What is Dating Violence?
Dating violence is controlling, abusive, and aggressive behavior in a romantic relationship. It occurs in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships and can include verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or a combination of these.

Incidence of Teen Dating Violence
- Approximately 1 in 5 high school girls reports being abused by a boyfriend.
- 40% of teenage girls ages 14-17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
- 50%-80% of teens report knowing someone involved in a violent relationship.
- Physical aggression occurs in 1 in 3 teen dating relationships.
- 33% of teenage girls report experiencing physical violence at the hands of a dating partner.
- Young women, ages 16-24, experience the highest rates of relationship violence.
- 12% of high school students (female and male) report experiencing some form of dating violence.
- Date rape accounts for almost 70% of the sexual assaults reported by adolescent and college age women; 38% of those women are between 14 and 17 years old.
- Many studies indicate that as a dating relationship becomes more serious the potential for and nature of violent behavior also escalates.

Victims and Dating Violence
- Victims may remain in an abusive relationship for many reasons, including: fear of the perpetrator, self-blame, minimization of the crime, loyalty or love for the perpetrator, social or religious stigma, or lack of understanding.
- Sexual assault victims experience more anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide than non-victims.
- Initial reactions to rape and sexual assault include anger, depression, embarrassment, and guilt.

Dating Violence and the Law
- All 50 states and the District of Columbia have laws against dating violence behaviors such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. However, the specific term “dating violence” is almost never used in these laws.
- In 39 states and the District of Columbia, victims of dating violence can apply for protective orders against the perpetrator. Age requirements and the language of the laws vary by state.

Who Can Help
- Crisis hotlines or campus helplines can provide immediate assistance and referrals to sexual assault or domestic violence programs that provide shelter, counseling, support groups, legal assistance, and medical services/ accompaniment.
- University and college health centers often offer counseling services. Campus police or school judicial programs can provide sanctions for on-campus violations.
- Legal options include reporting to the police, obtaining protective orders, and cooperating with criminal prosecution.

The Dating Violence Resource Center, a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime, provides training and technical assistance to the Office on Violence Against Women grant recipients in order to increase awareness of and commitment to addressing teen dating violence and to help craft community-specific responses to meet the needs of teenage victims of dating violence.


This document was developed under grant number 2002-X1678-DC-WT from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) of the U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions and views expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office on Violence Against Women of the U.S. Department of Justice. This document may be reproduced only in its entirety. Any alterations must be approved by the Dating Violence Resource Center. Contact us at (202) 467-8700 or dvrc@ncvc.org.