

ADULTS LISTEN UP!

Tips for Talking with Teens about
Relationships and Dating Violence



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Between Friends
Building a Community Without Domestic Violence

#ADULTSLISTENUP CAMPAIGN

Tips for Talking with Teens about Relationships and Dating Violence

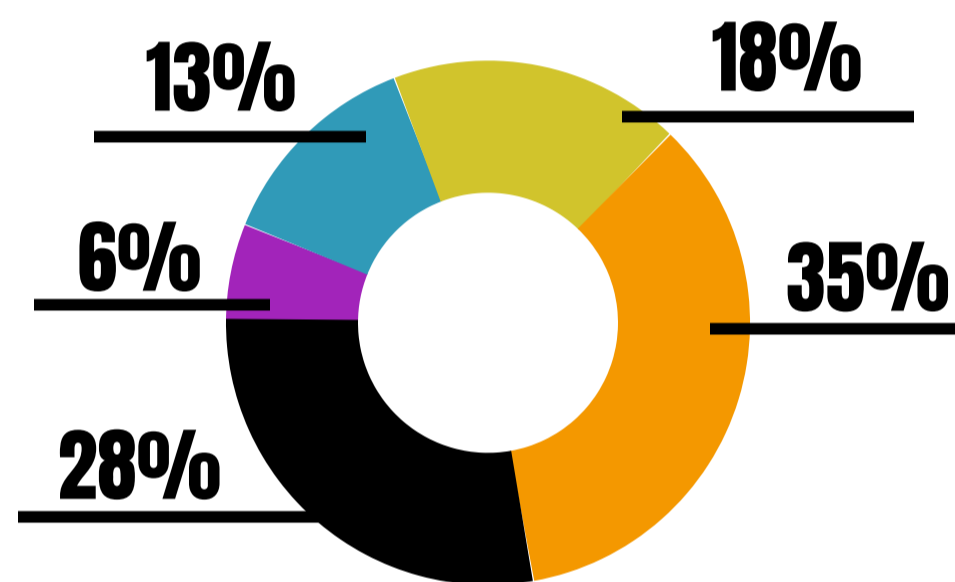
February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM) and in 2019 Between Friends is excited to continue our **#AdultsListenUp Campaign** for the second year in a row!

Because we strongly believe in the power of youth voices, we surveyed over 600 young people in 2018 and asked them to share how they want adults to engage and support them when discussing relationships and dating. Teens responded with feedback on how adults can better support them in talking about healthy, unhealthy, and unsafe relationships.

Here's what teens and young adults had to say!



53% of young people had an adult respond to their conversations about relationships by "not taking them seriously" in the past year at least 1x.



When asked how much they share with parents or caregivers about their relationships (friendship/romantic), teens said:

- 6% share "most everything"
- 18% share "a lot"
- 35% share "some"
- 13% share "nothing"
- 28% did not respond

37%



37% of young people surveyed reported talking to their friends the most about relationships, while only 5% shared that they talked to a trusted adult.

5%

In 2018 teens expressed the value of engaging in intergenerational dialogues to end abusive and unhealthy relationships. For 2019 we're taking **#AdultsListenUp** to the next level by asking teens to share their opinions and stories with adults on how to do just that.

Young people and adults collaborated on this guide, which features tips and suggestions directly from teens on how to better support them by "listening up." You'll find essays detailing their experiences talking to adults about relationships, challenges leaving abusive relationships, and suggestions for how to best guide these conversations in a way that positively impacts them.

16 TIPS FROM TEENS

#AdultsListenUp Campaign with Between Friends

1

CONNECT WITH US BY BEING OPEN AND HONEST.

It's important to connect with young people by being open and honest about your own teenage and adult experiences. It encourages teens to feel safe and comfortable opening up about what's going on with them at school, at home, or if someone is hurting them emotionally and/or physically in a relationship.

2

ENCOURAGE US TO ASK FOR SUPPORT AND ADVICE WHEN WE NEED IT.

