

Families for SAFE Dates

*A Program for Parents and Other Caregivers
to Help Teens Date Safely*

GETTING STARTED

**Introducing Caregivers to the
Families for Safe Dates Program**





Welcome to Families for Safe Dates

This booklet introduces caregivers to the Families for Safe Dates program and explains the benefits of doing the program with your teen.

Families for Safe Dates is a program for caregivers—including parents, grandparents, foster parents, and others—to help their teens date safely. Whether your teen has already started dating or not, this program is for you.

Dating is an important part of being a teenager. It's fun and exciting for teens, and it also plays an important role in their development. Through dating, teens learn responsibility and cooperation; communication and social skills; and loyalty, trust, and respect. What teens learn while dating carries over into their adult relationships.

But some dating can be harmful. If a person is treated disrespectfully or physically injured by a dating partner, it's dating abuse, and it can take several forms: psychological, physical, and sexual. Both boys and girls can be *victims*, and both boys and girls can be *abusers*, of the people they date.

With Families for Safe Dates, you can help keep your teen from becoming a dating abuse victim or an abuser. You'll also learn how to help your teen if he or she is already in an abusive dating relationship.

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This Getting Started booklet is just for caregivers. Your teenager will be involved in later booklets.

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WHAT IS DATING ABUSE?

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE can include insulting a dating partner, threatening that person, and trying to control who that person sees and what he or she does.

PHYSICAL ABUSE can include hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, beating up or assaulting a dating partner, slamming a dating partner against a wall, dumping that person out of a vehicle, or assaulting a dating partner with a weapon.

SEXUAL ABUSE means forcing a dating partner to do sexual things he or she does not want to do; dating sexual abuse includes but is not limited to date rape.

This Getting Started booklet will

- answer your questions about the Families for Safe Dates program
- explain how the program helps you and your teen talk about dating and dating abuse
- introduce you to some important facts about teen dating abuse
- discuss some of the harmful consequences of dating abuse—for teens and for their families
- describe how to introduce Families for Safe Dates to your teen



Answering Your Questions about Families for Safe Dates

Q: What is Families for Safe Dates?

A: A program to prevent teen dating abuse, Families for Safe Dates consists of five short, easy-to-do booklets that are sent to your home. Each booklet contains useful information and fun conversation-starting activities for caregivers and teens to do together. Through these activities, you'll gradually build a discussion about safe dating.

There are two different ways that you may be receiving the program. If you are working with an agency, a health educator will send you the booklets one at a time and will call you about two weeks after you receive each booklet to discuss any questions you may have. If your teen is participating in the *Safe Dates* curriculum at school, you will receive all five booklets at once with guidelines on how to use the program. If you receive all five booklets at once, be sure to complete them in order from booklet 1 to booklet 5. Refer to the letter you received with this booklet to determine which format is being used for this program.

Q: What is covered in the five booklets?

A: Booklet 1, *Talking about Dating*, helps caregivers and teens talk comfortably about dating in general, laying the groundwork for later conversation about dating abuse.

With booklet 2, *Skills for Handling Conflict*, teens learn how to recognize and manage anger and how to settle disagreements. These skills can help reduce and resolve conflict in all kinds of relationships, including dating relationships.

Booklet 3, *Recognizing Dating Abuse*, helps caregivers and teens recognize signs of dating abuse, learn what abusers do to control dating partners, and identify harmful consequences of dating abuse.

Booklet 4, *Preventing Dating Sexual Abuse and Rape*, helps caregivers and teens recognize dating sexual abuse, including date rape, and identify its harmful consequences. They also learn practical, real-life ways to prevent dating sexual abuse and rape.

Booklet 5, *Planning for the Future*, encourages teens to develop goals for how they treat, and are treated by, their dating partners. Teens are also encouraged to develop a plan for what they will do if they are treated disrespectfully or abusively by a dating partner. This booklet also guides caregivers and teens in setting dating guidelines.

Q: How much time will Families for Safe Dates take?

A: For each booklet, allow about 15 minutes to read it, and 45 to 50 minutes to complete the activities with your teen. The activities can be done in two or more short sittings, if you prefer. Today's families are very busy, so Families for Safe Dates was designed to be done at times that are convenient for you.

Q: Who will be involved?

A: All of the activities in Families for Safe Dates involve both the caregiver and the teen, but some could involve other family members, including other children or adults who are frequently with your teen. It is your choice who to include in the program.

