IMPROVING YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT'S POLICY ON TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides step by step guidance on how to establish local and district-wide school policies to promote healthy relationships and prevent relationship violence. The advice reflects the experience of leaders from the *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships Initiative,* an initiative targeted at middle school youth to build healthy relationship skills as a way to prevent teen dating violence. *Start Strong* was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Blue Shield of California Foundation. The 11 communities funded as part of this initiative were tasked to implement a district-wide policy utilizing the model policy *School & District Policies to Increase Student Safety & Improve School Climate: Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Teen Dating Violence[1],* as a guide.

Are you a violence prevention advocate, social worker or public health official who wants to address adolescent relationship abuse? A teacher or school counselor concerned about student behavior and changing your campus' environment? A concerned parent or caregiver? A young person that wants to make an impact?

Introduction

Adolescent relationship abuse, or teen dating violence, affects up to one-third of U.S. adolescents, many who are involved in abusive relationships from as early as middle school.[2] Even with these epidemic rates of relationship abuse, a recent study found that 81 percent of the school counselors reported that they did not have a protocol on how to respond to an incident and ninety percent had not been trained on how to respond to students by relationship abuse.[3] There is a significant gap between the serious issue of adolescent relationship abuse and the ability to respond to this abuse within our current school systems. There is even less support for schools on how to prevent this abuse and promote healthy relationships. Young people have the capacity to change behavior patterns, reframe and redefine their relationships, become more empowered, and make healthier choices. System change approaches have been shown to reduce teen dating violence and other peer-to-peer conflicts like sexual harassment and bullying.[4] When systems support young people in making healthy relationship choice, and providing timely and appropriate responses, youth have the opportunity to develop the relationship skills that will allow them to become engaged adults and powerful community members. This toolkit will provide resources for systems change on the school level through policy adoption.

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[1] The model policy, *School & District Policies to Increase Student Safety & Improve School Climate: Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Teen Dating Violence,* aims to improve overall school climate, an approach commonly used by schools to improve relationships among students and to create a positive learning environment. It was written for middle schools, but is also relevant for high schools. Experts from domestic violence agencies, youth-focused organizations, schools, researchers, parents, legal experts and adolescent healthcare providers contributed to the development of this model policy. See: http://www.startstrongteens.org/resources/policy

[2] Davis, A., MPH. 2008. *Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency Focus*. Available at http://www.nccdcrc.org/nccd/pubs/Dating%20Violence%20Among%20Teens.pdf.

[3] Khubchandani J, Price JH, Thompson A, Dake JA, Wiblishauser M, Telljohann SK., *Adolescent dating violence: a national assessment of school counselors' perceptions and practices*. Pediatrics. 2012 Aug;130(2):202-10.

[4] Stein, N., *Shifting Boundaries: Lessons on Relationships for Students in Middle School*. Available at http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/teen-dating-violence/shifting-boundaries-all-schools.pdf.

With adolescent relationship abuse receiving greater attention nationally, many states have passed laws that encourage their schools to develop policies and procedures for dealing with incidents or providing prevention education. These school policies pave the way for prevention programs and intervention procedures. As a stakeholder in ending relationship abuse, this toolkit will provide an overview of key strategies in creating policies that impact systems to promote healthy relationships. We hope you find this toolkit useful in helping you achieve your policy goals.

I. Why Policy?

Policy is an important piece of the overarching goal to prevent adolescent relationship abuse because it codifies and explains an agency/school/institution's commitment to responding to and preventing this issue. Policy is a key strategy in both public health and social justice frameworks for lasting change. Goals for an adolescent relationship abuse and healthy relationship promotion policy in your school should include:

- Educate students and school staff about promoting healthy relationships and preventing teen dating violence;
- Ensure that all school staff know how to respond to an incident of teen dating violence;
- Encourage students to approach school staff as a resource who can help them stay safe;
- Ensure staying power and long-term impact even with changes in budget, priorities and personnel;
- Provide for the protocols and procedures to demonstrate compliance with Title IX requirements that schools not discriminate on the base of sex;[5]
- Pave the way for program development that reinforce healthier norms and behaviors; and
- Be an integral part of a coordinated school and community approach to building healthy adolescent relationships and preventing teen dating violence.

