

Families for **SAFE Dates**

*A Program for Parents and Other Caregivers
to Help Teens Date Safely*

BOOKLET 3

Recognizing Dating Abuse





Recognizing Dating Abuse

For teens, dating is mostly fun and exciting; it's a natural part of growing up. But some dating can harm teens. If a person is treated disrespectfully or physically injured by a dating partner, it's dating abuse, and it can take several forms: psychological, physical, and sexual. With dating abuse, the roles of victim and abuser aren't necessarily linked to gender. Both boys and girls can be *victims* of dating abuse, and both boys and girls can be *abusers* of the people they date.

In booklet 2, you learned some skills that can keep conflict from turning into a bad dating situation. But those skills won't always prevent dating abuse if the other person isn't using them. It's good to have a plan for getting out of those situations safely.

This booklet helps caregivers and teens talk about dating abuse. It includes information and activities to help you better understand and recognize dating abuse, and to think about what to do if it happens.

Instructions

1. Do activity 1, Recognizing Dating Abuse, to help caregivers and teens recognize dating abuse and its harmful consequences.
2. Do activity 2, Recognizing the Ways Abusers Control Dating Partners, to help caregivers and teens recognize some of the things abusers do to control dating partners.
3. Do activity 3, Warning Signs of Abuse.
4. Do activity 4, Healthy Dating Behaviors.
5. Read the Recap of booklet 3.
6. Do the Next Steps listed at the end of the booklet.

Before you start each activity with your teen, read the introduction and instructions aloud, taking turns reading if you prefer.

You'll need a total of about 50 minutes to do these activities, in one or more sittings.
They should be done in the order they appear.



ACTIVITY 1

Recognizing Dating Abuse

Purpose: To help caregivers and teens recognize dating abuse—and its harmful consequences.

What you'll need: Examples of Psychological Abuse on page 3 of this booklet, and Harmful Consequences of Dating Abuse on page 4 of this booklet.

Time needed: 20 minutes

Introduction: Dating abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual, or a combination of these. Some kinds may be hard to recognize, especially psychological abuse, but all kinds of abuse can lead to harmful consequences for teens and their families. This activity helps caregivers and teens recognize dating abuse and its harmful consequences, those that are clear immediately and those that don't appear until later on. It also gives caregivers and teens a chance to plan for what to do if dating abuse happens.

Instructions: Read the three short stories and the questions that follow. Because psychological abuse is often hard to recognize, examples can be found in the list on page 3.

When you're asked to think about the harmful consequences of dating abuse, for both the victim and the abuser, refer to the list of such consequences on page 4. You can select them from the list or come up with your own. After discussing each story, go over the story points that follow.

Remember the Tips for Successful Activities and Tips for Successful Communication from booklet 1.

Examples of Psychological Abuse

- Calling a dating partner names
- Criticizing a dating partner's opinions
- Ignoring a dating partner's feelings
- Isolating a dating partner from others
- Behaving jealously
- Telling lies
- Scaring a dating partner; for example, by driving recklessly
- Cheating on a dating partner
- Trying to make the partner feel guilty
- Spreading rumors about a dating partner
- Threatening to hurt oneself
- Using sexually offensive names
- Making unwanted sexual advances
- Encouraging dating partners to do something they don't feel comfortable doing
- Criticizing their beliefs about sex
- Putting down their friends and family or treating them disrespectfully
- Humiliating a dating partner, either publicly or privately
- Insulting a dating partner's beliefs or values
- Displaying inappropriate anger
- Overcontrolling
- Manipulating
- Unfairly blaming a dating partner
- Making dating partners feel bad about themselves

Harmful Consequences of Dating Abuse

POTENTIAL HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ABUSER

- Get arrested
- Unable to attend college due to criminal record
- Spend time in jail
- Experience feelings of shame and guilt
- Feel isolation from family and friends
- Face inability to maintain long-lasting or fulfilling relationships
- Contract a sexually transmitted infection
- Experience an unwanted pregnancy
- Build up large doctor or lawyer expenses
- Abandon dreams and goals
- Become depressed, anxious, fearful, or suicidal
- Begin having problems at work, school, and other activities
- Lose dating partner's love and respect
- Have conflict with parents or other caregivers
- Dating partner could end relationship