Teenagers constantly feel like they are in between the stages of childhood and adulthood. They want to be able to ask a caregiver or adult they trust for advice when they feel like they need it. However, many times they feel like adults are afraid to talk about relationships with them because they want to protect them from experiencing hurt or suffering.

3

OPEN COMMUNICATION HELPS US MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.

If adults choose to put their hesitation or fears aside and listen to what teens have to say, teens will be more likely to open up and discuss their relationship(s) with that adult. When young people are able to communicate with adults regularly in this way, they will develop the skill of talking to trusted adults about challenging conversations when they arise. Teens believe that the act of listening and communicating with them is an important step in helping them make more informed decisions about their lives.

4

TEENS ARE HUMAN LIKE ANYONE ELSE; WE MAKE MISTAKES, TOO.

Adults should have more faith in teens by encouraging healthy risk-taking and allowing them to make mistakes. This is an important skill set in life and as one teen said about young people, "We are allowed to make mistakes; we are human after all."

5

DON'T TELL US "WE'RE TOO YOUNG TO UNDERSTAND."

Teens said that they often felt like adults tell them that they are "too young to understand" certain situations, or that adults look down on them for decisions they've made in the past. Learning how to make decisions and experiencing mistakes is an important life skill teens need to develop to be successful as adults. When adults label teens as "reckless," "disobedient," "ignorant," "irresponsible" and other negative characteristics, teens are less likely to share the decisions that they make, and end up facing more situations alone.

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6

WE JUST WANNA KNOW THAT YOU LOVE US & ARE GONNA BE THERE FOR US.

We were all teenagers once, so we've experienced what it feels like to be looked down at and feel alone. Most likely as a teenager you experienced a tough time or two, so you know how important it can be to have an adult say: "I support you, I love you, and I'll be there for you."

The more adults and caregivers that a teen has, the less likely they are to experience feelings of isolation and loneliness during challenging times. Teens without adult support systems often use isolation to protect themselves from rejection or pain, especially after dealing with a traumatic event like a breakup. Increased isolation in teens also raises the risk of depression.

7

ALLOW US THE SPACE AND TIME TO PROCESS WHEN WE NEED IT.

Building trust with young people is a critical component of relationship-building. A part of that is picking your battles; if you react strongly over something small or criticize a teen's every decision, they may feel like you don't trust them or appreciate them for who they are. If a teen is unwilling to talk to you at the moment, let them know that you care and are willing to wait to talk to them about it when they're ready.

Sometimes giving teens the time and space they ask for allows them the ability to process what they're thinking and feeling. Respecting their needs and requests make it more likely for them to come to you in the future when they need support.

8

WORK ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR FRIENDS.

Social and peer groups are one of the most important and influential parts of a teen's life. So if you want an "in" to their world, try building relationships with their friends. Invite them over for dinner or to hang out, actively listen to them talk about their lives, and offer support when needed. Teens shared with us that accepting their friends is super important to them!

9

TELLING US "YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO DATE" DOESN'T KEEP US FROM DOING IT.

When you tell young people that they're too young to date, that not only keeps them from asking you for support and guidance when they have relationships problems, they then feel like they have to hide that they're in a relationship. One teen shares that they "remember having so many questions and problems that quickly became painful, but I had to hold them inside because I was not allowed to have a boyfriend." Teens are more likely to share what's going on with them when their age isn't treated as a negative factor.

16 TIPS FROM TEENS

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10

WE NEED EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW TO HAVE THEM. THIS MEANS TALKING TO US ABOUT CONSENT.

A lot of parents talk to their kids about sex, also known as "the talk." When it comes to consent or how to have a healthy relationship, those conversations are not as common. That leaves young people to figure things out on their own, through examples in their own lives, the media, and their friends. When adults and parents are more intentional about teaching young people about healthy relationships and consent, they are empowered to make informed decisions about themselves and their lives overall.

11

YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH US HELP BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE.

When adults communicate with young people about healthy relationships and dating violence, regardless of their own relationship experiences, it reduces the risk of generational violence, or helps to "break the cycle of violence," with that one conversation.

