Preventing Teen Dating Violence

[Note: Raven Bennett, a student at Swarthmore College, came to the Center at UCLA for a summer internshipfunded by the Eugene Lang Opportunity Scholarship. Based on her interest in the topic, she generated a draft for this resource as one facet of her work at the Center. The Center Co-directors edited and added to the draft.]

> *The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are vital. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.*
>
> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The National Center for Victims of Crime (2012) defines dating violence as controlling, aggressive, and abusive behavior in a dating relationship. Such behavior can include verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse (including stalking). Dating violence can take place in person or electronically, such as repeated texting or posting sexual pictures of a partner online. Dating violence is one of the most prevalent forms of peer-to-peer violence. Estimates suggest that one in three adolescents in the U.S. has been victimized by a dating partner (Love is Respect, 2013). Additionally, 20 percent of a sample of 13- to 14-year-olds reported that they know friends or peers who have been physically abused by a dating partner (Teen Research Unlimited, 2008).

Victims of dating violence experience physical, emotional, social, and academic problems. They are more likely to engage in physical fights, sexual activity, binge drinking, drug use, and suicide attempts (Ackard, 2007). They may suffer from problems with self-esteem and body image (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002), and often continue to experience patterns of violence in their future relationships (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003).

African American youth are estimated as two-times more likely to experience dating violence than white youth (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2006). Age and gender are also risk factors for dating violence victimization, with younger individuals and females particularly vulnerable (Wolitzky-Taylor, 2008). Research suggests that having friends in violent relationships may be an even stronger predictor of dating violence perpetration and victimization than witnessing inter-parental violence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). Exposure to inter-parental violence and history of parental victimization is another factor that has been listed as putting youngsters at risk (Leiderman & Almo, 2001; Manseau, Fenet, Halbert, Collin-Vezina, & Blais, 2008; Tschann, Pasch, Flores, & VanOss Marin, 2009;).

What Is Being Done to Prevent Dating Violence?

Primary prevention entails targeting a potential threat before it occurs. In the case of teen dating violence, primary prevention programs are often either universal, addressing an entire population, or targeted, delivered to individuals who have risk markers that indicate they are more likely to be involved in dating violence. Interventions are most often implemented in schools, but some are administered at non-profit organizations. Programs may take on a variety of forms including traditional lecture style presentations, film screenings, role-playing, discussion groups, poster competitions, and theater play productions. While many varieties of primary prevention programs for dating violence exist, few have undergone rigorous research on effectiveness. The following Exhibit offers some major examples.

Exhibit: Sampling of Primary Prevention Programs

>*Safe Dates* (Hazelden Publishing, 2015). This dating abuse prevention program is designated as a Model Program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and was selected for the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. It aims to help teens recognize the difference between caring, supportive relationships, and controlling, manipulative, or abusive dating relationships. The program is co-ed and addresses both victimization and perpetration in abusive relationships. It includes a 10-session curriculum, student-parent booklets to encourage at-home discussions, a poster contest, and a school play.

Students who participated in the program reported less acceptance of dating violence, stronger communication and anger management skills, less gender stereotyping, and greater awareness of community services for dating abuse. Four years after implementation, students who participated reported 56 percent to 92 percent less physical, serious physical, and sexual dating violence victimization and perpetration than nonparticipants. Data suggest the program is equally effective for males and females and individuals of any race.

>*Shifting Boundaries* (Taylor, Stein, Mumford, & Woods, 2012). This dating violence and sexual harassment primary prevention program for middle school students was rated as "promising" by the National Institute of Justice. The program is composed of two parts: a classroom-based curricula and a school-wide component. The classroom-based curricula includes six lessons that cover the construction of gender roles, setting and communicating boundaries in interpersonal relationships, healthy relationships, bystander intervention, the consequences of perpetration, and the state and federal laws related to dating violence and sexual harassment. The school-wide intervention includes identifying and responding to dating violence and sexual harassment, the introduction of temporary school-based restraining orders, the installation of posters in the school to increase awareness and reporting of dating violence and harassment, and the mapping of student reported unsafe 'hot spots' in order to determine the placement of faculty or school security supervision.

