

**Category 3:**  
Building Positive Relationships

**Meeting 6**

**Teen Dating Abuse**

**Background**

Dating abuse among teenagers may be more common than many people realize. In the United States, about 12 percent of high school students say that they have been physically abused by a dating partner in the previous year, and in some parts of the country it is as high as 40 percent.<sup>21</sup> Psychological dating abuse is even more common, impacting about one in four high school students. Adults who use violence with a dating partner often started doing so when they were teens. Physically abused teens are three times as likely as non-abused teens to be victims of violence in college. Like bullying, abusive dating relationships can impact the student being abused, the student who is abusing, and those around them. It is critical for students, both boys and girls, to have the tools to stop dating abuse before it ever starts. This class meeting is to be conducted following the session Dating, Relating. This topic could be addressed in multiple class meetings.

**Learner Outcomes**





By the end of this session, students will be able to

- define *teen dating abuse* and identify physical and psychological behaviors that can be abusive
- analyze scenarios to understand how and why a dating partner could use harmful behaviors

This class meeting is adapted from *Safe Dates: An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum*, second edition, by V. Foshee and S. Langwick (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

- discuss the difficulties of recognizing and leaving an abusive dating relationship
- identify ways they could be a helpful friend to someone in an abusive dating relationship
- identify local resources if they or someone they know needs help with dating abuse issues

### Materials Needed

- Dating Abuse Red Flags, one copy per student 
- Ali's Story, one copy per student 
- How to Help a Friend in an Abusive Relationship, one copy per student 
- Dating Abuse: Who Can Help?, one copy per student 
- Situations and Discussion Questions for Teen Dating Abuse on pages 126–28 and Ali's Story on page 129 of this manual
- Pencils

### Preparation Needed

- Print the handouts listed above from the CD-ROM. Each student will need one copy of each handout.
- Work with your Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee to identify community and school resources that can help students with dating abuse issues. Add these resources and the contact information on the “Local Resources” section of the Dating Abuse: Who Can Help? handout.

### Class Meeting Outline



#### Introduction (15 minutes)

1. During a previous class meeting, we discussed healthy dating relationships and difficulties that can sometimes arise when dating. Today, we'll expand on that discussion to explore unhealthy relationships and how behaviors can cross the line and become abuse between dating partners. Let's start with the definition—what is dating abuse? List student responses on the board. Compare responses to the following definition.

Dating abuse is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner. These behaviors could be physical, sexual, emotional, and/or psychological and are used to manipulate, control, or gain power over someone; make someone feel bad about themselves or those they're close to; or make a person feel afraid of their dating partner.<sup>22</sup>

2. How does this definition of dating abuse compare to the definition of bullying? *(Both can involve repeated behaviors, imbalance of power; behaviors are used to manipulate, control.) Are behaviors considered "abusive" only if they happen more than once? (No, particularly when the behavior involves physical or sexual force or violence—even once is abusive. Unhealthy behaviors should be addressed before waiting for a pattern.)*
3. Make two headings across the top of the board: Physically Harmful Behaviors and Emotionally/Psychologically Harmful Behaviors. What are some examples of physical and emotional dating abuse? These could be "cross-over" behaviors, as physical abuse is often connected to emotional abuse. Write student responses under the appropriate headings. Students may mention the following behaviors:
  - Physical: hitting, grabbing, scratching, shoving, biting, pinching, choking, shaking, pushing, spitting, pulling hair, throwing things, preventing someone from leaving, forcing unwanted sexual activity including rape, damaging personal property, using a weapon, etc.
  - Emotional/Psychological: name-calling, mocking, criticizing, ignoring someone's feelings, isolating a dating partner from their friends, lying, undue suspicion ("checking on" someone constantly through continuous text messages or phone calls), jealous behavior, threatening, scaring someone, cheating, making someone feel guilty, spreading rumors, threatening to hurt oneself, using sexually derogatory names, driving or acting recklessly to scare someone, humiliating someone publicly or privately, insulting someone, showing inappropriate anger, stalking, using technology to abuse a dating partner, etc.
4. These behaviors that you listed may be considered warning signs or "red flags" that a person is a victim of abuse or is an abusive partner. Distribute copies of Dating Abuse Red Flags as a reference for students to take with them.

## Activity 1 (15 minutes)

1. I'm going to read a few dating scenarios to you, and then we'll discuss them to consider whether or not they show abusive behavior and why. In each of these situations, the genders could be switched around. Statistics do show that males abuse more often, but females can also abuse males.
2. Read both situations from pages 126–28 and use the discussion questions after each scenario. You may refer to the list on the board or the red flags handout as you move through the discussion.



## Activity 2 (20 minutes)

1. Abusive or unhealthy dating relationships might be difficult to recognize, but even if problems become clear, it's often very difficult for the abused person to leave the relationship. The decision to stay together or break up can be complicated.
2. Distribute the Ali's Story handout. I'm going to read a story from the point of view of a girl named Ali about her relationship with her boyfriend Tanner. At various places I will pause in the story and say, "Weigh in." At that time, decide what Ali might be thinking at that point. Answer from the perspective of Ali, not yourself. If you believe she sees the situation as healthy, put a hatch mark under "Things Are Good" on your handout. If you believe she would think it was unhealthy, make a mark under "Red Flag" on your handout. If you think she would be undecided, mark "Not Sure" on your handout. Although the story is from a girl's point of view, all of the behaviors in this story could be behaviors of either gender. When we finish with the story, we will discuss this together as a class.
3. Read Ali's Story from page 129.

