

Adolescents' Perspectives on Parental Responses to Teen Dating Violence

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Abstract : Teen dating violence (TDV) is a significant public health problem with severe negative impact on youths' mental and physical health and well-being. Exacerbating the negative impact of TDV victimization is the fact that teens rarely report the violence. They are fearful to tell friends or family, especially parents. The family context is the first place where children learn about interpersonal relationships, and therefore, parental response of teens' life experiences influences teens' actions and development. This study examined youths' perspectives on parental responses to TDV. Effective parental responses to TDV may increase the likelihood that youth will leave abusive relationships. Method. Eleven gender-separate focus groups were conducted with 27 females and 28 males, ages 12 to 17, to discuss parental responses to teen dating violence. Youth were recruited from a metropolitan community in the southwestern part of the United States. Focus groups questions asked the middle and high school youth how they would want their parents to respond to them if they approached them about various incidents of dating violence. All focus groups were transcribed. Using QSR-N10, two researchers' analyzed data first using open and axial coding techniques to find overarching themes. Researchers triangulated the coded data to ensure accurate interpretations of the participants' messages and used the scenario questions to structure the coded results. Results. Most youths suggested that parents should simply talk with them; they recognized the importance of communication. Teens wanted parents to ask questions, educate them about healthy relationships, share their personal experiences, and give teens advice (tell them to break up, limit contact with perpetrator, go to police). Younger youth expressed more willingness to listen to parental advice. Older youth wanted their parents to give them the opportunity to make their decisions. Many of the teens' comments focused on the importance of parents protecting the teen, providing support and empathy for the teen, and especially refraining from overreacting (not yelling, not getting angry and staying calm). Implications. Parents need to know how to effectively respond to youth needing to leave unhealthy relationships. Demanding that their children end a relationship may not be a realistic approach to TDV. A parent's ineffective response, when approached by an adolescent for assistance in TDV, may influence a youth to dismiss parents and other adults as viable options for seeking assistance. Parents and prevention educators can learn from hearing youths' voices about effective responses to TDV.

Keywords : adolescents dating abuse, adolescent and parent communication, parental responses to teen dating violence, teen dating violence

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