II. Get to Know Your System

The first step in effective advocacy is to get to know the system that you are trying to impact. This means tracking the various ways that the system changes. For example in the school context this could mean changes through school board mandates as well as superintendent decisions. Some suggestions for how to learn more about the system include:

- Conduct a local assessment of your existing school policies. Review local and state school discipline code for the definitions of behaviors that describe teen dating violence and other forms of peer-to-peer abuse and harassment, as well as threatening behavior. Read over the *School & District Policies to Increase Student Safety & Improve School Climate: Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Teen Dating Violence,* available at http://www.startstrongteens.org/resources/policy. Use the Scorecard to track your progress on page 44 of the Model Policy.

- Explore district and school websites to find out about existing policies and procedures—focus on how your school system responds to and prevents sexual harassment, bullying, teen dating violence, and other violence prevention and intervention work on campus. See if your district uses a positive school climate approach or a school climate survey tool which could support your policy and healthy relationship promotion approach. Download your school district and school handbooks given to students and/or parents.

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[5] Title IX analysis is discussed in more detail in Section II—Get To Know Your System.

- Map out how a policy gets passed in your school district. This may include multiple routes of policy change.

- Find out if your school board or system has open listening sessions and how they solicit ideas from the community as well as how they get feedback from the community.

- Find out if your state has passed any relevant laws such as:

    o An adolescent relationship abuse law: http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17582
    o Civil domestic violence protection order laws that allows teens to seek protection from abusive relationships: http://www.breakthecycle.org/state-law-report-cards.

- Investigate your state's mandatory reporting of child abuse laws and statutory rape laws, since issues of relationship abuse can be linked to sexual activity, as well as child abuse in some cases, triggering child abuse reporting systems. It is important to know who is a mandatory reporter for child abuse in your state, as well as the standards for making child abuse reports. When working with young people it is imperative for the trust-building process to be upfront about your responsibilities and limits to confidentiality. These sites can help you understand confidentiality and child abuse mandatory reporting requirements:

    o http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/sr/statelaws/summary.shtml
    o http://www.teenhealthlaw.org

- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, a federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in schools, can hold schools responsible for response to dating violence and sexual violence. It is important to make the argument to general counsel or school legal advisor that:

    o a) Adolescent relationship abuse can be a form of sexual harassment because it involves unwanted touching, sexual demands, verbal abuse and physical coercion of a sexual nature (68 5 C.C.R. § 4916(a)) (2007);
    o b) Failure to adopt and implement policies on sexual harassment and adolescent relationship abuse that qualifies as sexual harassment may qualify as "deliberate indifference" and exposes school districts to civil liability under Title IX;[6] and
    o c) Title IX regulations require that each educational institution has a written policy and protocol for responding to sexual harassment.

III. Get to Know Your Policymakers

Policymakers are put in place to represent the voice and needs of their constituents. This makes them public servants that should be interested in feedback and ideas from the people they represent. Getting to know the people that make the decisions that impact your school and community is an important step in building the momentum for system changes.

- Learn early on if the school board has ever considered this issue before or similarly related issues such as violence prevention or violence against women issues or sexual harassment. Find out what the outcome from proposed policy changes in this area have been.

- Create a list or map of connections to people in decision making positions. Think about personal and professional connections to those that already exist.

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[6] *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 526 US 629 (1999).

- Interview district staff, attend a school board meeting and/or arrange a meeting with a school board member to introduce yourself, educate, get to know the policymaker's priorities, and gauge their views about the importance of policy adoption on this issue.

    o Each school designates a Title IX Coordinator to handle claims of sex discrimination. These person can be a significant policymaker or policy influencer.

IV. Identify and Develop Champions

Networking with and developing champions in the system you are trying to impact is imperative to creating lasting policy change. Champions are individual stakeholders/policymakers that can work within the system to create the rules/laws/procedures that impact the entire system/school. Champions have a strong advocacy voice and can reach out to the individuals who are making the decisions that impact your school and community. The leadership of champions within and outside of the school system is a crucial piece of policy change.

- Identify possible champions— for example: individuals with an interest in violence prevention, experts from student wellness council or student health council, Principal, Assistant Principal, Teacher, Counselor, Nurse, or Parent.

- Ask champions to help find out what schools need – training, counseling services, legal assistance – and use your expertise to be of service.

- Ask champions to help set up to opportunities for you to network and get to know like-minded leaders. Be open to unlikely champions.