POTENTIAL HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE DATING ABUSE VICTIM

- Lose confidence in oneself
- Become afraid to express feelings of anger
- Suffer serious injury, even death
- Begin to doubt their own abilities, feelings, and decision-making ability
- Feel isolation from family and friends
- Feel shame and guilt
- Feel lonely
- Face inability to maintain long-lasting or fulfilling relationships
- Get a sexually transmitted infection
- Experience an unwanted pregnancy
- Build up large doctor or lawyer expenses
- Abandon dreams and goals
- Become depressed, anxious, fearful, or suicidal
- Begin having problems at work, school, and other activities
- Experience damage to personal property

The Park

Nicole has liked Jin all through middle school. He's a year ahead of Nicole, but they have a lot in common. They hang out every day after school and go to movies together. They had been dating for four months when one afternoon after school, Jin asked Nicole to come hang out with him and his older brother at the park. Nicole went along, and when they got there, Jin found his brother with a group of high school kids who were smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. Nicole told Jin she felt uncomfortable and wanted to go home. But Jin was trying to act cool in front of the other boys, telling Nicole not to be a baby and offering her a beer. The other boys started snickering and laughing at her. Nicole was obviously upset, but Jin joined in with the other boys and made fun of her. She took the beer.

THE PARK: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Jin being abusive? _____

2. What are some harmful consequences of the abuse for Nicole and for Jin? _____

3. How do you think Nicole should handle this situation? _____

THE PARK: STORY POINTS

Jin is being psychologically abusive to Nicole. He is treating her disrespectfully. He ignored her feelings, called her a name ("Don't be a baby"), humiliated her in front of others, didn't respect her request to leave the park, and got her to do something she did not want to do. If Nicole continues to date Jin, she may lose confidence and start feeling bad about herself. She might become afraid of expressing her feelings to Jin, and get into trouble for doing things she shouldn't be doing, like drinking beer. Jin could lose Nicole's respect and love.

Nicole tried to use some of the SAFE skills: she told Jin how she felt. But Jin ignored her feelings and her request to leave. In this case, Nicole should trust her feelings and leave the situation. Later, Nicole should tell Jin privately that she doesn't appreciate feeling pressured to drink and being put down in front of his friends. If Jin continues to ignore her feelings and treat her disrespectfully, she should stop dating him.

Computer Chatting Dates

Taylor and Jake are both in the eighth grade and recently started hanging out at school and eating lunch together. Taylor, who's especially popular, added Jake's user-name to her friends list, and they started chatting through instant messaging every night. Jake's computer curfew is 9:30 P.M., but Taylor pressured him to sneak onto the computer and chat later than that. Jake told Taylor the sneaking felt uncomfortable, but kept doing it anyway, not wanting to lose her. Then Jake's mom caught him using the computer after curfew and took away his computer privileges. Taylor got mad about missing that evening's chat and ignored Jake at school the next day.

COMPUTER CHATTING DATES: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Taylor being abusive? _____

2. What are some harmful consequences of the abuse for Jake and for Taylor? _____

3. How do you think Jake should handle this situation? _____

COMPUTER CHATTING DATES: STORY POINTS

Both boys and girls can abuse their dates. Taylor is being abusive by ignoring Jake's feelings, encouraging him to do something that feels uncomfortable, making him feel guilty and bad about not being allowed to chat, getting angry about something beyond his control, and being overcontrolling and manipulative. Wanting to spend time talking with a boyfriend or girlfriend is a normal part of dating. But teens have responsibilities to families, school, and work that sometimes limit how much time they can spend with a dating partner.

