

A Parent's Guide to Teen Dating Violence



RESPOND, Inc.

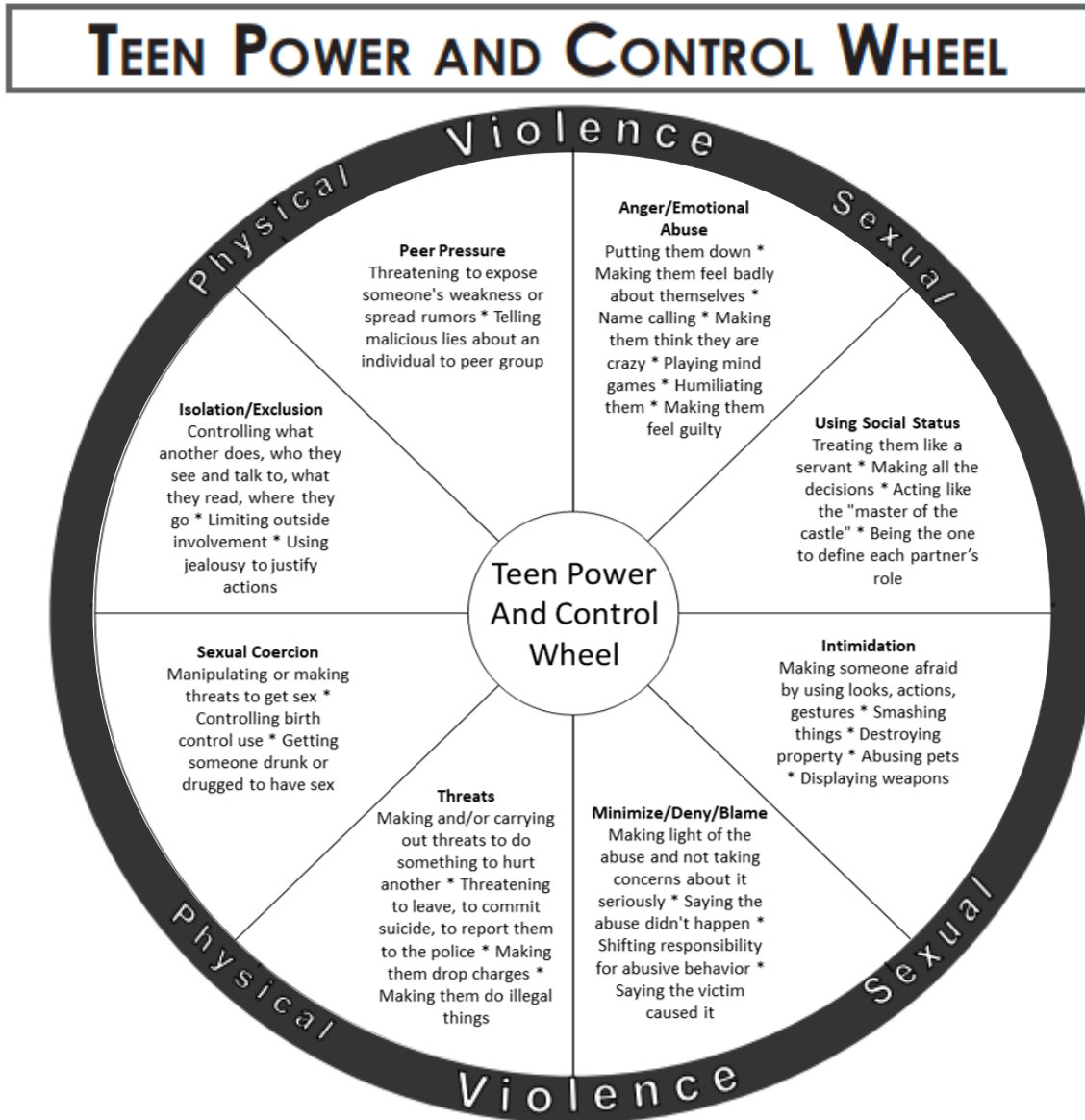
Somerville, MA 02143

24-hour Hotline: 617-623-5900

What is Teen Dating Violence?

