

Shifting the Lens on How We Talk About Adolescent Dating Abuse

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

The Need for New Messaging

- Although adolescent dating abuse is common, with one in four adolescents experiencing adolescent dating abuse each year, it rarely appears in the news.
- Between 2012 and 2014, only one story per month appeared in California papers and fewer than 10 substantive articles appeared in education journals in that same timeframe.
- When adolescent dating abuse is covered in the media, there is little discussion of solutions beyond awareness raising.
- Better communication about adolescent dating abuse will lead to improved school environments and policies that support and nurture healthy relationships.

What We Created

The Partnership developed and advocates for the usage of four messaging themes that promote the prevention of adolescent dating abuse. These messaging themes highlight:

- Schools as a part of the solution that need to support young people
- How educational outcomes are affected (in terms of attendance records, test scores, drop out rates, etc.) when adolescent dating abuse is not addressed
- Adolescent dating abuse prevention as an investment in the future
- Inviting allies and communities to talk about healthy relationships and participate in prevention solutions and policies.
- Connecting solutions to adolescent dating abuse with work on related policies or issues,

The four messaging themes include:

-  ➤ **Schools have a responsibility to give students the skills they need to succeed in the classroom and in life.**
-  ➤ **Healthy relationships are the foundation for a strong and healthy community.**
-  ➤ **Students can't learn if they're hurting or don't feel safe.**
-  ➤ **Together we can prevent teen dating violence.**

Methods and Materials

What was assessed?

48 California newspapers

All articles that referenced adolescent dating abuse or any related phrase

Articles from education journals that reach California school administrators

What was covered?

85% of articles about adolescent dating abuse were news or feature stories (85%)

The remaining items were editorials, op-eds, letters to the editor, or columns

47% of articles focused on one-time events

Who was represented?

25% of speakers were domestic violence advocates

School representatives appeared in 10% of articles

Other speakers included: government officials, survivors and criminal justice representatives

Shifting the Frame

We know many stories focus on individual "portrait" stories that detail the individual profiled. This portrait view evokes:

- A system of personal responsibility, along with punishment and criminalization
- Suggestions that the solutions to adolescent dating abuse lie with greater personal responsibility

Far fewer stories pull back to show the "landscape" surrounding individuals. This landscape view focuses on:

- The systems, including schools, businesses, government, or other institutions, that impact and surround individuals
- Solutions that involve all societal structures playing a role in prevention

Portrait (Individual) vs. Landscape (Community)

"Every time we meet with administrators we refer to this message. They agree that it is the responsibility of schools since students are not learning this at home."

"California can take the lead in preventing adolescent dating abuse if educators work with advocates to make this happen."

"We definitely use this message when speaking with administrators and teachers and they are always on board with that. We will start using this with other community partners and in press releases about the program."

"Our children deserve a safe school environment as a prerequisite for academic success and healthy relationships."

"A strong, safe, and economically viable community is built by people who know what it means to be part of healthy, respectful relationships at every level. We need policies that help us model for kids the skills they need to be part of the communities we all want to live in."



Let's help our teens have healthy relationships!

Our schools should...

- Provide staff with training on healthy teen relationships and preventing dating abuse.
- Let students know there is a person they can talk to about having a healthy relationship.
- Establish a plan to respond to dating abuse when it happens.
- Teach and talk about healthy relationships.
- Model and teach healthy communication skills.

For more information, contact advoc@cpedv.org

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