

How parents can help youth date and relate safely

Take young relationships seriously. Don't underestimate the intensity of young feelings or minimize the importance of young relationships.

Talk about the benefits and risks of the Internet. Make them feel that it's OK to ask you questions or talk to you if they run into problems online. Build guidelines around Internet use just as you would for other activities. Be proactive in finding out who your kids are talking to online. Help them make smart decisions while they use the Internet.

Watch for warning signs. Most young people do not tell their parents about violence within their dating relationships. Instead, youth generally idealize their partners and internalize the blame. Symptoms of abuse among adolescents may include:

- sudden personality changes or extreme mood swings
- drop in school performance
- withdrawal from activities, family or friends
- sudden fearful or self-destructive behavior
- drug or alcohol abuse
- development of eating disorders
- being secretive about fights with boyfriend/girlfriend
- unexplained bruising or other injuries

Educate young people to know these danger signals:

A youth may be abused if he/she:

- believes they must be in a relationship to be happy
- "walks on eggshells"
- gives up friends and enjoyable activities for a partner
- is afraid to express his/her own opinion
- accepts or excuses inappropriate behavior
- believes that jealousy/possessiveness are signs of love

A youth may be abusive if he/she:

- controls the relationship using threats, intimidation, criticism or ridicule
- becomes angry easily; has a temper or is a "bad loser"
- is unable to talk about negative feelings
- approves and justifies violent behavior
- becomes excessively jealous or possessive; wants to limit a partners contact with others
- believes in and wants to enforce traditional roles
- uses alcohol/drugs

If a young person tells you about dating violence:

- Listen without judging; believe
- Recognize your own feelings are separate from the youth's feelings
- Realize your limitations in providing support; help the youth access other helping resources
- Discuss options: counselling, reporting, laying charges, medical needs,
- Let the youth be in control; support the young person's decisions