



## — SCV/SOUTHLAND —

# Teens Susceptible to Dating Violence

■ Unhealthy behavior may not be apparent to them because of their lack of life, relationship experience.

By Serena Maria Daniels  
SIGNAL STAFF WRITER

Love and relationships can be hard for anyone, but when it comes to teen dating, the issues that can arise can be especially difficult, especially if there is violence involved.

Kenn Hicks — a licensed clinical social worker who recently created a teen dating contract — said it is important for teens to talk to their parents and friends about their dating issues so they will better know how to handle a painful situation should it arise.

About one in 11 high school students have reported that they have been hit, slapped or physically hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the past year, according to findings by the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.

Physical violence does not necessarily happen overnight, Hicks said.

The cycle of violence, as he calls it, often starts at a young age, when a child witnesses parents' interaction, Hicks said. Then, they learn how their father treats their mother and how their mom might respond to a confrontation with their father.

"Dad might be the one who controls everything in the house," or the mother might allow her husband to hit or belittle her in front of the children, said Hicks, who has taught domestic violence classes to convicted spousal batterers.

Inexperience in romantic situations can also lead to confusion among teens, said Jean Albrecht, co-executive director of the Domestic Violence Center of the Santa Clarita Valley.

"In the teen dating world, it may seem so exciting that someone is so in love with

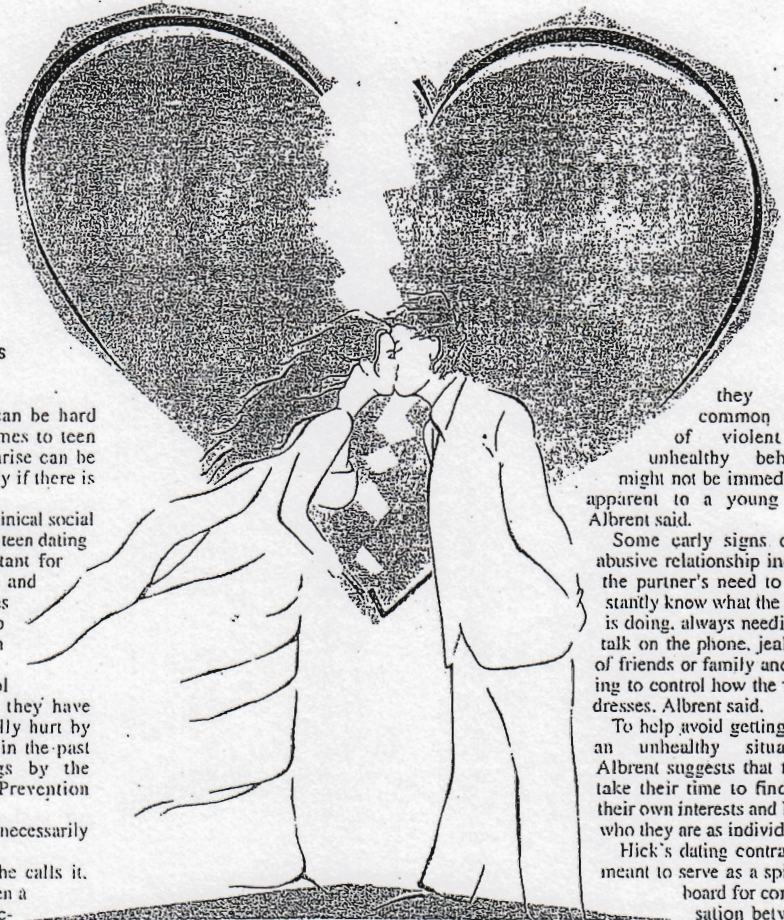


Photo illustration by BRYAN KNEIDING/The Signal

"In the teen dating world, it may seem so exciting that someone is so in love with them that it's not seen as an issue in their life."

— JEAN ALBRECHT,  
SCV Domestic Violence Center

them that it's not seen as an issue in their life," Albrecht said.

At a time when teens are exploring their sexuality, becoming increasingly independent of their parents and discovering who

they are, common signs of violent or unhealthy behavior might not be immediately apparent to a young girl. Albrecht said.

Some early signs of an abusive relationship include the partner's need to constantly know what the other is doing, always needing to talk on the phone, jealousy of friends or family and trying to control how the other dresses, Albrecht said.

To help avoid getting into an unhealthy situation, Albrecht suggests that teens take their time to find out their own interests and learn who they are as individuals.

Hicks' dating contract is meant to serve as a springboard for conversation between teens and their

parents. Created last summer, the written agreement includes a section on physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse and warns both parties the consequences for violating the agreement.

"The more they hear it, the more likely it will sink in," said Hicks, who plans on speaking at high schools about the contract. "They have to hear the message again and again."

For more information about the contract, visit [www.dvprevention.com](http://www.dvprevention.com).