It's never too early to talk to your child about healthy relationships and dating violence. Teen dating abuse describes actual or threatened acts of *physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal* harm by a partner, boyfriend, girlfriend or someone wanting a romantic relationship. It includes violence between two young people in a *current or former* relationship and can occur among heterosexual, same-gender, and non-binary couples. It can also include using the internet, social media sites, calls, or text messaging to harass, pressure, or victimize.

Dating abuse is about one person using power and control over another person. The tool below can help you recognize different ways this might be present in teenage relationships.



Far too common

It is scary to think about, but important to recognize how common teen dating violence is.

1 in 10 high school students has been purposely hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend

1 in 3 adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner

Young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence

40% of teenage girls aged 14-17 report knowing someone who has been hit, slapped, or pushed by a partner

This abuse can have long-lasting effects, including a higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, further domestic violence, and even suicide.

Where you come in

Only 33% of teens who are in an abusive relationship ever tell anyone about the abuse while it is happening and 81% of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue, or don't know if it is. **Talking to your teens about relationships can help them recognize warning signs and stay in healthy relationships.** There is no easy solution, but open dialogue can encourage them to seek support (from you or someone else) if they are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship.

Warning Signs

Teens may be experiencing a variety of physical and emotional changes during this time of their life and they may not readily share with you all of the changes they are experiencing. Be on the lookout for any of these potential signs:

Do you notice your teen:

- Spending less time with family and friends?
- Excessively text messaging, phone calling, emailing or visiting with their partner?
- Giving up things that used to be important to them?
- Having declining grades or missing school?
- Being pressured by a partner about what to do, where to go, or what to wear?
- Being worried about upsetting their boyfriend/girlfriend?
- Apologizing or making excuses for their boyfriend's/girlfriend's behavior?
- Has injuries that he/she tries to cover up or can't explain?
- Has a partner who is extremely jealous or possessive?
- Being depressed or anxious?
- Has a partner that abuses other people or animals?
- Dressing differently?

**Note: These are warning signs. Paying attention to them is important, but noticing one does not necessarily mean your child is in an abusive relationship. Many can be natural changes that happen over the course of teenage years.*

Why it is hard to leave

It can be extremely challenging to watch someone you love be hurt by a relationship and not be able to end it, but understanding some of the reasons why they might be unable to leave the relationship may help you work with them with patience and understanding.



Relationships usually do not start out with identifiable abusive or even unhealthy behaviors -- they start out in the honeymoon phase. As the relationship becomes more routine, fights and unhealthy behavior can start. People stay in unhealthy relationships for many complicated reasons, but often because they have *hope* it will get better (and it usually temporarily does), *love* for that person, and *fear* of leaving. Abusers also often use tactics of *minimization* and *blame* so that it is more difficult for the victim to recognize the

unhealthy behavior. Additionally, they may feel external pressure to stay in the relationship.

As confusing and scary as this is for you, keep in mind your child is also feeling a strong mix of emotions. Remember that ultimately your child must be the one who decides to leave the relationship. There are many complex reasons why individuals stay in unhealthy relationships and pressuring them could make them more likely to stay and less likely to reach out to you. Your continued support can make a critical difference in helping your teen find their own way to end their unhealthy relationship.

If you think your teen is in an unhealthy relationship

Knowing that your child is in an unhealthy relationship can be both frustrating and frightening. But as a parent, you're critical in helping your child develop healthy relationships and can provide life-saving support if they're in an abusive relationship. It is most important to start open and honest conversation. Believe what they say and take it seriously. As you validate their feelings and show your support, they can become more comfortable and trust you with more information. Be careful not to minimize your child's situation due to age, inexperience, or the length of the relationship. Remember, dating violence occurs in same-sex, opposite-sex, and gender non-defining couples and any gender can be abusive. As difficult as it can be, your unconditional support and patience is making an important impact even if you don't see it immediately. Also, if your child does decide to leave the relationship, be especially supportive during this time and try to connect your teen to a professional (such as counselors at RESPOND) as it can be scary and potentially dangerous to leave. Early conversations and support are also beneficial if you believe your child might be the controlling partner. Teens are learning the skills needed for relationships, and your guidance can prevent unhealthy or escalating behaviors.