In addition to these conversations, adults must also look at their own relationships and the impact that those have on young people. Breaking the cycle of violence is an act that takes all of us examining and understanding the kind of relationships we have.

12

SOME OF US HAVE BEEN IN UNHEALTHY OR UNSAFE RELATIONSHIPS. WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THESE.

Sometimes teens find themselves in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, but they don't always know what to do to change it. It can be really difficult when they have no idea what to change or how to change it.

As adults, we need to let teens think about, process, and understand their relationship dynamics. They might need time before they ask an adult for support. Teens want you to know they understand that leaving an unhealthy or unsafe relationship takes time. Letting go and moving on can be dangerous, scary, and hard; it's not helpful for adults to try and take control of the situation by telling them what they should do.

Having the support of an adult can make all the difference in helping teens let go of or leave an unhealthy/unsafe relationship. So listen to them, ask what they need, and be there to support them through the process. Above everything, be open-minded and non-judgmental to the information they share with you; this will encourage them to come to you in the future.

16 TIPS FROM TEENS

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13

SOMETIMES THE MOST SUPPORTIVE ADULT ISN'T A PARENT, BUT A TEACHER OR CARING ADULT IN OUR COMMUNITY.

Teens talk about feeling like adults don't always take them seriously, and because of that it can be hard to truly express themselves and find the support system they need. Having support at home, at school, and in communities is critical to positive youth development!

With the help and support of adults in these positive environments, teens gain a sense of security, expand their minds, and grow more comfortable in themselves as people.

14

WHEN YOU TRULY LISTEN, WE FEEL HEARD.

When an adult notices a young person going through a difficult time and listens to them, it can make all the difference. Engaging in dialogue about what's going on in their lives lessens feelings of isolation, hesitation, and self-doubt. It encourages teens to find their voice and shows them that they matter, especially if they don't have other adults to talk with.

15

WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES AND HOW YOU DEALT WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS WITH RELATIONSHIPS.

This important tip came up again and again with young people! One of the main ways teens wanted support from adults consistently was for adults to be willing to talk about their own experiences. When adults share their own experiences as teens and adults with dating, healthy, unhealthy or unsafe relationships, not only are teens able to relate more to their experiences, you put them on the same level as another person dealing with this stuff.

Teens want you to share your experiences and stories organically, and allow them to talk about theirs as well. Respect the decisions they've made in the past and coach them through making decisions for the future.

16

ADULTS: LISTEN UP!

Adults, above all, please know that taking the time to believe in the power of youth voices, trusting their capabilities, and encouraging them to voice their experiences with relationships has a tremendous positive impact on their lives!

TEEN ESSAY #1

Ruby , College Freshman

A lot of parents tell their children about sex, which is also known as “the talk.” When it comes to consent or how to have a healthy relationship, those conversations are harder to find. That leaves young people to figure things out through examples in their own lives, the media, and their friends. I have never had an example of what a healthy relationship was, much less an adult willing to tell me what one was. When it came to consent, let’s just say the message I received was that I couldn’t wear anything too provocative because that would be “asking for it.” Of course, other young people will have different situations and experiences, but take a look at the examples given to us in the media: rapists getting six-month prison sentences, partners verbally and physically abusing each other, and toxic relationships being romanticized. These are all real consequences of adults not having well-informed conversations with their young people. Adults must be more intentional when teaching young people about healthy relationships and consent.

I remember starting my first serious relationship when I was 14 years old and having to hide it from my parents because I was not allowed to have a boyfriend. I remember trying to do the opposite of what my parents’ relationship was before they split up, but also not having any guidance on how to do that. I remember having so many questions and problems that quickly became painful for me, but I had to hold these inside because I was not allowed to have a boyfriend. One time, my mom actually walked in on me crying and I had to lie and say it was because of a sad book I was reading. I’m sure no parent wants their child to have to go through everything by themselves. It’s so easy to write young people off because they couldn’t possibly be going through anything that serious, but this has real implications that will ultimately harm the person in question.

