**DaySpring Villa**

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For most of us, it’s difficult to imagine our first dating experiences involving violence. Dating, after all, is a rite of passage we keep stowed in our memory bookshelf, where visions of our youth and perhaps a clumsy first kiss live forever.

But as domestic violence among adults has slowly emerged from the shadows, so too has the reality of teen dating violence. The latest study from the National Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative found that teenage girls are actually at a higher risk for intimate partner abuse than adults. What’s more, one in five high school girls reports being physically or sexually assaulted during a date. One in three teen girls reports knowing someone who has been hit, slapped, punched, kicked or raped during a date.

So, has something changed in the teen dating dynamic that has made violence a new phenomenon, or has the reality of this abuse always existed? The answer, says Wilma Lively, executive director of DaySpirng Villa, is complicated.

“We know that nearly one-half of adult sex offenders committed their first sexual offenses before the age of 18. Whether those offenses occurred during a date or not, we don’t know,” she says. “On the other hand, today’s teenagers tend to view dating quite differently than teens in years or even decades past. They are more in tune with what they view on television or listen to in music—images and lyrics that often glorify love to another. They also have other modes of communication like the internet and phone texting, so a one-on-one date can carry a lot more expectation than it used to.”

Much like adult domestic violence, teen dating violence extends across all races, religions and socioeconomic backgrounds; and just like its counterpart is based on control. While teen males can also be victims, they are less likely to report occurrences.

According to the study, female victims between the ages of 16 and 19 were most likely assaulted by a former or current boyfriend, while 81 percent of parents surveyed either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don’t know if it’s an issue. A majority of parents, some 54 percent, report they had not spoken to their child about dating violence.

“Summer tends to be the dating season for teens, so parents not only need to be aware of dating violence but they should also talk to their kids about it, both girls and boys,” Lively says. “Domestic violence is a learned behavior, so in order to prevent our younger people from becoming abusers or victims they need to hear from an adult that any kind of abuse is an unacceptable behavior.”