

The Secret Side of Teen Dating

"Domestic Violence and Emotional Abuse"

By: Li Vasquez Noone

Does this story sound familiar? Deanna (not her real name) and her boyfriend have been together for 8 months. At first he was very sweet. But lately something's changed. Her boyfriend has started calling her names. Instead of cute endearments, he calls her things like "Dummy" and "Fatso." He is constantly mocking her about her weight, glasses, and braces, even though she has asked him repeatedly to stop. And recently, he has been trying to keep her from spending time with her friends. It all makes Deanna very uncomfortable, but she shrugs it off – he says he loves her, after all. Besides, there's nothing wrong with some name calling, right?

Wrong. This type of behavior is classified as verbal and emotional abuse, and is considered domestic violence.

What is domestic violence? Basically, it's when there is an abusive relationship between people in a close or intimate relationship. And it's becoming a serious problem among teenagers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that nearly 10 percent of all high school students have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Think about it – that means one out of every ten teens has been hurt by their significant other.

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However, there's more to the story than that. Most people think of domestic violence as physical actions, such as punching, slapping, kicking, hitting, and threatening; or sexual violence, such as forcing you to have sex without your consent, and sexual harassment. These physical actions often lead to injuries that are noticeable and visible to others.

But what about more subtle forms of abuse? Yelling, calling names, and putting you down are forms of verbal abuse. Making you feel bad about yourself, controlling who you see and what you do, and blaming you are all characterized as emotional abuse. Don't forget about stalking, harassing phone calls and text messages, and cyber bullying. Any of these actions point to an abusive relationship.

These forms of teen dating abuse, because they leave little or no outside physical evidence, can be hard to spot. Yet they affect many teens, both male and female, and can be just as damaging as physical violence.

How do you know if you are in an emotionally abusive relationship? The biggest sign is if you are afraid of your boyfriend or girlfriend. If you feel like you have to be careful about everything you say and do, and that any little thing might cause your partner to blow up, then your relationship is probably abusive. It can be hard for an emotional abuse victim to talk about what's going on. Maybe they think no one will believe them – after all, they don't have any bruises or outside marks. Many victims are made to feel that the abuse is their fault. Their abuser may even tell them they deserve it. Why should you be worried about emotional

abuse? There are a number of reasons why an emotionally abusive relationship is just as damaging as a physically abusive one.

- Your self-esteem may suffer. Teen dating abuse can affect your future relationships with family, friends, and partners.
- Your grades may suffer. A study by the U.S. Department of Education found that teens who suffered dating violence had lower grades than their peers.
- Your health may suffer. Teens who experience domestic abuse may suffer from chronic health problems such as obesity and arthritis as adults, according to the CDC.
- You may drop out of school. Targets of online abuse, such as cyber bullying, are three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school.
- If left unchecked, the abuse may escalate into something physical.

It's important to realize that verbal and emotional abuse is real and dangerous. It's still abuse, even if you don't have any bruises. It is not your fault. You did nothing to bring it on, and you can't make it better just by changing your behavior. And it is not going to stop without intervention.

What can you do if you find yourself in an emotionally abusive relationship? First and foremost: tell someone. Talk with a friend or someone you trust, like a teacher or counselor. It may be uncomfortable, but you will almost certainly feel better, and you will get the support you need to deal with the situation. You can also contact the National Teen Dating Violence Abuse Helpline at 866-331-9474, or the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at 800-799-SAFE or 800-799-7233. Or talk to your doctor, a local counseling center or shelter, or a local court. If you feel you are in immediate danger, call 911. No matter what, remember that this is not your fault. You do not deserve to be abused. You do not have to suffer through this alone.



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