

Tips for Parents:

When your teen is being hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend

- Listen and don't judge. Don't punish. If your teen believes s/he will be listened to and not yelled at or given ultimatums, s/he will be more likely to be honest with you and let you help.
- Don't blame your teen. Violence is always the choice of the abuser, but the abuser may have your teen convinced s/he "brings it on" or does something to deserve it. Let your child know s/he does not deserve to be abused. Don't ask blaming questions like "What did you do to make him hit you?" or "Why do you let this happen?"
- Don't put your teen down. S/he has been put down enough by the abuser. Don't give your teen the message that you think s/he is stupid or senseless for being in the relationship. Instead, talk about your child's strengths and focus on positive behavior.
- Take your teen's feelings seriously. Remember your first love? Could anyone have told you it wasn't really love? Acknowledge that your teen's feelings about his/her partner, both the good and the bad, are real. Don't tell your teen s/he doesn't love the partner or expect your teen to just "get over" the partner, because it's not that simple. It is possible to love someone who hurts you.
- Don't get into a power struggle by forbidding your teen to see the partner. If you do this, your teen will probably go behind your back, and then s/he will not be able to come to you when s/he really needs help! You will also set yourself up as the "bad guy" and play right into the abuser's hands by making it seem like you are the enemy and the abuser is the good one. If you can offer patient support, your teen will be much more likely to come to the decision to end the relationship on his/her own, and learn how to have healthier relationships in the future.
- Help your teen plan a safe way to see his/her partner. For example, allow them to spend private time together in your home, where you are within earshot but not in the room. Help develop a safety plan so s/he knows what to do under different circumstances if it gets violent. Tell your teen you will pick her/him up any time, anywhere s/he feels unsafe, without punishing.
- Allow your teen as much control as possible. Empower your teen to make healthy decisions. Obviously, safety is your first priority, but it is important to allow your teen to make his/her own decisions whenever it is safe to do so. The abuser has taken away your teen's power and control, and if you do the same, it may make matters worse.
- Reassure your teen of your love and concern, and your wish to help do what's best for him or her.
- Call a domestic violence agency or hotline. You can get information about relationship abuse, advice on how to help your child, and support for yourself to deal with your own anger and frustration. (The RACS hotline is 634-4911 or 800-303-0013.)
- Get your teen into counseling, preferably with an agency or counselor who specializes in domestic violence and teen relationship abuse. Even if s/he ends the relationship, it will take time and work to repair the emotional damage that has been done by the abuse. Counseling will also help your teen learn how to avoid abusive relationships in the future.
- Do not threaten violence against the abuser. This just reinforces the idea that problems can be solved with violence. If it's okay for you, then it's okay for them. Instead, let your teen and his/her partner know that you will call the police if you ever witness violence.
- If the abuser goes to the same school, help your teen figure out who at the school s/he can talk to and make a part of the safety plan.
- If your teen breaks up with the abuser, be aware that the break-up period is the most dangerous time. Check with RACS about how to get an order of protection.

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**Questions? Call the Rape and Abuse Crisis Service hotline.
634-4911 or 800-303-0013**