



Break the Cycle

Empowering Youth to End  
Domestic Violence

# Building Safe Schools

A Guide to Addressing Teen Dating Violence

A Resource Manual for School Employees

You have the right to a safe  
and healthy relationship...  
free from violence and  
free from fear



Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner each year.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

### The problem – a silent epidemic

Young people are at enormous risk for interpersonal violence. Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner each year.<sup>1</sup> Dating violence is not just dangerous, it is devastating to a young person's health and safety.

The effects of dating violence are long-lasting. Teens who experience abuse in relationships exhibit higher rates of drug abuse, school drop-out, high-risk sexual behavior, acts of violence and suicide.<sup>2</sup>

### Statistics

One in three teens experience some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships, including verbal and emotional abuse.<sup>3</sup>

40% of teenage girls, ages 14 to 17, know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by their partner.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly 80% of girls who have been physically abused in their intimate relationships continue to date their abuser.<sup>5</sup>

1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Physical Dating Violence Among High School Students—United States, 2003." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 55:19 (May 19, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Jay G. Silverman PhD, et Al., "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 286 (2001) 572-579.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Tucker Halpern, Ph.D. et Al., "Partner Violence Among Adolescents in Opposite-Sex Romantic Relationships: Findings From the national Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *American Journal of Public Health*, 91 (2001) 1680.

<sup>4</sup> Children Now/Kaiser Permanente "National Poll on Kids Health and Safety," December 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Children Now/Kaiser Permanente "National Poll on Kids Health and Safety," December 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Liz Claiborne Inc. study on teen dating abuse conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, February 2005.

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*"It's like you go with somebody, your boyfriend and girlfriend, and they want to touch in the hallways in inappropriate places but it's like you don't want to. And they get mad."*

**- Alecia - 16**

# DYNAMICS OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

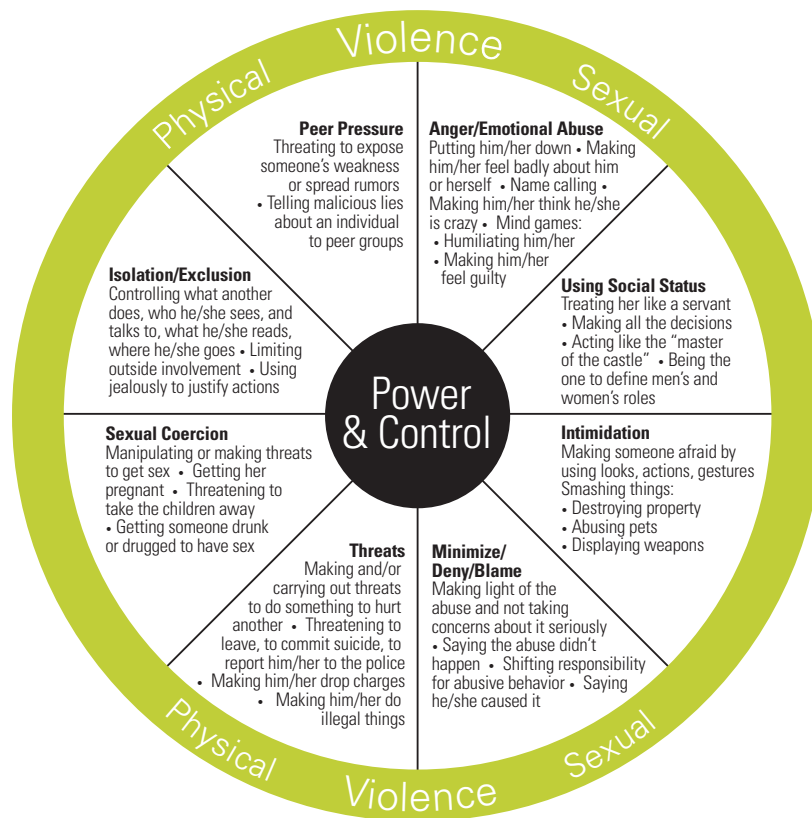
## What is dating violence?

Dating violence is a **pattern of abusive behaviors** used to exert **power** and **control** over a dating partner.

That definition seems simple at first but it is worth taking a closer look at a few key points. First, notice that dating violence is a pattern of behavior. This does not necessarily mean that the first instance of abuse is not dating violence, but merely that dating violence usually involves a series of abusive behaviors over a course of time.

This definition also points out that the core of dating violence is power and control. As the diagram shows, abusive words and actions are the tools that an abusive partner uses to gain and maintain power and control over his/her partner.

The last thing to notice is that the target of these abusive behaviors is a dating partner. That might mean different things to different people, particularly across generations. The important thing to remember is that dating violence occurs within an intimate relationship. The relationship may be sexual, but it does not have to be. It may be serious or casual, monogamous or non-monogamous, short-term or long-term.



## Who is affected by dating violence?

Teens of all ages can experience dating violence. Boys and girls can both be victims and abusers. Dating violence can happen in heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

## What does dating violence look like?

Teens experience the same types of abuse in relationships as adults. This can include:

**Physical abuse-** any intentional use of physical force with the intent to cause fear or injury, for example hitting, shoving, biting, restraining, kicking, strangling, or use of a weapon

**Emotional/Psychological abuse-** non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, or stalking

**Sexual abuse-** any action that impacts a person's ability to control whether or not sexual activity occurs or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs, including rape, coercion or restricting the use of birth control

This is not an exhaustive list of the types of abuse that teens experience. Use examples from your own experience and training to identify abusive behaviors. And remember that dating violence is ultimately about power and control.

While teens experience the same types of abuse, often the methods are unique to teen culture. For example, teens often report receiving threats in text messages or being stalked on their Facebook or MySpace page.

## CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Dating violence can look different in different relationships. [Here is one model.](#)

### Tension Building

Things start to get tense between the student and their dating partner.

### Honeymoon

The abuser will apologize, try to make up with the student, and try to shift the blame for the explosion to someone or something else.