Q: My teen isn't dating yet. Is this program for us?

A: Yes. Families for Safe Dates is for any family with a teen, dating or not. If your teen isn't dating yet, he or she will probably start within the next couple of years. Even when as young as twelve or thirteen, teens often begin to "date" very informally by meeting groups of friends at places like ball games or a mall. Dating abuse sometimes happens even in these situations. Families for Safe Dates will prepare you to help your teen date safely—now and in the future.

Q: I suspect that my teen is already in an abusive dating relationship. Is it too late to do Families for Safe Dates?

A: No. This program will give you and your teens the knowledge, skills, and insight to deal with this problem. Start the program right away, and for immediate help, you can call one of the hotlines listed at the end of booklet 1.

Q: Is dating abuse really an issue for teens as young as mine?

A: Yes. Let's look at the three types of dating abuse among eighth and ninth graders. Research shows that about 26 percent of girls and 28 percent of boys have already been victims of physical dating abuse. Girls are more likely than boys to experience severe physical abuse. Psychological abuse is even more common among both genders. Although both boys and girls are victims of dating sexual abuse, girls are more likely to experience this than boys. About 12 percent of girls this age have already experienced sexual abuse from a dating partner.*

Q: What do I do next?

A: Read the following story. Then keep reading to find out how Families for Safe Dates will help you and your teen talk more easily about this important topic.

* Foshee, Vangie A., Fletcher Linder, Karl Bauman, Stacey Langwick, Ximena Arriaga, Janet Heath, Pam McMahon, and Shrikant Bangdiwala. "The Safe Dates Project: Theoretical Basis, Evaluation Design, and Selected Baseline Findings." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine (supplement)* 12, no. 5 (1996): 39–47.



Does This Sound Like You?

Marcus and His Mom

Amanda and her thirteen-year-old son, Marcus, are watching a movie together. In one scene, a girl is treating her partner disrespectfully. Amanda considers making a comment to her son; she feels this could be a good time to talk with him about dating and healthy relationships. But she decides not to. She thinks to herself, “This could be embarrassing for both of us. What if Marcus doesn’t take me seriously? Besides, I don’t have much information to share with him anyway. And he’s not even really dating yet. I’ll wait.”

Are you like the parent in this story? If so, you are not alone. Some caregivers don’t talk to their teens about dating issues. Why not? Some feel too embarrassed to talk about this personal subject. Others think they don’t have the knowledge they need, or that it’s too early to talk about it. And others feel their relationship with their teens or their communication skills are too poor to have that kind of discussion.

The Families for Safe Dates program will make it easier for you to talk with your teen about dating. After completing the activities in all five booklets, one parent said,

“My daughter and I opened up a discussion that probably should have taken place a long time ago. But as a parent, I did not know how to start that conversation. I am going to go back to my older daughter with these books.”

Below are some of the challenges that Families for Safe Dates will help you manage.

Challenge: I don’t know much about dating abuse. So how can I talk to my teen about it?

Teens are more willing to discuss sensitive topics with people they believe have some knowledge and understanding of the issues. Families for Safe Dates will give you the information you need to discuss dating issues with your teenager. For example, you’ll learn answers to questions like these: Why do some teens abuse the people they date? How common is dating abuse? And how does it affect teens and their families?

Challenge: I don't communicate well with my teen. Will I be able to do Families for Safe Dates?

Improving teen-adult communication about dating is one goal of this program, so that it will be easier to talk about dating abuse. All five booklets offer suggestions that should make communication easier. After completing Families for Safe Dates, one teenage girl said,

"This is the first time I've ever really talked to my mom about boys and it got somewhere. Usually we argue, but this time it was constructive. That is why I liked this program."

Challenge: It will be embarrassing for me and my teen to talk about dating and relationships.

Caregivers and teens may feel uncomfortable at first when talking about these issues. So this program eases you into the discussion, starting with fun activities that don't address sensitive and potentially embarrassing topics. More sensitive issues, like dating sexual abuse and date rape prevention, will come up in later booklets, after you and your teen are talking more easily about dating. One teenage boy who completed the program said,

"It was helpful in breaking the ice with my parents. It helped us get a lot of those uncomfortable feelings about talking about stuff out of the way so now we can all talk about that kind of stuff."

Challenge: If I talk to my teen about dating, I'm afraid he or she will think I should "mind my own business."

