

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

Kendall County Women's Shelter Prevention Program

Parent Involvement

Kendall County Women's Shelter (KCWS) exists to provide support services and emergency shelter for victims of family violence. The KCWS prevention program was developed to educate the youth of Kendall County about healthy and unhealthy relationships so we can prevent future generations from entering into abusive relationships.

Through the use of evidence based curriculum, KCWS Prevention program is teaching students about warning signs of an unhealthy relationship, how to leave an unhealthy relationship, communication skills needed in a healthy relationship, healthy relationship boundaries, as well as many other impactful topics.

KCWS has expanded our prevention program to include district-wide efforts and events for Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. We have planned events to present at both middle schools and high schools in BISD.

We are needing parent support to help make these events impactful on our students. We hope you decide to join our efforts to prevent relationship abuse in the lives of our students.

How do I talk to my teen about relationship violence?

1. *Establish connection with your child*

It can be difficult to dive into a conversation about a serious topic such as teen dating violence without connecting to your child first. Whether you feel close or distant from your teen, establishing this connection sets up an open space for both you and child to share. Choose a safe space where time is not limited to try and introduce this open conversation with your child. EX: in the car, out to dinner, sitting on the back porch, coffee on the weekend, etc.

Don't know where to start? Try these questions below. As a parent, you know your child well, but take time to get to know their own perspective, the way they see themselves, ways they see their actions, point of views, behaviors and preferences.

Reminder: this is a great opportunity for you to model good communication skills for your teen.

- Put phones away. Good communication involves uninterrupted attention.
- Actively listen. Show your child that you are engaged and interested with your body language or encouraging statements.
- Encourage your teen to share, even when a perspective might differ from your own. Find out how they have shaped this perspective and remind yourself that your child is being vulnerable by sharing their thoughts.
- Ask questions for clarification or detail. This will show that you are engaged.

***Avoid** giving too much advice or lecturing your child, forcing your opinions on the other person, or being critical, judgmental or sarcastic.

Getting to Know Your Child¹

- What are the three most interesting things about you?
- Name five reasons you're glad to be alive.
- If you could have any super power, what would it be and why?
- If you had a time machine for a day, what would you do with it?
- What's your favorite song? Why?
- What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?
- What's your favorite movie? Why?
- Why do you think kids put rings in their eyebrows and noses and bellybuttons?
- How about tattoos?
- Do you think you would ever want to do that? Why or why not?
- If we could go anywhere you wanted on vacation, where would you choose? Why?
- If you could have a conversation with anyone in history, who would it be?
- What would you want to ask them?
- What is your earliest memory?
- What are you most proud of?

¹ <http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication/family-discussions>

- If you could change one thing about your appearance, what would it be?
- Is there anything about you that inspires other people in any way?
- What is your idea of an ideal day?
- If you were invisible where would you go and what would you do?
- What is a quality you wish you could have more of?
- If you could ask anyone for help, who would it be and why?
- What scares you the most and why?
- What makes you feel better?
- What do you worry about the most?
- What is your biggest goal this year?

Your Relationship with Your Child

- What is your favorite thing about our relationship?
- What is your least favorite thing about our relationship?
- Do you think you can tell me anything?
- If you got into really big trouble, how do you think I would respond?
- Is there something I can do better that I am not doing now?
- Do you feel like you could talk with me about anything at all?
- If we had a special day together what would you want to do?
- Do I ever embarrass you?

Family

- How do you think your friends' families compare to ours? Are they about as close? Closer? More distant? Why do you think that?
- Do you think your friends talk to their parents?
- What do you think makes a family close?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how strict are the parents in this family? What is the ideal number?
- Is the discipline in our family fair?
- What's the best thing about our family?
- If you could change one thing about your parents, what would it be?
- What are the most important things your parents have taught you?
- What do you think are the most important qualities of a good parent?
- What do you think makes a happy family?
- Tell each person in the family why you're glad they're part of the family.
- How do you think our family is the same or different from other families?
- Do you want to have kids when you grow up? Why or why not?
- What kind of parent will you be?
- Do you think you will be close to your siblings when you grow up?
- How many of your ancestors can you name and what do you know about them?
- What is your favorite family tradition?
- What three words do you think best describe our family?

Blended Families

- Do blended families take more work? Can they be as happy as birth families?
- Do you ever miss your dad?
- Do you think things would be different if your dad was still with us and I had never met your step-dad? How?
- Even though your step-dad is not your biological dad, you know he adores you. Do you feel close to him?
- You know, to your little sister you are completely her sister, not her stepsister. Do you feel that way, or is it different for you? Do you feel close to her?
- When you both grow up, do you think you will stay connected?
- Do you think it's harder for adopted kids than birth kids?
- Do you think it's a good idea for adopted kids to look up their birth parents? Why or why not?

