

If your friend is in an abusive relationship....

More than half of America's teens know friends who have experienced some sort of dating abuse, while nearly three in four say that physical dating violence is a serious concern for their age group, according to a survey sponsored by Liz Claiborne Inc and conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. In many situations, teens do not recognize they are being abused until serious emotional and/or physical damage is done. Teenagers have the right to safety and to experience healthy relationships.

Teen dating violence can be as serious as domestic abuse. It may include hitting, yelling, threatening, name calling, and other forms of verbal, sexual, emotional, and physical abuse.

The number of incidents and the severity of the abuse increases as the relationship continues. Very few teens tell someone else, ask for help. In a violent relationship, one partner chooses to maintain power and control over the other through abuse. Dating violence happen in all kinds of relationships.

What can you do to help them?

There are many things you can do to help people in this extremely difficult, emotional and dangerous situation.

* Gather all the information you can about domestic violence .

Victim's advocates can be an excellent source of support for both you and the person you want to help. Educate yourself and find out how to be most supportive and helpful to someone who is being abused.

"People have an absolute right to be free of bodily harm," said Phyl Rubinstein, nationally recognized domestic violence expert. "We must act on that belief."

* Lending a sympathetic ear may be the best help you can offer .

Don't force the issue. Simply let them confide in you at their own pace. Always validate their thoughts and feelings, offer them choices and remain respectful of their autonomy.

"Never blame her for what's happening or underestimate her potential danger. Remember that your friend must make their own decisions about their life," advises the Department of Justice. "Don't think you'll be the influence in their life that will rescue them, or get frustrated because they are making choices that you don't agree with or because things are not moving as fast as you would like.

* Acknowledge that no one deserves to be hurt. Remember Domestic Violence is a crime.

* Guide your friend to community services . Share the information you've gathered about abuse with her privately. Let them know they are not alone and that people care about them. Encourage her to seek the assistance of victim's advocates at the local domestic violence hotline 303-688-8484.

* Give her the emotional support she needs . Battered teens live with emotional as well as physical abuse. According to the Department of Justice:

The abuser probably continually tells your friend that she is a bad person. Emphasize that they deserve a life that is free from violence.

Don't tell them what to do, how they should feel, or make excuses for the abuser.

* Help them develop a safety plan . Help your friend think through the steps that they should take if her partner becomes abusive again. Make a list of people they can call in an emergency.

NEED HELP OR JUST HAVE QUESTIONS?

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