

Report on the Teen Dating Climate at Mariposa County High School - Spring 2012

What is this?

Mariposa County Project Respect, in cooperation with Mariposa County School District and the Friends of Rachel Club at Mariposa County High School, surveyed approximately one-third of the student population in grades 9-12 to learn about the dating climate among students. Questions in the survey were designed to focus on relationship behaviors that may or may not indicate patterns of social, emotional and/or physical abuse.

The survey was constructed to closely mirror a national survey commissioned in 2008 by Liz Claiborne and the American Bar Association in order to provide a comparison between students at Mariposa County High School and their peers nationwide.

The comparative national survey asked in depth questions of parents and teens regarding specific behaviors, including questions about sexual activity, and some of those questions were not included in the local version. Additional insight into our results might be gained in a more comprehensive review of our survey, and the national survey we used as a guide, both of which are available online through a links posted at <http://mariposarespect.org/surveys.html>.

A total of 227 responses were randomly and anonymously collected. Sixteen surveys were discarded due to anomalies, yielding 211 usable records. The sample broke down to 48.8% female, 51.2% male, with 24.2% - 25.6% from each class. Responses were collected during the month of February, 2012.

About “dating” ...

There are a number of studies indicating that teens define “dating” in many different ways, from casual social activities to fully committed, and possibly sexually active, dating relationships.

In the national sample we used for comparison, a definition of dating relationships was not provided.

For purposes of this survey, we chose to use the phrase “serious boyfriend/girlfriend relationship” and left the definition of that phrase up to the respondent’s own applicable perspective.

Here’s some of what we learned ...



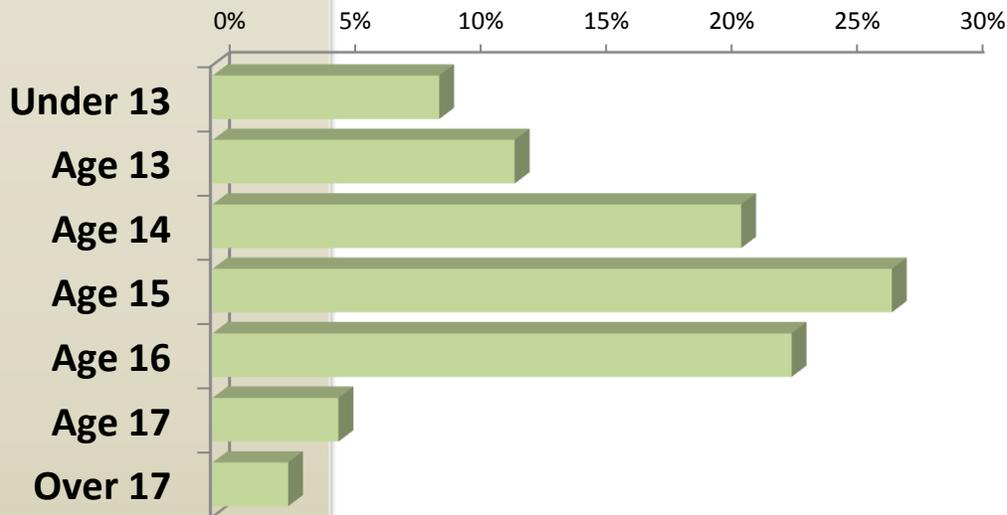
87.6%

of the respondents indicated they have been or are in “a serious boyfriend/girlfriend relationship”.

Some highlights from the results:

- ✓ Teens attending Mariposa County High School are experiencing dating lives that do not differ much from their peers nationwide.
- ✓ Some of the youth in our community are reporting physical, social and emotional abuse in their dating relationships.
- ✓ Only 42% of the respondents said their parents or guardians know “a lot” or “everything” about their dating lives.
- ✓ When asked to rank on a scale from “agree a little” to “agree a lot”, 57% of the respondents indicated that “physically hurting partners” is a serious problem for people their age to some degree. The result was 89% when we asked the same question about “using words to hurt a dating partner”.

Q. At what age do you think your friends usually have their first serious girlfriend/boyfriend relationship?



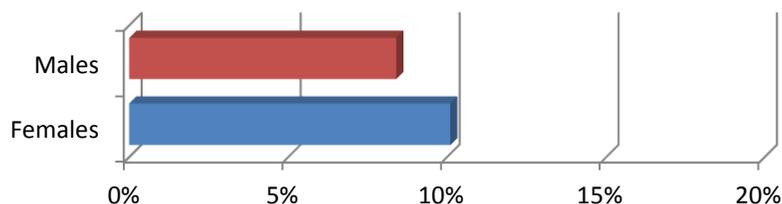
Physical abuse

We asked three questions that directly identified physical abuse in relationships, and several more that were indicative of physically coercive and controlling behaviors.

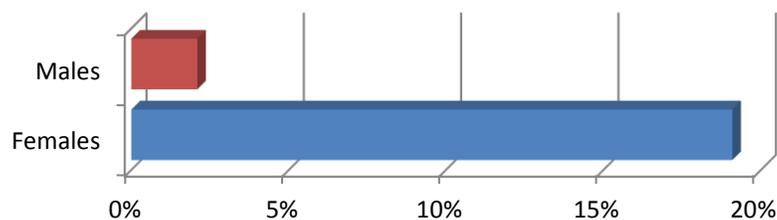
Of those respondents who indicated that they have been or are in a serious dating relationship, some type of *physical abuse* was reported by 19% of the respondents. As might be expected, there were some gender disparities in the answers, however males were not immune from physical abuse.