Start the Conversation

Starting conversations -- even if you don't think your child is dating -- is one of the most important steps you can take to help prevent dating violence. These conversations may feel difficult and may not be perfect, but this is about opening a dialog so that your teenager knows they have your support and attention and you want them to make the best decisions for themselves. When a teenager does not feel comfortable talking to you about dating violence, reassure them that you will be there when they are ready. You can also offer them resources like the RESPOND hotline for help.

How to talk to your teen about dating violence

12 Tips on Talking about Healthy Relationships with Teens

1. Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection. Talk openly with your teen about healthy relationships. Allow them to articulate their values and expectations for healthy relationships. Rather than dismissing ideas as wrong, encourage debate —this helps young people come to his or her own understanding. Avoid analyzing, interruptions, lecturing, or accusations.

2. Be sensitive and firm. Parenting a teen is not easy— especially when it comes to helping him or her navigate their way through relationships. To be effective, you will need to find the balance between being sensitive and firm. Try to adapt to the changes faced by your child. Be willing to talk openly, respect differences of opinion, and try to come to mutually acceptable decisions.

3. Be supportive and nonjudgmental. Even with the right intentions, being too pushy or judgmental can lead your teen to become defensive, stay in a bad relationship and make them less likely to come to you in the future. Also, what is normal for you is likely not normal for them. **Believe them and take them seriously.** Stress that you are on their side and remember – any decisions they make about their relationships need to be their own.

4. Understand the pressure and the risk teens face. Teens face new and increasing pressures about sex, substance abuse and dating. Time and time again, teens express their desire to have parents/role models take the time to listen to them and help them think through the situations they face – be that person!

5. Take a clear stand. Tell your child you are concerned for their safety and that everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship. Make sure your teen knows how you feel about disrespect, use of abusive or inappropriate language, controlling behavior, or any forms of

Each year,
approximately 1 in
4 adolescents
report verbal,
physical, emotional
or physical abuse.

violence. Remind your teen that they have the right to say no and must respect the rights of others. Let your teen know that it's not their fault and no one deserves to be abused. Make it clear that you don't blame them and you respect their choices.

6. Make the most of teachable moments. Use TV episodes, movies, music lyrics, news, community events, the experiences of friends, and your own lives to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships.

7. Discuss how to be an upstander. Teach teens how to stand-up for friends when your teen observes unhealthy treatment of their peers.

8. Discuss options if your teen has witnessed or experienced dating violence. If your teen is in a relationship (or knows of one) that feels uncomfortable, awkward, or frightening, assure them that they can come to you and offer to connect them with other resources such as counselors at RESPOND who they can talk to confidentially.

9. Accentuate the positive. Conversations about relationships do not need to focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences. Conversations should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and relationships. Reinforce that dating should be fun!

10. Be an active participant in your teen's life. Explore ways to know more about your teen's friends and interests. Find activities you can do together.

11. Be prepared to make mistakes and acknowledge you don't have all the answers. You *will* make mistakes. Accept that you will make mistakes, but continue to help teens make responsible choices while trying to maintain that delicate balance of being sensitive, but firm. Admitting to not knowing the answer to questions builds trust and honesty and you could look for the answer together.

12. Keep it low key. Do not push if your teen is not ready to talk. Make sure they know you are there for them and try again another time.

Talking to your teen about dating violence

Sample questions to start the conversation:

- Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like?
- Are you dating?
 - *It may be easier to talk about other people and relationships first but it is important to talk directly to your child when possible.
- What qualities would you want in a partner?
- What makes a relationship good or bad?
- Have you seen unhealthy relationships at school? What happened? How did you feel?
- Do you know what you would do if one of your friends was in a bad relationship?
- What would you want your friends to do if you were in a bad relationship?
- Has anyone you know posted anything bad about a friend online? What happened after?
- Would it be weird if someone you were dating texted you all day to ask you what you're doing?

Dating: *What are you or your friends' dating relationships like? What qualities do you want someone you date or go out with to have? What makes a relationship good? What makes it bad? What does respect look like in a relationship?*

Talking points:

- Respect is the foundation for healthy, happy, and safe relationships.
- In mutually respectful relationships there should be safety, support, individuality, equality, trust and communication.
- Pay attention to how certain situations make you feel – good and bad – and trust your instinct when you feel hurt.
- Many teens feel they need to be in a relationship. Remind them there is just as much respect for those who are single. No relationship is better than being in a bad relationship.