Values & Character

- What traits do you most admire in other people?
- Did you help anyone today?
- Did you have a chance to be kind to anyone today?
- Is it hard to make the choice to be kind sometimes?
- Do you think it's okay to lie about your age to get into an Amusement Park with a cheaper ticket? Is it ever ok to lie?
- Do you think your parents ever lie?
- What kinds of lies do your friends tell their parents?
- Does it matter if a person makes a moral or immoral choice, if no one ever knows?
- Is it ever ok to cheat, in academics, sports, business?
- Do adults automatically deserve respect? How do you earn respect?
- What could our family do that would make the world a better place?
- What do you think the biggest problem in the world is? How about in our country?
- How would you change the world if you could?
- What do you think the "take-away" message of this movie is?
- Do you admire the hero in this movie? Why or why not?

School & Learning

- Who is or was your favorite teacher? Why?
- Do you think there is a difference between being smart and being wise?
- What are the best and worst things about school?
- What do you know how to do that you could teach someone else?
- How common do you think cheating is at your school?
- What would you do if all the other kids were planning to cheat on the final and you knew that doing so would lower your grade?
- What do you think makes the most difference in how kids do at school? Hard work, innate ability, parental supervision, peer attitudes, how good the school is?

- Do you think it makes sense to admit students to a college based only on academic achievement or should an attempt be made to achieve racial and ethnic diversity as well?
- Do you think kids from wealthier school districts have an unfair advantage?
- What do you think about home-schooling?

Emotions

- Do you know what EQ (emotional intelligence quotient) is? If someone has a high EQ, what are they like?
- Are you able to tell me or others when you are upset?
- How do you feel when someone is angry with you? How do you act?
- Are you a "cup is half full" or "cup is half empty" kind of person?
- What do you do to cheer yourself up when you feel down?
- Have I never not noticed when you're sad?
- What is the best way for me to help you when you feel grumpy?
- When do you like me to hug you? When does it embarrass you?
- What hurts your feelings? How do you act when your feelings are hurt?
- When you get really angry, how do you help yourself calm down?
- When you make a mistake, are you able to repair things so that you end up feeling ok?
- What are the different kinds of courage? How do you define bravery?

Drug and Alcohol Use

- Why do you think it's illegal for kids under the age of 21 to drink alcohol? After all, many parents do it.
- Why are marijuana and other drugs illegal?
- What would you do if you were in a car and the driver had been drinking or smoking marijuana?
- What if the driver was a grown-up, like your friend's parent?
- What do you think happens in the brain when people smoke marijuana? Why shouldn't kids smoke it?
- Have you ever thought that I drank too much? Acted differently when I drank alcohol?
- When do you think kids are ready to try alcohol?
- Do you know any kids or adults who you think have alcohol or drug problems?
- When do you think kids are ready to try alcohol?
- Do you know any kids who have tried alcohol or drugs, what do you think of them?
- What do the kids at your school do at parties?
- Have you been to a party like that? Have you ever been offered a drink? A marijuana cigarette or other drugs?
- How did you handle it?
- What would you do if you were at a party and someone passed out from drinking alcohol?
- Would you be worried about becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs?
- Do you think coffee is a drug? When do you think it's ok for kids to start drinking coffee?

Friendship & Peers

- Who is your best friend and why?
- What traits do you look for in friends?
- Do you think you're good at making friends?
- Where do you consider yourself on the shy to outgoing continuum?
- Do you think there is such a thing as peer pressure? Do you ever feel peer pressure? Do you think some people are more susceptible to peer pressure than others? Why do you think that is?
- What do you think makes a person popular? Are wealthier kids more popular? Kids who mature faster?
- Are you popular? Why or why not? Would you like to be?
- What do you think leadership is? What makes a good leader?

Love, Sex & Marriage

- At what age do you think people can fall in love? At what age should people marry?
- Do you think people should be married to have sex? If not, how should they decide whether they're ready?
- What do you think changes when you have sex?
- How do you think love is different in real life than it is in the movies?
- What would be most important to you in looking for a spouse?
- Do you think any of the kids at school are not virgins? What do you think about that?
- Do kids at your school actually "date"? What do you think about the idea of "friends with benefits"? Does the girl benefit as much as the guy?
- Do you think girls and guys have the same needs from sex and relationships?
- Do you know anyone who's gay? Does anyone treat them differently? What do you think about that?
- Why do you think people get divorced? How do you think it affects the kids?

Body Image and Gender Roles

- How do you think ordinary peoples' bodies compare to the models and actors on TV? How does it make you feel to watch them?
- What do you think of the way girls and guys in high school dress these days?
- Do you think girls look better with or without makeup?
- Is there a difference between "attractive" and "hot"? Between "hot" and "sexy"?
- How would you define "sexy"? Is it important to be "sexy"? Are some of the kids at school sexy? How does someone know if they're sexy? Is it important that your future boyfriend or girlfriend be sexy?
- What are the most important qualities you would want in a boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Do you think most girls are glad when they reach puberty? Why or why not? Do you think most guys are glad when they reach puberty? Why or why not?
- What's the hardest thing about being a girl?
- What's the hardest thing about being a boy?

- Do you know anyone with an eating disorder? Why do you think kids develop eating disorders? Why do you think there's such an emphasis on thin-ness in our society?
- Can you name three things that you really like about yourself that have nothing to do with what you look like?
- When do you feel the most proud of who you are?