With the Families for Safe Dates program, you'll learn skills that will help you communicate with your teen in non-prying ways that don't invade his or her privacy. To open the communication channels, you'll learn how to really listen and respond in encouraging, nonjudgmental ways.

Challenge: I know my teen is going to say he or she already knows everything about dating and dating relationships.

Even if your teen says that, it's not true. Teens do have some knowledge and opinions about dating and dating relationships, and that's as it should be. But teens do not know all the complications of dating and dating abuse. Your own experiences with relationships, and the facts you'll learn in Families for Safe Dates, will add to your teen's knowledge.

Challenge: I'm having problems with my own relationship—so how can I talk to my teen about healthy relationships?

All caregivers want their children's lives to be better than their own. If you acknowledge some of the troubles in your own relationship, your credibility with your teen may grow. Your honesty will help get across the importance of preventing problems. You can tell your teen that the Families for Safe Dates program is an opportunity for the both of you to learn together. If you are in an abusive relationship and need help, you may want to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Challenge: It will be hard to get my teen to do this program.

Teens like having a chance to express their opinions and beliefs about things, and they are especially eager to talk about dating issues—once the topic is opened in a nonthreatening way. The Families for Safe Dates activities are designed so that teens can discuss their views about dating and dating abuse. Teens want to talk to their caregivers about important issues like dating, but face some of the same challenges in doing so that you do. Families for Safe Dates will help both you and your teen overcome the challenges to discussing dating and dating issues. This Getting Started booklet will give you some ideas for how to introduce Families for Safe Dates to your teen.



Dating Abuse Myths and Realities: Quiz for Caregivers

How much do you know about teen dating abuse? Decide whether you think each of the following statements is true or false and mark your answers. See the next page for the correct responses.

	True	False
1. Caregivers usually don't know when their teen is being abused by a dating partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Boys are rarely the victims in abusive dating relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Being insulted by a dating partner is not that big a deal, as long as there's no physical violence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Teens who have never witnessed violence between their parents rarely become involved in abusive dating relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Date rape is more common among college students and older singles than it is for teens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Dating abuse only happens in heterosexual relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Dating abuse is more common among teens from poor families than among teens from families with more money.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My teen could never be a dating victim or abuser.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Girls do not abuse their dates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. When dating abuse happens once, it is likely to happen again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Caregivers have a big influence on how teens treat their dating partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Dating Abuse Myths and Realities: Answers

1. Caregivers usually don't know when their teen is being abused by a dating partner.

True. Most teens involved in dating abuse *do not* tell their parents. In fact, teens will go to great lengths to hide it. Teens say they're afraid their parents will overreact, be judgmental, and make them end a relationship they are not ready to end. Often they feel embarrassed, ashamed, and afraid of losing independence.

2. Boys are rarely the victims in abusive dating relationships.

False. Nearly equal numbers of boys and girls are victims of psychological and physical dating abuse, but girls are more likely than boys to be victims of severe types of physical abuse. Girls are also more likely than boys to be victims of sexual abuse.

3. Being insulted by a dating partner is not that big a deal, as long as there's no physical violence.

False. Psychological abuse often leads to physical abuse. Being insulted is a sign of disrespect. People who are in physically abusive relationships often mention that at first they were victims of only psychological abuse, such as being insulted.

4. Teens who have never witnessed violence between their parents rarely become involved in abusive dating relationships.

False. Most teens in abusive dating relationships have never witnessed any violence between their parents.

5. Date rape is more common among college students and older singles than it is for teens.

False. Teens between the ages of fifteen and nineteen are at the highest risk for date rape. Rape by a date is by far the most common form of rape.

6. Dating abuse only happens in heterosexual relationships.

False. Some teens date people of their own sex. About 25 percent of those teens report being victims of psychological and physical dating abuse and 10 percent report being a victim of

sexual abuse. The Families for Safe Dates booklets focus on heterosexual dating relationships, but the information in the booklets applies to dating abuse among same-sex dating relationship as well. It's your choice whether or not to discuss same-sex dating relationships with your teen.

7. Dating abuse is more common among teens from poor families than among teens from families with more money.

False. Abuse is just as common among wealthy and middle-class teens as among poor teens.

8. My teen could never be a dating victim or abuser.

False. Teens from all kinds of families have become dating victims and abusers. Parents of these teens often say they don't understand how their son or daughter, who was well behaved and from a supportive family, could have become involved in dating abuse.

