



# Teen Dating Violence Prevention

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Adolescence is a time when many young people start their first romantic relationships. Dating can be a new and exciting phase in teens' lives that helps them learn more about themselves and sets the stage for future relationships. But for many teens, the dating experience can also include different forms of violence that can cause short- and long-term harm to their physical and mental health. Helping teens develop healthy and respectful relationships early on may protect them from the harmful consequences of dating violence and set the stage for healthy relationship patterns that persist into adulthood.

The Children's Safety Now Alliance and Children's Safety Network seek to strengthen state and jurisdiction health department infrastructure to support child safety and well-being. This fact sheet can guide the work of states and jurisdictions by informing where and how to focus programs and strategies to prevent and reduce teen dating violence.

## What is Teen Dating Violence?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teen dating violence includes four forms of violence that can occur within the dating relationships of adolescents:<sup>1,2</sup>

- **Physical violence:** the intentional use of physical force, which includes hitting, pushing, shoving, grabbing, restraining, or using strength against someone
- **Sexual violence:** forcing someone to take part in a sexual act (e.g., kissing, touching, sexual intercourse) or a non-physical sexual event (e.g., sexting) when the person does not or cannot consent
- **Psychological aggression:** the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to cause mental or emotional harm, or exert control over someone
- **Stalking:** a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact that causes fear or concern for one's own safety or the safety of someone else (e.g., family member, close friend)

Teen dating violence can take place anywhere, including schools and cyberspace. When any form of dating violence is perpetrated using technology, such as messaging and social media, it may be referred to as cyber dating violence.<sup>3</sup> Examples include sending sexual pictures of a dating partner to others without consent, sending or posting insulting or threatening messages, and sharing negative rumors about the person.

## How Common Is Teen Dating Violence?

Research suggests that dating violence is common among U.S. teens, but that its prevalence varies by:

- Form of violence—physical, sexual, psychological, or stalking—and whether it is perpetrated in person or using technology
- Whether the teen is the perpetrator, victim, or both
- Demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, and sexual identity

For example, teen boys are more likely than girls to perpetrate sexual violence, while teen girls are more likely than boys to perpetrate psychological forms of dating violence.<sup>4</sup> And while both boys and girls report perpetrating physical violence during a dating relationship, girls are more likely to suffer injuries as a result of this violence.<sup>5</sup> Studies also suggest that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth are more likely to experience more forms of dating violence than heterosexual youth.<sup>6,7</sup> Understanding these and other differences among subgroups of teens is critical for identifying those that may be at highest risk for specific forms of dating violence perpetration or victimization and implementing tailored prevention efforts.

