

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

This week, two letters have a similar theme.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We have a 16-year-old daughter who had only been going out as part of a group with friends.

She now wants to start pairing off in a dating situation.

While we feel that she is mature and has good judgment, we want to make sure she is prepared for dating.

What are some of the things that we should have a conversation about?

Parents of a Dating Teen

Q. Dear Miriam,

Our daughter has been dating the same young man for about six months. In the beginning she was excited and they did a lot of things with friends as a couple. She has always been very outgoing and has had a lot of friends around.

In the past month, we have noticed that most of her phone calls are with her boyfriend. She doesn't do things with her friends very much any more. She is also much less joyful and happy than she used to be. We are worried about her, but she won't talk about it with us.

What can we do?

Concerned Parents

A. Dear Parents,

Your letters show different concerns but may be related to an issue that we don't give enough attention to. That is dating abuse.

As our children grow up, many parents talk with their children about physical safety, sexual safety, alcohol, smoking and drugs. What we leave out and don't follow up on is date abuse.

For those parents whose children are beginning to date, be sure you discuss how your daughter should expect to be treated by boyfriends. Keep an open communication on this subject. If she knows ahead of time some of the danger signals, she will be armed and better able to avoid getting so emotionally

involved that she feels caught.

For parents whose daughters are already dating, some of the warning signs of an abusive relationship are withdrawal from friends, secretive behaviors about the relationship, and unwillingness to go out without the boyfriend.

If you observe any of these behaviors, you need to intervene.

Professional help is available through places like Jewish Family Services.

Parents might also want to have professionals address youth groups and parents groups on this subject.

While I've concentrated on abuse of young women in a dating situation, it is not limited to girls!

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.

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