



Healthy Relationships

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What does a *healthy* relationship look like? Relationship patterns learned in adolescence can carry into future relationships.¹ Helping youth distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns early on can have implications for their life-long physical and emotional health and well-being,² as well as provide important skills to help reduce the potential for sexual risk and relationship violence.³

Many existing school or community-based programs designed to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among youth focus on general sexual behaviors, but typically do so outside the context of adolescent relationships.⁴ Most youth have their first sexual encounters within the context of romantic relationships,⁵ so it is important to teach them how to develop healthy relationships and end unhealthy ones. You can help promote healthy relationships and prevent unhealthy relationships as part of your adolescent pregnancy prevention program.

WHAT WE KNOW

- Teen dating violence* is a type of intimate partner violence. It occurs between two people in a close relationship. The nature of teen dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual.⁶
- Teen dating violence can take place in person or electronically, such as repeated texting or posting sexual pictures of a partner online.⁶
- Youth who experience teen dating violence are at risk for engaging in unhealthy behaviors and more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, symptoms of depression and anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. These patterns are also more likely to continue into adulthood, often in a series of abusive relationships.⁶
- About two thirds of adolescents who have dated report experiencing abuse from a dating partner.⁷
- Youth with intellectual, emotional, or learning disabilities are at greater risk of dating violence victimization; 60% of adolescents with intellectual disabilities who had been in romantic relationships reported interpersonal violence, with no gender differences noted.⁸

* Teen dating violence is also referred to as adolescent relationship abuse, to emphasize the fact that abuse between teens does not always occur in the context of "dating."

- The following are potential topics to discuss around healthy relationships:
 - how to recognize gender-based stereotypes and double standards;
 - how to develop communication and conflict management skills;
 - how to recognize what healthy relationships and abusive dating relationships look like;
 - how to set limits and navigate different limits in relationships;
 - how to help a friend who might be in an abusive relationship; and
 - how to communicate with parents and other trusted adults.

TIPS FOR INTEGRATING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CONTENT INTO YOUR PROGRAM

Partner with a Local Domestic Violence Agency

- Invite a domestic violence community educator to hold a discussion on teen dating violence with youth or parents and other trusted adults.
- Invite a local domestic violence partner to review your current adolescent pregnancy prevention program and provide suggestions for ways to integrate healthy relationship content.
- Have a local domestic violence agency conduct a staff training on healthy relationships. Engage staff from settings that are also serving vulnerable youth (e.g., community-based organizations, foster care providers, group homes, juvenile justice facilities).

Provide Healthy Relationship and Teen Dating Violence Information to All Program Participants

- Pass out palm cards that include basic information about healthy relationships, adolescent relationship abuse, how to get help, and local and national hotline numbers. (Sample palm cards are available for youth and adults at <http://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/download-materials/>).
- Provide information to youth on local resources for support.
- Consider providing peer training on relationship violence, such as bystander education. Youth often share information about violent experiences with their peers before they share with anyone else.

Increase Awareness about Healthy Relationships and Adolescent Dating Abuse

- Infuse your social media campaign activities with information about healthy relationships and adolescent dating abuse. (See, for example, this CDC infographic on teen dating violence prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence_infographic.html)
- Raise awareness during nationally recognized awareness months: February is Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Month; April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month; and October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Put up posters, hand out brochures, or hold a special event, such as a film screening.
- Provide information and resources about adolescent relationship abuse, sex trafficking, and online dating abuse (e.g., cyberbullying, electronic dating).

Ensure Information about Healthy Relationships is Relevant to Youth

- Develop or adapt information and materials on healthy relationships to the context of the youth you are serving to ensure that they are relevant. Update existing relationship education curricula and/or develop resources to reflect modern and realistic relationships and the needs of youth today.

- Remember that context matters; there is not a one-size-fits all approach.
- Ensure that information and materials are appropriate and inclusive for youth of all races, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, and youth with intellectual disabilities.
- Ensure that the information does not promote outdated gender norms.

SPECIFIC RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Evidence-based and Evidence-informed Interventions

Intervention	Description	Available at
Coaching Boys into Men	This promising program engages high school athletic coaches to have brief, ongoing discussions with male high school athletes about violence against women and girls. The program includes training for coaches and “training cards” to guide discussions.	http://www.coachescorner.org/
Families for Safe Dates	This evidence-based parent-child communication intervention aims to prevent teen dating violence and promote communication skills between parents and their adolescent children. It is intended to be an add-on component of Safe Dates (see below).	Contact Hazelden at http://www.hazelden.org/
Fourth R	This series of evidence-based classroom curricula for 7th, 8th, and 9th grade youth focuses on prevention of violence, substance abuse, and risky sexual behaviors.	https://youthrelationships.org/
Love Notes	This evidence-informed healthy relationship education curricula is designed to support youth (16 to 24 years of age, including young parents) who are at risk for poor quality relationships and unplanned pregnancy. The program empowers youth with the skills needed to form and maintain healthy relationships and to make wise sexual decisions and plans for their sexual choices.	http://www.dibbleinstitute.org/love-notes-philosophy-and-goals/
Safe Dates	This evidence-based 10-session, classroom-based teen dating violence prevention curriculum can be implemented for youth in 6th to 12th grade and consists of interactive sessions, a play about dating abuse, a poster contest, parent materials, and a teacher training outline.	http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/safedatesproduct.page

Online Resources

- **Loveisrespect’s** mission is to engage, educate, and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships. Its Website provides extensive materials on promoting healthy relationships and preventing abusive relationships (<http://www.loveisrespect.org/>).
- **Futures Without Violence** provides extensive resources on teen dating violence–related programs, policies, and campaigns (<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>).

- **CDC** has information on teen dating violence and prevention programs (http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html).
- **Administration for Children and Families** provides a toolkit for incorporating adolescent relationship abuse prevention into existing adolescent pregnancy prevention programming (<http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/features/toolkit-incorporate-adolescent-relationship-abuse-prevention-existing-adolescent-pregnancy>).
- **Advocates for Youth** provides information on adolescent relationship abuse and young people (<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/417?task=view>).

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