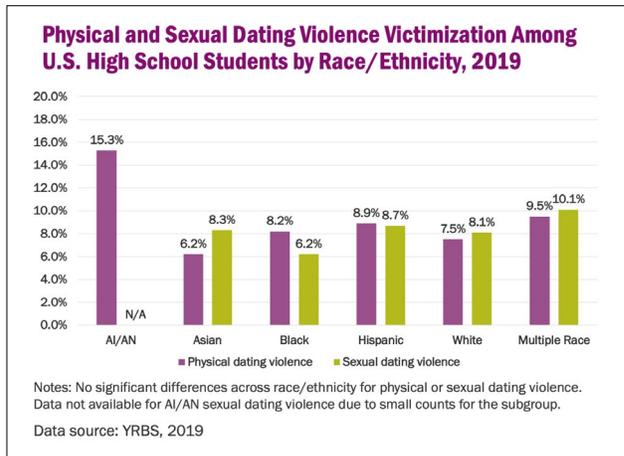
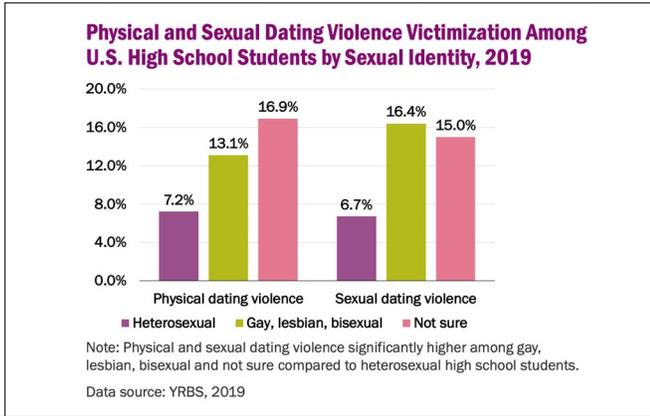
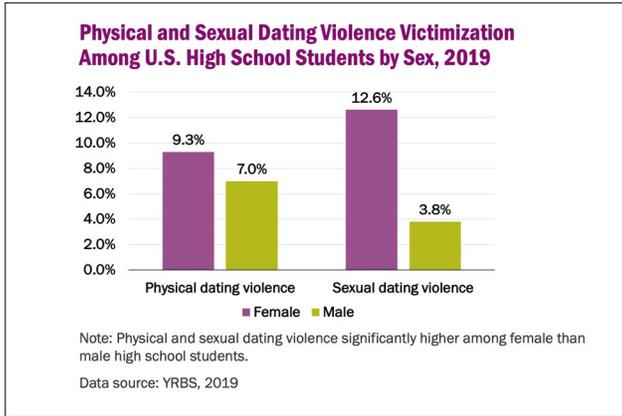
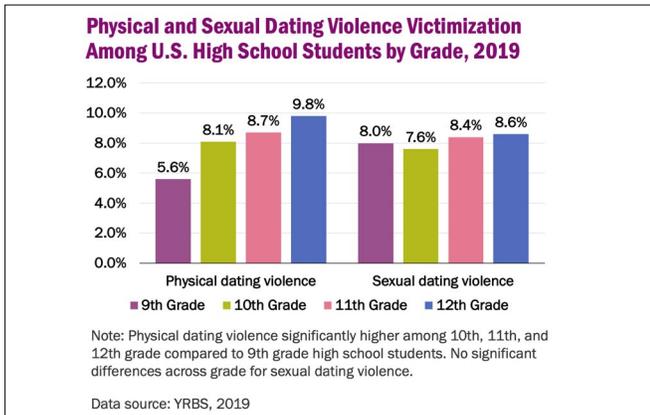
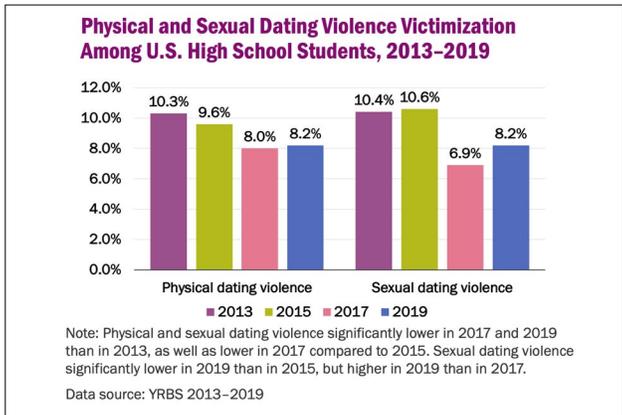
# Physical and Sexual Dating Violence

National estimates of the prevalence of physical and sexual dating violence among U.S. high school students are available from CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). Conducted every two years, the survey includes questions on physical and sexual dating violence victimization (e.g., “During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose?”).

In 2019, about two-thirds of students (66.1%) reported having dated or gone out with someone in the 12 months. Among these students:<sup>8</sup>

- About 1 in 12 (8.2%), experienced physical dating violence.
- About 1 in 12 (8.2%) experienced sexual dating violence.

