Project Respect

Why we’re talking to your child about dating

PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN YOUNG RELATIONSHIPS

In partnership with

LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE & TROPICAL MEDICINE

University of BRISTOL

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR
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Most young people have a positive experience with dating. But, whether face-to-face or online, some dating relationships can become toxic and violent. This violence can take different forms, such as physical, emotional or sexual violence, and it can happen to all young people, regardless of their gender.

A healthy relationship, on the other hand, is free of violence. Not only that, it is an opportunity for a young person to learn about respect, personal responsibility, and life in a community. Such experiences can improve the quality of their relationships well into adulthood. So you can see why all young people need healthy relationships – and the skills and knowledge for developing them.

That’s why your child’s school is participating in Project Respect, which is all about preventing violence and promoting healthiness within young people’s relationships.

But we understand it can be embarrassing or uncomfortable to talk about sensitive issues with your child. And we know many students will not yet have started dating.

So, as part of this project, we are giving you and the other parents and carers at your child’s school this short booklet. It offers advice about how you could discuss safety when they begin dating. It starts with a section explaining the issue of dating and relationship violence, before going on to:

- answer frequently asked questions
- offer some practical advice on next steps
- give advice on what to do if your child is experiencing violence or abuse
- provide some activities to help start conversations with your child.

These activities are fun but also help you reduce the risk that your child will experience dating and relationship violence. And they help you respond if your child ever does experience it. Before starting the activities, we recommend that you and your child both read the background section.

Thank you.
**Background**

**What is dating and relationship violence?**

This can include:

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<tr>
<th>Physical Abuse</th>
<th>Emotional Abuse</th>
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<td>Hitting</td>
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<td>Forcing unwanted sexual activity</td>
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As well as this, abusers often manipulate the other person into continuing the relationship.
For example, the abuser may:

- make them feel more dependent by lowering their self-esteem
- suggest that they deserved the abuse
- make them think they are unattractive
- say that the abuse will help them be a better person
- hide the abuse by being nice and funny when in larger groups
- appear to make up for abuse with kindness or romance
- threaten to hurt themselves if they leave.
**The scale of the problem**

Dating and relationship violence is a pressing issue in England, confirmed by a number of sources.

A number of large-scale surveys find girls and young women consistently reporting high levels of sexual violence in school.

Recent surveys of young people in England suggest that 66-75 per cent of young women and 32-50 per cent of young men aged 14-17 years have been victims of dating and relationship violence.

Stonewall’s annual school report (2017) found that 52 per cent of LGBT young people frequently or often hear homophobic or transphobic remarks in school.

Research by Public Health Bristol City Council gives some insight from young people. Those from school years 9-11 (aged between 13 and 16) said that there is significant pressure on boys to prove their masculinity by objectifying and teasing girls. This sort of sexual bullying is a normalised, everyday occurrence that’s often positioned as a joke and not reported.

**The impact of dating and relationship violence**

People who experience violence in their early relationships are more likely to be victims of violence in their adult relationships. They are also more likely to be faced with:

- mental health difficulties including suicidal behaviours
- substance misuse and anti-social behaviour
- low educational attainment
- sexually transmitted infections
- eating disorders
- teenage pregnancy.
Frequently asked questions

Q: Is this really an issue for children?
A: Unfortunately, yes. Recent surveys of English young people suggest that 66-75 per cent of young women and 32-50 per cent of young men aged 14-17 years have been victims of dating and relationship violence. Project Respect is also about how schools can prevent young people seeing harmful behaviours as normal.

Q: My child is too young to be thinking about dating, is this really relevant to them?
A: Yes. It’s true it takes until about age twelve or thirteen for children to begin dating informally in groups of friends. But these group situations can be a place where abusers display relationship violence. So even if your child is not dating yet, or if they won’t for the next two or three years, they will still benefit from being able to recognise if a relationship is becoming unhealthy.

Q: What if I think my child is already in an unhealthy relationship?
A: If you have any concerns about your child, please come and speak to us. We will provide sources of support in school and out of school for you and your child. As well as this, we’ve made all school staff aware of Project Respect, so they can also respond to concerns.

