

Protecting Your Son or Daughter from Abusive Relationships...

*Following this introduction are links to a three part series designed to increase awareness surrounding the issue of dating violence and abusive relationships. The counseling team of Lincoln East High School invites questions from parents and guardians based on the content of these articles. Although the information is being distributed in three parts, the entire series is available to parents or guardians at any time by contacting any LEHS counselor. Special credit must be given to the book “**but I love him**” by Dr. Jill Murray, an anti-dating violence curriculum, “**Unmasking Sexual Con Games,**” by Herron and Sorens, and numerous other publications relating to dating and relational violence. In addition, the East High School counseling team is willing to do a presentation to audiences interested in this topic. It can be adjusted to be appropriate for parents, or parents and their teens or preteens.*

ABSTRACTS:

Part 1 – Who are the victims? Who are the abusers? Part one is a brief discussion of the personality and behavioral qualities common to the profile of many relational violence victims and their abusers. It is important, however, to remember that victims or abusers can be anyone of either sex.

Part 2 – Recognizing a Dangerous Relationship Part two provides a checklist of some common characteristics of dangerous and abusive relationships. Parents and others in the lives of students may want to seek additional consultation and information if they are observing one or more of these patterns of conduct in their son or daughter.

Part 3 – Prevention and Intervention – how to talk to your teens and preteens about relationships In this final section of the series, parents and others are given some suggestions about communication with young adults about relationships. Supportive, thoughtful and sensitive treatment of difficult topics, such a dating safety, is essential in creating a positive and realistic line of discussion with teens and preteens.

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Who are the victims? Who are the abusers? – Part 1

Although there is not one single profile that fits all victims of abusive relationships, there are some qualities that many victims have in common.

1. Often, potential victims begin at an early age to attempt to please others.
2. Victims may be starved for attention and craving acceptance. They want someone, anyone, to care for them. They may want someone so badly that they ignore their feelings just to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Sometimes parents even ignore their own uneasy feelings, wanting their son or daughter to “fit in” and be in a relationship.
3. Being inexperienced in relationships, young adults may get deeply into an abusive situation and then not know how to get out

Victims are often caring young people who want to help anyone in trouble. They may have an early interest in the “healing “ professions, such as medicine, teaching, or social work. These victims feel a social responsibility to “fix” the abuser and help them survive.

Potential abusers, on the other hand, have often been victims of abuse. They crave control and tend to act in contempt of their victims. Some of the most obvious signs are;

1. They have been known to display physical, emotional or relational violence toward others.
2. They hit, kick, or throw objects in anger.
3. They expect the victim to spend all to their time with them, and keep them informed of their whereabouts.
4. They are jealous and seem to have two personalities. A sweet, almost childlike and needy outside for the public to see, with simmering aggression just under the surface.
5. They accuse the **victim** of being emotional, unfaithful, lying, etc.
6. Will tell the victim that nobody else would want them, they are stupid, unattractive, etc.

Abusers are skilled at manipulation and groom their victims with gifts, attention, and sometimes protection. They always want something in return. They are slick talkers and skilled at intimidation.

REMEMBER, ABUSERS OR VICTIMS CAN BE ANYONE OF EITHER SEX.

If you need help, please don't wait.

Call:

- **RAPE-SPOUSE ABUSE CRISES CENTER 475-7273**
- **LPD VICTIM-WITNESS UNIT 441-7181**
- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE 1-800-799-SAFE**
- **LINCOLN EAST COUNSELING CENTER 436-1314**
- **GIRLS AND BOYS TOWN NATIONAL HOTLINE 1-800-448-3000**

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Recognizing a Dangerous Relationship – part 2

One in three young women will be involved in an abusive relationship before they leave high school. Although the statistics for young men are somewhat less, it is also a serious problem for men and may be underreported for that population.

Adults in the lives of teens and even pre-teens may spend a great deal of time expressing concern for issues of pregnancy, STDs and drunk driving. Just as dangerous and harder to recognize are dangerous abusive relationships in the lives of young adults. The task of recognizing when relationships have gone bad is hard work, but it may save a life.

The following is a checklist of signs and symptoms of relationships that may have crossed over the line from healthy to pathological;

1. Before my child started dating, they had a lot more friends.
2. My daughter's grades have declined since she started dating.
3. He cries frequently, or is sad.
4. Her boyfriend has given her a cell phone or pager. She will interrupt **any** activity to call them back immediately. She will sit by the phone for hours waiting for him to call.
5. His girlfriend told him she loved him early in the relationship.
6. Her boyfriend frequently roughhouses or "play wrestles" with her.
7. He makes excuses for the person he is dating, and says all problems are his fault.
8. Her boyfriend makes strong suggestions about her choice of friends, hairstyle, clothes or makeup.
9. His girlfriend calls him demeaning names and then tells him she was only "kidding."
10. She has become secretive with you.
11. He frequently has to explain himself and tell his partner he is sorry.
12. She has bruises she cannot explain and appears nervous about explaining them to you.

Teens and preteens are often reluctant to discuss relationships with their parents. Although they will often resist, tactful and sensitive listening by loving parents may lead to the disclosure of relationships that are out of the control of the victim.

If your daughter or son is already in an abusive, controlling relationship, open the door to communication and proceed with great caution.

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Prevention -How to talk to teens and preteens about relationships - part 3

Although most teens and preteens would have a difficult time admitting to it, they do want to know what you think about dating and relationships. Probably the most powerful thing you can do is set a good example *in your own relationships*.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions of your son or daughter, and then be ready to listen, listen, listen! And then, listen some more to all of the messages he or she gives you – verbal, emotional, spiritual or physical. Trust your instincts.

- Practice with her or him how to say no. They will probably tell you that you are being a dork. Later, they will appreciate what you have done. (do not hold your breath, however, waiting for them to tell you they appreciate it) For example, ask her to do something. Have her look you in the eyes and say, “Let me think about it.” or “I’ll get back to you.” or “I’m sorry, I can’t do that right now.” This trains her not to say, “yes” reflexively.
- Have a standing agreement that you will come and pick up your daughter or son **any** place, **any** time and **NO questions that night**. Then be faithful to that promise.
- Discuss the hard issues with your daughter or son. Suggest that they -
 1. Stay away from people who put them down, talk negatively about women or men.
 2. Set sexual limits before you go out with someone. Don’t make your date guess your feelings - tell them.
 3. When on a date, stay in control. Always have an alternate plan for transportation.
 4. Listen to and trust your instincts.
 5. If you feel threatened in any way, forget about being a “nice” girl or boy who always tries to get along. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!**
 6. If your date tries to use physical force, do not hit them in the stomach, shoulders, or back. Target the kneecaps, heels, eyes or crotch. Scream, run, and call 911.

Assure your daughter or son that you will always stand behind them and support them if they need to report abuse, whether to them or anyone else. Victims all too often face a system, including the home, where they are blamed for what happens to them. While they may have made an error in judgment, that does not justify violence of any kind.

Listen and teach, listen and believe, listen and support, and if necessary, report.

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