

Children & Youth Advocate Manual

Section 3: Teen Dating Violence



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Introduction & Importance

As youth grow into their teen years their want for autonomy increases and begin to explore dating & intimate relationships. It is extremely essential that children & youth advocates understand that Teen Dating Violence (TDV) & Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is JUST AS SERIOUS AS domestic abuse and should be treated as such. IPV is a term that can be used as to include more intimate relationships outside of exclusive dating (i.e. hookups, polyamorous relationships, etc.). Knowledge on increased access to technology and social media are vital components to working with teens.

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Recognition

The Teen Dating Violence section of the Children & Youth Advocate Manual could not have been completed without the help of teens and teen mentors from across the state. Their valuable insights and feedback are what helped shape the content and information for this section. Their dedication and passion continues to inspire me in this work.

- Community Health Promoters – Diverse & Resilient – Milwaukee
- Fighting Against Abusive Relationships – Safe Haven – Shawano
- Teens Against Abusive Relationships – Stepping Stones – Medford
- Resilient By Design – Racine
- Southeast Asian Youth Anti-Violence Project – Milwaukee
- Sisterhood – CAP Services – Stevens Point
- Forging Youth Relationship Education – Sturgeon Bay

Understanding Teen Dating Violence

Prevalence and Statistics

The reality is that:

- **1 in 5** teens experience dating violence in Wisconsin.
- **1 in 4** teens in a relationship say they have been called names, harassed or put down by their partner through mobile devices.
- **2 in 3** teens who were in an abusive relationship never told anyone about it.
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth **are more likely to experience** physical and psychological abuse; sexual coercion; and cyber dating abuse than their heterosexual peers.
- More than half of women and men who have been physically or sexually abused, or stalked by a dating partner, **first experience abuse between 11-24 years old.**

To find more information on Wisconsin specific TDV and IPV data go to the [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System \(YRBSS\)](#). The YRBSS monitors six types of health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults including behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, sexual behaviors related to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol and other drug use, tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and inadequate physical activity.

A place to start looking on this website is the [Youth Online Data Analysis Tool](#). Here you can click on Wisconsin. The questions that might be most helpful to you (forced sexual intercourse, physical dating violence, and sexual dating violence) can be found under 'CHOOSE TABLE CONTENT' then clicking 'Unintentional Injuries and Violence'. You can then put the data into subgroups by choosing sex, race, grade, or sexual orientation under the 'VIEW DATA BY SUBGROUP'.

Types of Violence

The most dangerous time for a victim is when they try to leave a violent or unhealthy relationship. The chance for a domestic violence homicide is significantly increased during this time. The same is true for teens, if a teen is wanting to leave a violent or unhealthy relationship they should be just as careful and cautious during that time.

The [Teen Dating Violence Charts](#) give six types of abuse, an explanation of that abuse, and examples of what the abuse may look like. Teens may use different language than what is provided in these charts, so it is good practice to ask what that means to them instead of assuming. Love is Respect offers [a power and control wheel](#).

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Advocacy Skills

SKILLS TO HIGHLIGHT

The following responses were provided by youth in domestic violence youth programming.

Understand that every teen's situation is unique.

- Keep an open mind with every teen because they are all different with different perceptions.
- Not one size fits all in working with teens.
- Put yourself in their shoes.

Meet the teen where they are at.

- Have a lot of patience and understanding.
- It probably took a lot for the teen to come talk to an advocate.
- Be aware of the teen's comfort level, if the advocate does not know, ask!
- Be ok with awkwardness and silence.

Let teens know they are not alone.

- Give teens a sense of solidarity.
- Bring awareness to connection.

Very important to be more empathetic.

- Validate their feelings.
- Try to care by sowing emotion to help the person heal.
- Restate, briefly, from previous session.
- Ask teen to add anything before moving on.
- Treat the teen like their own person.
- Treat the teen like their problems matter.

Acknowledge that the teen is in the room if they are being talked about instead of talked with!

SKILLS TO HIGHLIGHT

The following responses were provided by youth in domestic violence youth programming.

ALWAYS begin by building relationship with teen.

