

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Parent Connection

During the month of February, Fenton's SEL program will focus on conflict resolution. Three specific areas that will be presented to students are conflict resolution skills, identifying unhealthy relationships, and standing up to bullying. This month's column will focus on how parents can identify if their child is in an unhealthy relationship, what to do about it, and how to prevent it from happening.

According to loveisrespect.org, a program of the National Council on Family Violence, these are early warning signs to look for to determine if your child is in an abusive relationship:

- Your child's partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- Your child's partner texts him or her excessively.
- Your child begins to dress differently.
- You notice that your son or daughter is depressed or anxious.
- Your son or daughter stops participating in extracurricular activities or other interests.
- Your child stops spending time with other friends and family.
- You notice unexplained marks or bruises.

If you do suspect your child is in an abusive relationship, the National Council on Family Violence suggests the following:

- Tell your child you're concerned for their safety. Point out that what's happening isn't "normal." Everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship.
- Be supportive and understanding. Stress that you're on their side. Provide information and non-judgmental support. Let your son or daughter know that it's not their fault and no one "deserves" to be abused. Make it clear that you don't blame them and you respect their choices.
- Believe them and take them seriously. Your child may be reluctant to share their experiences in fear of no one believing what they say. As you validate their feelings and show your support, they can become more comfortable and trust you with more information. Be careful not to minimize your child's situation due to age, inexperience or the length of their relationship.
- Remember that ultimately your child must be the one who decides to leave the relationship. There are many complex reasons why victims stay in unhealthy relationships. Your support can make a critical difference in helping your son or daughter find their own way to end their unhealthy relationship.

Finally, if your child isn't in an unhealthy relationship, the National Council on Family Violence asserts that conversations like the following really do make a difference in your child's dating life:

- Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like? What would you want in a partner?
- Have you witnessed unhealthy relationships or dating abuse at school? How does it make you feel?
- Do you know what you would do if you witnessed or experienced abuse?
- Has anyone you know posted anything bad about a boyfriend or girlfriend online? What happened afterwards?
- Would it be weird if someone you were dating texted you all day to ask you what you're doing?
- Provide your child with examples of healthy relationships, pointing out unhealthy behavior. Use examples from your own life, television, movies or music.
- Keep it low key. Don't push it if your child is not ready to talk. Try again another time.

For more information, visit loveisrespect.org.