Q: Shouldn’t my child spend more time in lessons such as English and maths?
A: During the project your child will develop their social skills and their ability to articulate themselves. For example, learning how to communicate effectively, how to deal with conflict, and how to manage anger – things that are beneficial in all areas of school work and later life.

Q: Is there anything I can do to help my child after reading this booklet and doing the activities?
A: You can talk to your child about the work they have been doing in the lessons for Project Respect. There are two homework tasks, one after lesson one and one after lesson four. Pupils will be working on campaign ideas about what they would like to change in school. You can support them by discussing their ideas. Pupils will also be learning about an app called Circle of 6, which can help them reach out to trusted friends or family if they need help. It is available for free from the Apple Store or Google Play. You can download it to see how the app works and what it can do.

Q: How can I talk to my child about dating and relationship violence when I don’t know much about it?
A: Young people are more willing to discuss sensitive topics with people who have some knowledge and understanding of the issues. But don’t worry, this booklet gives you that knowledge.

Q: How can I talk to my child about these issues when I don’t communicate well with my child?
A: You can get help with this booklet. There are suggestions for starting conversations and making sure these conversations are helpful. There’s advice about how to talk in a way that doesn’t feel intrusive. And there are gentle activities that don’t immediately go into personal and sensitive areas. Overall, these things should help you listen and respond positively to your child.
1. Think about the family members you’d like to discuss the project with. If some are other adults, you may want to give them this booklet to read.

2. Choose a time soon to tell your child that you would like to discuss Project Respect with them. You can explore what they already know about the project from school. You can explain that it won’t be embarrassing and that you will do some interesting activities together. If your child hasn’t started dating yet, you can explain that having these conversations could help them prepare for when they are dating.

3. Ask your child to read the Background section of this booklet.

4. Read the next section of the booklet.

**Plan a time to work on the activities in this booklet**

You can choose whether you want to do all the activities in one go or spread them over several sessions, for example one each week.

Choose a time that doesn’t conflict with other important things. Choose a place where there won’t be lots of interruptions and you won’t be distracted by screens. Put your phones on silent or switch them off.

Write down when you plan to have your conversation below.

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**Tips for good communication**

- Talk face to face.
- Listen really carefully to what your child says, think about what they mean and avoid interrupting them.
- Ask them questions so you really understand what they are saying and so they can see you are interested in understanding how they feel.
- Respect what they say even if you disagree.
- Avoid telling them directly what they should do or that you know better than them.
- Avoid being too critical or judgemental and show that you care about them.
- Check your body language so that it is clear you are really listening to them, not turning away or checking your phone for example.
Activity 1:
Understanding dating relationships among young people

Time needed
15 minutes

Aim
This activity helps you and your child develop a common language to describe dating relationships, and helps you both understand what these relationships might involve.

Instructions
Look at the questions below and take it in turns to ask each other about girlfriend and boyfriend relationships among young people. The parent or carer should talk about their memories from when they were at school, and the child should talk about how things are now. So that you can remember your answers, write each of them down in the space after each question.

• How many people in year 9, the third year of secondary school, have had a girlfriend or boyfriend?
  Parent/carer
  Child

• What words do people use to describe such relationships? Dating? Going out with? Seeing?
  Parent/carer
  Child

• How do young people show they are interested in someone?
  Parent/carer

  Child

• How do young people know if someone is interested in them?
  Parent/carer
Child

Parent/carer

Child

**Where do young people go with their boyfriend or girlfriend?**

Parent/carer

Child

**How do young people keep in touch with their boyfriend or girlfriend?**

Parent/carer

Child

**Reflection**

Here are some things to think about afterwards:

- Whether you used the tips for good communication.
- What you learnt about dating relationships as young people now experience them.
Activity 2: Exploring acceptable and abusive behaviours in dating relationships

Time needed
20 minutes

Aim
This activity helps you and your child agree about which sorts of behaviour are acceptable and which are unacceptable in relationships with boyfriends or girlfriends.

Instructions
Take it in turns to use words that describe the characteristics of a great boyfriend or girlfriend to have when you are a young person.

These might be words like funny, cool, sporty, confident, into the same things as me etc.

Try to name four words each. And write them down in the spaces below:

Parent/carer

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Child

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Now take it in turns to think of some good places to go with this great boyfriend or girlfriend.