If the relationship continues, Taylor may start controlling and manipulating other parts of Jake's life, such as interfering with activities with his friends and family. He could lose friends and get into arguments at home. If this continues, Taylor could lose Jake and become unable to maintain long-lasting and fulfilling relationships.

Jake should request that Taylor respect the 9:30 P.M. curfew and other rules of his household. Jake could suggest a time for them to chat online that doesn't break the rules and that works for both of them. If Taylor doesn't agree, Jake should consider just being friends and ending the "dating" relationship.

The Breakup

Juan and Christina have been dating for a few weeks. Juan likes Christina, but he's not in love with her. In fact, he wants to date another girl. When he tells Christina that he wants to break up with her, she gets angry. Then she starts crying. Juan is uncomfortable. He doesn't know what to say, but he doesn't want to be in a relationship with Christina anymore.

THE BREAKUP: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is Juan abusive? Why or why not? _____

2. Is Christina abusive? Why or why not? _____

THE BREAKUP: STORY POINTS

Not all upsetting behaviors and conflicts are abusive. Teens may have difficult and painful experiences while dating, but they're not necessarily abusive. Misunderstandings and thoughtlessness may make someone feel bad, but conflict can be resolved in a way that allows both people to express themselves. A breakup may be upsetting, but it's not necessarily abusive.



ACTIVITY 2

Recognizing the Ways Abusers Control Dating Partners

Purpose: To help teens and caregivers recognize what abusive partners do to try to control those they date.

Time needed: 15 minutes

Introduction: People who abuse others try to control them in different ways. This activity shows caregivers and teens some of the things abusers do to control dating partners. With this awareness, teens are less likely to allow someone else to control them.

Instructions: Read the list of control methods on page 9. Then read the three stories that follow and place a checkmark next to the control methods being used in the story by the abuser. After discussing each story, review the story points together.

Control Methods

ABUSERS TRY TO CONTROL DATES BY:

- following the abuse with later kindness or romance
- misleading the person's friends and family by being nice and funny around them, so they'll find it hard to imagine any abuse
- trying to convince dating partners that no one else would date them
- saying that their abuse is to help the dating partner in some way (like to be more popular or helpful)
- making dating partners feel bad about themselves so that they become dependent on the abuser
- threatening to harm himself or herself if the dating partner leaves
- saying the abuse is because of love and jealousy
- telling a dating partner that his or her help is needed for the abuser to become a better person
- saying a dating partner deserved the abuse because the person wasn't acting like a boy or girl should act

The Friend's Birthday

Last Saturday was Caroline's best friend's birthday, and a bunch of girls planned to dress up and go to a fun restaurant to celebrate. Caroline's boyfriend, Erick, didn't want her to go, but she told him it was really important to her friend.

The night of the party, Erick showed up at the restaurant. Caroline was surprised, but happy to see him. Her friends all thought Erick was cute and funny. Then Erick asked Caroline to come outside with him for a minute. In the parking lot, he shoved her against his car and told her she looked like a tramp in her outfit. He said, "How am I supposed to trust you when you go out looking like this?" Caroline started crying, and Erick left in anger.

The next day, Erick brought Caroline roses and the sweetest card. He apologized for overreacting the night before. He told her that she was so beautiful, he was afraid someone else would try to steal her away. He told Caroline that he loved her very much and that she was the only person who could make his life better.

Place a checkmark next to the control methods Erick used.

THE FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY: CONTROL METHODS

- Followed the abuse with later kindness or romance.
- Acted nice and funny with Caroline's friends, so they wouldn't see him as an abuser.
- Tried to convince Caroline that no one else would date her.
- Said that the abuse was to help Caroline in some way (like to be more popular or successful).
- Made Caroline feel bad about herself so that she would become dependent on him.
- Threatened to harm himself if Caroline leaves.
- Said the abuse was because of love and jealousy.
- Told Caroline that he needed her help to change and to become a better person.
- Told Caroline that she deserved the abuse because she was not acting like a girl should act.

