



Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Teen Dating Violence: An Imperative for Student Safety and Academic Achievement

“Teaching healthy relationship skills early on is integral in the prevention of teen dating violence, which is far too prevalent and prevents far too many students from being able to focus on their education.”

– Kevin Jennings, the Assistant Deputy Secretary,
US Department of Educationⁱ

Teen dating violence (TDV) is pervasiveness and harmful. It affects the entire school climate, making it difficult for students to focus on learning. TDV results in poor health and mental health, lower academic achievement, truancy and drop out. Education programs to promote healthy relationships and prevent TDV through family-school-community partnerships can increase safety and academic achievement for California’s most cherished residents and most valuable resource – our youth. Healthy relationships skills in communication, critical thinking, empathy and boundary-setting not only keep students safe and focused on learning, they can also be applied into adulthood at home, work and in the community.

Teen Dating Violence is Pervasive and Harmful

- Approximately 1 in 3 adolescent girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner – a figure that far exceeds victimization rates for other types of violence affecting youth.ⁱⁱ
- Young women ages 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Victims of TDV are at greater risk for poor health and mental health outcomes.^{iv}
- A substantial number of TDV incidents occur in school buildings and on school grounds.^v
- Abusive behaviors learned in adolescence can escalate into adulthood.^{vi}
- The impact of dating and domestic violence is devastating, both economically and socially. In 2006, the cost of intimate partner violence was estimated at \$5.8 billion.^{vii} The cost to the youth of California is beyond what can be measured in dollars.

Students Can’t Learn If They Don’t Feel Safe

- The pervasiveness of abusive behaviors occurring on school campuses affects the overall school climate and distracts students from their focus on learning.^{viii ix x}
- TDV victims have lower academic performance and are at greater risk for truancy and dropout.^{xi xii}
- According to analyses of data from the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey for San Francisco and Los Angeles, high school girls who were victims of physical dating violence in the past 12 months were more than twice as likely not to attend school due to feeling unsafe at school – or on the way to or from school – on one or more occasions in the past 30 days compared to non abused girls (20 percent versus 8 percent).^{xiii}

Teen Dating Violence and Bullying Are Closely Linked

- Students who reported that they had perpetrated physical dating violence were nearly five times more likely to report perpetrating physical peer violence.^{xiv}
- In a cross-sectional study with 369 middle school and 315 high school youth, bully-victims (students who were both bullied and who bullied others) reported significantly more physical and emotional dating violence victimization compared to other bullying subtypes: uninvolved, victims and bullies.^{xv}

Schools Can Effectively Address Teen Dating Violence through Curricular, Extra-Curricular and School Climate Improvement Efforts

- California schools have “an obligation to protect pupils from mistreatment from other children” and to protect the right of every student “to attend campuses which are safe, secure, and peaceful.”^{xvi}
- In 2008, the CA Attorney General’s Office encouraged schools to offer TDV prevention education through multiple school activities as an integral component of a school’s academic mission.^{xvii}
- Also in 2008, the State Board of Education adopted *Health Education Content Standards for CA Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, which include grade-level recommendations and content areas that address risky dating situations and characteristics of healthy relationships.^{xviii}
- The American Bar Association recommends that TDV prevention activities be integrated into the following classes: English, math, government/citizenship, computer/media production, drama/theater, family/consumer science, art and health.^{xix}
- In 2010, the Family Violence Prevention Fund and Break the Cycle released a model policy which reflects the latest research on effective school-based efforts to promote healthy relationships and prevent TDV. The model policy includes recommendations and examples of model programs for prevention education through curricular activities, extra-curricular activities and school climate improvement efforts, and activities to support parent/caregiver engagement.^{xx}
- School interventions that focus on creating a positive school environment can increase academic achievement, reduce dropout, reduce violence including TDV, and increase teacher retention.^{xxi}

“Schools need to think of teen dating violence prevention not as an ‘add on’ but as something that is integrated into the curriculum at every grade level.”

– Stephanie Pappas, School Health Education Consultant,
California Department of Education^{xxii}

A friend of mine was calling his girlfriend bad names over and over because she spilled his milk. I pulled him aside and told him what I learned from the ‘Coaching Boys Into Men’ program. He apologized to his girlfriend. I felt good because I knew I was being a role model. Using my voice, I made a difference.”

– Lawrence Hall, Mesa Verde High School, *Coaching Boys into Men* participant^{xxiii}

“If we can reach young people in middle school, to make them aware of the nature of abuse and show them how they can prevent it, we may be able to stop this spiraling cycle of pain before middle school students get involved in it.” –

United States Representatives John Lewis (D-GA)^{xxiv}

“I call upon all Americans to support efforts in their communities and schools, and in their own families, to empower young people to develop healthy relationships throughout their lives and to engage in activities that prevent and respond to teen dating violence. Let each of us resolve to do our part to break the silence and create a culture of healthy relationships for all our young people.”

– President Barack Obama^{xxv}

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