This might be a party, the cinema, dinner at a restaurant or hanging out with friends.

Try to name three places each. And write them down in the spaces below.

Parent/carer

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Child

__________________________________________

__________________________________________
Now read out from the list of behaviours below and discuss whether this behaviour is acceptable or not. Write Ys and Ns in the table overleaf to indicate your views and your child’s views.

See where you and your child agree or disagree. Where you disagree, explore why. (Don’t leap in to show you know better than your child)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Child thinks acceptable? Y/N</th>
<th>Parent thinks acceptable? Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The other person tells you that they will end the relationship unless you see them tonight.</td>
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<td>2. The other person calls you up to cancel an hour before you are meant to meet them.</td>
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<td>3. The other person gets cross because you promised to call them but forgot.</td>
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<td>4. The other person shouts at you so that you feel scared.</td>
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<td>5. The other person asks whether you are seeing anyone else other than them.</td>
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<td>6. The other person asks to see your phone so they can monitor who you’ve been speaking to.</td>
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<td>7. The other person often comments on how attractive you are.</td>
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<td>8. The other person suggests you would be more attractive if you lost weight.</td>
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Now, see if you and your child agree with our views on these behaviours:

We suggest that behaviours 2, 3, 5 and 7 are acceptable in most relationships, depending on what words used and how they are expressed.

- Behaviour 2 might be irritating and might even lead to conflict but it is not on its own abusive.
- Behaviour 3 involves anger, which on its own is not abusive. It would become abusive if the anger was expressed in a scary way.
- Behaviour 5 might feel intrusive but people in relationships are entitled to ask questions so they can understand the nature of the relationship. Such questions would only become abusive if they become part of a pattern to control the other person’s behavior.
- Behaviour 7 might be nice or it might be embarrassing, but it is not necessarily abusive. Comments about attractiveness might sometimes be abusive if for example they are lewd, clearly unwanted or directed at an inappropriate person.
We would suggest that behaviours 1, 4, 6 and 8 are unacceptable.

- Behaviour 1 is manipulative. It is using emotional abuse to get someone to do something that they don’t want to do.

- Behaviour 4 is aggression. While it is OK to have arguments in relationships these shouldn’t involve scaring the other person with threats or verbal aggression.

- Behaviour 6 is controlling behavior. While people may sometimes feel insecure or jealous, they do not have the right to control what the other person does or who they speak to.

- Behaviour 8 is emotional abuse. It makes the other person feel bad about themselves.

Did you and your child agree with each other, and with us, about which behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable?

If your child thought that some unacceptable activities were acceptable, see if you can come to an agreement by discussing how they would feel if they experienced those behaviours.

**Reflection**

Here are some things to think about afterwards:

- Whether you used the tips for good communication.

- Whether you did in the end come to an agreement with your child about what makes for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in a relationship.
Activity 3:
Identify gender stereotypes

Time needed
20 minutes

Aim
This activity explores what we mean by gender stereotypes, how they can affect our thoughts and behaviours, and how we can challenge or resist any that cause harm.

Instructions
Explain stereotypes:

A stereotype is a fixed or over-simplified idea of a particular type of person or thing. With gender, example stereotypes might be that girls are more emotional than boys, that boys are more aggressive than girls, or that girls are more interested in romance than sex.

These differences might be true for some boys and some girls but they cannot be applied as sweeping statements to all girls or all boys.

Next, read the following riddle out to your child.

A father and son are in a terrible car crash. Both are rushed unconscious to hospital. The son requires emergency surgery and the chief surgeon is called from home to perform the operation. Just as the operation is about to begin, the chief surgeon says, “I can’t operate – that boy is my son!”

Ask your child to explain how this could be the case. After you have discussed it (but not before) turn the page.
Did your child see that the chief surgeon could be the son’s mother?

Or were they completely baffled?

Or did they only see a solution where the chief surgeon was a man: perhaps the chief surgeon was the son’s biological father with the unconscious father actually being the step-father?

Now take it in turns to give examples of gender stereotypes. In particular, think about stereotypes that can get in the way of good relationships.

**Try to give four examples each. To get the ball rolling you could suggest some from the list below:**

* A boyfriend might think it is always his responsibility to decide what to do on dates.