THE FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY: STORY POINTS

To control their dates, abusive partners may behave sweetly and generously after the abuse. In this story, Erick brought Caroline roses after he abused her. Abusers often do this because it “hooks” the victim even more. Seeing a person be sweet makes it hard to leave them. That’s why nice gestures, such as bringing flowers and gifts, can be a way of controlling dates. Victims believe that maybe the abuse will stop. But dating abuse doesn’t just go away—it often keeps happening and gets worse over time.

In addition, abusers often hide their true nature by acting outgoing, funny, and friendly with others. That makes it hard for victims to get support from others who may have trouble believing there is abuse. Abusers often justify the mistreatment by saying that love and jealousy caused it. Jealousy in a girlfriend or boyfriend may seem flattering at first, but it is actually a way of manipulating and controlling.

Another way Erick manipulated and controlled Caroline was to tell her that he needed her to make his life better. This can appear flattering at first.

The Yearbook Committee

DeAndre and Malia have been dating for about three months. DeAndre really likes Malia—she's pretty and really nice. But sometimes he worries about how jealous she gets over nothing.

DeAndre works on the yearbook committee. It takes up a lot of time, and there are several girls on the committee. Malia wants DeAndre to quit because she hates all the time he's spending with other girls. DeAndre has tried many times to tell her that those girls are just friends.

Finally, DeAndre tells Malia maybe they should break up if she doesn't trust him. Malia gets really upset. She says she doesn't know what she would do without him and threatens to hurt herself if he breaks up with her. The next day, DeAndre quits the yearbook committee.

Place a checkmark next to the control methods used by Malia.

THE YEARBOOK COMMITTEE: CONTROL METHODS

- Followed the abuse with later kindness or romance.
- Acted nice and funny with DeAndre's friends so that they would not think that she was an abuser.
- Tried to convince DeAndre that no one else would date him.
- Said that the abuse was to help DeAndre in some way (like to be more popular or successful).
- Made DeAndre feel bad about himself so that he would become dependent on her.
- Threatened to harm herself if DeAndre leaves.
- Said the abuse was because of love and jealousy.
- Told DeAndre that she needed his help to change and to be a better person.
- Told DeAndre that he deserved the abuse because he was not acting like a boy should act.

THE YEARBOOK COMMITTEE: STORY POINTS

This scenario is about jealousy. Malia may love DeAndre, but controlling someone does not show love. Malia was controlling DeAndre by telling him she would hurt herself if he left her and by suggesting that she could not make it on her own without DeAndre.

When people like each other a lot, it is normal to feel jealous sometimes. It is not wrong or unusual to feel jealous, but limiting the people that a dating partner can talk to is psychologically abusive.

Having a girlfriend or boyfriend who is so jealous that they do not want you to talk to others may seem flattering at first, but it is actually a way of manipulating and controlling you.

If a relationship like this continues, the victim might become isolated from his friends and family.

important!

If you feel like hurting yourself or someone else—or a friend tells you he or she feels that way—talk to a teacher, counselor, or parent right away. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

The Pizza Party

Aidan is seventeen. His parents were out of town for the night. So he invited several of his friends and his fifteen-year-old girlfriend, Sarah, to his house to eat pizza and watch a movie. Sarah arrived first, and Aidan asked her to put some chips and drinks out for everyone and to get the pizza ready. When Aidan's friends arrived, they all sat down to watch the movie. When someone wanted more to eat or drink, Aidan told Sarah to go to the kitchen for refills.

At first, she did, but when Aidan asked for the third time, Sarah told everyone where to find the drinks and food, so they could help themselves. This made Aidan angry, and he ordered Sarah to come into the kitchen with him. In the kitchen, he yelled at Sarah and shoved her against the wall. He told her she had messed up the whole night because she didn't get his friends drinks and food—and the pizza wasn't even hot. He told her she had a lot to learn about being a woman. Sarah felt that she had been a failure. Aidan said he'd just have to teach her to do what she should already know how to do.

Place a checkmark next to the control methods used by Aidan.

