

## **Hyde County Hotline, Inc.**

**24-Hour Crisis Line 252-925-2500**

Visit us at: [HydeCounty-Hotline.org](http://HydeCounty-Hotline.org) Facebook: Hyde County Hotline

### **February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month**



***Hyde County Hotline wants you to know that there's a lot you can do as a parent, caregiver, teacher, pastor or friend to prevent teen dating violence and abuse.***

Almost 1 in 10 teens reports being physically abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the last year. One of the most important things you can do is keep the lines of communication open with the kids in your life.

#### **Take steps to make a difference:**

- Be a role model – treat the kids and others you know and interact with respect.
- Start talking to kids about healthy relationships early – before they start dating.
- Get involved with efforts to prevent dating violence in your community.
- Call the National Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or text “loveis” to 77054 or call Hyde County Hotline at 252-925-2500, if you are worried about a teen in your life.

**You can get help and keep the teens you know and care for safe and healthy by calling Hyde County Hotline's 24-Hour Crisis Line 252-925-2500.**

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### **The Hidden Side of Dating Abuse**

We've all heard the stories about teens and sexting, texting and diatribes on Facebook. But what hasn't been fully understood is how abusive technology can become, especially in teen dating relationships.

A recent study by the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center found that 26 percent of teens in a romantic relationship said their partners had digitally abused them during the previous year using social media, email and text messages. “We anticipated we would find kids in romantic relationships who were experiencing digital abuse from their partners,” said Janine Zweig, senior fellow at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. Zweig, along with fellow researcher Meredith Dank, conducted the study. “But what we didn't anticipate was the overlap that we found with other forms of teen dating violence.”

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### **Study Specifics**

The Urban Institute study delivers some startling statistics concerning teens and digital dating abuse. According to the study, girls in a relationship are digitally victimized more often than boys, especially when the abuse is sexual. This divide widens when the reported abuse involves sexual behavior.

The most prevalent form of digital abuse is tampering with a partner's social media account. More than one in 12 teens in a relationship (8.7 percent) say their partner used their social networking account without their permission.

Acts of sexual digital abuse are the second and third most-reported complaints. Approximately 7 percent of teenagers say their partner sent them texts and/or emails asking them to engage in unwanted sexual acts. The same percentage says their partner pressured them to send a sexually explicit photo of themselves.

Even more disturbing, digital harassment is a red flag for other abuse because such abuse in a relationship rarely happens in isolation. Eighty-four percent of the teens who report digital abuse say they also experienced psychological abuse by their partners, 52 percent say they were also physically abused, and 33 percent say they were also sexually coerced. Only 4 percent of teens in a relationship say the abuse and harassment they experienced was digital alone.

Perhaps not surprisingly, schools are relatively free from digital harassment, but remain the centers for physical and psychological abuse. Most digital harassment happens before or after school. Only 17 percent of the teens who report digital harassment say they experienced it on school grounds.

### **Digitally Speaking**

Teenagers today use technology more frequently than previous generations. "The reason technology has made teen dating abuse easier is partly due to the amount of time our teens are spending using technology," said Zweig.

While most teenagers have access to the Internet, Facebook, smartphones and tablets, it would be tempting to see results of studies such as this one and think that technology has made teen dating abuse easier. But what Zweig and her colleagues found instead debunked that idea. "We confirmed that it's more likely that kids who were experiencing digital abuse also were experiencing other forms of teen dating violence, so it is indeed tool in the tool box of someone inclined to be abusive," said Zweig. "Only 4 percent of the kids who said they were digitally abused experienced only that form of teen dating violence."

These ultra-connected teenagers are even more aware of who's saying what about whom—and how quickly bad information can flow from one person to another. "With the ability to text or be on a social networking site 24/7, you don't have to be with that partner to be abusive," pointed out Roy Baldwin, director of parenting and youth at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Colorado. "When used in a negative way versus a positive way, it can be relentless and really a source of control over that partner and be very invasive in his or her life."

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### Digital Reduction

Pulling the plug on technology might seem like a simplistic solution to teen digital dating abuse, but that would not solve the underlying issue. Both Baldwin and Zweig say having parents involved and aware of the how technology can be a tool in an abuser's hands is key to helping teens avoid and report digital dating abuse.

“The one thing that we thought was really important for this is to increase public awareness for parents in particular, that they know that this kind of abuse is happening, that their child might be experiencing digital abuse,” said Zweig.

She stressed that digital abuse is a huge red flag to parents that something else might be going on in the relationship, in particular physical violence or sexual violence. “Parents need to open a dialogue with their youth about digital dating abuse, to really understand the nature of that relationship so that the child can get help if needed.”

Zweig expressed her concern that some teens are starting to accept that such digital harassment is part of life. “We—parents, teachers and society—need to teach them that harassment is not the purpose of technology, so that if something happens, they are aware that it's wrong and can seek assistance,” she said.

Another key to training is for parents to teach their children what honoring the opposite sex means. “When our kids see how I treat my spouse, they're going to know what's healthy in a relationship,” said Baldwin. “It's our job as parents to make our home emotionally and physically safe for our children and to model what are appropriate and inappropriate ways to treat the opposite sex.”

“What this type of study says to me is that teens don't understand the importance of healthy relationships,” said Baldwin. “It starts with Mom and Dad and what kind of relationship they have.” He pointed to **Proverbs 4:23** as a good verse to share with teens: **“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”** (NIV). Parents can use the verse as a springboard to talk to their teen about why it's important to guard their hearts and how unhealthy behaviors can lead to any abuse, including digital dating abuse.

*(Source: Crosswalk.com-Sarah Hamaker is a certified Leadership Parenting Coach™ through the Rosemond Leadership Parenting Coach Institute)*



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**There are many signs of dating violence. The following are the most common:**

- Extreme jealousy or insecurity
- Constant belittling or put-downs
- Explosive temper
- Isolation from family and friends
- Making false accusations
- Constant mood swings towards you
- Physically inflicting pain or hurt in any way
- Possessiveness
- Telling someone what they can and cannot do
- Repeatedly pressuring someone to have sex
- Checking cell phones, emails or social networks without permission

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Everyone deserves a relationship that is healthy, safe and supportive. If you are in a relationship where you are being hurt, it is important for you to know that the abuse is not your fault. It is also important for you to start thinking of ways to keep yourself safe from the abuse whether you decide to end the relationship or not. You may not be able to control your abuser's abusive behavior, but you can take steps to keep yourself as safe as possible. You can begin this by making a safety plan.

### **Safety Planning:**

What is a safety plan? A **safety plan** is a personalized, practical plan with information that is specific to you that can help you avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when you are in danger. A safety plan helps lower your risk of being hurt by your abusive partner. A good safety plan helps you think through lifestyle changes that will help keep you as safe as possible on campus or in the dorms (if you are in school), at your home or job and other places that you go on a daily basis.

**Safety planning** is an important aspect of how advocates at Hyde County Hotline help victims protect themselves emotionally and physically in an abusive relationship.

If you feel you are in immediate danger please call **911**. If you would like to speak to a victim advocate please call Hyde County Hotline on the **24-Hour Crisis Line at 252-925-2500**. You can also follow the link below to learn more about Safety Planning for Teens.

### **Teen Safety Planning:**

<http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Teen-Safety-Plan.pdf>

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Family Violence Prevention  
& Services Program



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