Spirituality

- Do you believe in God? Why or why not? If so, how do you picture God?
- Do you ever talk to God?
- Is spirituality the same as religion or different?
- Has religion played a positive or negative role in history?
- Do you have good friends who practice religions that are different from ours? Acquaintances? How are you like them? How are you different?
- Do you think there is one best religion? Why or why not?
- What do you think happens after death?
- What do you think is the meaning of life? Why are we alive?
- How will you know if you've had a successful life?²

² <http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication/family-discussions>

2. Warning signs your child might be in an abusive relationship

Now that you have established trust and connection with your child, your child might bring you in to their relationships, troubles and triumphs included. Regardless of whether or not they offer this information to you freely, it is important to be on the lookout for warning signs that your child might be in a controlling/abusive relationship. Relationship includes dating relationships, friendships, stalking relationships, exes, etc.

You can look for some early warning signs of abuse that can help you identify if your child is in an abusive relationship before it's too late. Some of these signs include:³

- Your child's partner or friend is extremely jealous or possessive.
- You notice unexplained marks or bruises.
- Your child's partner emails or texts excessively.
- You notice that your child is depressed or anxious.
- Your child stops participating in extracurricular activities or other interests.
- Your child stops spending time with other friends and family.
- Your child's partner abuses other people or animals.
- Your child begins to dress differently.

What Can I Do?

As a parent, your instinct is to help your child in whatever way you can. This need to help can drive you to quickly react, but sometimes what feels like the right plan of action could stop the conversation before it begins. Here are some tips to keep in mind when trying to help a child who is experiencing dating abuse:

- *Listen and give support*
 - When talking to your teen, be supportive and non-accusatory. Let your child know that it's not their fault and no one "deserves" to be abused. If they do open up, it's important to be a good listener. Your child may feel ashamed of what's happening in their relationship. Many teens fear that their parents may overreact, blame them or be disappointed. Others worry that parents won't believe them or understand. If they do come to you to talk, let it be on their terms, and meet them with understanding, not judgment.
- *Accept what your child is telling you*
 - Believe that they are being truthful. Your child may be reluctant to share their experiences in fear of no one believing what they say. Showing skepticism could make your teen hesitant to tell you when things are wrong and drive them closer to their abuser. Offer your unconditional support and make sure that they know you believe they are giving an accurate account of what is happening.
- *Show concern*
 - Let your teen know that you are concerned for their safety by saying things like: "You don't deserve to be treated like this;" "You deserve to be in a relationship where you are treated

³ <http://www.loveisrespect.org/for-someone-else/help-my-child/>

with respect” and “This is not your fault.” Point out that what’s happening isn’t “normal.” Everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship.

- *Talk about the behaviors, not the person*
 - When talking about the abuse, speak about the behaviors you don’t like, not the person. For example, instead of saying, “She is controlling” you could say, “I don’t like that she texts you to see where you are.” Remember that there still may be love in the relationship — respect your child’s feelings. Also, talking badly about your son or daughter’s partner could discourage your teen from asking for your help in the future.
- *Avoid ultimatums*
 - Resist the urge to give an ultimatum (for example, “If you don’t break up with them right away, you’re grounded/you won’t be allowed to date anyone in the future.”) You want your child to truly be ready to walk away from the relationship. If you force the decision, they may be tempted to return to their abusive partner because of unresolved feelings. Also, leaving is the most dangerous time for victims. Trust that your child knows their situation better than you do and will leave when they’re ready.
- *Be prepared*
 - Educate yourself on dating abuse. Help your child identify the unhealthy behaviors and patterns in their relationship. Discuss what makes a relationship healthy. With your teen, identify relationships around you (within your family, friend group or community) that are healthy and discuss what makes those relationships good for both partners.
- *Decide on next steps together*
 - When you’re talking to your teen about a plan of action, know that the decision has to come from them. Ask what ‘next steps’ they would like to take. If they’re uncomfortable discussing this with you, help them find additional support. Suggest that they reach out to a peer advocate through loveisrespect’s phone line, online chat and text messaging service where teens can talk with peer advocates 24/7. To call, dial 1-866-331-9474, chat via our website or text “loveis” to 22522. They are also welcome to reach out to a local advocate at the Kendall County Women’s Shelter by calling the Hot-Line at 800-495-8078.
 - Kendall County Women’s Shelter offers support services to minors including
 - emergency shelter,
 - legal advocacy,
 - case management,
 - counseling and
 - support groups.

3. *But My Child Isn't in an Unhealthy Relationship*

It's never too early to talk to your child about healthy relationships and dating violence. Starting conversations — even if you don't think your child is dating — is one of the most important steps you can take to help prevent dating violence. Here are some sample questions to start the conversation:

- Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like? What would you want in a partner?
- Have you witnessed unhealthy relationships or dating abuse at school? How does it make you feel? Were you scared?
- Do you know what you would do if you witnessed or experienced abuse?
- Has anyone you know posted anything bad about a friend online? What happened afterwards?
- Would it be weird if someone you were dating texted you all day to ask you what you're doing?

Good luck and remember, you are having these conversations out of love and concern for your child. If you run into obstacles or barriers along the way, continue to pursue your child out of love and concern.