

THE SURVIVOR'S REPORT

Dating violence: In person and online

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “dating violence?” Many people might think of a male physically abusing his female partner. However, dating violence can occur in any type of romantic relationship, and the abuser isn't always a male.

Dating violence is “controlling, abusive, and aggressive behavior in a romantic relationship.” *Bulletins for teens: Dating violence*. It takes many forms and can at times be disregarded as the natural intensity that comes from “being in love.” In truth, no form of abuse is acceptable, and being in love certainly doesn't justify it.

One form of dating violence is physical abuse. This may include hitting, kicking, punching, hair pulling, scratching, strangling, etc.

Verbal abuse takes on an emotional edge and

may include name-calling, belittling and threatening. The abuser may act out of jealousy or feelings of inferiority.

Abusers may become very controlling, constantly wanting to know where you are, needing to be with you at all times, not allowing you to talk to or spend time with other people.

Finally, sexual abuse can include unwanted touching, kissing and other sexual behaviors that are unwelcome. The abuser may not allow the use of contraceptives during sexual activity.

With the new world of technology, online dating has become more prevalent in recent years. At face value, this may seem like a venue safe from dating violence, but verbal and emotional abuse can occur online. And as with any other type of relationship, abuse shouldn't be tolerated.

Some advantages of online dating include a bigger dating pool and profiles that allow for quick evaluations of whether

or not you want to meet someone. People may be more open if traditional face-to-face conversations induce anxiety.

However, there are also disadvantages,

including but not limited to, deceitful or dishonest profiles. People may call others names or post inappropriate pictures in response to anger. Given the reach and popularity of social media, it can be a fast and easy tool for scaring, intimidating, or controlling a romantic partner.

One way to combat these disadvantages is to do your research. A formal background check isn't necessary, but look for red flags, such as dishonesty, lack of openness, disrespect, etc. Take the time to get to know your partner and to build trust.

If you are a victim of dating abuse, online or in person, you may feel helpless, scared or angry. You may feel confused or threatened. You may feel that you deserve the abuse or think that the abuse is your fault. These feelings are common among victims of dating violence. Don't, however, let them stop you from talking to someone or getting help. Contact the Counseling Center to ask about resources through the Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program or for referrals to providers in the Harrisonburg community.



STEP
Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program

www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/services/sexual-assault-services

C&SDC
Counseling & Student
Development Center

FACT OR FICTION

Myths about dating violence downgrade the severity and prevalence of this form of abuse, making people believe it is “no big deal” while discouraging victims from seeking support. In actuality, dating violence is a pattern of assaultive and controlling behavior that one person uses against another in an attempt to gain or sustain control in a relationship. The abuser deliberately acts in ways that trigger fear, shame and humiliation to control their significant other. Dating violence is prevalent. It is serious. It should not be tolerated or ignored.

Myth: Relationship violence is rare in young people.

Truth: Almost 1/3 of high school and college aged men and women experience violence in a romantic or dating relationship. Domestic violence is the number one cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 to 44 in the United States. It causes more injuries than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined.

Myth: Most people in an abusive relationship will end the relationship after the abuser hits them.

Truth: Nearly 80% of women who have been physically abused by their partner continue to date their abuser after they have been physically abused. In fact, victims of dating violence may be at highest risk when they attempt to leave the relationship.

Visit the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services website (<http://www.dvsas.org/pages/Our-Services/Available-Services>) to learn more about dating violence and available services.

Question & Answer

Dear Answer Annie,

I haven't had much luck meeting guys in my area, so I decided to take a friend's advice and try online dating. I was hesitant to sign up for an official site so I thought I would start off with the dating app, Tinder. I've been chatting with this guy for a couple of weeks now, and he has been anxious to meet up in person. He seems like a really nice guy and we have a lot in common! We both like to hike, mountain climb and run marathons. He even suggested that we meet up at one of my favorite trails! I've heard that online dating can be dangerous, but it doesn't seem like I need to worry about him, right?

Sincerely,

First Time Online Dater

Dear First Time Online Dater,

Despite your common interests, I'd encourage you to approach this like any other first date. Online dating is a valid option for meeting new partners, but make sure you're comfortable with the service you've chosen. Highly utilized services like Match and EHarmony may provide more information about possible partners and help you discern whether a meet-up is a good idea or not. No matter how you meet someone, online or in person, trust your gut. If your gut says “beware,” consider taking a step back or checking out the next profile.

Sincerely,

Answer Annie

Please be advised that this article is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call JMU Counseling Center at (540) 568 6552.