While research found the classroom-based curricula alone was not effective, the combination of the school-wide and classroom-based components, as well as the school-wide component alone, were found to reduce sexual violence victimization involving either peers or dating partners at 6 months post-intervention. In addition, the school-wide only intervention resulted in a 27 percent reduction in the frequency of total violent victimization by a peer, a 35 percent reduction in the frequency of sexual victimization, a 54 percent reduction in the frequency of dating partner violent victimization, and a 50 and 53 percent reduction, respectively, in prevalence and frequency of dating partner sexual victimization. For students in the combined intervention group, there was a 34 percent reduction in the prevalence and 41 percent reduction in the frequency of total sexual victimization, as well as a 33 percent reduction in the frequency of total victimization by a peer, but no significant reduction in prevalence of victimization by a peer. There was also a 26 percent reduction in the frequency of sexual harassment compared to the control group, but no reduction in the prevalence of sexual harassment.

>*Coaching Boys into Men* (Miller et al., 2012). This dating violence prevention program targets coaches and high school male athletes. The program trains coaches to deliver violence prevention messages to their athletes, address norms that foster dating violence perpetration, and teach bystander intervention skills. Coaches undergo a 60-minutes training led by a trained violence prevention advocate to introduce the Coaches Kit, a resource which includes 11 "Training Cards" that prompt coaches to lead their athletes in 10 to 15 minute discussions about respect and dating violence. These discussions occur during practice throughout the sports season.

Athletes who participated in the Coaching Boys into Men program reported increased intentions to intervene if they saw a peer committing dating violence and more positive bystander behavior than those who did not participate in the program. In addition, those who did not receive the program showed decreased intentions to intervene and more emotional and verbal perpetration toward a female counterpart over time.

A 2011 CDC nationwide survey found 23% of females and 14% of males first experienced some form of partner violence between age 11 and 17. A 2013 survey found approximately 10% of high schoolers reported physical victimization and 10% reported sexual victimization from a dating partner in the previous 12 months.

What Are the Barriers and Supports to Violence Prevention Programs?
(From: Farrell, Mehari, Kramer-Kuhn, Mays & Sullivan, 2015)

Barriers	**Supports**

• Normative beliefs supporting aggression
  • Belief that aggression leads to better outcomes
  • Belief that others' provocative behavior warrants or deserves an aggressive response
  • Belief that fighting is justified in self-defense
  • Parental values supporting aggressive behavior
 	
• Skill is not consistent with youngster's beliefs or values
  • Belief that some people deserve to be the targets of violence
  • Perception that using a skill will make youngster feel weak
  • Skill inconsistent with sense of self
  • Belief that skill is ineffective
 	
• Skill not considered personally relevant
  • Youngster has his or her "own way" of handling situation
 	
• Situational impediment to use of skill
  • Unsure of the situation, the likely outcomes, or how others might react to use of skill
  • Does not feel capable of using the skill successfully
  • Feels too angry, scared, or nervous to use skill
  • Does not remember to use skill
  • Noisy and crowded environment
  • Presence and behavior of bystanders
  • Location of situation
  • Peers do not support use of skill
  • Threat to reputation
  • Threat of isolation
  • Age and size of the other person involved in situation
  • Number of others involved
	• Beliefs or values that support use of skill
	  • Belief that aggression and other delinquent behaviors are inconsistent with youngster's goals, values, or sense of self
	  • Belief that aggression is morally wrong
	  • Belief that skill is effective
	  • Skill consistent with sense of self
	  • Skill consistent with knowledge of right or wrong
	  • Skill consistent with parental messages
	  • Skill consistent with life goals
	
	• Belief that use of skill will result in positive outcomes
	  • Using a skill could help avoid a negative outcome
	  • Skill has worked in the past
	
	• Situational facilitation of skill use
	  • Feels capable of using the skill effectively
	  • Remembers to use skill
	  • Has prior knowledge about the situation or the other person involved
	  • Previous experience in similar situations
	  • Location of situation
	  • Peers supporting use of skill
	  • Environment well-suited for use of skill

A Synthesis of School Policy and Practice Recommendations Related to Teen Dating Violence

