

Digital forms of dating violence are on the rise—what school nurses need to know

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Author Jeff Temple. Credit: The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

Many teens experience physical or sexual abuse within their romantic

relationships and now dating violence can also be perpetrated digitally by harassing, stalking or controlling a romantic partner via technology and social media.

School nurses are often some of the first to identify such problems and play an active role in preventing them from happening in the first place. They are also in a natural position to act as first responders for victims of an abusive romantic relationship. Information on how school nurses can help these teens experiencing cyber abuse is described in a recent article in *NASN School Nurse*.

As online and offline forms of [dating violence](#) often go together, it is critical that school nurses are able to identify different types of digital dating violence. Digital dating abuse was also found to be associated with online bullying.

"School nurses can prepare for this task by being aware and making others aware that online and offline behaviors are becoming increasingly blurred in teens' lives and that digital dating abuse may be a warning sign of traditional abuse," said Jeff Temple, co-author of the paper and The University of Texas Medical Branch associate professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology. "Most importantly, school nurses can engage in conversations with students about digital dating abuse, safe Internet use and healthy relationships, letting students know that they can come to them if they encounter online or offline dating violence."

In order to provide credible advice to teens, Temple says that it's important that school nurses are able to speak adolescents' language. They should become familiar and stay connected with advances in technology and popular [social media](#) apps.

Cyber dating abuse conversations could focus on what constitutes

healthy communication within a romantic relationship and what signals could lead to abuse.

"Potential red flags can be identified, such as sharing pin codes and passwords to phones and apps, excessive contacting or demanding a partner to send a picture of where they are or whom they are with to 'prove' that they are telling the truth," Temple said. "Because of their inexperience with [romantic relationships](#), teens might not know how to appropriately cope with feelings of uncertainty about their relationship and may resort to monitoring as a coping mechanism."

Also, some teens do not always identify abusive behaviors as such, instead considering them to be simply annoying.

Previous investigations have found that 26 percent of surveyed [high school students](#) reported being a victim of cyber dating abuse and 12 percent reported having perpetrated cyber dating abuse. Of these students, 9 percent of the [teens](#) reported that they were both victim and perpetrator of cyber dating abuse.

In previous studies, Temple also has found that victims of cyber dating abuse are more likely to binge drink, be sexual active, and participate in risky behavior.

Other authors include Joris Van Ouytsel, Michel Walrave and Koen Ponnet from the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Provided by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

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