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YVONNE GALE: MY TURN: Teenagers: Beware Violent Relationships

They lived in different counties in North Carolina and died on different days in 2008. But Marisha, Chelsea, Skye, Dana, Roschelle, and Kelly had something in common.

They were all teenagers killed by their boyfriends with either a gun or a knife. The youngest was 14; the oldest was 19.

Feb. 2-6 is National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week. The Department of Justice reports that one in 10 teen girls experiences physical violence in her dating relationship. Abuse is not limited to hitting; girls are yelled at, threatened, called obscenities, stalked, harassed, and coerced into sex.

Teenagers often resent their parents' questions and concerns about their dating partners because they are asserting their independence, but parents have a responsibility to inquire about their child's dating partners. Alarming patterns of behavior -- such as their daughters or sons justifying spending every moment of free time with their dating partners, having unexplained bruises, or constantly receiving text messages and/or phone calls from their dating partners -- may indicate an abusive or potentially abusive relationship.

One of the first indications of an abusive relationship is when one partner tries to control the other partner in every aspect of his or her life, such as dictating what the person can do and wear, who the person can associate with, and where the person can go. Other warning signs are verbal abuse, which includes name-calling, insults, and excessive criticism, jealousy, becoming angry very quickly, and consistently communicating threats.

Parents can educate themselves and their dating teenagers about these warning signs. Communicating threats is not only against the law, but is dangerous and should be taken seriously. Any threat, whether it be electronically sent, written, or spoken, should be reported to school authorities and to the police.

If a person feels in immediate danger, the person should call 911. Having early conversations about safety issues and acceptable boundaries of behavior

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encourages dating teens to recognize abusive behavior and seek help before it is too late.



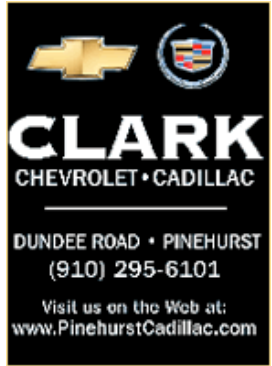
Friend to Friend is a domestic violence and sexual abuse agency located in Moore County. The agency's crisis line, 910-947-3333, is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by trained staff members. The caller can remain anonymous.

Staff members listen to and validate the caller's fears, concerns, and feelings; they also offer options to help the caller. Teenagers under 18 can come in with a parent to obtain a restraining order (a 50-B) against an abusive dating partner or obtain a 50-C order against a stalker. A teenager is not required to have a parent to accompany her or him if the individual desires counseling.

Another option for parents and teenagers is the National Teen Dating Hotline - - 866-331-9474 -- which was started in February 2007. The hotline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with trained professionals and young adult advocates who run the hotline and provide support.

When children are little, responsible and caring parents are focused and committed to ensure that they are safe from harm, danger, and any kind of abuse. Teenagers need their parents' commitment and attention just as much.

Yvonne Gale is the community education management at Friend to Friend, a United Way Agency. Questions and/or comments can be sent to her via e-mail at ygale2@hotmail.com.



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