

NEW YORK MARKETS AFTER HOURS After Hours EarningsWatch

THE BALANCE GET EMAIL ALERTS

5 disturbing things dating teens do with technology

Published: Oct 1, 2015 10:02 a.m. ET

143 50 3+ 19

Aa



Pew report shows harassment, intimidation identity theft



By **CATEY HILL**
REPORTER

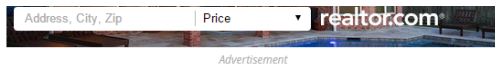


Thanks to technology, teens are exposed to some disturbing behavior from their current or former romantic partner (and we're not talking sexting here).

More than one in three American teens ages 13 to 17 have dated, hooked up or been romantically involved with another person — and of those, many have been the victim of behavior using technology that may worry their parents, [according to a report from the Pew Research Center released Thursday](#).

Sometimes that's because technology makes it easier for a teen to act in a way they might not in person. "A screen can mediate a conversation, make it easier to say or ask or do things that you wouldn't otherwise do to someone's face," says Amanda Lenhart, the associate director of research at the Pew Research Center. Other times, a teen's relative immaturity, impulsiveness and lack of experience with the impact technology can have on another's life can lead them to act in a way that can hurt others.

Here are five traumatic things that millions (if you extrapolate the survey findings onto the general teen dating population) of teens who are in or were in a romantic relationship may have experienced, according to the Pew report, which included a survey of more than 1,000 teens ages 13 to 16, as well as in-person focus groups.



Threats of violence. More than one in 10 teens who have been in a relationship say that a current or former partner has threatened to hurt them via the Internet or cellphone. What's even more troubling is that this kind of behavior can go from threats on text or social media to actual in-person violence, says Juanita Allen Kingsley, [vice president of the board of Casa Myrna](#), which focuses on ending dating violence.

This online behavior often starts out innocuously enough — a partner may simply seem to check in a lot (nearly one-third of teens report that a current or former partner checked up on them multiple times per day on the Internet or by cellphone) — but can turn more and more controlling and then violent, experts say.

Pressure to have sex. Fully 15% of all teen daters say that a partner has used the Internet or text messaging to pressure them into engaging in sexual activity. Of those, 10% said it happened during their relationship, and 5% said it happened after a relationship had ended. And like online threats of violence, experts say, this behavior also can escalate into the real world, so parents should be on the alert.

Messages and identity hijacked. More than one in five teen daters say a romantic partner has read their text messages without their permission. (Many partners admit to this kind of behavior: More than one in 10 say they have accessed a mobile or online account of a current or former partner, and one in 10 say they have modified or deleted a partner's or ex's social media profile.)

While this may result in nothing, it can turn bad for the victim, who may find that her profile (and thus reputation) is compromised. Indeed, one in 10 teens who have been in a romantic relationship say they have impersonated a partner or ex in a message, which can have far-reaching implications for the victim's reputation, emotional well-being and ability to trust.

Rumors spread about them. Fully 15% of teen daters say that a partner or ex has spread rumors about them using cellphones or the Internet; mostly this occurs after a breakup (13% of the time), but in 2% of cases, it occurs while the couple is still together. This is troubling because, thanks to technology, these rumors can spread very quickly and hurt someone's reputation.

Online information used to harass or embarrass them. Nearly one in 10 teens say that an ex-partner has used information posted on the Internet against them -- with the purpose of embarrassing or harassing them. This may come in many forms, including the use of photos; nearly one in 10 dating teens admits they have sent an embarrassing picture of an ex to someone else. Lisa Strohman, [founder and director of the Technology Wellness Center](#) and co-author of "Unplug: Raising Kids in a Technology Addicted World," says that these kinds of behaviors can lead kids to have to change schools and even contemplate suicide.

Seeing this data, no doubt, will make many parents wonder if their child is the victim of a behavior like that — and simply asking them may not yield any results. "Most kids won't say anything," says Strohman — at least not without a parent's prompting. So we asked experts how to figure out if your teen is the victim of troubling behavior from a romantic partner or ex.

One of the first things parents may notice is a change in mood (beyond the normal teen moodiness), says Strohman. They may withdraw from family, friends or academically, she says. Plus, you may also notice that "there is an even greater need for the child to have her phone next to her at all times," says Kingsley.

When you see that combination of behaviors, you should say something. "You have to feel confident saying to a child, 'I know when you're not okay,'" Kingsley says — and then ask them what is wrong.

When you see that combination of behaviors, you should say something. "You have to feel confident saying to a child, 'I know when you're not okay,'" Kingsley says — and then ask them what is wrong.

Sometimes that may not be enough, so Jennifer Bright Reich, coauthor of the [book series The Mommy MD Guides](#), says that you could (as she has done with her children) take them to a counselor just to establish a relationship with the person, and then tell your kids that they can talk to the counselor anytime, with or without parental involvement. This way, if they feel uncomfortable talking to you about how a romantic partner is behaving towards them, they have another responsible adult to turn to.

If your child is currently romantically involved with someone, it's also important that you ask your teen to bring the person over to your house so you can meet him or her and assess the person yourself, Kingsley says. You also shouldn't be afraid to call and meet the other teen's parents.

If your teen won't tell you anything and you're sure something bad is happening, Kingsley says it is okay to check your child's phone and social media as long as you are very upfront with your child about what you are doing and why. (Just realize that this may lead them to more deftly hide things from you, says Strohman.) Reich says that this is how she parents with her own kids: "Since day one, they have understood that their phones are not private. I have their passwords, and they know I can check anything on the phones any time."

Finally, if you do find out that your child has been bullied or threatened via technology, Kingsley says you should get the school or even the police involved. "This has to be addressed with the right kind of firepower," she notes.