### Explosion

There is an outburst of violence that can include intense emotional, verbal, sexual and/or physical abuse.

**The one thing that is common to most abusive dating relationships is that the violence will escalate over time and become more and more dangerous for the teen victim.**





If you know what to look for you might be able to identify an **abusive relationship** before it becomes dangerous.

## HELPING YOUR STUDENTS

### **How do I know if one of my students is experiencing violence in a relationship?**

The warning signs of dating violence will not always be dramatic, but if you know what to look for you might be able to identify an abusive relationship before it becomes dangerous. You can also help your students identify warning signs of dating violence in their own relationships.

#### **Look for these red flags:**

- Problems with school attendance, particularly if this is a new problem
- Lack of interest in former extracurricular activities
- Sudden request for a change in schedule
- Unexplained changes in behavior, grades, or quality of schoolwork
- Noticeable change in weight, demeanor, or physical appearance
- Isolation from former friends
- Little social contact with anyone but the dating partner
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Making excuses or apologizing for the dating partner's inappropriate behavior
- New disciplinary problems at school, such as bullying other students or acting out
- Name-calling or belittling from a dating partner

#### **For School Resource Officers, in addition to the red flags above, other red flags include:**

- Showing intense fear or being guarded or anxious at your questions and won't make eye-contact with you
- Constant or severe bruises and/or other injuries
- Arguments with other students or school employees that are uncharacteristic of the teen
- Damaged or torn clothing
- Teen is quick to deny suggestions of abuse or becomes protective of dating partner on the suggestion of abuse

# WHAT DO YOU DO...

## If you suspect one of your students is experiencing dating violence:

- Refer to your school's dating violence policy for school-specific procedures.
- Talk to the student privately about your concerns. Tell him/her what you have seen and that you are concerned about his/her health and safety.
- Offer to connect the student with resources on campus or in your community, including Break the Cycle.
- Offer to help the student create a safety plan (see Appendix).
- Suggest s/he take the Healthy Relationship Quiz (see Appendix).

## If you suspect one of your students is abusing a dating partner:

- Refer to your school's dating violence policy for school-specific procedures.
- Talk to the student privately about your concerns. Tell your student what you have seen and that you are worried that s/he is not treating his/her dating partner with the respect s/he deserves.
- Tell him/her that dating violence is a crime and a violation of school policy.
- Offer to connect the student with resources on campus or in your community, including Break the Cycle.

## If you witness an incident of dating violence:

- Refer to your school's dating violence and disciplinary policies for school-specific procedures.
- If the incident is in progress, intervene to help the victim or get help from another school employee.
- Address safety and health first. Ask if either party needs immediate medical attention.
- Tell the students that you saw the incident and what steps you will take next.
- Tell the victim of the abuse that you are concerned about his/her safety.
- Tell the perpetrator of the abuse that you are concerned about his/her behavior and that his/her actions are abusive.
- Offer to connect both students with resources on campus or in your community, including Break the Cycle.

**For School Resource Officers:** Officers should intervene, separate the teens, and make sure that the teens meet separately with the Principal or a school employee who is designated to handle teen dating violence or sexual violence.

# TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT DATING VIOLENCE

## What to say:

- I'm glad that you told me about this.
- This is important.
- I want you to be safe.
- Let's make sure you get the help you need right now.
- It's not your fault.
- You deserve to be treated with respect in your relationship.
- I am here if you ever need help or want to talk.

## Do:

- Listen.
- Be honest about your ability to keep information confidential or not.
- Be specific in your concerns (especially if you have witnessed abusive behaviors).
- Ask questions.
- Challenge your student to see the warning signs in his/her relationship.
- Allow your student to make his/her own decisions about the relationship.
- Tell your student what you are required to do under the law or school policy.
- Provide information on local resources.
- Reach out to community organizations to educate yourself on the issue.
- Urge your student to seek help.
- Familiarize yourself with your school's dating violence policy. If your school does not have one, organize a group to write one.
- Educate all your students about dating violence.
- Continue to check in with the student throughout the school year and beyond.

## Don't:

- Be judgmental about your student's relationship or choices.
- Try to take control of the situation, unless an emergency requires you to.
- Ignore the red flags you see – say something.
- Make assumptions about how your student wants to handle an abusive relationship.
- Minimize the abuse or the importance of the relationship.
- Assume that because the relationship is new or casual the abuse is minor.
- Assume that the student is heterosexual.
- Share a student's private information with unnecessary people or talk about students in public areas of the school.
- Assume that younger teens are not dating.
- Show shock or disapproval if your student tells you about his/her sexual activities.
- Blame your student for remaining in the relationship.



# TEENS SEEKING HELP

Some teens will tell no one if they are experiencing abuse. If they do choose to tell someone, the first person a teen will turn to for help is usually a friend, not a parent or teacher. They may believe that adults are not trustworthy, do not care about teen relationships, won't take them seriously, will report the abuse to the police or their parents, or are not capable of really helping. Adults must be willing to take the first step to reach out to teens when they think abuse is happening.

## Teens face a variety of obstacles to asking for help with an abusive relationship. Here are some examples:

### Relationship with parents

- The teen might be worried that his parents will react negatively, or even abusively, if they find out that he is dating or sexually active. He may be in a same sex relationship and fear consequences if his parents find out.

### Fear of social consequences

- She might be afraid of losing her social standing if she accuses a classmate of abuse. She might believe that her popularity is dependent upon staying in the relationship. She might worry that her peers will not believe her and label her a liar.

### Embarrassment

- He might be embarrassed to admit that he is a victim of dating violence. He might be worried that he'll be thought of as weak or unable to take care of himself.

### Loss of independence

- She might be scared that her parents will take away her privileges and keep her under stricter control if they find out she's experiencing abuse. She might worry that her parents won't trust her to make decisions about her life and relationships anymore.

### Isolation

- His abusive partner might have isolated him from his friends and family, his support network. He might believe that no one really cares about him and that no one is able to help him. He might have internalized his partner's abusive words and believe that he doesn't deserve help.