* A girl might criticise a boyfriend for showing his emotions, while thinking it’s alright to be emotional herself.

* A boy might act sensitively with his partner when they’re alone but try to tease or dominate her around friends.

* A girl might think that, to get what she wants, she needs to manipulate her partner’s feelings rather than just telling him.

**In each case think about the consequences of these stereotypes. For example the above cases might lead to:**

* The boyfriend feeling exhausted, the partner feeling angry, and both of them having less fun than if they could both suggest ideas.

* The relationship becoming less open, the boy feeling like he can’t express himself, and the girl not knowing how her boyfriend actually feels.

* The partner feeling nervous in group situations and not being able to relax when they are socialising together.

* The girl failing to get what she wants, and the partner losing respect for her.

**Reflection**

Afterwards think through:

* Whether you used the tips for good communication above.

* Whether you could both see that gender stereotypes can unconsciously affect how we think and behave.

* Whether you could both see that gender stereotypes can get in the way of relationships being fun and healthy for young people of any gender.
Activity 4:
Realise what makes you angry

Time needed
10 minutes

Aim
This activity helps you and your child identify the signs of anger and the situations that make you angry.

Instructions
Explain:

Most people feel angry sometimes. But there are good and bad ways to handle it. A good way to deal with feeling angry is to:

- know what makes you angry
- know when you are getting angry
- have some strategies to use to calm down

Do the activities below with your child.

This exercise examines what makes you angry and how you know you are angry. The next exercise involves identifying ways to calm yourself down and deal with anger constructively.

PART A
First your child should read out the sentences below, and you should complete each sentence. You don’t have to write the answers in the space below but you can if you want to.

I get angry when my one of my friends
I get angry when my child
I get angry when my child’s teacher
I get angry when my current or previous partner

Then you should read the sentences below to the child, who should complete each one. You don’t have to write the answers in the space below but you can if you want to.

I get angry when my one of my friends
I get angry when my parent or carer
I get angry when my teacher
I would get angry if someone I was dating
PART B
Next, your child should read out the sentences below, and you should complete each sentence. You don’t have to write the answers in the space below but you can if you want to.

When I get angry I start to

When my child gets angry they start to

And then, you read out the sentences to your child, who should complete each sentence. You don’t have to write the answers in the space below but you can if you want to.

When I get angry I start to

When my parent or carer gets angry they start to

If you need to get the ball rolling you might include signs of anger such as:

• increasing the volume of your voice
• struggling to find the right word to say how you feel
• racing heartbeat
• feeling agitated
• standing up
• becoming sullen or not speaking
• feeling like you might cry.

Reflection
Here are some things to think about afterwards:

• Whether you used the tips for good communication.
• Whether you could both identify things which often make you angry and signs that you are angry.
• Whether these were similar or different for each of you.
Activity 5:  
Create strategies to stay calm

Time needed
10 minutes

Aim
Following on from the last exercise about anger, this one involves identifying ways to calm yourself down.

Instructions
Both of you should write down a list of things you might do to calm down. For example: pausing, taking a few deep breaths, telling the other person that you are starting to feel angry, and politely deciding on a later time to continue the conversation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Child</th>
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</table>

Keep this list and look at it regularly.

Reflection
Here are some things to think about afterwards:

- Whether you used the tips for good communication.
- Whether you and your child could make a list of things that work for each of you.
- Which of these techniques and help you calm down when you start to feel angry.
**Activity 6:**
**Manage conflicts**

**Time needed**
10 minutes

**Aim**
This activity helps you develop strategies that emphasise finding a solution rather than arguing about who’s to blame.

**Instructions**
Read through the suggestions below.

A well-established way of dealing with conflict is to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Stay calm</th>
<th>Using the strategies discussed in Activity 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Express how you feel</td>
<td>Talk face to face.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use honest language that builds understanding, rather than attacking and increasing the anger.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Say “When you (say what behaviour you don’t like), I feel (say how you feel) because (say why you feel that way).”</td>
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<td>For example: “When you try to make all the decisions I feel upset because I feel like you don’t take my views seriously.”</td>
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<td>Make sure your body language doesn’t come across as aggressive.</td>
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<td>3. Understand how the other person feels</td>
<td>Ask open questions so you learn how the other person feels. Don’t assume you know.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Move from the problem to a solution</td>
<td>Think of what concrete steps you can take to avoid the same problem occurring again.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Move on from the current problem and exactly who is to blame for it.</td>
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</table>
Discuss and think of ways that you could use these suggestions to deal with a previous conflict between the two of you as parent/carer and child.