Adults communicating with their children, regardless of how healthy their own relationships are, could potentially break cycles of generational violence with just a simple conversation. In addition, if it could be helped, adults need to set a better example of what a healthy relationship is, because the process of internalizing is fast, but the healing and recovery process is slow. I also recommend adults challenge themselves to be more comfortable speaking to young people about difficult subjects, such as consent and healthy relationships. We need to feel safe enough to go to adults when facing an issue.

Conversations about consent and healthy relationships are not happening nearly as much as they should. From the point of view of a young person, I believe that adults need to do a better job to allow these conversations to flow naturally.

The importance of these conversations cannot be stressed enough because they will dictate the type of life your young person lives. Nobody wants their child to be the aggressor or the victim, so take the time to talk to your young person and make sure they know you are there and know the right way to treat a fellow human being.



I have never had an example of what a healthy relationship was, much less an adult willing to tell me what one was. When it came to consent, let’s just say the message I received was that I couldn’t wear anything too provocative because that would be ‘asking for it.’



TEEN ESSAY #2

Kayla, 11th Grade

Over 50% of the students surveyed last year in the #AdultsListenUp campaign reported that adults had not taken them seriously at some point in their lives. As a teenager, I do have some experience with adults making me feel like a child who does not understand life. Most of our issues as teens seem to mainly be that we are underestimated because we are told “You’re too young to feel that,” “You’re just a kid it’s fine,” and “You think your life is hard? Just wait till you’re an adult.” Those are just a couple to name. Studies show that depression affects about 20% of adolescents by the time they become adults. I believe having an adult present and willing to help with our issues would decrease the rate of teen depression.

I deal with having multiple adults making me feel like my problems aren’t significant enough to give my attention to, due to me being a minor. I do understand that I am still young and all, but I also consider that no matter how old I am my problems are still significant. In some households, adolescents fear confiding in their guardians or other adult figures in their life due to being judged, looked down upon, or being a disappointment. Michael Sayman says: “Many adults will dismiss our thoughts as ‘hormonal.’ Often times our teachers will assume we don’t have the attention span to hold a meaningful conversation. And if we ever try to dispute a claim or attempt to explain how to do something that might work differently than someone older than us thinks it would, we could get dismissed before even opening our mouths. Having your potential underestimated by adults due to age is a very common issue most adolescents share.”

A friend of mine once told me a story about how her mother got a new MacBook Air. Her mother was struggling with how to set up her Apple ID, and as she attempted to help her mom she was automatically shut down because she was “only a teenager.” I don’t believe that was a valid excuse to shut down help; most people need to understand that even though we are younger we are still capable of understanding most topics. Studies show that friends and friendships give teenagers a sense of belonging, a feeling of being valued, help with developing confidence, a sense of security and comfort that comes from being with others going through similar experiences, and a social group to do new things with, especially things that are different from what families do. I believe most teenagers tend to lack the support of adult figures due to being scared of being underestimated and judged.

My advice to parents with teenagers: pick your battles wisely, build trust, don’t push them to talk to you at the very moment, let them know you care and are willing to talk to them, and invite their friends over. Picking your battles wisely is a key tip because if you flip out over something little, or criticize their every movement or decision, then they will feel like you don’t trust or appreciate them for who they are. Building trust means a lot to teenagers nowadays, and if you constantly badger and punish them for every little thing, then they are 1) most likely to rebel, and 2) won’t tell you anything.

It may be hard to understand but we know we are still young and make mistakes; we are not perfect! If you see teenagers upset or in a bad mood, do not pry or push them to talk about it! Sometimes we need time to process what is going on and it will only make teens more upset if you force it out of them.

I also think inviting their friends over for dinner is important because it shows that you want to be a part of their social life and you accept the friends they have. Finally, do not push them to open up. It is important to let them know that you are here for them to listen and to talk to them, but know that they will open up when they are comfortable to talk.

As a last thought, it is very important for adolescents to have adult-like figures in their lives to be a good support system. Yes, having friends to talk to is beneficial, but there is nothing like being supported by an adult in your life. Even though we are still young doesn't mean we do not know about life: adolescents should not fear being underestimated. I say we stop putting teens down and start being more supportive and open to new suggestions.



