



GENDER GUEST POSTS SOCIAL ISSUES

# Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, Week 1: How Teens Handle Rejection

[Ava Nicol - JRNOLA](#)

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Story by Ava "AJ" Nicol, a freshman at Riverdale High School. Image provided by [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).

February is [Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month](#), an initiative created in 2010 by Congress to help raise awareness about this

pervasive problem. It seems like every day, we read about another shooting, another rape, another act of violence. Visit the website [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org), for a comprehensive list of statistics, such as “approximately 1.5 million high school students in the United States experience physical abuse from a dating partner. One-quarter of parents don’t talk to their teens about domestic violence.” Debates over gun control, Title IX, and toxic masculinity can be sensationalized in the media. However, as Jessica Valenti posits in The Guardian, there is one common element in nearly all reported acts of violence and aggression towards women: [rejection](#).

Consider this imaginary (but easily conceived) scenario in which a male student experiences a common rejection. A guy, we’ll call him Steven, is a sophomore in high school. He has been working up the nerve to ask out a girl who has no idea he likes her for over a year. When he finally asks her, she tells him that she’d rather just be friends. How Steven handles the rejection is related to his [perceived social identity](#)<sup>1</sup>. If Steven knows his worth is not affected by the girl’s rejection, it might sting, but he will move past it. Unfortunately, teens who have poor emotional control and believe in gender stereotypes, such as male dominance, are the two main factors that contribute to the likelihood that someone will react violently to

rejection, writes Olivia Campbell in [Quartz](#).

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Whether it's disparaging the person who said "no" by spreading false rumors at school, calling that person a "ho", or, if a couple has broken up, sending revenge sexts, [which is illegal](#). Teens can be aggressive and hostile to prove they aren't weak if their social identity is threatened. This is particularly true for males who score higher in SDO (Social Dominance Orientation)<sup>2</sup>. Over time, this difficulty in overcoming smaller conflicts leads to an inability to cope with rejection. This problem can start earlier than you might think.

The reasons people develop insecurities in childhood are varied. Campbell writes, according to Dr. Chris Hafen, a research scientist at the University of Virginia's [Adolescent Research Group](#) (the Kliff-Vida Project), people who never establish

secure attachments may develop **rejection sensitivity**. An embarrassing public breakup might trigger feelings of aggression in someone who already has low self-esteem. The news is full of stories of mostly male offenders who threaten and act upon violent feelings towards women who have rejected them as well as women in general. Recently, as reported by the Washington Post, [Christopher Cleary](#) threatened to “kill as many girls as I see” at a women’s rally in Utah. Mollie Tibbets died last July when Cristhian Bahena Rivera kidnapped and killed her while she was jogging in Brooklyn, Iowa. She had threatened to call the police while he followed her and he “got mad” and blocked his memory, [writes Stephen Gruber-Miller in the Des Moines Register](#). The high profile cases of [Rihanna](#) and [Janay Rice](#) bring attention to the fact that girls and women [between 16 and 24 years old](#) experience the highest rate of domestic violence and sexual assault, almost triple the national average.

When is the best time to reach kids to teach them how to cope with rejection? Although it is ideal for kids to learn how to regulate their emotions and communicate throughout childhood, Campbell writes that Dr. Hafen says [late middle school and high school](#) is a critical age to foster resilience and communication. People who are mentally strong have different ways of dealing with rejection. As psychotherapist [Amy Morin](#)

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[writes for Inc.com](http://writesforinc.com), once people learn to acknowledge their emotions, they don't have to deal with the pain of suppressing, ignoring, or denying their pain. After reaching that level of acknowledgment, they move on to treating themselves with love and compassion to boost their spirits. They learn from rejection, they don't shut down from it.

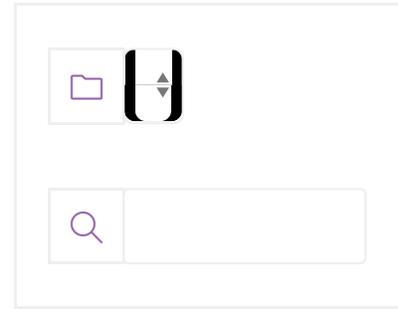
Your world should not revolve around one human being, unless that one human being is you. Don't let rejection define who you are, or who you will become, because your life and your happiness is always, and always will be, a choice **you** make. Teens who want to learn more about teen dating violence can visit <http://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself>.

1 Stratmoen, Evelyn & M Greer, Madelin & Martens, Amanda & Saucier, Donald. (2018). What, I'm not good enough for you? Individual differences in masculine honor beliefs and the endorsement of aggressive responses to romantic rejection. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 123. 151-162. 10.1016/j.paid.2017.10.018.

2 Kelly, A.J., Dubbs, S.L. & Barlow, F.K. Arch Sex Behav (2015) Social Dominance Orientation Predicts Heterosexual Men's Adverse Reactions to Romantic Rejection.44: 903. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0348-5>

*JRNOLA was officially formed in 2017 to change the face of journalism, addressing the underrepresentation of women and people of color in professional media. JRNOLA*

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