



## **Exposure to and Primary Prevention of Adolescent Dating Abuse & Sexual Assault: Comprehensive Approaches of the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho**

### **Summary**

Our education system plays an important role in preventing violence against girls and boys. Schools are uniquely positioned to promote better attitudes and behavior among young people, and to help teens who are experiencing abuse. We need to educate young people on healthy teen relationships and social emotional learning skills. Boys and girls who are empowered through awareness and education are less likely to engage in violence or to think violence is acceptable.

A school policy on the prevention and response to relationship abuse and sexual assault is consistent with our values of promoting healthy teen relationships.

Adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault is important to address when discussing youth exposure to violence because it is highly prevalent, connected to youth participation in risk behaviors, a precursor to abusive relationships in adulthood, and often overlooked.

- Adolescents 12 to 19 years old experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault (Truman & Rand, 2010).
- Victims of sexual assault are more likely to suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, abuse alcohol, abuse drugs, and contemplate suicide (RAINN, 2009).
- Rates of physical, emotional or verbal abuse experienced by adolescent girls greatly exceeds estimates of other youth exposure to violence (Davis, 2008).
- Teen victims of *physical dating violence* are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in unhealthy diet behaviors ... engaging in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide (Futures Without Violence, 2010).

Prevention work, starting during the middle school years, can prevent exposure to violence in adolescents, adulthood, and prevent youth participation in risk behaviors and negative health outcomes.

There are effective prevention and interventions that exist and more being developed. The Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, through the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho can share lessons from its work to promote healthy relationships as a way to reduce adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault.

Policymakers should support policy that supports programs promoting healthy relationships in middle school and preventing and responding to adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault.

## Organizational Information

The Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to engaging voices to create change in the prevention, intervention, and response to domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual assault. The Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence oversees two programs on the prevention, intervention, and response to adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault – the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women and Start Strong Idaho funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships is a statewide, Idaho initiative to engage, educate, and empower teens to develop the skills and knowledge to build healthy relationships and prevent adolescent<sup>1</sup> dating abuse<sup>2</sup> and sexual assault. The statewide program is funded through the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Assistance Program. The statewide education and prevention strategy informs parents and adult influencers working with adolescents on the importance of fostering healthy teen relationships and the prevalence and warning signs of adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault. The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships serves as a national Technical Assistance Provider under the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Assistance Program and the Services, Training, Education, and Policies to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking in Secondary Schools Grant Program.



Start Strong Idaho is also a program of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, and is part of the national Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships Initiative funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.<sup>3</sup> Start Strong Idaho is a project in southwest Idaho to promote healthy teen relationships and prevent teen dating violence in middle schools by helping 11- to 14-year-olds develop healthy and safe relationship knowledge and skills. The Idaho Coalition was one of eleven sites selected for this four year initiative, and works closely with Futures Without Violence, the National Program Office for the Start Strong initiative, to develop comprehensive prevention programming for 11- to 14-year-olds as a way to reduce adolescent dating abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the term adolescent instead of teen to more fully encompass the age ranges discussed (11 to 19 years old).

<sup>2</sup> The term “dating abuse” is used in place of “dating violence” throughout this paper as “abuse” has been shown to be a term better understood by adolescents and parents alike in covering the entire range of behaviors normally included within the term “violence”.

<sup>3</sup> The Start Strong Initiative is the largest initiative ever funded to target 11- to 14-year-olds to promote healthy relationships as the way to prevent teen dating violence and abuse.

The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships collaborative partners include the Idaho Department of Education and St. Luke's Children's Hospital. Additional partners include the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, Idaho School Counselors Association, Idaho School Nurses Association, American Academy of Pediatrics – Idaho Chapter, Boys & Girls Clubs, Public Health Districts, Silver Sage Girl Scout Council, Treasure Valley Family YMCA, Nampa Family Justice Center, Idaho Legal Aid Services and all of Idaho's domestic violence and sexual assault programs.

### **Lessons Learned**

The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships was formed in 2005 through a U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Assistance Grant as the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project. The Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Project was renamed in 2010 to the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships. In its original form, the Project created awareness materials (posters, brochures, bracelets) and brief awareness-raising curricula to be taught in Idaho's secondary schools. A teen council was used to conduct awareness activities and provided consultation on materials and curricula.

In 2008, the Idaho Coalition received funding through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, through the Start Strong initiative, and expanded the focus to middle school aged adolescents as a primary prevention strategy.