Recognizing Abuse: *Have you ever seen a couple act in a way that made you worried or uncomfortable? What happened? Have you ever been in a similar situation? What would you do if you felt uncomfortable, controlled, pressured, or threatened?*

Talking points:

- Abuse or violence in a relationship can include using harmful language, physical violence or digital technology to control, pressure or threaten. It's NEVER okay for anyone to use pressure, control or threats in a relationship.
- If you ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a relationship, there are resources available to help. You can always talk to me and I will help you. You can also talk to your teacher, counselor or a helpline.
- If you ever see or learn about abuse, tell me or another adult you trust immediately so we can help.

*Sometimes focusing on what IS healthy can help them begin to identify the unhealthy

Positive Problem Solving: *How do you feel when you become more aggressive during a game, or an argument? When does aggression cross the line? How can you communicate respectfully during a disagreement?*

Talking Points:

- There is an important difference between asserting an opinion and becoming overly aggressive and potentially threatening.
- Use language and actions that do not cause or have the intent to cause harm.
- When problems come up in relationships, it is NEVER okay to use violence or threats to control someone.
- Everyone has different personal boundaries. It's important to respect boundaries and to treat a person how they want to be treated.
- It's always ok to take a break or time to reflect on an argument to better help resolve it.

Alternatives to Peer Pressure: *Are your friends dating? How can you respond to pressure from a friend? How can you respond to pressure from someone you're dating?*

Talking Points:

- You have the power to choose the type of friendships and relationships you want.
- Even though a friend or partner may be comfortable with certain experiences and certain choices, it doesn't mean you need to be.
- It's important to be yourself. If you don't feel comfortable, let your friend or partner know. Real friends will like the real you.
- It is never okay to pressure, intimidate, control or threaten someone.
- Trust yourself and make sure you feel respected, safe and comfortable.

The Importance of Self Respect: *What do you like most about yourself? Why is it important to respect yourself? How can you give respect to yourself?*

Talking points:

- You deserve to be treated with respect. Surround yourself with people who appreciate and support you.
- You have the right to make decisions that keep you safe, healthy and comfortable.
- You are somebody I love and respect.
- Trust yourself and your instincts on what is safe, appropriate and respectful.

Personal Boundaries: *What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries? When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun? What can you say and do to communicate your personal boundaries?*

Talking points:

- Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. This includes how you're treated by friends, family, and classmates, both online and offline.
- Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed.
- Each person has different boundaries on what's okay or not okay. Treat others how they want to be treated and if you're unsure, ask them directly what they're okay with.

Does your teen know how to be a good friend? If not, you can help. By helping your teen learn to be a good friend you'll be helping him or her develop healthy relationships now and in the future. Here are some key points to cover with your teen:

Helping a Friend: *What can you do if you hear a friend being mean/disrespectful towards a friend or someone they're dating?*

Talking Points:

- If you witness one of your friends being disrespectful, don't join in on it. Instead, call your friend out.
- If you witness a situation that makes you feel unsafe, don't intervene directly. Ask someone you trust, such as me, a coach, teacher, or school counselor, for help.
- If you think someone you know might be in an abusive relationship, let them know there are people they can talk to and resources that can help.

Technology

Technology keeps changing, likely faster than you can keep up with. It seems every week there is a new popular app. What you consider normal use of technology probably isn't the same as what your teen considers normal. For them, it may be normal to wake up to texts and go to sleep to texts. Conversations often don't end as they used to, they just pause. It is also becoming more challenging to keep things private. Remind your child that once something is posted, even if they are careful about who can see it, it is extremely challenging to take it down. Even deleted posts and pictures can still be accessed by those with skill. Looking at your privacy settings together might be a good way to spend quality time together while keeping yourselves safe. Chances are they could teach you a thing or two!

Here are some things to look out for:

- Is your child overly stressed if they are not able to respond to their partner quickly?
- Have you noticed drastic changes in how attached your child is to their phone?

DATING AND TECHNOLOGY

Digital tools – social media, text messaging, and e-mails – have given bullies and abusers a new way to control, degrade, and frighten their victims anywhere, at any time, even when they're apart.