This represents a decrease from 2013, when 10.3% of teens reported physical dating violence victimization and 10.4% percent reported sexual dating violence victimization. Other 2019 findings indicate that the prevalence of sexual dating violence victimization was similar across grades, but physical dating violence was more common in upper grades than in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Physical and sexual dating violence victimization were more commonly reported by students who were female; lesbian, gay, or bisexual; or not sure of their sexual identity. The study did not find significant differences in physical or sexual dating violence among different racial/ethnic groups.



## Others Forms of Teen Dating Violence

Findings from existing studies indicate that psychological aggression, stalking, and cyber dating violence are more common among teens than physical or sexual dating violence that is perpetrated in person. For example:

- **Psychological aggression.** Nearly two-thirds (65.0%) of youth ages 12 to 18 in the National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV) reported experiencing moderate psychological dating violence (e.g., accusations of flirting with another person, jealous behavior, excessive tracking of the victim) in a current or recent relationship.<sup>4</sup> A similar percentage of youth (61.3%) reported having perpetrated this type of dating violence.
- **Stalking.** Another study that analyzed STRiV data found that nearly half of teens in current or recent relationships (48.0%) reported experiencing stalking or harassment—defined as having ever spied on or followed a partner, damaged something that belonged to the person, or gone through the person’s online accounts.<sup>9</sup> A similar percentage (48.6%) reported having perpetrated stalking or harassment.
- **Cyber dating violence.** A survey of middle school and high school students in 10 schools in three northeastern states found that more than 1 in 4 (26.3%) students who were in a relationship had recently experienced cyber dating violence.<sup>10</sup> In another study, 41.4% of teens in 11 California school-based health centers reported recently being the victims of cyber dating violence.<sup>3</sup>

## Risk and Protective Factors

Research suggests that several risk and protective factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels of the social-ecological model<sup>11</sup> may play a role in teen dating violence (see below).<sup>12-14</sup> As CDC’s technical package on intimate partner violence prevention notes, different forms of violence often share similar risk and protective factors.<sup>12</sup> Teen dating violence is connected to several other forms of violence and risky behaviors, including family violence, child maltreatment, substance use, vandalism, bullying, neighborhood violence, and societal norms that support aggression.<sup>15</sup> These interconnections provide many opportunities for prevention, as efforts to address risk and protective factors associated with teen dating violence are also likely to further the prevention of other forms of violence and related problems.

## Consequences

Dating violence can have strong and lasting effects on a teen’s developing body and mind that may have an impact across the person’s lifespan. Teen dating violence victimization—which is considered a type of adverse childhood experience—has been found to increase the risk for substance use, unhealthy weight control behaviors, risky sexual behaviors, physical injury, and suicide.<sup>13</sup> In the long-term, victimization has also been associated with declines in physical health and increased risk of experiencing adult intimate partner violence. For teens who perpetrate dating violence, consequences can include increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, and a decrease in self-rated health.

## Sample Risk and Protective Factors for Teen Dating Violence

Social-ecological Level	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to family violence or maltreatment</li> <li>• LGBTQ sexual identity               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depressive symptoms and/or anxiety</li> <li>• Engagement in risky behaviors, such as substance use, vandalism, and risky sexual behaviors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High empathy, verbal IQ, and self-esteem</li> <li>• Skills in communication, self-regulation, and coping</li> <li>• Good grades</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor relationship with parents</li> <li>• Friends who experience or perpetrate dating violence, or who engage in risky behaviors or bullying</li> <li>• Conflict in relationship with dating partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attachment to school and family</li> <li>• Higher levels of parental monitoring</li> <li>• Healthy relationships with peers</li> <li>• Strong social support system</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of neighborhood cohesion</li> <li>• High poverty rates</li> <li>• High violence and crime rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community support and connectedness</li> <li>• Low alcohol outlet density</li> </ul>
<b>Societal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional gender norms and gender inequality</li> <li>• Norms that support aggression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norms that protect against violence</li> <li>• Strong health, educational, economic, and social policies or laws</li> </ul>

## Guidance for Prevention

Health departments have an important role to play in helping communities implement effective approaches to promoting healthy teen relationships and preventing teen dating violence.