Try using the form of words suggested above to express how you felt during this conflict.

**Reflection**

Here are some things to think about afterwards:

- Whether you used the tips for good communication.
- Whether you and your child could see how this approach might work to take the heat out of conflict and move towards an amicable solution.
Activity 7:
Make a plan for what to do if violence happens

Time needed
20 minutes

Aim
This activity helps you plan what to do if your child ever experiences violence or abuse in a relationship.

Instructions
Together with your child, read through the questions, and after they’ve answered tick the boxes below. Next to each tick, write down who you would seek help from in each of these situations. For example:

- parents
- friends
- teachers
- the police.

What sorts of one-off behaviours might you respond to by challenging your boyfriend or girlfriend?

Name calling?

Controlling behaviour?

Derogatory remarks about family or friends?

Telling lies?

What strategies would you use to challenge your boyfriend or girlfriend about these behaviours?

Expressing how you feel?

Telling them that it must not happen again?

When would you decide that the time for challenging the other person had passed, and instead end the relationship and seek help?

Repeated name calling?

Repeated controlling behaviour?

Repeated derogatory remarks?

Repeated telling lies?
### Continued...

**Physical Abuse**

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<td>Biting</td>
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**Emotional Abuse**

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<td>Intimidation</td>
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**Sexual Abuse**

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Online Abuse

- Spreading rumours
- Unsolicited sending of images
- Sharing private images with others without permission
- Controlling access to social media
- Monitoring someone else’s calls or messages

Reflection

Here are some things to think about afterwards:

- Whether you used the tips for good communication.
- Whether you are satisfied with your plan for how to respond if your child experiences dating and relationship violence.
Where to get more help

We hope you found this booklet useful.

Below is a list of other sources of support that you can access or share with your child if you think these would be useful.

Resources for young people

- **Childline:**
  Help for children and young people. Call 0800 1111

- **Gendered Intelligence:**
  Support for young trans people under the age of 21. Visit genderedintelligence.co.uk

- **Young Minds:**
  Advice and support for young people on mental health. Visit youngminds.org.uk

Resources for anyone

- **The Samaritans:**
  Someone to talk to, available 24 hours a day for confidential, non-judgmental support. Call 116 123 or visit samaritans.org

- **Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline:**
  Providing information, support and referral services for lesbians, gay men and bisexual and trans people, and anyone considering issues around their sexuality or gender identity. Call 0300 330 0630 or visit switchboard.lgbt/help

- **Mind:**
  Offering advice and support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Call 0300 123 3393 or visit mind.org.uk

- **Rape Crisis:**
  Provides information on nearest services for people who have experienced sexual violence at their website (rapecrisis.org.uk) and by phone (0808 802 9999)

Resources for adults

- **NSPCC Helpline:**
  Help for adults who are concerned about a child. Call 0808 800 5000.

- **NSPCC information on talking about difficult topics with children:**
  nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/talking-about-difficult-topics

- **National Domestic Violence Helpline:**
  National service available 24 hours a day for women experiencing domestic violence, and for their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Call 0808 2000 247.

- **Young Minds Parents Helpline:**
  Provides confidential advice for parents concerned about a child’s behaviour, emotional wellbeing or mental health condition. Call 0808 802 5544 or visit youngminds.org.uk

- **Stonewall:**
  Information and support for LGBT communities on their website (stonewall.org.uk) and 08000 50 20 20.
Together we can help children who’ve been abused to rebuild their lives. Together we can protect children at risk. And, together, we can find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

We change the law. We visit schools across the country, helping children understand what abuse is. And, through our Childline service, we give young people a voice when no one else will listen.

But all this is only possible with your support. Every pound you raise, every petition you sign, every minute of your time, will help make sure we can fight for every childhood.

nspcc.org.uk