- Have a conversation rather than an intake process or counseling session.
- Take interest in what they are interested in and their lives.
- Have advocate be their true self.
- Relate to teens through appropriate personal experiences.
- It is ok for advocates to not have all the answers.
- It is ok for advocates to feel lost.
- Be there for support.
- It is ok let teens just talk
- Let them know that if you don't have an answer you will try your best to get one for them.

Let teens know if you're a mandatory reporter.

- Inform teens of agencies mandatory reporting policy so they understand it!
- Repetition is good, allows youth to know when you make a report.

Allow teens to make their own decisions.

- Support and validate their decision making process.
- Offer advice when appropriate.
- Give teen opportunity to accept or reject advice.
- Watch your body language.

Discuss positive and negative outcomes with the teen's decision.

- Many more factors involved than just ending a relationship.
- Not easy to leave the relationship.
- Not easy to come stay at shelter.

Listen and ask clarifying questions.

- Actively reflect what the advocate is hearing.
- Ask what the teen means with the words they are using.
- Take notes on important things when appropriate.
- Be a good and active listener.

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

These are paired with tips to help aid advocates in working with teens. These types of behaviors will have teens shutting down and stop seeking services from children & youth programs.

Shame or blame the teens about their experiences.

- Do not be judgmental.
- Do not shame around sex or substance use.
- Avoid victim blaming language like; How could you have avoided this? Why are you in this relationship? I told you, you should have listened...
- Watch your tone of voice.

Be a parent or friend figure.

- Advocates should be adult mentors with appropriate and healthy boundaries.

Scold them.

- Advocates are meant to support the people that they work with by offering resources and advice when appropriate.
- Do not come off as a cold authority figure.

Assume gender of their partner(s).

- There is an increase in gender and sexual identities an advocate should avoid heteronormative and cisnormative language.
- Adopt gender neutral language (like they/them/their for pronouns and partner) as default language to use.

Talk poorly about their partner, unless they've given permission.

- Ask the teen if it is ok to use the language, they are using about their partner.
- Ask the teen if it is ok to offer a negative criticism about their partner.

Act like the advocate is all knowing.

- Do not assume that the teen does not know what's best for them
- They are the experts in their own life and know what resources and solutions will work for them
- Not preaching to the teen.

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

These are paired with tips to help aid advocates in working with teens. These types of behaviors will have teens shutting down and stop seeking services from children & youth programs.

Continuously remind teens of their experiences.

- There is an increase in gender and sexual identities an advocate should avoid heteronormative and cisnormative language.
- Adopt gender neutral language (like they/them/their for pronouns and partner) as default language to use.

Tell the teen how to feel or what to do.

- As an advocate it is not your job to try and fix the teen or their situation.
- Do not tell the teens that they HAVE to forgive their abuser.
- Do not tell the teens that you know how they feel.

Not really listening to the teens and not hearing or understanding what the teens are saying.

- Turn of the sound off of electric devices or other devices that will make noises (computers, cell phones, office phones, etc.).
- Rephrase or summarize what they have said and ask the teens if that is correct.
- If the teen feels it is not correct ask them to clarify what they meant so you are understanding correctly.

Jump into 'problem' right away.

- Building a trusting relationship is key with teens before diving into their experiences.
- Be careful of how you react to what the teen is telling you.
- Shift the focus from the action to more on how they feel and what they would now like to do about it.

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

These are paired with tips to help aid advocates in working with teens. These types of behaviors will have teens shutting down and stop seeking services from children & youth programs.

Minimize or trivialize the teen's experiences.

- Avoid ageism language to teens like 'wait until you are an adult if you think you have big problems now' or 'you shouldn't be dating now anyways really you should be focusing on school'.
- Minimizing language is dangerous when working with teens in TDV or IPV relationships because it dismisses the actual danger the teens are in
- Do not treating teens like a child

Make promises advocates cannot keep

- It can feel great to tell a teen that there is a definitive solution to their experiences.
- The reality is that we CANNOT guarantee that our solutions will produce the exact outcomes.
- Like everything is going to be ok, you are going to get this restraining order in place, they are going to go to jail for what they did to you, etc.
- It is better to explain the processes, create safety plans with the teens.
- Then let the teens know that even though they are going through the process or creating safety plans it does not mean that outside circumstances will not happen.
- Ask the teen what clarifications they need.