### Distrust of adults

- She might have heard teachers talking about other students' problems and be worried that her private experiences will become gossip. She might believe that all school employees will notify the police and her parents if she discloses abuse.

### Desire to stay in the relationship

- He might believe that an adult will try to convince him to end the relationship. He might still love his abusive partner and want the abuse to stop but for the relationship to continue. He might believe that he is safer staying in the relationship than ending it.

### Protecting the abuser

- She might not want to see her partner get in trouble with the school or the criminal justice system. She might fear retaliation from her partner or her partner's friends. She might rely on her partner for financial support, housing, or co-parenting.

# POP QUIZ!

*Do you know how teen dating violence affects teens across the country?*

*Take this quiz to find out!*

- 1. At what age do females experience the highest amount of relationship violence?**  
a. 16-24                      b. 25-30                      c. 31-35
- 2. What percentage of young teens (ages 11-14) in relationships know friends who have been verbally abused (called stupid, worthless, ugly, etc.) by a partner?**  
a. 5%                          b. 25%                          c. 47%
- 3. What is the number of teens that have had partners try to prevent them from spending time with friends or family?**  
a. 1 in 35                      b. 1 in 4                        c. 1 in 50
- 4. What percentage of high school students have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse?**  
a. 2%                          b. 15%                          c. 8%
- 5. What percentage of teens in relationships have been sent text messages 10, 20 or 30 times an hour by a partner wanting to know where they are, what they are doing and who they are with?**  
a. 30%                        b. 10%                        c. 25%
- 6. What percentage of teens in relationships have been called names, harassed or put down by their partner through cell phones and texting?**  
a. 25%                        b. 17%                        c. 3%
- 7. Which of these groups is able to deal with teen dating violence better?**  
a. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) teens  
b. Teenage boys  
c. Heterosexual teens  
d. Teenage girls over 17  
e. No one group is better able to overcome teen dating violence.

**Quiz Answer Key:** 1. a. (16-24); 2. c. (47%); 3. b. (1 in 4); 4. c. (8%); 5. a. (30%); 6. a. (25%); 7. e. (no one group is better able to overcome teen dating violence.)

Did you get all the questions right? Were some of your selections wrong? Guess what? It's not the score that really matters; what's important is to get the word out. Many people, especially teens, don't know about teen dating violence. Regardless of whether you got all the questions right or wrong, share this knowledge with your students.



The purpose of a safety plan is to empower a teen to prepare for an emergency.

## SAFETY PLANNING

### What is a safety plan?

A safety plan is an individualized set of actions, strategies, and resources that addresses a student's safety with regard to dating violence or sexual violence. The purpose of a safety plan is to empower a teen to prepare for an emergency and to make safe choices in the relationship and after ending the relationship. It is important to urge your student to create a safety plan even if she is not ready to break up with her abusive partner.

The safety plan should take into account a teen's entire life – home, school, extracurricular activities, work, and social life. Because a teen's safety needs are always changing, a good safety plan should be a living document, frequently reevaluated and updated.

The **Safety Planning Worksheet** in the Appendix can be completed by a teen alone or with the aid of an adult.

*"I mean most people think of domestic violence as just like a man smacking around a woman physically and stuff like that. There's also verbal abuse. That's also a form of domestic violence."*

**– Demar - 15**

*"I think intervention is very important. Because most of the time the person who is doing the harm, they don't recognize what they're doing, they don't see it as domestic violence. So I think bringing it to that person's attention is the most effective way to bring about change in a relationship."*

**– Aaron - 14**

## Questions to ask:

- What other adults can you tell about the abuse?
- Who can you tell at school to help keep you safe?
- What friends can you turn to for support?
- Where could you go quickly if you had to get away from your partner in an emergency?
- Who could you call to pick you up if you are stranded?
- Who can walk with you between classes and home from school?
- Who can stay with you if you have to be home alone?
- Can you change your schedule or routine to limit your interaction with your partner?
- Do you want to report the abuse to the police?
- Do you want to apply for a civil protection order?

## Tips to pass on to teens:

- Keep a list of phone numbers in your wallet, backpack, or purse with you at all times.
- Every few days, consider changing your route to and from school, work, extracurricular activities, daycare, and home.
- Keep a calling card and/or extra money in an “emergency wallet” that you have with you always.
- Think about the people in your life you turn to when you need help or when times are tough. Maybe it’s a teacher, a counselor, a coach, a pastor. Whoever this person(s) is, consider reaching out to them about what you are experiencing.
- If you have a support network of friends and family and if you feel safe, let them know about the concerns and safety plan with them.
- Consider changing your locker or school schedule.
- Have a journal that documents the abuse that you are going through and keep the journal in a safe place.
- With your support network, especially your friends, have a code word that you use if abuser is present and you need help, so your friends can call the police and/or other people to help you.

## Remember, a good safety plan is:

- teen-driven
- frequently reevaluated
- an opportunity to educate the teen and the teen’s friends and family
- empowering to the teen
- holistic in its vision

# TEENS' LEGAL RIGHTS

## **What is a civil protection order or stay away order?**

A civil protection order/stay away order is a judicial order restricting a person's movements and activities towards another person(s). These orders will also prohibit an individual from stalking, harassing, and communicating (in any form) to the other individual. If violated, the restricted person can face criminal penalties, including jail time. Depending on where you live, these orders can be called restraining order, protection order, peace order or protection from abuse order. A protection order is given by a judge in civil or family court, whereas a stay away order is given by a judge in criminal court. Both of the orders have these same restrictions on the individual.

## **Can a teenager get a civil protection order or stay way order?**

Each state has its own standard on how teens can obtain a civil protection order or stay away order. In some states, minors cannot file for a protection order without parental involvement. In other states, the minor has to be a certain age to file on their own. If a teenager is asking you about getting a restraining order, please refer the student to a community-based organization working with teens on teen dating violence. In many states domestic violence laws are vague as to how minors can access civil protection orders, leaving it open to judicial interpretation. Sometimes, the judge wants the parent to file on behalf of the minor child, other times they do not.

