lifelong unhealthy relationship practices, may disrupt normal development, and can contribute to other unhealthy behaviors in teens that can lead to chronic mental and physical health conditions in adulthood.

According to the Centers for Disease Control 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, one in 10 adolescents' reports being a victim of physical dating violence; one in 4 adolescents report verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse each year, about 72 percent of eighth and ninth graders report "dating," and teen dating abuse most often takes place in the home of

one of the partners. Teens who were physically hurt by a dating partner were more likely to say they engage in risky sexual behavior, binge drink, use drugs, attempt suicide, and participate in physical fights.

Dating violence is not just abuse by young men against young women. The bullying, verbal abuse, and physical violence works both ways. It happens when one of the people in a relationship has a fundamental lack of self-esteem.

In January 2010, Congress passed Senate Resolution 373 designating February as “National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month,” citing the following statistics:

- 20 percent of teen girls exposed to physical dating violence did not attend school because the teen girls felt unsafe either at school, or on the way to or from school, on 1 or more occasions in a 30-day period.
- Digital abuse and “sexting” is becoming a new frontier for teen dating abuse, with one in four teens in a relationship say they have been called names, harassed, or put down by their partner through cell phones and texting. Three in 10 young people have sent or received nude pictures of other young people on their cell or online, and 61 percent who have “sexted” report being pressured to do so at least once. Targets of digital abuse are almost 3 times as likely to contemplate suicide as those who have not encountered such abuse (8 percent vs. 3 percent), and targets of digital abuse are nearly 3 times more likely to have considered dropping out of school.
- Being physically and sexually abused leaves teen girls up to 6 times more likely to become pregnant and more than 2 times as likely to report a sexually transmitted disease.

So what can be done to stop teen dating violence? According to a 2007 survey of teens by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy, teens say that *parents* most influence their decisions about dating and relationships. Parents should talk with their teens about the characteristics of a healthy relationship, pointing out that any type of violence or power and control within a relationship is not healthy. Teens need to learn about dating violence before they start dating.

Resources

[National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

[The Library of Congress](#)

[National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#)