- Do not discount the current status of champions—a teacher or administrator can become a school board member or school personnel may be board members of local domestic or sexual violence prevention organizations.

V. Develop a Case for Change

You must be ready to make your case for change—through both personal stories and research/statistics on the impact of adolescent relationship abuse. Here are steps to take to think through your case for change:

- Gather relevant research to establish how a prevention policy will improve your community in terms of:

    o Academic achievement
    o Reducing bullying and harassment and/or improving school climate
    o Creating a culture of safety, effecting school environment
    o Educating the whole child
    o Reducing costs due to fewer discipline problems and prevention strategies that reduce costly intervention services and protocols

- Create a one-pager to hand out to potential champions/supporters/school board.

    o For national, state and local data on teen dating violence behaviors, see the Futures Without Violence fact sheets and literature reviews at www.startstrongteens.org.

    o Go to the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey: available at http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx?SID=HS (dating violence is in Unintentional Injuries and Violence under the Violence category). Cross-checking data on dating

violence, academic grades and health implications can help make the case for the interconnection of the issue with other school concerns.

- o See the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/.

- o For national, state and local statistics on number of teen hotline calls, contact http://www.loveisrespect.org/get-help/contact-us.

- o See the Dating Violence Literature Review prepared by Futures Without Violence for the *Start Strong* Initiative: http://www.startstrongteens.org/sites/default/files/Dating%20Violence%20%20Literature%20Review%202010.pdf

- o Develop your own statistics by distributing a survey, collecting responses and comparing them to state and national statistics. For an example see Mariposa's County High School Project Respect Survey Results: http://www.mariposarespect.org/surveys.html

- o For advocacy samples including talking points, factsheets, and sample support letters see the Heather's Law Toolkit at: http://www.icadvinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Strategy-Pack-3-21-2011rev.pdf

VI. Build a Coalition of Supporters

Building support and partnerships around the issues of adolescent relationship abuse makes your position stronger and also provides for a more holistic and comprehensive strategy for policy change.

- Consider who could be part of a group of supporters: parents/caregivers, health experts, faith leaders, civil rights leaders, youth, youth program leaders, teen survivors, school and administrators, violence prevention organizations, local educational associations, unions, and partners (American Federation of Teachers, PTA, etc.). To get more ideas visit: http://www.aft.org/about/community/index.cf

- Interconnect with important issues in the community that link to healthy relationships and preventing adolescent relationship abuse. This could include:

  - o Anti-bullying
  - o Sexual harassment response and prevention
  - o Gang prevention
  - o Violence prevention
  - o LGBTQ anti-discrimination
  - o Hate crimes
  - o Teen pregnancy prevention
  - o School climate change
  - o School health centers/healthcare
  - o Substance abuse intervention and prevention

- Engage in cross-training and support across issue areas. See these supporters as powerful spokespeople for change and promote their leadership. Their diverse perspectives will strength the argument for policy change.

- For more information on building a coalition of supporters see:

- o Prevention Institute's Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide: http://www.preventioninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_jlibrary&view=article&id=104&Itemid=127
- o Organizing for Power, Organizing for Change: http://organizingforpower.org/resources-for-ally-coalition-building/

VII. Map Out Your Strategy

Making a strategy plan is an important way to incorporate and solidify the needs and goals of your organization, coalition, and community. The most effective strategies will vary by community. Some ways to start mapping out your strategy include:

- Review what you've learned in previous steps, conversations with champions and administrators.
- Think about the top goals for the policy given the current climate around policy change on this issue. You can tailor the model school policy to your schools based on the needs of the district.
- Be clear and concise about your needs; what you want them to do; why they should care; and why this matters to their constituents.
- Review the approval process for policy change and timing.
- Consider competing interests.
- Be realistic about the level of support for this effort. Anticipate opposition and reach out to opposition.
- Revisit previous steps as needed.
- Continue to build coalition and community support.
- Get policy expertise and advice as needed through champions and state/national leaders—such as state domestic violence and sexual violence coalitions.
- Scan for opportunistic events and incorporate them into your strategy. This includes getting to know your media sources and outlets, developing talking points, aligning with current events and other policy efforts. The unfortunate and tragic incidents of teen dating violence are sometimes the events that motivate change.