Various organizations and researchers have offered policy and practice suggestion. The following is a brief synthesis. [From: Adelman & Taylor, 2010; American Bar Association, 2006; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015; Davis & Gidycz, 2000; Farrell, Mehari, Kramer-Kuhn, Mays & Sullivan, 2015]

Policy

All middle and high schools should have explicit policy about
- sexual and dating violence (e.g., defining what is not acceptable, such as language that dehumanizes and sexually objectifies others, touching without consent, threatening and coercive behavior)
- school staff development that
  >ensures understanding of federal and state laws regarding sexual and dating violence
  >enhances understanding and capacity to address the problem of dating violence (e.g., general and specific time-and-place monitoring to minimize problems,what to do if a student reveals personal information regarding sexual or dating violence -- immediate response and follow-up interventions that support and protect survivors in compliance with Title IX, including, but not limited to, no contact orders, protection against retaliation, and counseling and educational support)
  >supports activities and a school-wide culture/climate that promotes interpersonal relationships, prevent problems, and respond effectively when a problem is identified
- mechanisms that should be in place to ensure policies are enforced effectively and with positive outcomes

Practice

- Address factors within the school and peer environment that increase the likelihood of problems occurring
- Address factors within the school and peer environment that reduce the likelihood of problems occurring
- Ensure educational materials account for individual differences (e.g., level of development, motivation, cultural background, language, etc.)
- Focus on developing understanding, attitudes, and skills for addressing the problem (including underlying beliefs and values about aggression, dealing with aggressors, peer resistance emotional regulation; explore examples of frequently encountered problem situations that place youth at-risk and how to deal with them)
- Facilitate active learning and retention (e.g., role playing, simulations, discussisons/debates; motivated and spaced practice activities outside of the classroom and school setting)
- Provide special interventions (or referrals) to address victim and perpetrator problems.

CDC's website (http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/teen-dating-violence-factsheet-a.pdf) recommends the following sites for learning more about the problem and hotlines for help:

- CDC's Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters

- National Dating Abuse Helpline and Love is Respect: 1-866-331-9474 or text 77054 or www.loveisrespect.org

- National Sexual Violence Resource Center www.nsvrc.org

- National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

- National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Concluding Comments

It is unlikely that problems such as teen dating violence will be solved simply by developing better strategies for schools to focus specifically on prevention. Such strategies can help, but ultimately what a school needs is to embed such a focus into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to development and learning and re-engaging disconnected students.

The time has come for schools to move away from stand-alone programs for addressing problems such as peer-on-peer violence. Just adding another program worsens the marginalized, fragmented, and piecemeal status of efforts to help students.

Rather than pursuing yet another discrete program, it is essential to use each concern that rises to a high policy level as an opportunity to catalyze and leverage systemic change. The aim should be to take another step toward transforming how schools go about ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond. It is time to embed advocacy for discrete programs into advocacy for unifying and developing a comprehensive and equitable system.*

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*Addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students is a school improvement imperative. Developing and implementing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports is the next evolutionary stage in meeting this imperative. It is the missing component in efforts to enhance safe schools, close the achievement gap, enhance social and emotional development and improve interpersonal realationships, reduce dropout rates, shut down the pipeline from schools to prisons, and promote well-being and social justice.

See the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html
See *Transforming student and learning supports:*
Developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.

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Additional Resources from CDC

•CDC TV's *Break the Silence: Stop the Violence*
   In this video, parents talk with teens about developing healthy, respectful relationships before
   they start dating. http://wwwdev.cdc.gov/CDCTV/BreakTheSilence/index.html

•*Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention*
   This 60-minute, interactive training is designed to help educators, youth-serving
   organizations, and others working with teens understand the risk factors and warning signs
   associated with teen dating violence. http://www.vetoviolence.org/datingmatters

•*Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships*
   CDC's new teen dating violence prevention initiative seeks to reduce dating violence and
   increase healthy relationships in high-risk urban communities through comprehensive,
   multisector prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/DatingMatters/index.html

•*Division of Adolescent and School Health*
   This CDC Division promotes the health and well-being of children and adolescents to enable
   them to become healthy and productive adults. http://wwwdev.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth

•*Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence: Program Activities Guide*
   This guide describes CDC's public health activities and research related to intimate partner
   and sexual violence. http://wwwdev.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ipv_sv_guide.html

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