## Activity 2 Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

1. Where were most of your marks? What were some of the good things about Ali and Tanner's relationship? What were the red flags?
2. Relationships can be complicated. Why might it be difficult to leave a relationship that's not going as well as it could? Why might someone be reluctant to leave an abusive relationship? *(Because they are in love, they think the unhealthy behavior will go away, there are good parts of the relationship, they don't think the behavior is really abusive, they think the other person's negative behavior is really their own fault, they want to help the abuser, they are embarrassed, they*

*are afraid that the abuser will harm them physically or emotionally [spread rumors, share photos] or that the abuser will harm himself or herself.)*

3. **What are the consequences to the abused person if they stay in the relationship?** *(They could have low self-esteem; they could get physically hurt; they may think these behaviors are normal for this relationship and future relationships; they will be embarrassed and humiliated; they will feel powerless and be scared to get into other relationships; if not stopped, the abuse can get worse.)*
4. **What are the consequences to the person who is the abuser?** *(Could face legal consequences if there is physical or sexual violence, could continue the abuse and it would likely get worse, could think the behavior is okay in future relationships.)*
5. **What could be the positive and negative consequences to the abused person if they leave the relationship?** *(Negative: The abuse could escalate, they may be fearful of their former partner, they may need to "hide." Positive: They may seek support, they may become more emotionally healthy without the abuse, they may have more time to devote to friendships, schoolwork, activities they enjoy, etc.)*
6. **When unhealthy relationships continue, there usually are consequences for both dating partners. If abuse is present in a relationship, it almost always continues. If the abuse continues, it can get worse. Adults who use violence in their dating relationships often started that pattern when they were teens. According to the 2009 National Crime Victimization Survey, almost 70 percent of violent crimes against women (including rape) were perpetrated by someone they knew.<sup>23</sup> Physically abused teens are three times as likely as non-abused teens to be victims of violence in college. Consider bulleting these facts on the board for students to see and discuss.**
7. **It's important for both partners to look honestly at what is going on in their relationship. If you think that you or someone you know is involved in some red-flag behaviors with a dating partner, it's important for both people to get help so that neither partner continues to be involved in unhealthy or unsafe relationships in the future.**
8. **So what can you do if you or a friend is in an abusive dating relationship?** *(Get help or counseling through a hotline or local organization; talk to a friend; talk to a professional; break up; get support from family, professionals, and friends for leaving the relationship.)*

9. It can be frustrating to be the friend of someone in an abusive relationship. Why might you be frustrated? *(It can be hard to understand why your friend doesn't clearly see what's happening and just leave, you worry that they aren't safe but they don't seem to want to help themselves, they say they'll listen to your advice but then change their minds.)*
10. Your frustration can make it even harder for the person in the abusive relationship. How?
11. Here are a few tips about how to help a friend. Give each student a copy of How to Help a Friend in an Abusive Relationship. Have student volunteers each read one of the sections and discuss why each is important.
12. Ask students if they have additional suggestions as to how they could help a friend.

### Wrap-Up

1. Dating relationships can be complicated, especially when they involve abuse. We have talked about what abusive behaviors look like, and how they relate to bullying. When abuse is part of a relationship, it is an unhealthy, unsafe relationship.
2. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological and can sometimes become violent. It's often hard for people to realize they are in an abusive relationship and hard to leave for many reasons.
3. You can help a friend who is being abused in a relationship by affirming their feelings, reminding them that no one deserves to be abused, respecting their choices, and assisting them in finding help.
4. Here is a list of resources that can be contacted online and by phone. At the bottom of the handout are local and school contact numbers. Give each student a copy of Dating Abuse: Who Can Help?
5. If you recognize these abusive behaviors in yourself, your dating partner, or a friend, it's important to get help.

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## Curriculum Connections

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### Art:

- Invite students to make posters providing information about resources and help lines for dating abuse.

### Health/Physical Education/Sexuality Education:

- Students can look at local college websites to see what kinds of resources are available for college students involved in abusive relationships or dating violence.
- Invite a representative from the local domestic violence program to speak to the class about dating violence and abuse, provide supportive resources, and answer questions. Consider requesting whether the representative may be available after class or school to talk privately with individual students at their request.

### Psychology:

- Instruct students to research the damaging effects of abusive relationships on both the abused person and the abuser; dating violence among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth; and connections between bullying, dating abuse, and other forms of domestic violence.

### Social Sciences/Civics:

- Students may research the incidence of domestic abuse internationally, nationally, and in your community. They should include the prevalence of partner violence, types of partner violence, and costs to your community to address this issue. Research service data from community domestic violence organizations: How many people are helped each year? How can adults get help? Are these services also available for teens in abusive dating relationships?