

# PARENT TIP SHEET

## HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD?

Knowing or even suspecting that your child is in an unhealthy relationship can be both frustrating and frightening. But as a parent, you're critical in helping your child develop healthy relationships and you can provide life-saving support if they are in an abusive relationship. Remember dating abuse can occur in any relationship regardless of the gender identities involved. As a parent, your instinct is to help your child in whatever way you can. Here are some tips to keep in mind when trying to help your child who is experiencing dating abuse:

**LISTEN AND GIVE SUPPORT:** It can be difficult to open up about abuse, and many teens fear that their parents will overreact, blame them, or be angry. Try to be supportive and non-accusatory. Ask your child how they want to be supported and how you can help.

**ACCEPT WHAT YOUR CHILD IS TELLING YOU:** Showing skepticism or disbelief can make your child feel unsupported and isolated. Believe them when they share their experience.

**SHOW CONCERN:** Try saying something like, "You don't deserve to be treated like this, and I want you to know this is not 'normal' relationship behavior. I am concerned for your safety."

**TALK ABOUT THE BEHAVIORS, NOT THE PERSON:** Instead of saying, "Your partner is controlling and I don't like them," you can say, "I don't like that your partner texts you to see

where you are so often. How do you feel when you get those back to back messages asking where you are?"

**AVOID ULTIMATUMS:** Resist the urge to say, "If you don't break up with them now, you are grounded." This cuts them off from support, and they may be less likely to trust that you're a safe person to talk to in the future.

**BE PREPARED:** Educate yourself on dating abuse and ask your child to learn about abuse dynamics with you. Read articles together and then ask for their thoughts.

**DECIDE ON NEXT STEPS TOGETHER:** Ultimately, the decision about next steps will need to come from them, but you can still play a role in helping them identify safe options. Help them find additional support, like a counselor or a loveisrespect advocate.

