

# Teen Dating Violence

## KEY ISSUE

### Approaches To Prevention



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# KEY ISSUE

## Approaches to Prevention

**E**arly teen dating violence prevention efforts fell most often into the category of primary prevention, focusing on educational presentations and awareness campaigns that took place in middle and senior high schools. Secondary prevention efforts, designed to reach teens identified as being at high risk, were most often designed for teens accompanying their mothers into safe shelter or into other community services offered by domestic violence programs. Prevention work in both of these settings usually included information about domestic violence as well as warning signs, dynamics and safety issues involved in teen dating violence. Advocates and teens doing the work today continue to expand on traditional messages and to create innovative approaches to the prevention of violence in intimate teen relationships.

Middle and high school classrooms have long offered space for rich discussion and spirited debate among teens, educators and advocates about the varied experiences, perceptions and beliefs that are part of violent teen dating relationships. At the same time, the presence of domestic violence program advocates in the classroom has been the subject of some controversy. In the minds of some educators and community members, information about dating violence is extraneous to the academic needs of students and unnecessarily burdensome to teacher workloads. In addition, domestic violence program advocates, whose time and resources are also limited, have sometimes had difficulty meeting the needs of battered women and their children while also devoting time to the development and implementation of classroom presentations. However, for many teens, advocates and educators involved in school-based collaboration, the importance of such work is a clear priority. School-based programs can play a vital prevention role in that they have the ability to address dating violence and promote positive alternatives, influence teen social norms regarding gender-based behavior and play an effective role in strengthening a school's ability to respond to on-site violence (Berkowitz et al. 2003). The messages of school-based programs are increasingly pertinent as they evolve to include information designed for specific populations such as pregnant and parenting teens, teens with disabilities and others who may have found earlier messages ill-suited to their life experiences.

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Growing acceptance of the importance of dating violence information in educational settings has prompted some local and state communities to implement major campaigns to develop extensive policies and procedures related to dating violence prevention in schools. One of the earliest and most comprehensive prevention programs was instituted in 2001 by the state of Massachusetts, and involved legislation which allocated funds to secondary schools for the development of domestic violence prevention/education programs. The Teen Dating Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (TDVIP) of the Massachusetts

Department of Education provided funds to public middle and high schools across the Commonwealth for use in the implementation of comprehensive dating violence prevention and intervention programs. Using a model that emphasized community collaboration, schools offered teen dating violence prevention education, implemented policies and procedures addressing all aspects of teen dating violence on campus and provided on-site support services to survivors and intervention services to adolescent abusers. Similar far-reaching education/prevention campaigns are in place in Michigan, Rhode Island, California, New Hampshire and other states. Across the U.S., teens and youth advocates continue working to establish strategies for coordinating dating violence prevention efforts throughout their educational systems and communities.

### BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

While school-based services and awareness campaigns have done much to create and ensure continued attention to and prevention of violent teen relationships, there is growing realization that it is also necessary for prevention efforts to take place outside traditional educational settings in order to address the complex and unique needs of individual teens. Youth advocates, recognizing that all U.S. teens do not spend their days in neighborhood schools or in any other traditional setting, seek to explore avenues not previously considered in prevention education. Teens who attend alternative schools, who drop out or never attend school at all, teens who live on the streets or are socially isolated because of poverty, cultural or health constraints, teens who reside in treatment centers and those who are incarcerated often do not receive the information they need to successfully navigate intimate relationships. In addition, prevention/education materials continue to be designed to speak primarily to young people who are close in age, racially similar, middle class, English-speaking, able-bodied and identified as heterosexual.

As dating violence prevention work gains momentum, teens and youth advocates are faced with the challenge of designing materials and approaches that are meaningful to a highly diverse population of young people. In developing adequate, wide-ranging strategies, advocates have increasingly come to understand that it is imperative to involve teens themselves in the design and implementation of any program. Because adolescence is usually a time when peer influences on behaviors and beliefs are strongest, teen audiences generally respond best to the voices that mirror their age and experience. Authentic interpersonal dynamics and language relevant to varied teen cultures are vital in the creation of education/prevention material. Just as they work to create material that reflects their experience for use in presentations and awareness campaigns,

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teens take on the roles of peer educators in classrooms and performers in teen theater.

