



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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# *Understanding Adolescent Brain Development in Teen Dating Violence Cases*

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# Welcome

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- Faculty & Staff
- About OVW Training and Technical Assistance for Courts on Dating Violence



Training and Technical Assistance for Courts on  
*DATING VIOLENCE*

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2018-TA-AX-K033 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed by program faculty and in program materials, including curriculum outlines, PowerPoint slides, handouts, and other program documents, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

# Format and Technology

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This session will be:

- Challenging
- Informative
- Opportunity for peer-to-peer learning

# Ground Rules

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Goal: productive and safe space

What are some ground rules that will help us achieve this goal?

- ✓ Mutual respect
- ✓ Assuming goodwill
- ✓ Listening with curiosity
- ✓ Being physically present and attentive
- ✓ Asking questions and offering comments
- ✓ Confidentiality

# Objectives

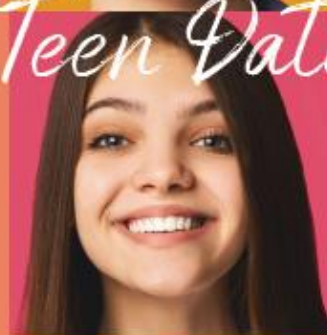
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As a result of this webinar, you will be better able to:

- Understand how normative adolescent brain development creates risks for teen dating violence
- Understand how exposure to violence increases some of the risks
- Understand how adolescent brain development creates opportunities for relationship-based intervention in TDV

# Technical Assistance Brief

Applying an Understanding of



**Adolescent  
Brain  
Development** in

*Teen Dating Violence Cases*



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# Teen Dating Violence

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20% of youth have experienced teen dating  
violence



# What does TDV include?

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*Physical:* Use or threat of physical force

- Examples: Hitting, kicking, shoving, attacking with a weapon

*Sexual:* Limiting individual's sexual agency

- Examples: Unwanted sexual contact (kissing, touching), forced sex, sexual coercion, restricting access to birth control (removes agency from own sexual health)

*Emotional & Psychological:* Manipulation, controlling partner's behaviour & agency, and undermining/belittling

- Examples: Insulting, threatening, monitoring, isolating, restricting access to friends, and stalking

# Dating then...

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# Dating now...

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# What does TDV include?

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*Emotional & Psychological:* Manipulation, controlling partner's behaviour & agency, and undermining/belittling

- Examples: Insulting, threatening, monitoring, isolating, restricting access to friends, and stalking

*Cyber:* Using technology to engage in dating violence

- Examples: Monitoring (e.g. using social media), threatening or harassing online, sexting coercion

# Teen dating violence can lead to...

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- Physical and emotional impacts
- Long-term negative consequences
- Challenges in adult relationships

# Teen dating violence myths

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1. Teen dating relationships are typically too short for violence to be a problem
2. Teen dating violence is only serious if it is physical
3. Adults and peers know when a relationship is violent
4. Youth who are experiencing violence know how to get help
5. Dating violence only occurs in certain types of relationships

# Thinking about Adolescence...

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What are typical characteristics and behaviors of adolescents?

# Typical adolescence

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Rapid physical and cognitive growth – including the brain!

Emerging focus on intimate relationships

Role of peer group

Identity exploration



# Typical Adolescence

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Of those characteristics and behaviors, what might make them vulnerable to dating violence?

# Participant Question

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Polling Question: When does rapid brain development stop?

- Age 3
- Age 6
- Age 15
- Age 24

# Adolescent brain development



# Question

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What connections did you make regarding kindness and adolescent brain development?

# Opportunities of Adolescence

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Period of tremendous neuroplasticity

Opportunity to learn new ways of being and relating

Opportunity for new skill acquisition – can contribute to rewiring the brain!

Interest in relationships creates engagement

# What Gets in the Way?

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# Impact of Trauma on the Brain



# Question

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What surprised you most about the impact of trauma on the adolescent brain?



# Impact of Trauma

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Fight or flight pathways become reinforced

Chronic exposure is particularly harmful

Fewer connections in the pre-frontal cortex

Safe and healthy relationships are key to strengthening underdeveloped areas

Brain continues to wire and rewire throughout adolescence

# Adolescent Brain Development is a Two-Sided Coin!

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Time of rapid growth and learning

Versus

Thinking and reasoning parts are the last to develop

# Implications for Intervening

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# Youth process information best when not activated

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The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is still under development!

When over-activated, PFC gets circumvented

Best able to access PFC when in a calmer state

# Overly punitive responses do not lead to learning among adolescents

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Reward centers in the brain are much more sensitive than risk-assessment or punishment centers

Punishment will not lead to true learning - > remember, the brain rewires through experience

# Effective interventions are rooted in positive, healthy relationships with service providers and informal helpers

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Human brains are wired for relational learning

Relational contexts can even change the expression of genes

Experiencing positive relationships provides important modelling of new skills and opportunities to practice

# Youth need opportunities to learn healthy relationship skills

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Relationship skills can be taught in the same manner as other skills

Show difference between healthy (and effective!) and unhealthy relationship behaviors

Break complex skills down into small pieces, practices, feedback, especially with other youth

Importance of healthy peer relationships

# Example: HRP-E in Youth Justice Settings



## Healthy Relationships Plus Program - Enhanced

A Fourth R small group program to promote healthy relationships and positive mental health enhanced for vulnerable youth and youth in the justice system

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# Healthy Relationships Plus- Enhanced

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- ✓ Relationship-focused
  - ✓ Strengths-based
    - ✓ Skills-focused

# What is Healthy Relationships Plus-Enhanced?

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- Small group intervention
- 16 hours
- Attuned to trauma and higher risk contexts
- Flexibility around delivery
- Audience: youth typically 13-18, but has been used outside that range

# Fourth R Skills

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Active Listening

Providing Support

Assertive  
Communication

Apologizing

Delay, Refusal,  
Negotiation

Ending a  
Relationship

Help Seeking

Coping Skills

# Evaluation Results

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Mixed methods quasi-experimental  
evaluation

Improvements in assertiveness, self-control,  
empathy, problem-solving efficacy

Decrease in attitudes supporting peer conflict

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*“Just listen to them, because that’s one of the main things, people want someone to talk to without any advice or their opinion give[n]. So that’s what I try with my sister. She struggles a lot, and after the program I kind of just started thinking about it, finding different ways to talk to her about it, so not just give her advice. I’ll just talk to her on the phone about it and just listen to what she has to say”.*

(Male, age 20)

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*“When you do too much drugs and alcohol, you’re not really in a clear state of mind and something bad could happen and you end up in a place like this. It doesn’t just affect you, it affects a lot of people like your family, and if you assault someone or victimize someone, their family, and it’s just a big chain reaction or domino effect”.*

(Male, age 17)

# Other promising practices

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Does anyone want to share promising relationship-focused practices that are being used in their communities?

# Putting knowledge into action...

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Reflecting on what was shared in this webinar, what is one thing you can do to integrate this knowledge into your practice?



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***Thank You!***