THE PIZZA PARTY: CONTROL METHODS

- Followed the abuse with later kindness or romance.
- Acted nice and funny with Sarah's friends so that they would not think that he was an abuser.
- Tried to convince Sarah that no one else would date her.
- Said that the abuse was to help Sarah in some way (like to be more popular or successful).
- Made Sarah feel bad about herself so that she would become dependent on him.
- Threatened to harm himself if Sarah leaves.
- Said the abuse was because of love and jealousy.
- Told Sarah that he needed her help to change and to become a better person.
- Told Sarah that she deserved the abuse because she was not acting like a girl should act.

THE PIZZA PARTY: STORY POINTS

Sometimes abusive partners justify their behavior with their beliefs about how men or women should act, such as “men should make the important decisions” or “women shouldn’t speak up.” But we harm people when we expect them to act certain ways just because of their sex. Shouldn’t men and women be allowed to be who they really are?

Aidan justified his abuse by saying that Sarah wasn’t acting the way women are supposed to, and that he was actually helping her by teaching her. He also tried to make Sarah feel bad about herself, so that she would become dependent on him.

Teens, if you are dating someone, think about your expectations of your boyfriend or girlfriend. Are they reasonable and fair? Are your expectations based on how you think all men or women are supposed to be?



ACTIVITY 3

Warning Signs of Abuse

Purpose: To increase caregiver's and teen's awareness of the warning signs of abuse.

What you'll need: Warning Signs of Abuse (for Teens) on page 17 of this booklet.

Time needed: 10 minutes

Introduction: To take action to stop abuse, teens need to be able to recognize when they are being abused and when they are abusing. Through these activities, teens and caregivers learn the warning signs of dating abuse. Some additional warning signs of abuse for teens to look for are on page 18.

Instructions: Caregivers and teens, go over the checklists on pages 17 and 18 by reading each warning sign out loud. Teens:

- if you're dating now, review the checklist thinking about your current dating partner.
- if you're not dating now but have in the past, think about your past dating partners when answering the checklist.
- if you've never dated, think about whether these red flags might apply to any friends of yours.

Warning Signs of Abuse (for Teens)

YES NO

- Being physically hurt
- Feeling afraid of your dating partner
- Feeling like you can't spend the time you want to with your friends because of your dating partner
- Changing your behavior due to your dating partner's jealousy
- Feeling embarrassed, put down, ashamed, or guilty
- Being threatened
- Feeling manipulated or controlled
- Being afraid to express your own feelings of anger
- A nervous or sick feeling in your stomach or a pounding in your chest when your dating partner is irritated, frustrated, angry, or unhappy
- Not being allowed to, or being afraid to, make decisions for yourself
- Feeling as if your dating partner gets too personal or touches you in an unwanted way
- Not having your thoughts or wishes for personal space respected

Warning Signs of Abusing a Date (for Teens)

YES NO

- Physically assaulting your dating partner (hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking)
- Intimidating your dating partner
- Becoming angry if your dating partner spends time with other people
- Asking your dating partner to change a behavior because you are jealous
- Verbally threatening your dating partner
- Using "guilt trips" to get your dating partner to do something
- Feeling unable to control your own feelings of anger
- Making your dating partner afraid of you
- Making your dating partner tell you where he or she is every hour of the day

If you checked *yes* for any of the red flags in the two lists, get help. Talk to your caregivers about it. You can also call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) for help.

If these red flags apply to any friends of yours, please tell them what you've learned about dating abuse and its harmful consequences. Give them the number to the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline (1-866-331-9474) or to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE) so they can get help.

To help their teens, caregivers should also know the warning signs of abuse. Could your teen be a victim or an abuser? The two lists on the next page give you some indicators.

Warning Signs of Abuse (for Caregivers)

Is your teen a victim of abuse?