1 IN 4

Dating teens say they are abused or harassed online or through texts by their partners

2X

As many teenage girls than boys reported sexual abuse online and through texts

Less than **1 IN 10**

Victims of digital dating abuse sought help

Source: URBAN Institute Sept. 2013

Digital Safety: *How do you decide who to share your cell phone number with? Who do you become "friends" with on Facebook? How can you respond if someone you don't know very well asks for your cell phone number, or to be "friends" online?*

Talking Points:

- Be careful about giving out personal information such as your cell phone number to people you don't know very well, regardless of whether you meet them online or in person.
- Check your privacy settings on Facebook and other online accounts to make sure your personal information can only be shared with people you trust.
- If you're ever uncomfortable with someone you're in communication with online or by phone, let me know. We can figure out a way to handle the situation together.
- Tracking is getting easier and easier and is often possible with apps that are designed for other purposes, such as Snapchat. Ask your teen if their friends can see where they are on that or other apps and discuss the benefits of going private or hidden.
- Remember that someone met online can present themselves as a teen but may actually be an adult.

Textual Harassment: *Do you ever feel like someone is over-texting you? What crosses the line for you – the number or content of messages? What can you do if you feel overwhelmed by text messages?*

Talking Points:

- It's not okay for someone to constantly send you messages that interrupt your regular life. For instance, if you can't study or sleep well because of texts coming in all night, that's not okay.
- It's never okay for someone to try to control what you do. If someone texts you asking who you're with, what you're wearing, or demanding that you respond ASAP, that's not okay.
- Even when dating, it's important to have your own personal time with friends and family. If someone you're seeing sends you controlling messages that cut into your private time, that's not okay. Let them know you need some space.
- It can be hard to tell someone to stop texting you, but it's really important to be clear about how you feel. Let the person know when it is okay to text you, how often, and what types of messages make you upset, overwhelmed, or uncomfortable.
- Remember to be self-aware. If you think you might be over-texting someone else, give yourself some space. Ask the person directly how they feel about how often and what you text. Treat others online and by cell phone the way you would treat them in person; with respect.

Privacy Violations: *How would you feel if your boyfriend or girlfriend was constantly checking your Facebook page or sneaking a peek at your cell phone log to see who you talk to? Why might that make you uncomfortable?*

Talking Points:

- You have the right to be friends with people outside of your dating relationship. It's not okay for someone you're seeing to control who your friends are and who you hang out with.
- A respectful relationship is built on mutual trust. It's not okay for someone to constantly monitor where you are, what you're doing or who you're talking with.
- Keep your passwords a secret to help protect yourself. It may seem harmless to share a password, but why does that person need it? Yes, you can always change your password, but it only takes a moment for someone to abuse their access to your account.

Sexting: *Have you heard about kids at school talking about sharing nude or private pictures? How do you feel about sexting? What would you do if you received one of these pictures? Why do you think people might send or ask for these pictures? Do you think people might feel pressured to send a nude picture, maybe to their boyfriend, for instance? How would you handle the situation if someone asked you for a nude or private picture?*

Talking Points:

- There are serious consequences to sending nude or private pictures, especially if the photo is of a minor, including possible criminal charges (even if that minor is you). Unfortunately, photos that were meant to be private often end up being public because they are sent out as revenge during a break-up, to show off or brag, or even just by accident. Private information can go viral in a matter of seconds.
- It is NEVER okay for someone to use pressure or threats in a relationship, especially in a

sexual situation or to get someone to send a nude or private picture. When you tell someone no or that you're uncomfortable, they should stop and respect your decision.

- You have the right to make decisions that keep you safe and comfortable and you deserve to be in relationships where your decisions are honored and respected. If you're feeling uncomfortable, trust your instinct.
- If someone shares a nude or private picture with you, do not pass it on. Spreading private information can be embarrassing and even criminal. Tell an adult immediately.

Other Resources: *That's Not Cool* is a national public education campaign to prevent teen dating abuse that uses digital examples of control, pressure and threats to help teens decide for themselves what's okay, or not okay, in their relationships. Their website is a great place to go for resources (including games!) about digital abuse.