Some interesting challenges and lessons learned in the first couple of years of the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho are:

- Some schools, especially middle and junior high schools, did not believe that their students dated and therefore did not want to be involved in the Project. This challenge required the Project to reframe the way it approached schools and community partners.
- Youth were more actively engaged by awareness and prevention activities if the Project was youth led and had a positive social norm message. The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho actively engage youth to create language for all program materials. Logos, taglines, types of media used, types of awareness materials, and wording of everything going to youth is developed, reviewed, and approved by diverse groups of teens.
- Effective prevention work that reduces violence requires a comprehensive, integrated approach. The components of a comprehensive approach are discussed more fully below.
- Creating multiple avenues for youth engagement ensure that the greatest number of youth will be reached. Over the years, the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho have expanded how youth interact with the topics of healthy teen relationships and adolescent dating abuse from assisting in the implementation of a 21-session health curriculum focused on building relationship competency to holding an annual healthy relationships poetry contest.
- Each year, teens and parents provide positive feedback on how the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho have helped Idaho students. Additionally, the number of Idaho high school students reporting they have experienced physical violence by a dating partner has dropped from 13.6% in 2007 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010b; Idaho Department of Education, 2007) to 10.6% in 2009

(CDC, 2010a, 2010b; Idaho Department of Education, 2009) to 8.7% in 2011 (Idaho Department of Education, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

- Most importantly, middle school matters. The peer group has enormous influence on dating attitudes and behaviors among middle school age youth. By addressing bullying, sexual harassment, dating abuse, and other hurtful behaviors among students, schools can create positive learning environments and raise students' expectations for respect in their dating relationships.

## What We Know for Sure

### It's Not Your Mother's Version of Dating

During middle school, many youths start engaging in romantic and/or sexual relationships for the first time – previously known as dating. There is “growing evidence that adolescent romantic relationships are significant for individual adjustment and development.” (Collins et al., 2009). Advances in the science of adolescent brain development indicate that this is a period of social emotional learning and empathy maturity. These are the years when the transition from childhood to adulthood begins, new peer and social influences come into play, and jealousy, anger, and pressure to conform are felt in more powerful and personal ways. Attitudes and behaviors learned at home, from peers, and from popular culture take root and manifest in adolescents' relationships. Research has shown that early adolescence is the critical time when prevention – including policies to promote healthy relationships and prevention, intervention, treatment, and response to unhealthy or abusive relationships – must begin (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2011).

**Early adolescence is a critical time when the promotion of healthy teen relationships must begin.**

### The Relationship Spectrum

Adolescent relationships exist on a spectrum – ranging from the broader peer group to hanging out with smaller groups or individuals to formal (or not so formal) dating. Relationships at each of these levels can also range from healthy, unhealthy, abusive, all the way to violent.

### Scope of the problem<sup>5</sup>

Intimate partner violence and sexual assault are national public health crises. Traditionally awareness campaigns, prevention activities, response and treatment have only focused on adults. However, adolescent girls are actually more likely than adult women to be victims of intimate partner violence and to suffer both minor and severe injuries as a result of that violence (Davis, 2008). Furthermore, adolescents 12 to 19 years old experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault (Truman & Rand, 2010). In fact, rates of physical, emotional or verbal abuse experienced by adolescent girls greatly exceeds estimates of other youth exposure to violence.

<sup>4</sup> The National Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported 9.9% (2007) and 9.8% (2009) for the same question (CDC, 2009). The 2011 national results have not been released.

<sup>5</sup> Much of the information in this section has been adapted from materials produced and provided by Futures Without Violence (formerly the Family Violence Prevention Fund).

(Davis, 2008). According to the CDC, “1 in 5 women and nearly 1 in 7 men who experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, first experienced some form of violence between 11 and 17 years of age” (2011, p. 49).

- Approximately one in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner.
  - Nearly one in ten (9.8 percent) of high school students nation-wide were hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend (CDC, 2010, p. 6)
- Almost half of all female victims who have been raped, experienced their first rape before age 18 (30% between 11 and 17) (CDC, 2011).
- In addition to experiencing violence, one in three teens report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped or physically hurt by a dating partner (Liz Claiborne Inc., 2005).
- In a national online survey, one in five adolescents aged 11-14 said that their friends were victims of dating violence (Liz Claiborne, Inc., 2008).
- Abusive and violent behaviors starts early – a study of 7<sup>th</sup> graders in a high-risk community showed shockingly high rates of physical dating violence.
  - More than one in five boys (21.2 percent) and nearly one in four girls (24.1%) reported being a victim of physical dating violence in the year prior to the survey (Swahn et al., 2008).

### **The Impact of Abuse**

Over the past ten years, there has been a growing field of research that demonstrates a clear link between adolescent dating abuse and risk behaviors.

- Teen victims of *physical dating violence* are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in unhealthy diet behaviors ... engaging in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide (Futures Without Violence, 2009).
- Data from the National 2005 Youth Risk Behavior survey showed that girls who considered suicide were one and a half times more likely to report being victims of physical dating violence. Girls who reported dating violence were also more likely to report sad/hopeless feelings and consider suicide (Futures Without Violence, 2010).
- Victims of sexual assault are more likely to suffer from depression, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, abuse alcohol, abuse drugs, and contemplate suicide (RAINN).