## **What is parental notification and does it apply to me?**

When working with a minor on legal issues, depending on the state and/or issue, the minor may need to have a parent or legal guardian involved in the process. In other words, the parent or legal guardian would be filing any legal documents on behalf of their child. If you are unclear if a parent needs to be involved, please contact a local community-based organization who works on youth-related issues.

## **When a teen talks to me about their dating violence issues, must it remain confidential?**

Depending on your role in the school, different confidentiality rules apply. In general, if a student is talking to you, as a teacher, about abuse, you may have to report what the student told you to a government authority like Child Protective Services. Every state has a rule on the scope of confidentiality in a school setting. You should contact your school's Principal to determine what the policy is and make it clear to every school employee. Regardless of what the policy is, you should state it upfront before working with a student who might reveal dating violence or sexual violence.

## **Can a teen file criminal charges against another minor who is perpetrating violence?**

Each state has its own criminal codes addressing how minors can be charged for domestic abuse. Some states charge minors for domestic abuse through the state's juvenile justice system, and others go through the family court system. If a teen is interested in going through the criminal justice system, please refer the teen to the local legal aid's family law unit to discuss the pros and cons of filing in the criminal courts.

## **What about mandatory reporting? Aren't I supposed to report anything related to abuse?**

Most individuals who work with youth are mandated reporters. In each state, there are laws that mandate certain individuals to report what they hear or see to government authorities. Often, if a minor reveals abuse to an adult in a school setting, the adult has to report the incident, including the student's name to government authorities. However, there are exceptions to that general rule. Therefore, it is important for you to know what material constitutes mandated reporting, and your principal or Superintendent will have those issues listed out in the teacher's manual. In Washington, DC, for example mandated reporters are not required to report dating violence but should address it when observed.

For more information on various state laws and how they address teen dating violence, check out Break the Cycle's State Law Report Cards at [www.breakthecycle.org/resources-state-law-report-cards.html](http://www.breakthecycle.org/resources-state-law-report-cards.html)



# LETHALITY ASSESSMENT

## What is lethality assessment?

Generally, the severity and frequency of battering increases over time of the relationship. There are certain behaviors, words, and actions by the abuser that can indicate a possibility of lethality. An assessment of the abuser's pattern of violence, control, and coercion can assist the teen victim in determining when the abuser is most dangerous. After doing this type of assessment, the safety plan should address what the teen should do when the abuser becomes most dangerous.

## What questions should I ask to determine lethality?

Ask the teen, has your abuser:

- Threatened you with a weapon?
- Threatened to kill or injure you?
- Threatened to commit suicide?
- Tried or threatened to choke or strangle you?
- Been violently or constantly jealous?
- Kept you from contacting family or friends?
- Come to control all or most of your daily activities?
- Forced you to have sex?
- Made you fear for your life?
- Threatened your family or friends?
- Been violent outside of your relationship?
- Abused you when you were pregnant?


## What should I do if the teen answers "Yes" to any of the above questions?

If the teen responded "yes" to any of the above questions:

- Tell the teen that she may be in increased danger of being severely injured or killed and you are concerned for her safety.
- Encourage him to seek help from community agencies and offer to make referrals.

*"I think that teens stay in situations where they can be harmed because they don't see another alternative and they don't see that they need help."*

**– José - 15**

A photograph of a young man and woman smiling and embracing each other outdoors. The man is on the right, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. The woman is on the left, wearing a red top. They are both looking at each other and smiling warmly.

Be a role model and promote gender equality among all members of the school community.

## PREVENTION

### Modeling respectful behavior

Teens observe how adults communicate in different settings. Teens often mimic these forms of communication within their own peer group. School administrators, teachers, coaches, and school resource officers are often the only adults, outside of family members, that teens are interacting with on a daily basis.

- Model respectful behavior that includes gender neutral language, mutual respect, and personal responsibility.
- Quickly respond to violence of any type, including bullying, sexual harassment, dating violence, sexual violence in a prompt manner.
- Address any derogatory language used by students and/or school employees by suggesting other words to replace those derogatory words.
- Promote gender equality among all members of the school community.

*“Some people are like real close to the counselor at my school and they might like, go talk to them.”*

**– Kayla - 16**

# Building teen dating violence education into the curriculum

**Teacher's Guide:** Interesting, Fun, and Effective Classroom Activities to Influence Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention<sup>8</sup>

## Suggested Classroom Activities

### Web Page Design Class, Computer Applications Class, Desktop Publishing Class, or Video Productions Class

- Depending on skill level and software availability, have students develop an interactive game, quiz, or automatic slide show/presentation dealing with teen dating violence awareness. (This can be done in anything from custom-animated PowerPoint to basic programming/authoring tools.) Consider setting the finished product up in the cafeteria as a kiosk and encourage students “test” themselves to see how much they know about the topic.
- Have your students incorporate their skills into producing something to raise awareness about teen dating violence. Depending on their skill level, students could create brochures to be placed in the school office, restrooms and locker rooms; an announcement could be aired in the school television broadcast system; or a web page could be featured on the school’s website. Check out [thesafespace.org](http://thesafespace.org) for ideas.