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Teen Engagement

Teen engagement in the groups and activities within their community can look different in many ways. Some teens will want to be very involved in decision making processes, while others may want to attend and use the services without being involved at an administrative level.

The [Ladder of Youth Engagement](#) illustrates different degrees of involvement that youth can have within an organization. This can range from situations in which youth are forced to be involved (manipulation) to youth initiating groups and activities and sharing decision making power with the adults involved. When starting a new group or organization for teens in your community, it is important to think critically about which form of engagement fits what your community needs, ideally having a goal of being in one of the degrees of participation.

If groups exist already, have the youth evaluate how well they feel their current level of involvement is fulfilling their needs. A good next step could be talking to the adults who are involved in existing groups to see if they think they are meeting the youth's goals. Effective youth groups and youth serving organizations have developed the level of engagement that fits the goals and mission of the group.

For more information on how to create groups or materials for children and youth, see the [Age Appropriate Support Groups](#) and [Age Appropriate Presentations](#), [wiskidsdv listserv](#) (connect with other children & youth advocates).

Using Social Media

Often advocates who are working with teens think about how to incorporate social media to offer more inclusive services. There are many different forms of social media platforms to use from work profiles, pages, groups, etc. If this is something advocates are interested in AND have the capacity to maintain the social media(s) then please consider the following. The [Using Social Media](#) document goes through:

- Important considerations – Confidentiality & Mandatory reporting
- Social media audit & marketing plan – Social media audit: 6 steps & Social media marketing plan.
- Social Media resources for adult mentors - Futures Without Violence resources & That's Not Cool resources.

Teen Events and Groups

To continue engaging teens providing events and groups directly geared for them is key. Below are different types of events and groups that are meant for just that.

Dare 2 Know

[Dare 2 Know](#) Dare2Know (D2K) is a challenge and a movement for teens in Wisconsin to rally around healthy relationships to end teen dating violence in Wisconsin. Through D2k teens can sign up to be involved with the Teen Ambassador Program (TAP) where they will be educated on the campaign and engage in a 6-month challenge activity that will encourage them to value their voice, persuade their peers, and connect with their community. D2k offers community programs and adult mentors to take part in being a media partner to continue to spread the word about teen dating violence in Wisconsin. **Follow on [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#) @Dare2KnowWI**

Teen Summit

This annual, statewide [Teen Summit](#) brings together a diverse group of teens and adults to learn how to prevent teen dating and sexual violence and promote healthy relationships. The Teen Summit is meant for teens working on or interested in learning more about teen dating and sexual violence. Adult mentors working with or supporting teens, including: parents and caregivers; sexual assault programs; domestic violence programs; runaway programs; school

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personnel; law enforcement; youth development organizations; tribal youth programs; Child Protective Services; Independent Living Programs; health care and family planning providers. All minor teens MUST be accompanied by an adult. You can find more information about the Teen Summit on [End Abuse's website](#) and on [Facebook](#).

This event is continuing to grow with over 450 people in attendance at the 2025 Teen Summit. End Abuse offers an excused absence form every year that students can provide to their schools without fear of being tardy or having unexcused absences.

The Summit includes:

- Workshops for teens and adults
 - We are committed to making sure that workshops have at least 1 YOUTH co-facilitator
- Roundtable Discussions
 - Brave spaces for teens and adults to discuss issues important to them
- Teen performances
 - From Ho-Chunk Nation drumming to open mic night, youth take center stage to share their talents.
- Engaging Panels
 - Intergenerational Indigenous Panel: Kwnwahta Smith, Alice Skenandor, Josephine Webster, Camille Billie, Chante Sittingbear.
- Dynamic Keynotes
 - Alexis Smith, Ajamou Butler, Sara Mora, D'LocoKid, Valarie Kaur, Alora Young, Aisha Fukushima, Kwnwahta Smith, Prenicia Clifton, Melissa (Melly) Denizard, Linda Sarsour, Nalo Zidan, Kyle (Guante) Tran Myhre, Samantha Collier, Violet Kilmurray, Dr. Bettina Love, Ajani Carr, Lah Tere, Rosa Clemente, Beverly Gooden, Janaya Khan, and Kat Blaque.