My advice to parents with teenagers: pick your battles wisely, build trust, don’t push them to talk to you at the very moment, let them know you care and are willing to talk to them, and invite their friends over.



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TEEN ESSAY #3

Cindy, 11th Grade

Being a high school student in the 21st century, it has become more difficult to truly express yourself to others around you. I say this, being a vegan and an animal rights activist, because whenever I share with others my goals and opinions, I am usually not taken seriously, ignored, or made fun of. Whether it be adults or other students, I experience this almost every time I have tried to share information about animal rights.

My only support was from my mom and sisters at home. It was not until I met my high school AP Photography teacher, Mrs. G, that I began to feel a similar security at school. Taking an advanced photography course was a challenge itself, but with the help and support she provided, our class created amazing work with open minds. I grew comfortable in this positive environment and felt it was time to share my views.

With different perspectives than others, I had finally found a support system after all these years. With photography and family, I was able to support the movement feeling secure. My mom was a great help with the adjustment of my diet and lifestyle. Small victories like these remind me that anything can happen; changes can be made. Nearing the end of the school year, College Board requires a portfolio to be submitted including sections on "Concentration" and "Breadth," both made up of twelve individual photos. They are expected to show growth, variety, and skill through the collection of images.



Being a high student in the 21st century, it has become more difficult to truly express yourself around others.



Adults: your voice and support could largely impact and change someone's life for the better. Listen to our ideas, and offer us support so we can prevent others from being silenced.



I had been having difficulty thinking of what to focus on for my Concentration. Ms. G noticed and helped me out. She asked me what my passion was. She listened and shared artists and photographers who use their work to promote the animal rights movement and spread awareness. We brainstormed ideas of how to incorporate veganism and animal rights into the images. I felt like I was finally climbing out of a hole I had fallen into of silence, hesitance, and self-doubt. I dug myself into that hole during all those years my voice was silenced or ignored. Finally, I was free, and I was me.

Students everywhere around the world share this struggle of showing who they truly are and what they believe in. It is important to be open to all people and their cause. Adults: your voice and support could largely impact and change someone's life for the better. Listen to our ideas, share with us your ideas, and offer us support so we can prevent others from being silenced.

TEEN ESSAY #4

Jeanise, 8th Grade

Alone. Anyone and everyone can feel alone, but teenagers feel that they have no one by their side, even when there is someone right in front of them. Teenagers reach out; they try to receive the support that they need from any adult. The only thing they get at the end is disappointment, or the adults tell them that they are unaware of what they are saying. This is the part in a teenager's life when they give up; they won't speak to anyone about what really goes on in their head. They won't say that they feel lost most of the time in school and at home, or that the person that they are in a relationship with is hurting them emotionally or/and physically. I should know; I am a teenager.



I am not a parent or an adult, but I do believe that parents are afraid of teenage relationships because they never want the person that they love more than anything to suffer. If adults choose to put their trepidation aside and listen to what teenagers have to say, then teenagers may want to create a trusting and honest relationship with that adult.



There have been many situations in my life in which I could've spoken up, but I choose to keep all the amazing, terrifying, and wonderful feelings to myself. Teenagers are young adults but also children. They want to believe that they can ask for your advice when they need it the most. Even though they are becoming amazing people in society, teenagers still need an adult's guidance to become themselves in the real world. I am not a parent or an adult, but I do believe that parents are afraid of teenage relationships because they never want the person that they love more than anything to suffer.

If adults choose to put their trepidation aside and listen to what teenagers have to say, then teenagers may want to create a trusting and honest relationship with that adult. This indicates that teenagers will communicate more with the adult that they believe in and will make better decisions when any difficult situation comes their way. Adults may have to face their fears, but their children will feel safer in the comfort that adults place around them.

