



## **Women's Center Update: Teen dating violence**

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Relationships between teens 13 to 18 years old are a rehearsal for future adult relationships. The partners and friends they choose now are likely to be the same kind of people they choose to surround themselves with as adults. It is imperative that teens learn the difference between a healthy relationship composed of love and respect and an unhealthy, abusive relationship.

Teen dating violence is on the rise and with 89 percent of teens claiming to have been in a dating relationship, the time to talk is now. Here are some statistics that may surprise you: 1 in 5 female high school student reports being physically or sexually abused by their partner; 1 in 3 teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped or physically hurt by their dating partner; 45 percent of girls know a friend or peer who has been pressured into either intercourse or oral sex; 39 percent of female high school students report that they talk in school about whether or not someone is trying to control the person they are dating; and 81 percent of parents surveyed either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue. South Lake Tahoe is a relatively small town, and with only one high school it is easy to assume that incidents like these would be obvious but, unfortunately, many of the signs are easily overlooked. Last year the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center provided services to 30 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17, a number that would fill one entire classroom.

Warning signs that a teen may be in an abusive relationship include: apologizing and making excuses for his/her partner's behavior; losing interest in activities he/she once enjoyed; no longer seeing friends or family members and becoming more isolated; hearing a teen's partner puts him/her down and calling her names in front of other people; jealous and controlling behavior such as constantly calling and demanding to know where he/she has been; laughing off the partner's violent behavior as a joke; and unexplained injuries. These are only a few of the red flags of unhealthy relationships to watch for, and are not limited just to teen relationships.

Conversations with your teen about topics like sex and relationships may be uncomfortable for you, but it is important not to let your discomfort with these topics blind you to the possible warning signs of abuse, or hinder you from opening up effective communication with your child. Even if you do not suspect that your child is involved in an abusive relationship, it's likely that a friend or classmate may be. Your child may have questions regarding the way a friend is treated by a partner or why his/her friend would stay with someone who is mean or hurtful.

Some advice for talking with your teen:

When creating an open dialogue with your child start with a general question about school or friends and don't ask your teen to talk while in front of other people, all of these things put him/her on the spot. Try to be an active listener and non judgmental in your responses. It may be helpful and supportive to share personal experiences from when you were that age, and offer realistic strategies for confronting situations. Some questions you may want to ask are: What are your friends' relationships like? Have you ever seen any abusive behavior between two people who are going out? Why do you think someone would hurt a person they are dating? Why do you think a person might stay in an abusive relationship? What do you think makes a relationship healthy?

If you would like more information on teen dating violence, or wish to speak with an advocate, please call our business line at (530) 544-2118 or stop by our office at 2941 Lake Tahoe Blvd., across from South Tahoe Middle School. The Women Center business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

- Lisa Michele Utzig is an outreach coordinator at the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center.

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