



Violence in adolescent romantic relationships

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD GOING THROUGH?

Children generally experience their first romantic relationships when they are teenagers. This discovery of love is accompanied by happy and exciting moments (trying to attract someone else, the first kiss, etc.), but the experience can be fraught with difficulty and disappointment (fear of rejection or heartbreak).

Violence in adolescent couples

Teens can indeed experience violence in romantic relationships. They can be the victim of violence, perpetrate violence, or witness violence. Violence in romantic relationships is behaviour that impairs the development and health of both partners and their relationship.

This violence can have different forms:

- **Psychological violence:** This type of violence involves control of the other person, control of their physical appearance, possessiveness, jealousy, emotional blackmail, etc.
- **Verbal violence:** This type of violence refers to hurtful words, insults, or rumours that can harm someone's reputation, etc.
- **Sexual violence:** This violence involves pressuring someone to have sex, sexual assault, etc.
- **Physical violence:** This behaviour includes punching, slapping, or hitting with objects, etc.



All parents want their children's romantic relationships to be enjoyable. How can you help your child enjoy mutual respect in a relationship?

Things that kids might be wondering

- Does jealousy prove that someone loves you?
- Is it normal for me to feel guilty when I refuse to do something for my boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Can I have a boyfriend or girlfriend and still hang out with my friends?
- I don't want to have a sexual relationship with my partner anymore: can I change my mind, even if I already said yes? How do I explain this to the other person?
- What is the best way to break up with someone?

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT?

On a daily basis, you can teach your child the importance of respecting other people, particularly in romantic relationships.

Help children have respectful romantic relationships

How? By asking them the following questions:

- **What does a romantic relationship mean to you?** (e.g., I can give my opinion without being judged, share common activities, experience tenderness, have someone who is there to listen to me, etc.).
- **How can you show respect in a romantic relationship?** (e.g., accept the other person's choices, listen to the person and consider their opinion, value the person's strengths and accept their differences, etc.).
- **What is unacceptable in a romantic relationship?** (e.g., when the other person prevents me from doing what I want, forbids me from seeing my friends, forces me to dress a certain way, talks to me aggressively, etc.).
- **What would you do if your partner forced you to do something?** (e.g., I would say no, I would talk to a parent or someone I trust, etc.).

Make positive comments

Complement children, emphasize their qualities and encourage their strengths as a way to stress that they are unique. This will show that they have value in your eyes and that it's important for them to have respect for themselves. If they value themselves, it will be easier for them to recognize situations in which people are disrespecting them.

Tips

If it seems like your child wants to talk to you about violence, it's important to:

Believe your child and avoid doubting what they say. This may be the first time that they are talking about the subject. If your child has experienced violence, you have to avoid making them feel guilty.

Be open and listen. It's hard to talk about violence in romantic relationships. Is your child experiencing violence? Is your child being violent towards someone else? Has your child witnessed violence?

Repeat that you will always be there to listen and to support them. As a parent, you are a role model in your relationships with other people, particularly in your romantic relationships.

WHAT CAN HELP YOU?

Web sites for you and your teen

Here are two websites to help you start a discussion with young people about violence in romantic relationships.

www.aimersansviolence.com

This site can help you determine how your teen feels about his or her romantic relationship. Short videos also illustrate different types of violence. (In French only.)

www.adoslaviolence.org

This site has animated videos that invite teens to reflect on violence and control by allowing them to choose the ending of the stories. (In French only.)

Do you need a professional resource?

Call Info-Santé at 811 or the parent help line at 1-800-361-5085.

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