

**unsafe
relationships**

**supporting
your child**

MAYOR OF LONDON



Is your child experiencing violence or abuse?

This leaflet is written for parents of teenagers who are experiencing domestic or sexual violence/abuse.

The information is mainly aimed at girls experiencing an ongoing risk: whether domestic violence, so-called 'honour' based violence, forced marriage or sexual abuse.

Of course it isn't only girls who are victims and most of the information, especially that relating to emotional responses, will apply to boys too.

What is teenage domestic abuse?

It is a pattern of abusive behaviour that someone uses against a partner. The abuse doesn't have to be physical: but can take many forms, including threats, emotional abuse, insults, isolation from friends and family, and controlling what someone wears or who they socialise with.

It can also include sex before they are ready and rape. Electronic abuse (cyber-bullying, monitoring via mobiles etc) is a common feature in abusive teen relationships.

Controlling behaviour can escalate into violence and then become a pattern.

Teenage relationship abuse often is hidden, because teenagers typically:

- ◆ have little experience of relationships
- ◆ can be under pressure from their peers to act 'cool'
- ◆ have unrealistically 'romantic' views of love
- ◆ see abuse as 'normal behaviour' within a relationship

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will.

It covers a range of offences, including:

- ◆ a completed nonconsensual sex act - ie rape
- ◆ an attempted nonconsensual sex act
- ◆ abusive sexual contact - ie unwanted touching
- ◆ non-contact sexual abuse - eg threatened sexual violence, exhibitionism, verbal sexual harassment
- ◆ sexting - sending sexually explicit material via mobile phones

Teenagers can be particularly vulnerable to sexual pressure as wanting to fit in is often one of their main concerns.

Warning signs?

The following signs may alert you to physical, sexual or emotional abuse in your teenager's relationship. Something is clearly wrong if you notice them:

- ◆ spending less time with friends
- ◆ constantly checking a mobile, and getting upset when asked to turn it off
- ◆ withdrawn or quieter than usual
- ◆ irritable when asked how things are
- ◆ making excuses for a partner
- ◆ unexplained injuries, scratches, bruises
- ◆ truanting and falling grades at school
- ◆ self-harming

Your teenager may also give you clues that abuse is happening in their relationship through their attitudes.

Misconceptions

Boys who are abusing their partners may believe:

- ◆ they have the right to control their female partners as they see fit
- ◆ masculinity is displayed through physical aggression
- ◆ they have a right to demand intimacy
- ◆ they will lose respect if they are attentive and supportive towards their girlfriends
- ◆ violence makes them feel in control

Girls who are being abused may believe:

- ◆ they are responsible for solving problems in their relationships
- ◆ their boyfriend's jealousy, possessive attitude and even abuse is 'romantic'
- ◆ abuse is normal – because their friends are also being abused
- ◆ there is no one to ask for help
- ◆ they would rather have a boyfriend who hits them than none at all

What can you do?

- ◆ ask questions rather than jump to conclusions - be sensitive
- ◆ believe them - abuse is hard to admit and talk about, especially when you think the abuser loves you
- ◆ take it seriously - sexual and domestic violence are damaging and can destroy self-confidence
- ◆ focus on their safety - try not to criticise the abuser as this may make them defensive
- ◆ help them to recognise how the abuse is affecting them
- ◆ stress the abuse is not their fault and no-one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do
- ◆ don't take over - make decisions with them not for them

Talking to boys

Boys are often told to be strong and in control.

In relationships, this can manifest itself as abuse, threats, possessive behaviour, and physical violence.

- ◆ most boys who abuse their partner are in denial about their actions
- ◆ boys are often shocked by the consequences of their behaviour on their partners, and don't actually want to become violent and controlling men
- ◆ explain how abuse can become a habit and can lead to violence
- ◆ if you suspect he is mistreating his partner, try to get him help to stop
- ◆ remember, boys can be victims too

Talking to girls

- ◆ help her understand what a healthy relationship is
- ◆ explain that abusers rarely change
- ◆ make it clear that she is never to blame

Ask her if her partner ever:

- ◆ shows extreme jealousy, anger
- ◆ displays controlling or threatening behaviour
- ◆ monitors her calls, emails
- ◆ believes in rigid sex roles
- ◆ blames her for his problems
- ◆ is verbally abusive

If she answers yes to any of these, make her aware this can lead to something much more serious.

Useful contacts

www.direct.gov.uk/thisisabuse

focuses on teenage relationship abuse

Childline

0800 1111

Parentlineplus

0808 800 2222

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Rape Crisis

0808 802 9999

www.rapecrisislondon.org

Havens

Camberwell: 020 3299 1599

Paddington: 020 3312 1101

Whitechapel: 020 7247 4787

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

www.mensadvice.org.uk

For a full range of services in London, visit:

www.london.gov.uk/knowwheretogo

Help for abusers:

Respect

0845 122 8609

www.respectphoneline.org.uk



