



# Teen Dating Violence Action Sheet for Adults

To commemorate February as Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, the Serving Our Youth TA Project ([www.servingouryouth.org](http://www.servingouryouth.org)) has compiled a list of tangible ways youth service providers, school communities, and adults can take action to support young people who are exposed to or are at risk of teen dating violence (TDV).

## What can I do to help prevent TDV as a family member or community member?

### **Have conversations with youth about healthy relationships and dating, and speak from your own experience.**

Young people have less experience in dating, so they might not be able to as easily identify warning signs that adults are familiar with. Talk to them about what healthy relationships look like, and share your own experiences (if you're comfortable). Being vulnerable with them makes it more likely for them to be vulnerable with you.

### **Build rapport with youth and be known as a trusted adult who they can come to if they are stalked.**

Being a trusted adult means being known as non-judgemental and open when youth ask questions about relationships or need help. Take their feelings and relationships seriously and try to avoid asking them "why" questions that may make young people feel defensive. If for whatever reason you feel like you cannot be this adult to a young person, help them identify which adults in their life they would feel comfortable asking for advice.



### **Discuss depictions of relationships in the media.**

Teen movies, TV shows, and music all promote different messages that set norms (some good, some bad) about what's appropriate when dating. If you're watching something or listening to music with a young person, discuss the themes that come up and ask questions like "What do you think about that couple?", "What would you do if you were in that situation?", or "What do you think about what this song is saying?" [One Love's Education Center](#) has many resources on media, and includes a youth-made web series called "The Halls" that portrays teens' experiences with dating and TDV (1).



**Be aware that some young people are engaged in online relationships, especially during the pandemic.**

Some young people may meet people on social media or in online game platforms, and begin a purely online relationship. It's very important that youth in these situations understand what personal information they should and shouldn't share online, [the risk of catfishing](#) (2), and what safety measures to take before meeting up with someone in real life.

## What can I do if a young person tells me they are being abused by their partner?

**First, emphasize that you believe them and that you're there for them.**

It takes a lot of courage for a young person to open up to an adult about TDV, and they might be afraid of people not believing them or blaming them for the abuse. Saying something as simple as "Thank you for telling me this. I believe you, and you don't deserve this. I'm here for you no matter what," can be really powerful and affirming to the young person.

**Make a safety plan.**

Work with youth on developing a safety plan to keep them safe both physically and emotionally. This may include: having a friend stay with them during the school day, informing school faculty and security staff about the situation, having a clear plan of who is picking them up after school, locking down social media accounts, and/or receiving a court order of protection (see next). Note that breaking up is when survivors are at most risk of violence from their former partner, and factor this into your safety plan. [Click here to download a safety plan template](#) from Love is Respect (3).

**Understand youth's legal rights, specifically related to protection orders.**

To learn which states allow juveniles to receive orders of protection on grounds of dating/domestic violence, [download this file](#) (4). Note that some states do not allow minors to obtain their own orders of protection, but may have an adult file on their behalf. If you are able to obtain a protection order, communicate it to your young person's school and other youth-serving organizations they visit so it can also be enforced on their grounds. Help them gather and document any evidence (whether physical or digital) that demonstrates the pattern of TDV. Local advocacy programs may be able to help with this. You can also find a digital evidence collection guide [here](#) (5).





**Be aware of community resources, and ask the young person how you can help them take next steps.**

See what services are available through their school, as well as local resources through nonprofits such as counseling or support groups for young victims. Present these options to youth and let them decide which they want to move forward with.

## What can schools and youth-serving organizations do?

### **Build relationships with local organizations with experience in TDV.**

Building partnerships with domestic and sexual violence organizations can help streamline the referral process to get teens counseling, advocacy, and safety planning. Building these relationships before TDV takes place means you will be ready to move quickly and responsively when needed.

### **Embrace trauma-informed practices school-wide.**

Experiencing dating violence can negatively impact a young person's mental health, behavior, academic performance, and feelings of safety. Trauma-informed practices understand the role of trauma in context and promote youths' resilience. To learn more about trauma-informed schools, visit the [National Education Association's Trauma-Informed Schools](#) page, or [TraumaAwareSchools.org](#). (Note these resources are tailored for schools, however they can be easily adapted for youth-serving organizations.)

### **Be prepared to support safety planning with trauma-informed policies that all staff are trained on and understand how to implement.**

Students who experience TDV may have additional safety needs at school (e.g. enforcing orders of protection or making sure only a non-abusing caregiver picks them up from school). Having a school-wide or district-wide policy on responding to incidents of TDV (that all staff are trained on) can create an existing structure for this response and prevention.



#### **Links Referenced**

1. [www.joinonelove.org/lms/](http://www.joinonelove.org/lms/)
2. [www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/Catfishing](http://www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/Catfishing)
3. [tinyurl.com/DownloadSafetyPlan](http://tinyurl.com/DownloadSafetyPlan)
4. [tinyurl.com/StatesProtectionOrders](http://tinyurl.com/StatesProtectionOrders)
5. [www.endtechabuse.org/2018/12/20/tool-3/](http://www.endtechabuse.org/2018/12/20/tool-3/)
6. <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/trauma-informed-schools>