Dating violence is a pattern of emotional, verbal, sexual, and/or physical abuse intended to control a girlfriend or boyfriend. Most victims are female, but females can be abusers as well. According to loveisrespect.org, one in three adolescents experience verbal or physical abuse from a dating partner. The rates are the same for LGBTQ couples. Even though about 72% of 8th and 9th graders state they are “dating,” this national problem is rarely discussed. Only 33% of teenage victims tell someone else what is happening to them.

Dating violence occurs among adults as well. In February 2014, a cell phone video surfaced showing football player Ray Rice dragging his unconscious fiancée, Janay Palmer, out of an elevator. He was later charged with aggravated assault. The NFL officially suspended Rice for two games and there was immediate criticism that his punishment was too light. Several months later, a video taken from the security camera in the elevator showed Ray punching Janay in the face and knocking her out. The Ravens fired Ray because the video showed that his original story distorted the truth.

Abusers often accuse victims of triggering their anger, implying that the victim “caused” the violence. This tactic makes victims blame themselves and discourages them from seeking medical or legal help. In fact, Janay publicly apologized for her part in the attack, saying that she had “agitated” Ray. Many commentators were critical of Janay and her statement, wondering why she hadn’t left Ray and pressed charges against him.

Imagine that, as you are leaving the movies, you happen to see your friend being yelled at in a threatening manner by her partner. You pause to make eye contact with her, but she won’t look at you, so you leave. The next day you ask your friend about her partner’s behavior. She says, “It’s just like that sometimes. Don’t worry.” You recall seeing some bruising on her arms that she had trouble explaining. After witnessing the episode at the movie theater, you are wondering if she is being abused.

What would you do in this situation? Is it your responsibility to report your suspicions even if your friend denies being abused?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS  *and alternate parts of speech

**assault** (verb) to attack suddenly or violently

→ *Sample Sentence:* At first, neither girl could believe that the beloved pop music singer physically assaulted his girlfriend.

→ *Turn and Talk:* What should happen in school when a student physically assaults another student?

*assault* (noun) an attack

→ *Sample Sentence:* Some gun owners feel that any law that limits access to guns is an assault on their freedom.

→ *Turn and Talk:* Is the government reading your emails and text messages an assault on your privacy? Explain.

**abuse** (verb) to inflict harm

→ *Sample Sentence:* One in three adolescents is physically, emotionally, or verbally abused by a dating partner.

→ *Turn and Talk:* How can someone verbally abuse another person?

*abuse* (noun) harmful treatment

→ *Sample Sentence:* Erika became a vegetarian because she does not want to contribute to animal abuse.

→ *Turn and Talk:* Is paying employees a low wage a form of abuse? Explain.

**trigger** (verb) to make something happen

→ *Sample Sentence:* Sometimes people blame the victim of dating violence by saying he or she did something that triggered the assault.

→ *Turn and Talk:* What is something that could trigger a bully to physically or verbally harm someone?

*trigger* (noun) something that causes something else to happen

→ *Sample Sentence:* Pictures of snakes were a trigger for Marie: Upon seeing them she became nervous and upset.

→ *Turn and Talk:* What foods might act as triggers for people with nut allergies?

**distort** (verb) to misrepresent or give false meaning to

→ *Sample Sentence:* The pop star’s attitude toward women and violence may have been distorted due to his upbringing.

→ *Turn and Talk:* Why might a candidate running for office distort the truth about his or her past? Discuss with your partner.

**physical** (adjective) of or involving the body

→ *Sample Sentence:* Bruises and broken bones are evidence of physical abuse.

→ *Turn and Talk:* Name some sports that are more physical than golf.
DO THE MATH
Many dating violence victims have distorted ideas about relationships. They may think that jealous behavior and even physical assaults are ways of showing love. They may blame themselves for triggering verbal or physical abuse. Violence prevention programs urge teens to recognize that mean and controlling behavior has no place in a healthy relationship and can lead to more serious abuse. Loveisrespect.org provides the following dating violence statistics:

- Each year, 1 in 3 adolescents is verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by a dating partner.
- 1 in 10 students report being physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend.

Option 1: What percentage of students have been physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend?

A. 10%
B. 15%
C. 20%
D. 25%

Option 2: In a group of 5 students, what is the likelihood that there are NO victims of any form of abuse by a dating partner?

Discussion Question: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 72% of 8th and 9th graders date. In your opinion, do students understand healthy relationships or do they have distorted ideas about how dating partners should act? Do students know which behaviors constitute abuse? Which do you think is a more common problem: physical assault or emotional abuse?
Mr. Seemy’s class is discussing dating violence. He mentions that some researchers think this kind of **abuse** stems from **distorted** ideas about gender. “Some young men believe that ‘being a man’ means solving arguments with **physical** force. These men might not know how to solve their problems with words, and then a disagreement can **trigger** an **assault**.”

“I don’t think male teenagers are like that,” said Pedro, “even if they become more like that as they grow older. And I have an idea of how I might collect some data!”

**Here is Pedro’s plan for his exploration:**

**Procedure:** On 10 cards, write down 5 words that are connected to violence and 5 words that are neutral. Ask male teenagers to sort the cards into categories as quickly as possible. The 4 categories are **male**, **female**, **both**, and **neither**. Then ask men in their 20s, 30s, and 40s to do the same thing. Compare results to see if older men place more of the violent words in the “male” category than younger men do.

How might Pedro use the Venn diagram as part of his investigation?

**If Pedro asked you for advice to make his investigation more scientific, what would you tell him?**
DEBATE THE ISSUE

Think back to the scenario presented at the beginning of this unit, where you suspected that your friend was being abused by her partner. Considering what you have learned about dating violence, what is the best way to help your friend?

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A  Try to convince her to leave the relationship.

B  Try to convince her to talk to the school counselors.

C  Tell her parents.

D  Call the police and report the suspected abuse.

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

I believe that...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

I agree with you, but...
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

assault | abuse | trigger | distort | physical