As it becomes increasingly clear that teens must be included in the development and implementation of prevention strategies,

there is a growing awareness of the importance of more fully engaging young men in the process of preventing violence in dating relationships. Research regarding overall youth violence has indicated that the most effective deterrent to teen violence may be mentoring arrangements between teens and adults or older teens (CSPV, 1999). This has been a successful framework for the inclusion of boys and men in education

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and awareness campaigns. In mentoring programs that utilize male and female participants and adult-to-teen and teen-to-teen collaborations, an approach can be developed to address dating violence by framing the role of young men and women as proactive and empowered bystanders who confront abusive peers and support peers who are being abused.

Many newly established dating violence programs – especially those being implemented in Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, African-American and Tribal communities – have used these mentoring methods with dating violence victims and perpetrators. Reports from these programs indicate that the mentoring approach is highly effective, especially in amending the behavior and belief systems of young perpetrators. This belief that mentoring and community involvement in prevention efforts is valuable is validated in the findings of the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative, designed and implemented by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at the University of Colorado. In assessing youth violence prevention programs in the U.S., the Initiative found that effective prevention programs most often involve working with community-based and individually focused services – an ‘ecological approach’ that involves the youth, the family and the community (CSPV, 1999).

## A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

It is important to remember that “one-size fits all” approaches are seldom effective in any prevention effort. Particular attention must be paid to informing teens of the dynamics and risks implicit to dating violence, providing them with resources and safety information pertinent to their individual lives and making certain that the necessary, appropriate and effective community safety nets are in place in answer to their needs. In addition to the efforts of individual teens, advocates and youth serving agencies, prevention efforts by all local, state and national youth serving systems are required in order for prevention efforts to be successful. According to former Surgeon General David Thatcher, “The most urgent need now is a national resolve to confront the problem of youth [dating] violence systematically, using research-based approaches and to correct damaging myths and stereotypes that interfere with the task at hand” (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

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## References

Berkowitz, A., Jaffe, P., Peacock, D., Rosenbluth, B. & Sousa, C. (2003). *Young men as allies in preventing violence and abuse: Building effective partnerships with schools* Family Violence Prevention Fund Online Discussion. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://endabuse.org/bpi/discussion4.php>>

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), (1999). *Blueprints model programs overview*. Boulder, CO: Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative, University of Colorado. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/overview.html>>

*Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (2001). United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General, January. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/default.htm>>

## ENCLOSURES

The enclosed materials (reprinted with permission) provide research findings, examples of promising projects and referral materials that offer information on prevention approaches for teen dating violence:

Wolfe, P. & Jaffe, P. (2003). *Prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault*. Harrisburg, PA: Applied Research Forum, National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.vawnet.org>>

Berkowitz, A. (2003). *The social norms approach to violence prevention*. Family Violence Prevention Fund Online Discussions. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://endabuse.org/bpi/discussion4.php>>

Berkowitz, A., Jaffe, P., Peacock, D., Rosenbluth, B. & Sousa, C., (2003). *Young men as allies in preventing violence and abuse: Building effective partnerships with schools*. Family Violence Prevention Fund Online Discussions. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://endabuse.org/bpi/discussion4.php>>

Katz, J. (2003). *Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)*, Family Violence Prevention Fund Online Discussions. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://endabuse.org/bpi/discussion4.php>>

SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center (2002). *Expect Respect: A School-Based Program Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships for Youth*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center (2002). *Kid & TeenSafe: A School-Based Program Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships for Youth*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

Oakland Men's Project (2000). *Making the Peace: An Approach to Preventing Relationship Violence Among Youth*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on these and other teen-related issues is available through the following:

- Technical Assistance/Public Education Team of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
Telephone: 800-537-2238 and TTY: 800-553-2508

and other organizations comprising the Domestic Violence Resource Network (DVRN):

- Battered Women's Justice Project  
Telephone: 800-903-0111, Ext. 1 (Criminal Justice), Ext. 2 (Civil Justice), Ext. 3 (Defense);
- National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
Telephone: 888-792-2873 and TTY: 800-595-4889;
- Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody  
Telephone: 800-52-PEACE (527-3223);
- Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women  
Telephone: 877-733-7623