### Math Class

- Help students to develop an anonymous school survey that will measure their peers’ attitudes and behaviors concerning dating relationships. After administering the survey, compile the results and calculate the probability that a student in the school will be a victim (or perpetrator) of teen dating violence. Present your findings to your school administration, school board, or parent group.
- Work with your students to develop an anonymous school survey that will measure their peers’ attitudes and behaviors concerning dating relationships. Data from the survey can be used to practice additional skills such as:
  - > measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode)
  - > graphing data in a variety of forms
  - > applying probability ratios to different populations (i.e. school, city, state, country) to determine the number of people affected; for example, if there is a probability that 1 in 5 teens will be a victim of dating violence, how many teens will be affected in your state? Population estimates for city, county, state, and country can be found at Census Quick Facts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>

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<sup>8</sup> © 2006 American Bar Association NATIONAL TEEN DATING VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE



### Government/Citizenship Class

- Have the students role-play a debate between state legislators. They can pretend they are debating in one of the chambers of your Capitol Building, or on a television political news show. Applying their knowledge of state law and policy, the students should debate the following topic: “Teens should (or should not) have the ability to file their own protective orders in a violent teen dating relationship.”
- Applying your state statutes, conduct a “mock trial” of a teen dating violence case. Assign students to act in the roles of the judge, the prosecuting attorney, the victim’s attorney, the accused and the victim. The judge and attorneys must integrate the state statutes into their individual courtroom roles: during the attorney’s opening and closing arguments; as the judge presides over the courtroom scene; and during the questioning of the victim and accused. Let the remaining students act as the jury and deliberate innocence or guilt.
- Help your students make a formal request that local government leaders proclaim “Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week” in your area. Have a group of students be present during the official proclamation signing. Invite the news media to cover the event, or submit a news release. Note: National “Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week” is the first full week of February.
- Discuss the role of citizens as activists and agents of change, particularly in the area of youth/teen advocacy and relationship violence prevention. As a class, identify an opportunity to influence change, such as:
  - > Volunteer or participate in a local event to show support of teen dating violence prevention.
  - > Hold a bake sale, car wash, etc. to raise money to donate to an organization that addresses teen dating violence prevention.
- Research relevant laws in your state and in other states. Write a letter to your senator expressing support for a specific issue related to the law and teen dating violence prevention.
- Have students review existing school policies concerning sexual harassment and dating and sexual violence. Discuss whether additional policies are needed to protect students who have been targets of these behaviors. They may wish to put their thoughts in writing in the form of a proposal to the school administrator or school board. Talk to Break the Cycle for a sample school policy.



### **Drama or Theater Class**

- Assist students to enact a mock teen dating violence incident, demonstrating how violent behavior escalates. Include the roles that friends, family, teachers, bystanders and others may play in these situations. Include community groups in the enactment as appropriate. Follow-up with a discussion about what occurred. Discuss the obligation of all those involved, as well as school safety issues and strategies.
- Invite your students to create a dramatic scene in which they confront a friend who is in an abusive relationship or a friend who is treating a boyfriend or girlfriend in a hurtful or disrespectful manner. Bring in a local teen dating or domestic violence organization representative to discuss different approaches.
- Through discussion or debate, ask students to investigate whether “Romeo and Juliet” was a “great love story” or “a compelling story of love addiction.” Have students write a summary essay supporting their decision. Identify other plays, movies, or musicals that depict healthy or unhealthy relationships.
- Have your students use improvisational acting skills to interview a potential boyfriend or girlfriend before going out on a date with them. Discuss what kinds of questions they would ask to determine whether their potential date will be respectful.
- Have your students role play behaviors that are warning signs of an abusive relationship. See [thesafespace.org](https://thesafespace.org) for warning signs.

### **Family/Consumer Science Class**

- Have your students perform research to find local professionals and organizations that can provide intervention services for a teenager who believes they are in a violent or potentially violent relationship. Have them report the results back to the entire class and submit a summary to the campus newspaper.
- Bring a representative from an appropriate community organization into the classroom to talk about teen dating violence and discuss services specific to teen dating violence. Your students could submit a short story and a list of services to the high school campus newspaper.
- Study the relationship between spousal abuse and child abuse. What are the effects of domestic violence on children? What similar factors are associated with dating violence perpetration?





### **Art Class**

- Using a life-size human shape, along with cut-outs from butcher paper and a variety of specific selection of materials (e.g. fabrics, yarns, papers, markers, clay, chalk, etc.), have students creatively and artistically create a visual representation of a person involved in a violent relationship vs. a person involved in a healthy relationship. Place them in a school location where they can be seen by other students and school personnel. Have the artists write a description to display with their artwork.
- Divide the class into pairs or groups and assign each pair/group a door in the school. Conduct a “Healthy Relationships” door decorating contest! To encourage student body awareness/participation, the student body can vote on their favorite door.
- Make a collage with pictures and words to illustrate the messages teens hear and see about intimate relationships in the media, music, from parents, and peers, to illustrate healthy vs. abusive relationships, or to illustrate what they want from a partner in a healthy relationship.

### **Health Science Class**

- Discuss relationship violence, the spectrum of violence (physical, social, emotional, psychological, verbal) and the continuum of violence. Have the students research the associated health problems beforehand. Conduct a class discussion about the adverse health effects of a violent teenage dating relationship, such as eating disorders, depression, suicide, unwanted sex, sexually transmitted disease, pregnancy, etc.
- Create a survey to anonymously and randomly survey the student body regarding their experience or awareness of the problem of relationship violence on the campus. Ask health-related questions in your anonymous survey. For example, one question might be, “Have you been in a violent or controlling dating relationship?” and a follow-up question might be, “If you answered ‘yes’ to the previous question, did your experience cause real or potential health problems, such as feelings of depression, thoughts of suicide, disordered eating behaviors, drug or alcohol use? Please explain.” Report the results back to the class and submit an article to the campus newspaper.
- Research and discuss why domestic violence is considered a major public health problem. Ask your students if any of the health concerns are also associated with teen dating violence. Talk about which strategies are considered most effective in preventing domestic violence from a public health perspective, and if any might also apply to teen dating violence prevention.

