

The Dynamics of Dating Violence

What is dating violence?

Dating violence is a pattern of coercive control that one person in an intimate relationship uses over his or her partner. The terms battering and abuse are also used to refer to this type of violence. Abuse people, or batterers, use physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, intimidation, threats, and money to control their partner. People of all ages date, and abuse can happen at any age. The focus of this guide, however, is on violence that happens in teen dating relationships.

Battering is done intentionally to gain and maintain power and control over someone in an intimate relationship. It is not about the abuser's inability to control his* temper. For example, the abuser will not assault the cashier at the grocery store who gave him the wrong change, but will assault his partner for something just as trivial. While the abuser knows that he could get in trouble for assaulting the cashier, he sees his partner as someone who he has the right to mistreat and control, and does not believe there is apt to be negative consequences if he is the violent towards her. In addition, where and when a batter abuses his partner is intentional. Most dating violence assaults do not happen in public. Batterers frequently avoid hitting their partners in the face or other visible areas. Instead, that will deliberately leave bruises only in body areas that will be covered by clothing. These facts are further indicators that assailants do not abuse their partners out of a loss of control, but rather are controlled enough to hide their abuse from public eyes.

Most often, a survivor** of dating violence is referred to as female while the batterer is referred as male. This is because 95% percent of such dating violence incidents involve men battering women. Despite this, women do sometimes abuse men. Abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships.

Like abuse survivors, abusers come from all races, cultures, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds, and economic levels. The only characteristic common those who are being abused is that the individuals with whom they are in a relationship are hurting them and exercising power and control over them.

Like abuse survivors, abusers come from all different background. For example, some abusers grew up in violent homes while others did not. The only characteristic common to those who abuse is that they are making the choice to be violent and exercise power and control over the individuals with whom they are in an intimate relationship.

Abuse does not go away on its own, and almost always gets worse over time. The only person to blame for the abuse is the abuse is the one who is being abusive. Because abusing is a choice, stopping the abuse is always the responsibility of the batter, and never of the survivor.

How stereotypes and misconceptions shape the dynamics of teen dating violence:

Adolescents are commonly seen as immature, irrational, and dramatic. Often their feelings are discounted, and their concerns are not taken seriously. As a result, their relationships are frequently viewed as trivial “puppy love”. Because adolescent relationships are often viewed in this context, the seriousness, or even existence, of teen dating violence is often minimized. These stereotypes create barriers for survivors of dating violence who want help.

How an adolescent’s lack of resources shapes the dynamics of teen dating violence:

Adolescents do not have the same rights in society as adults. This limits a dating violence survivor’s choices when seeking resources for help. For example, she must decide whether her need for help outweighs the risk of telling her parents what she has been experiencing at the hands of her partner. If her parents do not approve of her dating, or do not know she is sexually involved, she may be extremely hesitant to go to them for help. Consequently, survivors’ options and safety are limited by things such as parental consent laws, lack of transportation, and lack of money, lack of confidential healthcare and mental health care recourses, and lack of programming, specific to adolescents’ needs.

Why does she stay?

People often ask why someone would stay in an abusive relationship. No one likes to be abused. Most people do leave. Those who do not leave may stay for several reasons, mainly hope, fear, and love.

Hope: Abusive relationships are almost never abusive right from the start. Hope that the relationship will return to being free of abuse can be very strong. This is made stronger by the fact that even in an abusive relationship, things are not always bad. Happy times are mixed in with the bad ones. Hope can be further strengthened by the assistant’s promises that he will change, especially when combined with things such as seeing a counselor or taking anger management classes.

Fear: Dating violence is often at its most severe and more likely to be lethal, when the abused individual tries to leave, he will kill her. The survivor could fear leaving the relationship, particularly if her assailant has acted on violent threats in the past. The survivor may experience fear of the unknown should the reaction end. For example, the survivor may fear that she will never meet someone else, and will be alone forever if she leaves her batterer. Or, if they have a child in common, she may fear facing the emotional and financial struggles of parenting on her own.

Love: Love is a very powerful emotion. A survivor of dating violence may still love her boyfriend, even though he has been abusive to her. Just like hope, love can be strengthened by the good times when her assistant is still the sweet guy she fell in love with. Because she loves him, she wants to see the relationship work. She does not want to hurt him, and may therefore be hesitant to leave.