



FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

Did you know that American Indian teenagers experience higher rates of dating violence?

This dedicated month serves as a crucial reminder of the prevalence and impact of teen dating violence, urging communities to come together to address and prevent its devastating effects.

From raising awareness to fostering open dialogues and providing support, this observance empowers individuals and organizations to take proactive steps to combat teen dating violence and promote healthy relationships among adolescents.

Dating is an inevitable part of life that many experience for the first time as a teenager. Healthy relationships, however, require hard work, communication and a level of maturity that may not be present in teens. As a result, many teen relationships – nearly one third – are characterized as either unhealthy or violent. Understanding what teen dating violence is, why it happens and what it means for those involved is an important first step in prevention.

Teen dating violence “includes physical, psychological or sexual abuse; harassment; or stalking of any person ages 12 to 18 in the context of a past or present romantic or consensual relationship.”

- **Physical Abuse:** hitting, biting, shoving, hair pulling, scratching
- **Emotional or Psychological Abuse:** name calling, bullying, shaming, intentionally embarrassing, constant monitoring
- **Sexual Abuse:** forcing a teen partner to engage in a sexual act against or without their consent
- **Stalking:** repeatedly following or harassing a teen partner in a way that causes them reasonable fear for their safety or well-being.

Teenage romantic relationships are more likely to turn violent when:

- Teens are not mature enough to communicate their feelings to their romantic partners
- Teens do not understand how to communicate effectively with their romantic partners
- Teens are depressed or suffer from anxiety or other emotional problems
- Teens are pressured into behaving in ways they ordinarily wouldn't by their peers
- Drugs or alcohol are introduced

Teens are also sponges – they absorb what they see and hear in the world around them. Violence in entertainment is everywhere and, unfortunately, has been normalized. Teens mimic behaviors they see on screen, so it is not uncommon for teens to think the unhealthy relationships that are portrayed are normal or just a part of life everyone has to deal with. This belief is amplified if teens are witness to violent, abusive or unhealthy relationships at home.

Statistics from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** reveal that American Indian and Alaska Native students report disproportionately high levels of teen dating violence, demanding urgent attention and action.

According to the **National Institute of Justice**, American Indian adolescents experience violence at rates higher than any other racial group in the United States, with 56.4 percent reporting experiencing sexual violence, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

Here are some ways you can make a meaningful difference as you observe **National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month**, according to IHS:

- **Open Dialogue:** Engage in open, non-judgmental conversations with Native youth about healthy relationships and recognizing unhealthy behaviors.
- **Cultural Education:** Teach traditional values and beliefs that promote respect and harmony, addressing violence and other behaviors that disrupt balance.
- **Consent and Boundaries:** Educate youth about consent, boundaries and what constitutes a healthy relationship.
- **Media Literacy:** Help teens understand how media representations can distort perceptions of healthy relationships and bodies.
- **Positive Role Modeling:** Be champions for teens, demonstrating healthy, respectful communication and providing safe spaces for them to express themselves.
- **Community Engagement:** Invite others to join the conversation and promote traditional community wellness practices.
- **Cultural Expression:** Use storytelling, art and other culturally responsive methods to encourage healthy, nonviolent relationships among Native youth.

By promoting these values and providing support systems, the cycle of violence can be broken along with promoting positive health outcomes for Native youth. Additionally, accessing resources such as Love is Respect and the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Prevention Center can offer vital support and guidance.