

# Evidence Brief

## Six Best Practices for Effective Teen Dating Violence Intervention Programs

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### How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub, Google Scholar, and Google using the following key terms: "teen," "dating," "violence," "intervention," "prevention," and "programs."

### Definition of Key Terms

**Teen dating violence (TDV)** is a form of intimate partner violence that occurs between two adolescents in a close relationship. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression, and stalking. It can take place in person or electronically, such as repeated texting or sharing sexually-explicit pictures of a partner without consent (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2019).

### Summary of Evidence

#### A) Measurable Outcomes for Effective Teen Dating Violence Intervention Programs

Evidence suggests that participation in effective teen dating violence intervention programs is associated with a number of measurable outcomes, including:

- reductions in teen dating violence perpetration and victimization;
- increased use of healthy relationship skills, such as emotion regulation, conflict resolution, communication, and coping (Bonache et al., 2017; Niolon et al., 2019; Peskin et al., 2019; Reidy et al., 2017b; Rizzo et al., 2018); and
- reductions in attitudes that support dating violence (Levesque et al., 2016; Reyes et al., 2016b; Rizzo et al., 2018).

#### B) Six Best Practices

##### 1. Consider targeted programming for youth exposed to violence.

Exposure to violence in the home, school or community increases the risk for teen dating violence (Hébert et al., 2019). Evidence suggests that boys who have been victims of other forms of violence are more likely to be perpetrators of dating violence (Reidy et al., 2017a). Likewise, girls who witness intimate partner violence in childhood are more likely to believe that relationships include harm, and so may be more likely to accept dating violence (Lee et

al., 2016).

Organizations should consider developing tailored interventions for youth who have been exposed to violence, and fostering expectations for healthy, non-violent relationships (Lee et al., 2016; Niolon, et al., 2017; Reidy et al., 2017b). Use language that youth find relevant, and be mindful of gender differences in how youth describe and perceive dating violence (Taylor et al., 2017).

## **2. Foster healthy relationship skills.**

Effective teen dating violence interventions focus on strengthening social-emotional skills, including emotion regulation, conflict resolution, and communication (Bonache et al., 2017; Levesque et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2019; Peskin et al., 2019; Rizzo et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017).

For an example of an effective skill-building program, consider Teen Choices, an intervention that draws on the Stages of Change model to meet youth where they are at and build healthy relationship skills (Levesque et al., 2016). Make sure to incorporate multiple opportunities to practice and reinforce these skills (Niolon et al., 2019). *(You can access a factsheet outlining the Stages of Change framework on YouthREX's Knowledge Hub: <https://youthrex.com/factsheet/stages-of-change-framework/>)*

## **3. Be culturally responsive.**

When designing teen dating violence intervention programs, organizations should consider the intersection of culture and teen dating violence. Youth may benefit from programs that are responsive to their unique intersectional needs. For instance, a study of young South Asian women in the United States found that some aspects of culture can protect youth – for example, a close-knit community – while others can contribute to negative outcomes – for example, patriarchal attitudes and fear of stigma (Ragavan et al., 2018). Culturally-responsive programs should address the acculturation gap and potential conflicts between parents/caregivers and youth (Ragavan et al., 2018; Reyes et al., 2016a). Consider hiring facilitators from the same culture, partnering with cultural organizations, and seeking input from youth, parents/caregivers, and community members.

## **4. Foster peer support.**

A review of 87 studies found that peers play an important role in promoting *and* preventing teen dating violence (Hébert et al., 2019). Social support has also been found to protect against teen dating violence *perpetration*, suggesting that it is critical to build social supports, and encourage young people to draw on these supports as they navigate dating relationships (Espelage et al., 2019). Programs should include information on how to be a supportive peer,

and promote bystander intervention (Baker, 2017). Evidence suggests that barriers to bystander intervention among youth include (Debnam & Mauer, 2019):

- uncertainty about whether acts constitute abuse;
- fear for one's own, or the victim's, safety;
- a lack of confidence in one's ability to intervene; and
- the belief that abuse is a private matter.

Programs should support youth in confidently defining acts of dating violence, and promote a sense of responsibility to intervene. Build confidence and self-efficacy by fostering skills that allow young people to intervene appropriately and safely.

## **5. Involve parents/caregivers.**

Research suggests that parental/caregiver monitoring and support can protect youth against teen dating violence victimization and perpetration (Espelage et al., 2019; Hébert et al., 2019). One study found that youth who have experienced teen dating violence have lower levels of communication with their parents, and more problematic communication patterns (Ombayo et al., 2018).

If possible, organizations should find ways to involve parents/caregivers in prevention programming. Parents/caregivers should be able to effectively support youth by providing guidance that suits young people's developmental and relational needs (Black & Preble, 2016). Effective strategies include listening to young people's concerns without lecturing, offering advice only when asked, and sharing personal experiences and lessons learned (Black & Preble, 2016).

## **6. Incorporate online tools & technology.**

Online and technology-enhanced programs can be highly individualized, and administered with little staff time and training. For example, Teen Choices is a brief, three-session online program that has been proven to be effective in reducing teen dating violence (Levesque et al., 2016). The program delivers individualized guidance matched to dating history, dating violence experiences, and stage of readiness for using healthy relationship skills. Youth who have experienced dating violence are provided with information on how to keep themselves safe in relationships. Technology can also be used to supplement in-person programming by allowing for simulated skills practice and immediate feedback (Peskin et al., 2019).

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