### Assess health department role and state laws and policies relevant to teen dating violence

- Conduct an environmental scan to understand current Department of Health (DOH) involvement and determine its future role in teen dating violence prevention.
- Analyze current state legislation and policies related to teen dating violence prevention or intimate partner violence prevention across the lifespan.
- Coordinate and mobilize partners to support the development of teen dating violence prevention policies and laws.

### Collect, analyze, and disseminate data

- Work with epidemiologists to develop strategies for the surveillance of teen dating violence, including assessment of the social climate in schools and communities.
- Coordinate with data sources to promote information sharing that will allow for a comprehensive understanding of teen dating violence and facilitate the development of data-informed interventions.

## Implement and spread evidence-based teen dating violence prevention strategies and approaches

- Implement and spread evidence-based strategies and approaches for preventing teen dating violence at all levels of the social-ecological model (see examples below from CDC’s technical package on the prevention of intimate partner violence across the lifespan).<sup>12</sup>
- Encourage schools and communities to implement evidence-based teen dating violence prevention programs and strategies. A recent meta-analysis identified several individual programs, most of them school-based, as having evidence of effectiveness.<sup>16</sup> Examples include: It’s Your Game...Keep it Real,<sup>17</sup> Safe Dates,<sup>18</sup> and the Youth Relationships Project.<sup>19</sup> Another effective strategy is Dating Matters®, a multi-component teen dating violence prevention model tested by CDC in partnership with local health departments and middle schools in Baltimore, Chicago, Oakland, and Ft. Lauderdale.<sup>20-22</sup>

## Provide technical assistance

- Educate policy makers, families, and teens about teen dating violence prevention and effective strategies, approaches, and programs.
- Provide technical assistance and training to community providers, including law enforcement agencies, Parent Teacher Associations, teachers, behavioral health service providers, after-school program providers, families/guardians, and sports/recreation programs on how to recognize teen dating violence and intervene using evidence-based and promising practices.

## Evidence-Based Strategies and Approaches for Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan

Strategies	Approaches
<b>Teach skills for safe and healthy relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social-emotional learning programs for youth</li> </ul>
<b>Engage influential adults and peers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men and boys as allies in prevention</li> <li>• Bystander empowerment and education</li> <li>• Family-based programs</li> </ul>
<b>Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood home visitation</li> <li>• Preschool enrichment with family engagement</li> <li>• Parenting skills and family relationship programs</li> <li>• Treatment for at-risk children, youth, and families</li> </ul>
<b>Create protective environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve school climate and safety</li> <li>• Create workplace environments that promote safety and encourage help-seeking</li> <li>• Strengthen community ties and social cohesion</li> </ul>
<b>Strengthen economic supports for families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen household financial security</li> <li>• Strengthen work-family supports</li> </ul>
<b>Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment and support for victims</li> <li>• First responder and civil legal protections</li> <li>• Patient-centered approaches</li> </ul>

# Teen Dating Violence Prevention Resources

## Data

- Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Using Indicator Data to Inform Teen Dating Violence Prevention: A Guide for Local Health Departments | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Violence Indicators Guide & Database | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

## Educational Resources

- Preventing Teen Dating Violence | youth.gov
- Preventing Teen Dating Violence Fact Sheet | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Teen Dating Violence | U.S. Department of Justice
- Teen Dating Violence Literature Review | U.S. Department of Justice
- Teen Dating Violence Special Feature | U.S. Department of Justice

## Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies, Approaches, and Programs

- CrimeSolutions Web-Based Clearinghouse of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices | U.S. Department of Justice
- Dating Matters® : Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships Website | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Primary Prevention Interventions to Reduce Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Among Youth | Guide to Community Preventive Services
- STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

## Resources for Youth and Families

- Love is Respect Teen Dating Abuse Helpline (1-866-331-9474; TTY 1-866-331-8453)
- Preventing Teen Dating Violence | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-4673)
- Teen Dating Violence: Tips for Parents | American Academy of Pediatrics

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