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM)! It has also been called Teen Dating Violence Month (TDVM), Teen DV Month, Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month (TDVAPM), etc. Regardless of the name this month is a national effort to raise awareness about abuse in teen relationships and promote programs that prevent it. The following resources provide an updated Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month toolkit every year with different ideas, media, and activities. [Love Is Respect](#), [Break the Cycle](#), [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence \(NRCDV\)](#).

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Assisting Teens Transitioning into Adulthood

While there are many helpful resources for teens and youth, it is important to know that these resources may not have the capacity to continue to provide service to youth as they transition into adulthood. As teens who have been receiving services age, they may want resources about finding services for after they turn 18 and are no longer eligible for some teen and youth-based services. Finding those services can be overwhelming for an individual, so advocates can help both protective caregivers and youth themselves prepare a plan for how to find the services they need.

A helpful first step could be to contact the agency the youth has been receiving services from and ask about what services they may have for adults that the youth could have access to.

To find individual social service agencies, the first step can be to look on the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#) website. They have a list of community programs, social service, and human service agencies as well as contact information for the agencies. If that does not provide what the youth is looking for, looking on an individual county website can also provide links to services or providers in the youth's specific county. If neither of those steps identifies what the youth wants, the [End Abuse website](#) also has a list of programs and resources in Wisconsin by region.

Runaway Resources

There may be times when you work with youth who have run away from home. Here are some Wisconsin-specific and national resources to aid in further education and understanding of this topic.

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF)	Offers resources and a youth homelessness services map	https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ys/rhy
Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services (WAHRS)	Provides a nationwide, 24/7 text-for-support service for youth in crisis, a map of service providers, hosts an annual runaway services conference, and much more!	https://wahrs.org/programs.html
Courage+	Provide safe and inclusive housing, trauma-informed care catered to the LGBTQ+ community, education, and reliable data-supported thought leadership.	https://courageplus.org/
National Runaway Safeline	Responding to youth and families in crisis, serving as the national communications system for runaway and homeless youth. Available to call, text, and online chat.	https://www.1800runaway.org/

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Resources

[Break the Cycle](#) a website dedicated breaking the cycle of violence because everyone deserves a healthy relationship through youth leadership & education, capacity building, legal services, and policy & advocacy.

[Children's Safety Network Teen Dating Abuse: 2018 Resource Guide](#) This resource guide provides links to organizations, programs, publications, and resources focused on preventing teen dating abuse. It is divided into six sections: (1) national organizations; (2) prevention programs and interventions; (3) data, fact sheets, infographics, and toolkits; (4) policy and legislation; (5) special populations; and (6) research.

[Courage+](#) provide safe and inclusive housing, trauma-informed care catered to the LGBTQ+ community, education, and reliable data-supported thought leadership.

[Dare 2 Know](#) Dare2Know (D2K) is a challenge and a movement for teens in Wisconsin to rally around healthy relationships. Engaging both teens and adults to end Teen Dating Violence in Wisconsin.

[Love Is Respect's](#) this resource offers a lot of current and up-to-date resources. Love is Respect provides a Teen Dating Violence Month toolkit, as well as, the national dating abuse hotline 1-866-331-9474

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control – Dating Matter: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships](#) a comprehensive teen dating violence prevention model developed by CDC to stop teen dating violence before it starts.

[National Runaway Safeline](#) responds to youth and families in crisis, serving as the national communications system for runaway and homeless youth. Available to call, text, and online chat.

[One Love](#) offers many resources for teen dating violence.

[Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services](#) provides a nationwide, 24/7 text-for-support service for youth in crisis, a map of service providers, hosts an annual runaway services conference, and much more!

[Wisconsin Department of Children & Families](#) offers resources and a youth homelessness services map.

*Please notify the LGBTQ & Youth Program Director, [Cody Warner](#), if **ANY** links are no longer working.*
