

TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE:

A Guide for Parents & Caregivers

Talking about domestic violence and abuse can feel overwhelming, but these conversations help children and adolescents build understanding, recognize unhealthy behaviors, and know where to turn for support. Whether a young person has been impacted directly, witnessed violence, heard about it from peers, or seen it online, a trusted adult can make a significant difference.

What Youth Need Most

Children and teens benefit from knowing:

- They are safe and supported.
- Abuse is never their fault.
- It is okay to talk about difficult feelings.
- Healthy relationships are built on respect, trust, and care.
- There are adults who can help.

Creating a safe environment where young people can ask questions and express feelings is important at every age.

Before You Start the Conversation

- Choose a calm, private setting.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Stay curious rather than judgmental.
- Avoid forcing a conversation if your child isn't ready.
- Be prepared to revisit the topic over time.
- Focus on safety, support, and understanding.

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Talking Points for Elementary-Age Children

Young children understand simple, concrete messages best.

Key Messages

- Everyone deserves to feel safe.
- Kindness and respect are important.
- Hurting someone with words or actions is not okay.
- Trusted adults can help when someone feels scared or unsafe.

Conversation Starters

- Who are the grown-ups you know you could always go to if you needed help?
- What makes a home feel safe and comfortable to you?
- How can you tell when someone needs help?
- If one of your friends was feeling scared, what would you want them to do?

Sample Language

- "My job is to help keep you safe, and there are lots of adults who care about you too."
- "Sometimes people make choices that hurt others. When that happens, it's never a child's fault."
- "If something doesn't feel right, I want you to tell me. We can figure it out together."

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Talking Points for Middle School Youth

Middle school youth are beginning to explore friendships, identity, and independence. They can understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy behaviors in relationships.

Key Messages

- Healthy relationships involve respect, honesty, and communication.
- Controlling or intimidating behavior is not healthy.
- Everyone deserves to have boundaries respected.
- It is important to seek help when someone is being hurt.

Conversation Starters

- What do you think makes someone a really good friend?
- Why do you think some people have a hard time asking for help?
- What are some things people your age worry about when it comes to fitting in?
- Have you ever seen someone get pressured into doing something they didn't want to do?

Sample Language

- "Good friends make you feel accepted for who you are. They don't pressure you to be someone you're not."
- "It's okay to have strong feelings. What's important is how we treat other people when we have them."
- "If something is weighing on you, you don't have to deal with it by yourself."

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Talking Points for High School Youth

Older teens can engage in deeper discussions about power, control, consent, boundaries, and relationship dynamics.

Key Messages

- Abuse can be physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual, financial, or digital.
- Abuse often involves power and control.
- Healthy relationships include mutual respect and consent.
- Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness

Conversation Starters

- What advice would you give a friend who wasn't being treated well?
- How can social media affect relationships?
- Why do you think some people stay in unhealthy relationships?
- Do you think it's sometimes hard to tell the difference between caring and controlling?

Sample Language

- "What does respect look like when two people disagree?"
- "Do you think jealousy gets mistaken for caring sometimes?"
- "What are some signs that someone is trying to control another person?"

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You Don't Need the Perfect Opening.

Often, the best conversations start with something that's already happening:

- A scene in a movie
- A social media post
- A situation at school

Try simple openings like:

- "That made me think of something important. What do you think?"
- "I've been wondering how kids your age think about this."
- "Can I ask your opinion on something?"

These approaches help children and teens feel like they're part of a conversation, not being lectured.

What Youth Need to Hear Most

No matter their age, young people benefit from hearing:

- "You won't get in trouble for telling me something important."
- "You don't have to handle difficult situations alone."
- "Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected."
- "If something doesn't feel right, it's okay to ask for help."

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If Your Child Shares a Concern

- Stay calm.
- Thank them for telling you.
- Listen without judgment.
- Reassure them that what happened is not their fault.
- Avoid making promises you cannot keep.
- Seek additional support when needed.

Remember:

You do not need to have all the answers. The most important thing you can do is listen, support, and remind young people that they are not alone.

**For more information and resources, visit
safeathome.org**