Adults have always said that people our age, teenagers, are too young to understand certain situations that adults go through. Human beings are known for being very curious about the environment that they live in. Teenagers are always looked down on and are labeled as a single story. A single story is the first thing that people see in a certain group such as teenagers. Adults generally think that teenagers are reckless, disobedient, ignorant, irresponsible, and any other negative things you can think of. Since adults think of us in these terrible and false stereotypes, teenagers have to face these situations on their own based on curiosity. This only leads to an unhealthy relationship between teenagers and adults. Adults should have more faith that teenagers will make a mistake but will get right back up and learn from their decision. Adults should let teenagers make mistakes and learn from them, so they know what they may want in the future. We are allowed to make mistakes; we are human after all.

Adults: You were once teenagers, you've experienced what it feels like to be looked down on and to feel alone. If you are reading this message, then you know a lot of teenagers going through tough times are just looking to find themselves and happiness. Look at the person that you have raised and talk to them. Tell them that you will be there till your last breath; tell them that you love them till the sun and moon dies; and just listen. Listen to the feeling that is in their tone of voice. Listen to every word that comes out of their mouth because one day you may not see the beautiful, smart, and courageous child you have raised.

TEEN ESSAY #5

Angelo, Grade Not Disclosed

I was once told that I needed to change things in my life in order to have a better life. I was in an abusive relationship and had unhealthy friendships. I thought to myself, “obviously I need to change something,” because I was really unhappy with my life, but I had no idea exactly what to change or how to change it.

It took making many mistakes to even get a glimpse of what needed to be changed, but with how bad things were going in my life, I knew things needed to change a lot. I then started to really consider what was the most important thing that I needed to change first. I came to a simple conclusion: I needed to change who I hung around with and spent my time with. Then, I started to separate myself from friends. This was very difficult because these friends were almost family for so many years. However, I did what most people would not do—I let them go. I stopped going to parties with my friends and started staying in more to do homework. When they would go out and ride around, often getting into trouble, I would make up an excuse to stay in. Yes it was hard, but it needed to be done. That was only the beginning!



I was in an abusive relationship and had unhealthy friendships.

I thought to myself 'obviously I need to change something' because I was really unhappy with my life...



I then realized that the girl I was seeing at the time had to go, but at first that is not how I saw it. I made many excuses about why I didn't have to stop talking to and dating her. The first one was we really were not together, and we didn't have a label, so I thought it didn't matter if I was just “talking” to her. She was just a friend, so nothing was wrong with what I was doing, even though we were doing more than talking. I had noticed that this woman was toxic for many reasons. I am not saying I was a saint either, but what I am saying is that we had a very toxic relationship. We fought almost every time we saw each other. Even though I knew I had to change my relationship with people around me, I could not get this change also applied to this girl.

Too many people think unhealthy relationships are all bad and that's not true. We had a lot of good times together laughing and flirting. Just being together seemed good—well to me it did. I then asked myself, “What is good in this relationship?” and there were only very few things. Most of it was negative. We fought, lied to each other, called each other names, and made each other feel worthless. She had slapped me and I thought to myself this is what girls do when they get mad. I then found out that I was completely wrong. I found out that a relationship can only get worse from there and then because of my anger towards her, I almost got her pregnant. After we broke up, she started posting really negative things about me and even tried to get me jumped. In return, I slept with her one more time just to show her I could be with her then drop her. Not only was that wrong of me to do that to her, but we didn't use protection and I was almost tied to her forever over one bad mistake. That was wrong, I needed to let her go and I did. It was hard at first because I wanted to talk to her, as I had talked to this girl every day. Some days I would really miss her, but it needed to happen.

Letting her go was very hard for me. It took several times to completely let her go but it was the best thing to do for both of us. Yes, letting go of this girl and some other people around me was hard but it worked. I surrounded myself with good people and I started to create healthy relationships with others. I am now a 4.0 student in college and an active member in an honor society. After all is said and done, letting go of unhealthy relationships is the result of taking advice from a supportive adult.

ADULTS LISTEN UP WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR TEEN AUTHORS!

Angelo | Cindy | Jeanise | Kayla | Ruby

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