9. Girls do not abuse their dates.

False. Girls are as likely as boys to use psychological and physical abuse. However, girls tend to use less severe forms of physical abuse than boys. Some of the physical violence used by girls is in self-defense, but some is not.

10. When dating abuse happens once, it is likely to happen again.

True. Abuse usually occurs again in the relationship and gets worse over time. It does not just go away.

11. Caregivers have a big influence on how teens treat their dating partners.

True. You may feel that you no longer have an influence over your child now that he or she is a teenager. It may seem that your teen doesn't listen to what you say. That's because teens are trying to find a balance between independence and dependence, and it's not easy. But teens need and want guidance. Despite how they act, it does matter to teens what you think about the people they date. Teens learn a lot about how to act with others by watching and listening to their caregivers. Now that your teen is dating or getting ready to date, he or she will be looking to you even more for clues about how to act in dating situations.



Harmful Consequences of Dating Abuse

There are many potential harmful consequences of teen dating abuse—for the victim and for the abuser, and for their families too. Dating abuse is never just a phase in a relationship. It causes significant and often lasting damage. Some of the potential problems are immediate; some may show up months or years later. Read on to find out more about these consequences.

Potential Consequences for the Families of Dating Abuse Victims and Abusers

When a teen is in an abusive dating relationship, it can disrupt the whole family. Victims tend to isolate themselves, resulting in family conflict, communication problems, and often feelings of heartbreak for everyone. In some situations, family members, pets, and personal property may also be hurt or damaged. Some families may have to pay large doctor bills and lawyer expenses. If sexual abuse results in an unwanted pregnancy, caregivers may have to help raise the teen's child. Teens who are dating victims and abusers tend to be in abusive relationships as adults, and thus the cycle of violence continues with their own families later on.

Potential Consequences for the Dating Abuse Victim

- Lose confidence in oneself
- Become afraid to express feelings of anger
- Suffer serious injury, even death
- Begin to doubt their own abilities, feelings, and decision-making ability
- Feel isolation from family and friends
- Feel shame and guilt
- Feel lonely
- Face inability to maintain long-lasting or fulfilling relationships
- Get a sexually transmitted infection
- Experience an unwanted pregnancy
- Build up large doctor or lawyer expenses
- Abandon dreams and goals
- Become depressed, anxious, fearful, or suicidal
- Begin having problems at work, school, and other activities
- Experience damage to personal property

Potential Consequences for the Abuser

- Get arrested
- Unable to attend college due to criminal record
- Spend time in jail
- Experience feelings of shame and guilt
- Feel isolation from family and friends
- Face inability to maintain long-lasting or fulfilling relationships
- Contract a sexually transmitted infection
- Experience an unwanted pregnancy
- Build up large doctor or lawyer expenses
- Abandon dreams and goals
- Become depressed, anxious, fearful, or suicidal
- Begin having problems at work, school, and other activities
- Lose dating partner's love and respect
- Have conflict with parents or other caregivers
- Dating partner could end relationship



What Do I Do Next?

As you can see, there are many good reasons for doing Families for Safe Dates with your teen. Your next steps are to

1. Think about the family members you'd like to involve in Families for Safe Dates and discuss the program with them. If they are adults, you may want to give them this Getting Started booklet to read.
2. Choose a time soon to tell your teen that your family will be doing the Families for Safe Dates program. When you introduce the idea, you may want to make the following points:
 - Tell your teen that you want to do a program called Families for Safe Dates with him or her, and explain what you know about the program.
 - Let your teen know that the program isn't all about abusive dating. It also includes fun activities related to dating in general.
 - Let your teen know that Families for Safe Dates can help them to have better dating relationships, and it can help keep them safe.
 - Tell your teen that it can also give him or her the skills to help friends who are involved in dating abuse.
 - If your teen is not yet dating, point out that this program is great preparation for it. It also deals with the group or informal dating that often begins in seventh or eighth grade.
 - If your teen says he or she would never abuse anyone, say that that's great to hear. Then point out that this program also helps teens know if they are being abused by a date, and what to do about it.
 - Tell your teen that Families for Safe Dates includes lots of fun activities for caregivers and teens to do together, and that they will even learn something about their caregiver's dating experiences.
3. Read booklet 1: Talking about Dating. Then begin Families for Safe Dates by doing the booklet 1 activities with your teen.

Welcome to Families for Safe Dates!