## English Class

- Hold a class discussion or debate addressing whether “Romeo and Juliet” is a ‘great love story’ or ‘a compelling story of love addiction.’ Have your students write a summary essay supporting their position.
- Have your students write a comparative paper discussing, ‘how it feels to be loved’ versus ‘how it feels to be controlled.’ Have the class discuss their views.
- Using [thesafespace.org](http://thesafespace.org), ask your students to define “teen dating violence.”
- Challenge your students to write an article for the school or community newspaper on the issue of teen dating violence and prevention. Have the work judged by a panel of local journalists. Ask that the winning article be highlighted during the National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week or immediately afterward.
- Ask your students to read and analyze reports from newspapers and websites about dating violence and discuss how these stories are told. What words are used to describe acts of dating violence?
- Invite students to interview one or more older relatives or neighbors about dating customs and beliefs in the past. They might tape-record the interview, with permission, and write a report about what they learned.
- Ask your class to write poetry about the meaning of love, respect, friendship or other topics.
- Have the students read an article on teen dating violence or relationship violence and complete the following assignment:

## Sample Assignment Sheet

- State the topic.
- Write a citation for your article.
- Write a short article summarization.
- State the article’s main facts and opinions.
  - > Paraphrase one example of each.
  - > Draw an inference from the facts. (Do not just paraphrasing the facts.)
- Write 2-4 sentences about the article’s ‘tone.’ (the author’s attitude toward his subject).
  - > Quote words or phrases from the article which set the tone.
- Develop your vocabulary
  - > Choose two words from the article that you did not know previously.
  - > For each of the words, quote a sentence from the article that uses them.
  - > Write what you think each word’s definition is, based on context. (Use your knowledge of roots and prefixes to determine the ‘best guess’ definition.)
  - > Write the dictionary definition of each word.
  - > Write your own sentence(s) using the words.

## Science Class

- Around the topic of “teen dating violence,” have your students practice using their research skills, including:
  - Collecting background research (5 sources).
  - Applying experimental design skills, use a survey to conduct an experiment. For example, ask questions like the following:
    - > Does the gender of the interviewer and interviewee affect survey results?
    - > Do responses vary based on whether the survey is conducted one-on-one or in a group setting?
    - > Does the social context setting affect survey responses (e.g. if the survey is conducted in the boys locker room after PE vs. in science or math class)?
      - Develop a hypothesis.
      - Identify dependent and independent variables.
      - Conduct research.
      - Analyze the data.
      - Develop a conclusion and a discussion.

## History Class

- Assign students to research the historical timeline and social views of domestic violence, from when it was a “private family matter” to when it became a crime. Direct them to look at what occurred during those transitions, and to discuss in their paper any similarities to the current issue of teen dating violence. They should include information on legal statutes, and close with their summary of the findings, including their own opinion. Have students present their papers and discuss their findings and opinions.
- Ask the class to analyze the history of the Constitution in terms of power structures and equal rights (e.g. from land-owning, white men to women, minorities, etc.) and the role of the legal system in influencing change. Discuss some of the ‘teen rights’ your students think are important in today’s society. Students should consider how history might or might not determine opportunities to exercise those rights.

## Physical Education Class

- Invite presenters to the class to discuss personal safety issues, including how to respond to direct physical violence in a personal relationship. Include self-protection strategies, as appropriate.
- Assist your students to plan a dance to celebrate healthy relationships. Select music that promotes equality, respect, and other aspects of healthy relationships. Decorate with positive images of relationships. Give a prize to an individual or couple who demonstrates respect for others and each other.
- Plan a school-wide or community ‘walk’ with your students to honor those who have suffered or lost their lives or loved ones to teen dating violence. Students can use the walk to raise awareness and raise money to support a local service provider or to support prevention projects, resources and events on campus.

## General

- Assign teams of students to research local, state and/or national facts and statistics about teen dating violence. They should also research and provide information on preventive or intervention services. Applying their findings, allow them to develop brochures, informational flyers, web pages, newsletters, posters, public service announcements and/or commercials to promote awareness and prevention. Make sure the students' work is posted or distributed within the school and/or community.
- Have your students create posters on teen dating violence facts and prevention. Hang the posters in a visible area of the school, such as the student commons area or the hallway near the main entrance.
- Help the students prepare an informational community presentation, on teen dating violence. Assist them to deliver it to other high schools, parent groups, teacher organizations, and community forums. Encourage them to define and describe "dating," "violence" and "dating violence." They can also address what the difference is between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" dating behavior. Assist them to look for other opportunities to present this information to the public.
- Encourage students to use teen dating violence as a topic for local, state and national speech, drama, or essay competitions.
- Ask your class to watch a TV program or movie about a couple's relationship. During the next class, have the students give a short description of the relationship and how the people treated each other, particularly if there was violent, aggressive, or controlling behavior. Then have the class discuss the influence TV and movies might have on their own ideas about relationships. Did the TV program or movie depict how they see themselves in a relationship or not? Give them the opportunity to discuss what is acceptable behavior and what is not.







School Resource Officers are often the first responders to an incident of violence.

## SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

### Role of the SRO

As a School Resource Officer (SRO), you are often the first person called upon to respond to an incident of violence, including teen dating violence. There are many ways SROs can help prevent teen dating violence on- and off-campus.

### How to Help

- SROs should develop, with the assistance of community-based organizations, school-based activities that educate teens on teen dating violence, including the consequences for breaking the law.
- If you are called to a scene of a crime of teen dating violence, SROs should file complete and accurate police reports detailing what they witnessed.
- SROs need to integrate with the school culture and population so they become more aware of questionable characteristics of students.
- The SRO department should create a dating violence unit to handle complaints and incidents of teen dating violence. Every SRO should be trained on teen dating violence, with officers in the dating violence unit receiving additional, advanced training.

*“Victims need emotional support and someone needs to be behind them all the way till they get help.”*

– Terrell - 14





Being aware and attuned to cultural differences can help when working with teens.

## CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence means responding respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, in a manner that affirms the worth and preserves the dignity of individuals, families, and communities. Like adults, teens come from various backgrounds and have varying needs. Some have physical and mental limitations, while others are overcoming language, cultural, and religious barriers. Being aware and attuned to these differences can help when working with a teen who is trying to get out of an abusive relationship.

Cultural competence is not learned through a one-time training. It also doesn't mean learning all the characteristics of every culture. Rather, culture competence means that you:

- Learn to recognize and reject your pre-existing beliefs about that culture,
- Resist the temptation to stereotype or classify that person with cultural labels, and
- Focus on the information provided by the teen within that teen's cultural context.