IX. Evaluate and Document the Progress

It is important to try to measure the impact of your policy efforts throughout the process. This will serve both as feedback on your process for your supporters and a way to showcase the work you have done as you continue to network and share your experiences.

- Motivate your team and coalition by recognizing the accomplishment of the group and individuals each step along the way.
- Set up a meeting schedule and reasonable benchmarks.
- Keep a log of meetings and agendas.
- Seek feedback from partners and community members on the effort. Key informant interviews are a great way to build relationships while capturing valuable information about the impact of your policy work and momentum building for policy change.
- Record your own experiences of the process and outline lessons learned along the way.

X. Provide Implementation Support

Once you have had a policy change adopted, it is important to be part of the implementation phase. Often times a complete policy will not be adopted in one effort, and there is a continuing need to adjust and pursue policy change, as well as show the impact of what has been adopted so far. Throughout implementation stay connected by doing the following:

- Work with champions, policymakers, your coalition, and supporters to address implementation barriers such as resources, time, money, and expertise.

- Obtain media attention for intermediate steps such as: staff development, classroom lessons, parent sessions, print and online resources, student safety survey results, school and community task forces, personal stories about the impact of the policy, and opportunities for youth leadership.

- Help schools with providing the policy components. This can often times be school-based support services like: counseling and advocacy, support groups, links to students/families to community services, staff training, consultation and safety planning.

XI. Monitor What Happens

Policy change is only as strong as its implementation and articulated impact. You are an important piece in making sure the policy is being implemented as intended. To systemically monitor the process of your policy implementation:

- Establish an annual review of policy implementation based on data collection and reporting.

- Publicize the policy. Make sure that parents, students, teachers, and staff are informed.

- Track teachers/staff training and student education schedules.

- Work with schools and supporters to measure the impact of the policy on school climate and student/staff attitudes and behaviors.

- Stay connected to champions and other key school stakeholders.

APPENDIX

Factsheets:

The Facts on Tweens and Teens and Dating Violence: available at http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Teens/The%20Facts%20on%20Tweens%20and%20Teens%20and%20Dating%20Violence.pdf

Emerging Issues Facing Tweens and Teens: available at http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Teens/Emerging%20Issues%20Facing%20Tweens%20and%20Teens.pdf

The Connection Between Dating Violence and Unhealthy Behavior: available at http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Teens/The%20Connection%20Between%20Dating%20Violence%20and%20Unhealthy%20Behaviors.pdf

Sample Policy Toolkit:

Heather's Law Toolkit: for advocacy samples including talking points, factsheets, and sample support letters. Available at: http://www.icadvinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Strategy-Pack-3-21-2011rev.pdf

Sample Survey and Data Analysis:

Mariposa Teen Dating Violence Survey: Example of gathering and using community collected data to reflect teen dating violence climate in a particular area. Available at: http://www.mariposarespect.org/surveys.html

Futures Without Violence (Linda Chamberlain PhD MPH), December, 2010 Updated Version, *Teen Dating Violence Literature Review*, prepared for the *Start Strong* Initiative, http://www.startstrongteens.org/sites/default/files/Dating%20Violence%20%20Literature%20Review%202010.pdf

Resource Websites:

American Academy of Pediatrics: Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure: www.aap.org/ConnectedKids/

American Bar Association: Steering Committee on Unmet Legal Needs of Children Division for Public Education: www.abanet.org/publiced/teendating.shtml

American Psychiatric Association: Love Doesn't Have to Hurt – Teens: www.apa.org/pi/cyf/teen.pdf

A Thin Line: www.athinline.org

Break the Cycle: www.breakthecycle.org www.respect-works.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – National Center for Injury Prevention & Control (NCIPC) – Division of Violence Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention

Committee for Children: www.cfchildren.org/programs/ssp/overview/

Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM): www.coaches-corner.org

Fourth R/Strategies for Healthy Youth Relationships: www.youthrelationships.org

Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project: www.avp.org

Love is Not Abuse: www.loveisnotabuse.com

Love Is Respect: www.loveisrespect.org

Men Can Stop Rape: www.mencanstoprape.org

National Center for Victims of Crime - Youth
Initiative: www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB_YouthInitiative158

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: www.safeyouth.org

No Means Know: www.nomeansknow.com

Office on Violence Against Women: www.ovw.usdoj.gov/

Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships: www.startstrongteens.org/
www.startstrongparents.org/