

# *Domestic violence*

**Offense:** Domestic violence, dating abuse, battery

## **Boys and girls, gay and straight, physical and emotional**

Relationship abuse is a significant problem among adolescents. Estimates of prevalence vary widely, from less than 10% to more than 50%, with many researchers documenting a level of at least 20% among both girls and boys, both gay and straight. It can include psychological and physical expressions. Psychological abuse includes public or private humiliation, controlling behavior, rage, and fits of jealousy. Physical abuse can take both sexual and non-sexual forms. Unlike with adult domestic violence, rates of dating abuse are about the same for boys as for girls. Boys and girls in gay relationships are neither more - nor less - likely to be victims of relationship abuse than other youth. However, girls are more likely to be physically injured and to report the abuse. Thus boys more are likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system for this offense.

## **Risk factors**

Certain risk factors have been correlated with abuse, for both boys and girls. Substance use, depression and anti-social behavior are among them, though it is difficult to know which is cause and which is effect. Regardless of which are causes and which are effects, all of these risk factors are also predictors of school failure. Mental health, social behavior and school achievement are interrelated variables. As in any ecological system, disturbance in any one of them can have profound effects on the other two.

## **Learned behavior**

Physical and emotional violence in intimate relationships is learned behavior. Often it follows a generational pattern. Young boys' witness of their mother's abuse, is one of the strongest predictors of later anti-social behavior. Many experts believe it "disables" the ability to empathize with others, a key factor in many crimes against persons. It also often reflects a preoccupation with power and control.

## **Skill-based intervention**

Cognitive-behavioral training for emotional regulation, understanding the dynamics of power and control, communication and conflict resolution skills, and framing self-control as means of taking and holding power can be effective approaches for these youth.

## **Dual status**

Youth who enter the system for other offenses, including prostitution, may need help dealing with prior abuse in intimate relations, potentially from both perpetrator and victim perspectives. Thus, a suggested course of study includes both perspectives.

## Goals of intervention

### Youth will:

- Understand and value norms for healthy relationships
- Understand the dynamics and early warning signs of dating violence
- Learn constructive ways to manage feelings of anger and jealousy
- Recognize and practice impulse control as a tool of empowerment
- Use effective, non-abusive methods of communication and conflict resolution
- Develop assertiveness skills to avoid abusive relationship
- Learn who and how to ask for help
- Understand how to offer help to a friend who might be in an abusive relationship

## A suggested scope and sequence

### SKILL TRAINING TOPICS

#### Offender perspective

##### **Knowing yourself**

Power  
Strengths  
Risk factors  
Norms

##### **Managing feelings**

Self talk  
External triggers  
Relaxation  
Letting go

##### **Empathy**

Identifying feelings  
Perspective taking  
Gender

##### **Impulse control**

Stopping reactions

##### **Connecting to community**

Making friends  
Joining a group

#### Victim perspective

##### **Knowing yourself**

Strengths  
Risk factors  
Self-esteem

##### **Assertiveness**

Beliefs-standing up for  
Limits-setting  
Needs-stating  
Behavior-confronting  
Control-taking  
Feelings-communicating  
Pressure-resisting

##### **Decision-making**

Options  
Safety

##### **Connecting with others**

Communication skills  
Getting help  
Support-getting

### CHALLENGE TOPICS

#### **Dating abuse**

##### **Emotional abuse**

Abuse-boy/girlfriend  
Abuse-sexual  
Aggression  
Anger  
Beaten  
Broken heart  
Cold-hearted  
Depression  
Feelings-communicating  
Feelings-confusing  
Feelings-depressed  
Fighting  
Immaturity  
Insecure  
Jealousy  
Let-down  
Love  
Stereotype  
Substance abuse