*"Some people in relationships maybe think 'this is just the way it's supposed to be.'"*

**– Lonnisha - 14**

# Physically Challenged Students

Cultural competence includes understanding disabilities. The U.S. Office on Disability of the U.S. Office of Health and Human Services estimates that about 15% of the U.S. population has a disability. Under federal law, disabilities include:

- Blindness
- Deafness
- Mobility impairments
- Mental disability
- Learning disabilities

## Do:

- Determine if someone at your school speaks American Sign Language. If there are no school employees, are volunteers available or is there a service provider you can call?
- Figure out the school employee who knows how to use technology-based communication.
- Have your publications accessible for persons with disabilities, in large print, and in Braille.

## Don't:

- Focus on the disability. Remember that the teen is coming to talk to you about the violence she is facing from her abuser.
- Feel like you have to understand everything about the disability.

# Limited English Proficiency Students

Teens with limited English proficiency may not be able to write, speak, or understand English well enough to state the abuse.

## Do:

- Make an initial assessment of the student's English limits. Speak to the student's English or English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Ask the student if she is comfortable speaking in English or if he is comfortable reading the materials in English.
- Have forms and handouts in other languages that are predominant at your school.
- Figure out how your school handles interpreters. Do you have bilingual staff? Do you have contract interpreters? Do you have access to a language line?

## Don't:

- Ask the abusive partner to interpret for your student, even if the abusive partner is the only person at the school who speaks your student's language.
- Have the teen act as the interpreter for the parents and vice versa.
- Use untrained interpreters or language lines that are not trained in interpreting for victims of dating violence and sexual assault.

# APPENDIX

## Safety Planning Worksheet

### Creating a safety plan

You can't control your partner's abusive behavior, but you can take steps to protect yourself from harm. Whether you decide to stay or end the relationship, you should consider creating a safety plan. A safety plan is a personalized and practical plan for reducing your risk of being hurt by your partner. It can help you avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when you are in danger.

### What do I need to know?

Often victims believe, and have been told by their abusive partner, that the abuse is their fault. Remember that the abuse is not your fault and you can't control it by changing your own behavior. But you can change your behavior to better protect yourself when abuse happens. Even if you are not ready to leave your partner, or even if the violence hasn't escalated yet, you should consider a safety plan.

An effective safety plan makes changes to your daily lifestyle to better protect you at your home, school, work and community. These changes may be big, like going to a confidential shelter or changing schools. But these changes may also be small, like changing your email passwords or the route you take to school or work. Your safety plan will also help you to escape a violent incident safely, and prepare you to end your relationship when you are ready.

### What can I do?

Prepare a safety plan and remember to follow it whenever possible. Consider involving someone you trust to help you create the best plan for you. When creating your safety plan, ask yourself these important questions: What can I do to stay safe in my home? How do I safely get to school or work? Is there a safe place I can go when abuse happens?

Creating a safety plan can be difficult on your own. Break the Cycle can help you create a detailed safety plan. Contact Break the Cycle for specific tips on creating a safety plan or to find help in your local area.

*"Victims need emotional support and someone needs to be behind them all the way till they get help."*

**– Terrell - 14**

# MY SAFETY WORKBOOK - (Page 1)

[www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org)  
[www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)  
888.988.TEEN

## Staying Safe at School:

The safest way for me to get to and from school is:

\_\_\_\_\_.

If I need to leave school in an emergency, I can get home safely by:

\_\_\_\_\_.

I can make sure that a friend can walk with me between classes. I will ask:

\_\_\_\_\_ and/or \_\_\_\_\_.

I will eat lunch and spend free periods in an area where there are school staff or faculty nearby. These are some areas on campus where I feel safe:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

I could talk to the following people at school if I need to rearrange my schedule in order to avoid my abuser, or if I need help staying safe at school:

- School Counselor
- Coach
- Teachers: \_\_\_\_\_
- Principal
- Assistant/Vice principal
- School security
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

If I live with my abuser, I will have a bag ready with these important items in case I need to leave quickly (check all that apply):

- Cell phone & charger
- Spare money
- Keys
- Driver's license or other form of ID
- Copy of Restraining Order
- Birth certificate, social security card, immigration papers and other important documents
- Change of clothes
- Medications
- Special photos or other valuable items
- If I have children—anything they may need (important papers, formula, diapers)

## Staying Safe at Home:

I can tell this family member about what is going on in my relationship:

\_\_\_\_\_.

There may be times when no one else is home. During those times, I can have people stay with me. I will ask:

\_\_\_\_\_.

The safest way for me to leave my house in an emergency is:

\_\_\_\_\_.

If I have to leave in an emergency, I should try to go to a place that is public, safe and unknown by my abuser. I could go here:

\_\_\_\_\_ and/or here: \_\_\_\_\_.

I will use a code word so I can alert my family, friends, and neighbors to call for help without my abuser knowing about it.

My code word is: \_\_\_\_\_.

# MY SAFETY WORKBOOK - (Page 2)

## Staying Safe Emotionally:

My abuser often tries to make me feel bad about myself by saying or doing this:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

When he/she does this, I will think of these things I like about myself:

\_\_\_\_\_ and

\_\_\_\_\_.

I will do things I enjoy, like:

\_\_\_\_\_ and/or

\_\_\_\_\_.

I will join clubs or organizations that interest me, like:

\_\_\_\_\_ or

\_\_\_\_\_.

If I feel down, depressed or scared, I can call the following friends or family members:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

During an emergency, I could call the following friends or family members at any time of the day or night:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

[www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org)  
[www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)  
888.988.TEEN

## Getting Help in Your Community:

**For emergencies: 911**

**Break the Cycle: [888.988.TEEN](tel:888.988.TEEN) or [www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)**

**National Teen Dating Violence Hotline: [866.331.9474](tel:866.331.9474)**

Local police station: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Local domestic violence organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Local free legal assistance: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest youth shelter: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



# MY SAFETY WORKBOOK - (Page 3)

## These are things I can do to help keep myself safe everyday:

- I will carry my cell phone and important telephone numbers with me at all times.
- I will keep in touch with someone I trust about where I am or what I am doing.
- I will stay out of isolated places and try to never walk around alone.
- I will avoid places where my abuser or his/her friends and family are likely to be.
- I will keep the doors and windows locked when I am at home, especially if I am alone.
- I will avoid speaking to my abuser. If it is unavoidable, I will make sure there are people around in case the situation becomes dangerous.
- I will call 911 if I feel my safety is at risk.
- I can look into getting a protective order so that I'll have legal support in keeping my abuser away.
- I will remember that the abuse is not my fault and that I deserve a safe and healthy relationship.