Some of the physical abuse reported in the survey:

Students who indicate that they have “been struck in anger by a partner (hit, slapped, choked, punched or kicked)”:



Students who indicate that they have “been pressured into doing something physical with a partner” when they did not want to:



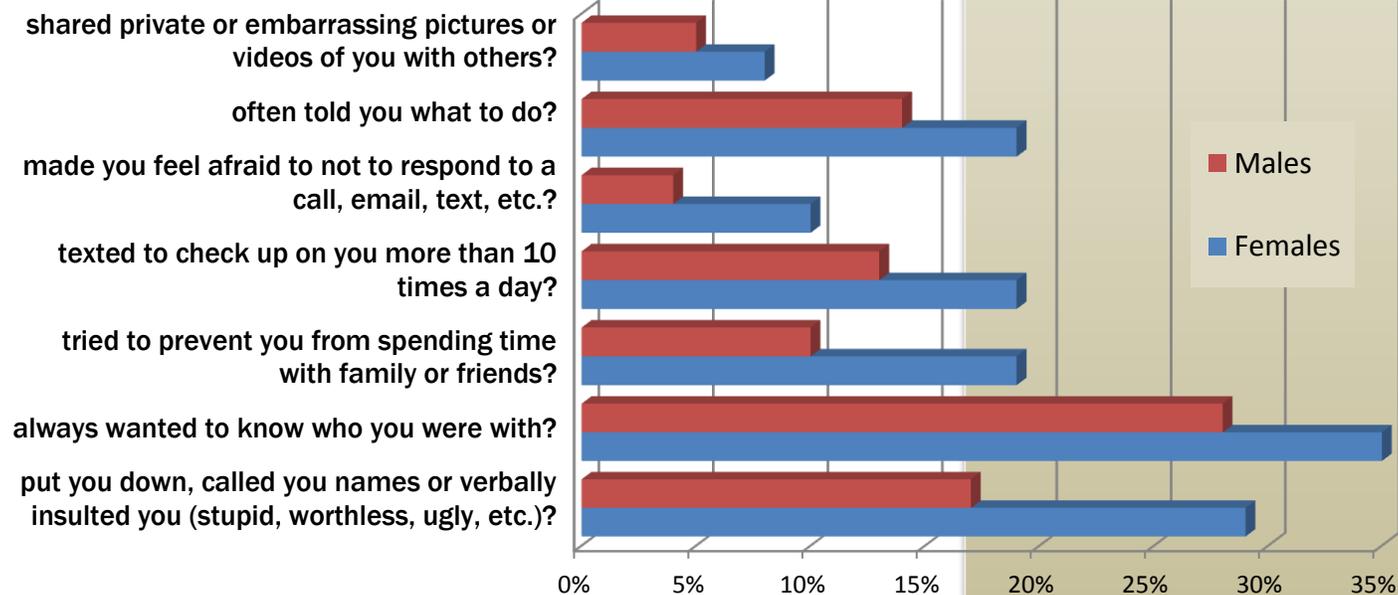
“I think it would be a very good idea to have somebody talk to us about what a healthy relationship is all about ...”

(Anonymous comment from the survey)

Emotional, social and verbal abuse

Emotional, social and verbal abuse may not leave marks, but it can still have a devastating impact on young lives. Abuse of this type can be direct or indirect, and may include manipulation of a partner’s social and peer relationships (including in the electronic world) in order to control their partner. In our survey, we found that 45.4% of our students reported experiencing some form of this abuse in their dating relationships. Some of the findings:

Have you ever had a partner who ...



Who they talk to:

Friends are the overwhelming choice teens pick when it comes to who they say they talk with “the most” about their relationships. Even though we let them pick more than one choice, parents still came in a distant second place.

While it might not come as surprise that teens indicate that they talk with friends “the most” about their relationships, we did learn that teens in Mariposa tended to rank communication with their own parents better than that of their peers.

Who teens say they talk with **THE MOST** about girlfriend/boyfriend relationships:*

Friends	Parents
88%	38%

*Respondents could pick more than one.

They're ready to talk more ...

69%

of the teens surveyed indicated (to some degree) that they would like to have someone to talk to about their boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.

We asked several questions about perceptions of dating abuse in the community and whether or not teens felt they knew how to help a friend, could spot the signs of abuse, or if they thought dating abuse was a problem at all. Their answers were not definitive, but there is some room for improvement.

We learned that teens in our community may not be sure about what defines dating abuse, and to what degree they think it is a problem. In a few instances we heard from individuals who had experienced abuse, but did not want to talk to anyone about it, including their parents.

On the other side of the coin, of those teens who said they have been, or are currently in, a serious dating relationship, most indicated that they are at least somewhat interested in having someone to talk to about their relationships.

Next Steps ...

- ✓ Mariposa County Project Respect will continue to partner with the Friends of Rachel Club at Mariposa County High School to create program opportunities that promote emotionally and socially healthy dating relationships.
- ✓ Project Respect program planning will include a longer focus, recognizing that bully prevention work is only the start to creating healthy social and dating relationships as our kids get older.
- ✓ We will be looking to partner with the parents and guardians of middle school students to develop a dating-readiness program that will help students get off to a good start *before* they begin dating.