<https://thatsnotcool.com/>

Home Rules and Boundaries

Setting rules and boundaries with your teen

Every family and house has their own rules for teenagers. Some of the most common ones include rules about phones, curfew, family time, communication about their location, and driving. Even if you don't already have any guidelines regarding these, you could create them at any time. In order to sustain an environment where your child feels supported and that they can continue to come to you to discuss their relationships, it is important to make the rules about the general wellness of your teen, not as an attack on their relationship. Here are a few examples of boundaries you could set:

Phones- consider the time of day your child may need their phone and your child's engagement in other activities or quality time that phones can distract from.

Curfew- Keep in mind the activities they are involved in and what is reasonable for your family. Curfew can help ensure safety of your child and a good night's sleep.

Family Time- Find time that you can spend quality time as a family. This could be as simple as dinner at home together or activities over the weekend.

Communication- Be clear about how and when your child should communicate their activities. This could be based on location or a specific interval of time while they are out of the house.

Driving- Having access to the car should be a privilege and your child's safety should be forefront. If they have their Junior Operating License there are also legal restrictions on when they can drive and with whom.

Drugs/Alcohol- There are legal implications here as well but your child will be faced with decisions regarding these at parties or with friends. Make clear expectations and encourage honesty.

Make sure your teen understands the rules and what is expected of them, and set consequences for when they are broken. It is also helpful to create rules in the positive instead of negative. For example, "speak in a pleasant voice," rather than "don't shout." Your child is beginning to make decisions for themselves and with these are a range of consequences. They

Clear
expectations
Consequences
Communication!

need to be able to weigh the options for themselves and understand both short term and long term consequences to their actions. House rules can be a great beginning to this process.

Keep open communication about your rules and boundaries. It is ultimately your decision when and how to set them, but explaining your reasoning and listening to their ideas and feelings may be beneficial for both of you. It may even make sense for you to work together to figure out what makes the most sense for your household.

They may push back against rules, but teenagers do want boundaries and to know what is expected of them. Even if they don't show it, they want to know you care about their health and safety and this is one way you can show that.

Safety at Home

Are you in an unhealthy relationship?

When you're a parent in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, it makes a difficult situation even harder. Not only do you have to worry about your safety, but you also have to consider your child's well-being.

Witnessing domestic and dating violence can have a huge impact on children, both physically and psychologically. They may grow up believing that domestic violence is normal and mimic the behaviors they witnessed in their parents' relationship. Some may have difficulty trusting others, setting boundaries, or even develop symptoms of PTSD. If you're involved in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, it's important to get help.

Talk to your child. You may think that your child doesn't know about the abuse, but they do. Talking about it can help both of you. However, don't put pressure on your child or expect them to help solve your problems. It is important to tell them that their job is to stay safe, not protect you. Make sure your child knows the abuse isn't their fault and violence is never ok, even when someone they love is being abusive. Make sure they know what a healthy relationship looks like. It might be helpful to brainstorm together what you would want in a relationship. It is also important to know your limits; if you are not ready to talk to your child about relationships, find another trustworthy adult who might be better able to.

Making the decision to leave is very hard and can be dangerous, especially if you have a child with your abusive partner. Whether or not you are ready or able to leave, you can take steps to help keep you and your child safe. When it is safe, call the Respond hotline **617-623-5900** to speak with a counselor. We can discuss your options, help you with short-term plans, and guide you to other resources that may be helpful.

Resources

RESPOND, Inc.

24/7 hotline: 617-623-5900

TTY/TDD: 800-439-2370

Speech to Speech: 866-645-9870

www.respondinc.org

National Dating Abuse Helpline

24/7 hotline: 1-866-331-9474

TTY: 1-866-331-8453

Text: text “loveis” (capitalization does not matter) to 22522

*Msg&Data Rates apply

*text “STOP” to unsubscribe and “HELP” for tech support

Love is Respect

www.loveisrespect.org (online chat available)

National Domestic Violence Hotline

24/7 hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

TTY: 1-800-787-3224

VP: 1-855-812-1011

www.ndvh.org (online chat available)

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)

24/7 hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

www.rainn.org (online chat available)

Break the Cycle

www.breakthecycle.org

That’s Not Cool

<https://thatsnotcool.com/>

Futures Without Violence

www.futureswithoutviolence.org

Information in this guide was compiled from:

RESPOND, Inc.

Futures Without Violence

Love is Respect

Break the Cycle’s Love is Not Abuse Coalition