## These are things I can do to help keep myself safe in my social life:

- I will ask my friends to keep their cell phones with them while they are with me in case we get separated and I need help.
- If possible, I will go to different malls, banks, grocery stores, movie theaters, etc. than the ones my abuser goes to or knows about.
- I will not go out alone, especially at night.
- No matter where I go, I will be aware of how to leave safely in case of an emergency.
- I will leave if I feel uncomfortable in a situation, no matter what my friends are doing.
- I will spend time with people who make me feel safe, supported and good about myself.

## These are things I can do to stay safe online and with my cell phone:

- I will not say or do anything online that I wouldn't in person.
- I will set all my online profiles to be as private as they can be.
- I will save and keep track of any abusive, threatening or harassing comments, posts, or texts.
- I will never give my password to anyone other than my parents or guardians.
- If the abuse and harassment does not stop, I will change my usernames, email addresses, and/or cell phone number.
- I will not answer calls from unknown, blocked or private numbers.
- I can see if my phone company can block my abuser's phone number from calling my phone.
- I will not communicate with my abuser using any type of technology if unnecessary, since any form of communication can be recorded and possibly used against me in the future.

# POP QUIZ!

## IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY?

Everyone deserves to be in a safe and healthy relationship. Do you know if your relationship is as healthy as you deserve? Answer "yes" or "no" to the following statements to find out! Make sure to circle your responses. At the end you'll find out how to score your answers.

### The person I am with:

	<b>Circle</b>	<b>One</b>
1. Is very supportive of things that I do.	Yes	No
2. Encourages me to try new things.	Yes	No
3. Likes to listen when I have something on my mind.	Yes	No
4. Understands that I have my own life too.	Yes	No
5. Is not liked very well by my friends.	Yes	No
6. Says I'm too involved in different activities.	Yes	No
7. Texts me or calls me all the time.	Yes	No
8. Thinks I spend too much time trying to look nice.	Yes	No
9. Gets extremely jealous or possessive.	Yes	No
10. Accuses me of flirting or cheating.	Yes	No
11. Constantly checks up on me or makes me check in.	Yes	No
12. Controls what I wear or how I look.	Yes	No
13. Tries to control what I do and who I see.	Yes	No
14. Tries to keep me from seeing or talking to my family and friends.	Yes	No
15. Has big mood swings - gets angry and yells at me one minute, and the next minute is sweet and apologetic.	Yes	No
16. Makes me feel nervous or like I'm "walking on eggshells."	Yes	No
17. Puts me down, calls me names or criticizes me.	Yes	No
18. Makes me feel like I can't do anything right or blames me for problems.	Yes	No
19. Makes me feel like no one else would want me.	Yes	No
20. Threatens to hurt me, my friends or family.	Yes	No
21. Threatens to hurt him or herself because of me.	Yes	No
22. Threatens to destroy my things.	Yes	No
23. Grabs, pushes, shoves, chokes, punches, slaps, holds me down, throws things or hurts me in some way.	Yes	No
24. Breaks things or throws things to intimidate me.	Yes	No
25. Yells, screams or humiliates me in front of others.	Yes	No
26. Pressures or forces me into having sex or going farther than I want to.	Yes	No

## Scoring:

Give yourself 1 point for every "no" you answered to numbers 1-4; 1 point for every "yes" response to numbers 5-8; and 5 points for every "yes" to numbers 9-26.

Now that you're finished and have your score, the next step is to find out what your score means. Simply take your total score and see which of the boxes below applies to you.

### Score: 0 points

You got a score of 0? Not to worry—it's a good thing! It sounds like your relationship is on a pretty healthy track. Fostering healthy relationships takes some work—keep it up! Remember that while you may have a healthy relationship, it's possible that a friend of yours may not. If you think you know someone who may be in an abusive relationship, find out how you can help that person end the abuse.

### Score: 1-2 points

If you scored 1 or 2 points, you may be noticing a couple of things in your relationship that may be unhealthy, but it doesn't necessarily mean they are warning signs. It's still a good idea to keep an eye on them to make sure there isn't a pattern. The best thing to do is to communicate with your partner and let them know what you like and don't like. Encourage them to do the same. Remember, communication is always a step forward to building a healthy relationship. It's also good to be informed so that you learn to recognize the warning signs. Read about teen dating violence and the different types of abuse there may be.

### Score: 3-4 points

If you scored 3 or 4 points, it sounds like you may be seeing some warning signs of an abusive relationship. Warning signs should never be ignored. Something that starts small can get much worse over time. Relationships are never perfect—they take some work! But in a healthy relationship you won't find abusive behaviors. If you think your relationship may not be as healthy as you deserve, contact Break the Cycle for help and to get more information.

### Score: 5 points or more

If you scored 5 points or more, you are definitely seeing warning signs and may be in an abusive relationship. You don't have to deal with this alone. Break the Cycle can help. We can help you learn about your different options and legal rights. Contact us to get more information.

**To contact Break the Cycle, call us at (888) 988-TEEN. Or visit [thesafespace.org](https://thesafespace.org) to get more information and to find out how you can get involved.**

BREAK THE CYCLE ENGAGES,  
EDUCATES AND EMPOWERS YOUTH  
TO BUILD LIVES AND COMMUNITIES  
FREE FROM DOMESTIC AND  
DATING VIOLENCE.



**Empowering Youth to End  
Domestic Violence**

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