



TACKLING ABUSE IN TEENAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Information for Health Professionals

This leaflet describes the Government's new marketing campaign to tackle abuse in teenage relationships, and the role that health professionals can play.

Violence in relationships is unacceptable, whatever the context, whatever the circumstances.

In 2009, NSPCC research revealed that violence in teenage relationships is highly prevalent and that teenagers have surprisingly tolerant attitudes to violence in relationships.

Evidence shows that coercive and controlling behaviour can escalate into both physical and sexual violence and lead to repeat incidents.

The Government has developed a marketing campaign which aims to end this pattern of violence to help young people understand how to form healthy and respectful relationships. It is designed to challenge the attitudes of 13-18 year olds, and get them to rethink their views by showing them that they do not have to accept or tolerate violence in relationships.



FACTS AND FIGURES

At least 1 in 4 young people suffer some form of relationship abuse:

- One in four experience physical violence
- Three in four girls suffer emotional relationship abuse (controlling and bullying behaviour)
- One in three girls and 16% of boys suffer sexual partner violence

Teenagers are surprisingly tolerant of violence in relationships: 43% of young people believe it's acceptable for a boyfriend to be aggressive under certain circumstances (such as; flirting, nagging, and dressing provocatively)

Experiencing relationship abuse as a young person makes them disproportionately likely to be an adult victim (possibly as much as twice as likely). Attitudes adopted now will shape the futures of these young people. Therefore it is crucial for schools to actively ensure a clear whole school approach to gender equality and to undertake prevention work across the curriculum to educate young people about healthy and respectful relationships.

Abuse in relationships can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender or family situations. It can happen to boys as well as teenagers in same sex relationships. Boys can be victims too and it is important to make sure they do not feel alienated and this issue is not ignored.

Communication technologies are an important component of teenage relationships. A significant minority of teens say their partners use mobile phones or the internet to control, humiliate and threaten them.

ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Health professionals can help to identify young people who are in relationships where violence is a problem and, where possible, give the young person the opportunity to talk and direct them to appropriate support.

KNOW THE INDICATORS OF HARM

Some young people are more vulnerable to being harmed than others. Similarly some are more prone to harm others. Early identification of these young people's needs means interventions can be made at a stage where they will be most effective. Circumstances which may alert a professional include:

- What the young person's living circumstances are; whether they are attending school or whether their home life is violent
- Whether there is an age or power imbalance between the young people in a relationship, for example, differences in age or social and physical development
- Whether one of the young people is part of a gang. For example, a 14 or 15 year old boy who is supported by a group of his peers is able to exert very real pressure over a girl of the same age or older
- [If appropriate] Whether the young person is competent to understand, and consent to, the sexual activity in which they are involved
- Whether overt aggression, coercion or bribery was, or is, involved in the teenage relationship, including alcohol or other substances

- Whether the young person's own behaviour, e.g. through misuse of alcohol or other substances, places him/her in a position where he/she is unable to make an informed choice
- Whether methods used to secure a young person's compliance and trust and/or secrecy by the sexual partner are consistent with grooming for sexual exploitation e.g. by offering gifts, treats, money, drugs, developing a trusting relationship with the child/young person's family, or by developing a relationship with the young person through the internet
- Whether the young person's partner is known by relevant agencies (police, local authority, children's services or health) as having or having had, other concerning relationships with children or young people.



OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK

Most people, including young people, find it difficult to confide in someone about violence. Health professionals need to:

- Be aware of the prevalence of relationship abuse among young people
- Understand how relationship abuse happens and its impact
- Provide opportunities for a young person to disclose in private, including sensitively asking direct questions
- Know how to support a young person and what services are available to help meet their needs
- Help the young person to access the other services if they need to.

EXPLORE THE CONSEQUENCES

Teenage relationship abuse can have a devastating impact on young people's physical and emotional health. It can:

- Destroy self confidence
- Remove choice, just at the point when a young person is beginning to have more responsibility and more choices available to them
- Create loneliness and isolation from friends and family (many abusers seek to isolate their victims)
- Result in physical problems such as not being able to sleep, headaches, stomach aches or depression
- Have a profound, long lasting impact on both people in the relationship.



Research with young people revealed that they don't appreciate the impact of their actions, and helping them to understand this is an important step in challenging attitudes.

A broad range of professionals are likely to come into contact with young people in violent relationships. We encourage all professionals working with young people to discuss how to manage the issue of teenage relationship abuse across agencies.

DIRECT TO HELP

The stakeholder website (www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/spotteenabuse) contains information and links to services to meet young people's needs (both those who are harmed by violence and abuse and those who harm), and services providing support for their families/carers. It also contains safeguarding guidance if you require further detailed information.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

The Home Office is launching a national campaign to tackle abuse in teenage relationships in February 2010. The campaign challenges the attitudes of 13-18 year olds, getting them to re-think their views by showing them that they do not have to accept abuse in relationships

Research shows when young people are confronted by the reality of violent and controlling relationships, both boys and girls often express regrets. The campaign has been developed following research and consultation with the target audience, parents and relevant third sector organisations.


The campaign seeks to empower young people to make the decision to avoid violent and controlling behaviour by encouraging them to recognise abuse; reflect on the consequences of their actions; and seek help if required. The adverts target both boys and girls and educate young people on the range of behaviours that constitute abuse, illustrating how easily controlling behaviour can escalate to verbal or even physical abuse.

The campaign will run on TV, radio, online, in teenage magazines and in posters/postcards in cinemas, shopping centres, schools, sixth form colleges and youth clubs.

All advertising directs young people to a dedicated website where they can find more information, chat about the issue and find help:

www.direct.gov.uk/thisisabuse

The campaign also highlights the issue of abuse in relationships to parents and carers and encourages them to talk to teenagers about their relationships. Advertising will run in magazines and newspaper supplements, with further advice available in the form of a leaflet which can be ordered by calling or on www.direct.gov.uk/spotteenabuse



HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can get involved by working with the national campaign and engaging young people, parents and carers, and your colleagues. In this way, you will help to deliver the campaign's messages and, in turn, help to shift young people's attitudes about violence in their relationships.



To download campaign materials and for links to support and information, please visit:

www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/spotteenabuse

TOGETHER WE CAN END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In November 2009, the Home Secretary launched the ‘Together we can end violence against women and girls’ strategy. The Government is committed to ending violence against women and girls (though this campaign is concerned with addressing violence by, and inflicted upon, both genders). To achieve this, we must work together to challenge perceptions and make people realise that violence against women is unacceptable under any circumstances.

To view the strategy and other related resources for health professionals, visit: www.dh.gov.uk/vawg