Look for these warning signs:

- Intense jealousy or possessiveness from your teen's dating partner
- Change in your teen's mood or character (depression, moodiness, tendency to be argumentative)
- Often checks in with partner
- Unexplained marks on the body (bruises, scratches, burns)
- Sneaking around and lying to caregivers about behavior with dating partner
- Deferring to the partner's every wish
- Often apologizing for the partner's behavior
- Poorer academic performance
- Isolation from friends and family
- Gets visibly upset after phone calls or dates with dating partner
- Is afraid of making partner angry
- Describes being "punished" by an angry partner (through silence, humiliation, or force)

Could your teen be an abuser?

Look for these warning signs:

- Gets violent when angry
- Talks disrespectfully about dating partner, puts down dating partner
- Brags about having total control over partner
- Dates other people but doesn't allow partner to do so
- Gets angry after phone calls or dates with partner
- Is obsessed with partner's actions
- Tries to exert control over family members
- Discusses violent behavior as normal
- Gets in fights with others, including those of the same sex
- Has criminal record of abuse
- Acts out violence toward pets or inanimate objects (for example, kicks dog or punches walls)
- Talks about getting even with others
- Blames problems on others or outside circumstances
- Believes jealousy is a sign of love



ACTIVITY 4

Healthy Dating Behaviors

Purpose: To learn what a healthy dating relationship looks like.

Time needed: 5 minutes

Introduction: You've focused on what an abusive relationship looks like—now see what a healthy relationship looks like, one where both people are respected and treated equally, regardless of their sex.

Instructions: Caregivers and teens, review the list of healthy dating behaviors below by taking turns reading the items out loud. Teens, if you are dating, think about your dating relationships: do you and your partner practice these behaviors? If you haven't started dating yet, think about your friends who have. Do your friends have healthy dating behaviors? Assess the health of those relationships by using the list below.

Behaviors That Support Equality in a Healthy Relationship

- Talking and acting so that both people feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves.
- Listening supportively to each other's opinions.
- Supporting each other's interests and activities.
- Talking openly and truthfully and admitting when you're wrong.
- Being willing to work out problems and cooperate to find solutions.
- Accepting when your partner changes his or her mind, and being willing to compromise.



Recap

- In addition to being fun and exciting for teens, dating is important for their development. Through dating, teens learn responsibility and cooperation; communication and social skills; and loyalty, trust, and respect. What teens learn while dating carries over into their adult relationships.
- Booklet 3 of Families for Safe Dates shows you ways that dating partners can be abusive.
- If your teen can recognize what abusers may do to control dating partners, then he or she will be less likely to be controlled by them. Preventing dating abuse now may keep your teen from becoming involved in an abusive relationship when he or she is an adult.
- In relationships that are already abusive, the SAFE skills for settling disagreements that you learned in booklet 2 may not help the victim. When victims of abuse try to use these skills, their efforts may be blocked because the abuser doesn't want to give away any power. In these situations, it's important to seek help outside of the relationship.
- Not all upsetting behaviors are abusive. Behaviors are abusive when they are used to manipulate, control, or intimidate someone.
- Luckily most dating relationships are not abusive. By knowing characteristics of healthy dating relationships, teens can choose healthy, happy, and fun dating experiences.
- Caregivers, in your discussions with your teen, you may have discovered that he or she is in an abusive relationship. If so, please refer to the resources listed on the last page of booklet 1. Remember, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline is 1-866-331-9474, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Next Steps

If you have received all five Families for Safe Dates activity booklets at once, these are your next steps:

1. Continue to practice your communication skills and your skills for managing anger and settling disagreements.

2. Complete booklet 4, Preventing Dating Sexual Abuse and Rape, which includes activities to help teens and caregivers:
 - understand some issues related to dating sexual abuse, including rape
 - learn strategies for avoiding date rape
 - learn about date rape drugs

If your family is participating in Families for Safe Dates through an organization that will be calling you after you complete each booklet, these are your next steps:

1. Continue to practice your communication skills and your skills for managing anger and settling disagreements.
2. Write down any questions you have about dating abuse or this booklet's activities to ask the health educator who will be calling you soon.
3. Booklet 4 (described above) will be sent to you about three days after your telephone conversation with the health educator.