

TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE:

A Guide for Educators & Youth-Serving Professionals

Educators, mentors, coaches, counselors, and youth-serving professionals play an important role in helping young people understand healthy relationships, recognize signs of abuse, and identify trusted sources of support.

Conversations about domestic violence and abuse should be developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and grounded in safety and empowerment.

Core Messages for Youth

When discussing domestic violence and abuse, reinforce that:

- You matter, and your safety matters.
- Nobody has the right to hurt, control, threaten, or scare you.
- It's okay to speak up when something doesn't feel right.
- Healthy relationships should make you feel supported, respected, and safe being yourself.
- You don't have to handle difficult situations alone.
- There are trusted adults and resources that can help.

Signs a Young Person May Need Support

Every child responds differently, but some signs may include:

- Increased anxiety or fear
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Changes in behavior or mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent worries about family members
- Sudden declines in school performance
- Reluctance to go home

If a young person shares concerns, remain calm, listen carefully, and thank them for trusting you.

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Helpful Responses

Do:

- Listen more than you speak
- Believe and support them
- Thank them for sharing
- Validate their feelings
- Connect them with appropriate support

Avoid:

- Pressuring them for details
- Making promises you cannot keep
- Blaming or judging anyone in front of them
- Dismissing their feelings
- Suggesting the situation is their responsibility to fix

If a young person discloses abuse or harm:

- Stay calm
- Listen without judgment
- Let them know they are not alone
- Tell them the abuse is not their fault
- **Follow your school or organization's reporting and safety procedures**
- Connect them with appropriate support services

One supportive conversation can make a meaningful difference. Youth do not need adults who have all the answers. They need adults who listen, believe them, and help them access support when needed.

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Talking Points for Elementary-Age Children (Grades K-5)

Young children benefit from simple language, concrete examples, and opportunities to connect concepts to their everyday experiences.

Talking Points

- Safety is important at home, school, and in the community
- Kindness and respect are important in relationships
- Everyone has feelings, and all feelings are okay
- Hurting others is not an appropriate way to handle emotions

Conversation Starters

- What helps people feel safe?
- What does kindness look like?
- What can you do if someone is feeling scared?
- Who are trusted adults you can talk to?

Facilitator Prompts

- "What are some ways we can help others feel respected?"
- "What makes a classroom or group feel safe?"

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Talking Points for Middle School Youth (Grades 6-8)

Youth in this age group are beginning to understand more complex relationships and social influences.

Talking Points

- Healthy relationships involve respect and trust
- Unhealthy relationships may involve intimidation, pressure, or control
- Friends can be supportive, but adults have an important role in helping
- Emotions are normal, but harmful behavior is not

Conversation Starters

- What are the qualities of a healthy friendship?
- What are examples of respectful communication?
- How can someone support a friend who needs help?
- What are some warning signs that a relationship might be unhealthy?

Facilitator Prompts

- "What would you say to a friend who felt unsafe?"
- "How can we create communities where people feel supported?"

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Talking Points for High School Youth (Grades 9-12)

High school students can explore more complex topics, including power, control, consent, boundaries, and advocacy.

Talking Points

- Abuse is not limited to physical violence
- Power and control are common dynamics in abusive relationships
- Healthy relationships require communication, consent, and mutual respect
- Community members can play a role in prevention and support

Conversation Starters

- What are examples of healthy boundaries in relationships?
- How can digital communication impact relationship health?
- Why might someone have difficulty leaving an unhealthy relationship?
- What does it mean to be an active ally or advocate?

Facilitator Prompts

- "What messages about relationships do young people receive from social media, entertainment, and peers?"
- "What actions can individuals take to support a culture of respect and safety?"