### **Promotion of Healthy Relationships as a Way to Prevent Adolescent Dating Abuse and Related Risk Taking Behaviors Works**

The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho, programs of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, promote healthy adolescent relationships as a way to reduce adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault. Here's why:

- Healthy adolescent relationships can reduce adolescent risk behaviors – dating abuse and sexual assault, early sexual activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and other forms of violence. (Wolfe et al., 2006).
- Violence, along with other risk behaviors, rarely occur in a vacuum. Rather, these behaviors almost always take place within a relationship. Promotion of healthy relationships prevents violence because it teaches adolescents the skills they need to negotiate relationship issues, including responding to pressure to participate in risk behaviors. (Wolfe et al., 2006).

### Multi-dimensional Approach to Innovation

A multi-dimensional approach is critical to effectively promote healthy adolescent relationships and change social norms or socially accepted behaviors. An outline of a multi-level approach demonstrates:

**Effective prevention empowers youth to be actively involved, creating ownership and buy in.**

- Innovation and engagement at each level of the socio-ecological model:
- Adolescent empowerment and leadership by setting new standards for acceptable relationship behavior; and
- Programs and policies that reflect a relationship spectrum – from healthy to unhealthy relationships, including abusive and violent relationships, and address and intimate relationships.

the full range of abusive and disrespectful behaviors that adolescents use and experience in their peer



Core strategies of effective adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault prevention programming include:

- Engaging and educating middle and high school students in and out of school with lessons that teach characteristics and skills of healthy adolescent relationships, warning signs of adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault, bystander intervention skills, along with information regarding how and where to get help. Lessons give students a time and place to practice communication and decision making skills necessary for the formation of healthy relationships.
- Supporting adolescents who are already involved in unhealthy or abusive relationships or at increased risk due to exposure to violence or abuse at home, in the peer group, and in the community.
- Educating parents/caregivers and adult influencers on the characteristics and skills of healthy adolescent relationships, warning signs of adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault, bystander intervention skills for adults/influencers, effective communication with adolescents, and knowledge of how and where to find resources that are specific to age and location;

- Youth-led communication and marketing efforts – online and offline, moving at the speed of young people; and
- Designing and implementing school-based policies that include prevention, intervention, treatment, and response to adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault.

## **Empowering Youth to Be Part of the Solution**

### **What is Youth Engagement?**

Youth engagement is the active and sustained involvement of young people in the creation of their own destinies through participation in socially meaningful activities. Youth engagement involves the encouragement, motivation, and support of adolescents to include themselves in programs that enhance their abilities to establish a sense of autonomy and power, decision-making skills, and most importantly, belong.

### **Who Cares? WE CARE!**

Engaging youth to participate in various organized programs (e.g., community and/or school-based activities) provides a positive framework for important developmental benefits for adolescents (Dawns & Larson, 2011). By engaging youth in proactive programs, adolescents not only take advantage of the social benefits, but learn to demonstrate self-sufficiency and initiative. In addition to gaining essential capacities that are marketable to future employers, communities can also benefit from the innovations and perspectives adolescents bring to organizations, activities, and relationships with adults. When youth become engaged in a meaningful program or activity, they gain a sense of empowerment as individuals and create healthy relationships with others. Recent research has shown that the encouraging, developing, and educating youth on healthy adolescent relationships can actually decrease adolescent risk behaviors such as dating abuse, sexual assault, early sexual activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and other forms of violence (Wolfe et al., 2006). If done properly, engaging youth can be a promising endeavor for advancing outcomes for youth, strengthening organizations, and engaging voices for systematic and social change.



## **Core Strategies of Effective Adolescent Dating Abuse & Sexual Assault Prevention Programming<sup>6</sup>**

All prevention and response models should be based and build on demonstrated approaches to preventing dating abuse and sexual assault, and should at a minimum:

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<sup>6</sup> This section was adapted from information provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

- Engage and educate 11- to 19-year-olds in school and in out-of-school settings, including targeted prevention programming for vulnerable youth.
  - This should include the implementation of evidence-based school and/or community-based programming that promotes healthy relationship development.
  - Programs such as the Fourth R, SafeDates, and Expect Respect focus on concepts such as conflict resolution, communication skills, decision-making, gender roles, and self-confidence.
- Engage and educate parents/caregivers, teachers, and other influencers.
  - This includes implementing programs that help teen influencers (including older teens, peers, and adults) gain the skills to support the creation of healthy relationships; increase public awareness of the issue; and incorporate healthy relationship skills and concepts into their own relationships.
  - This can include working with teachers and coaches to incorporate relationships skills into class curricula and programming; integrating relationship violence prevention and response into social settings where parents and other adult teen influencers gather; and engaging older teens as mentors and mediators to model and support healthy relationships.
- Youth led and designed communications and marketing efforts.
  - Any communications and marketing campaign should be in a format that will reach and be relevant to youth. Communications and marketing campaigns should be a combination of traditional and new mediums, including posters, cool give away items, and the use of social networking and media sharing sights such as, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, Pintrest, and others.
- Design and implementation of school-based policies on the promotion of healthy relationships and the prevention, response, intervention, and treatment of adolescent dating abuse. Policy is critical for establishing a safe and respectful learning environment on campus and for achieving effective and consistent responses to dating abuse from school personnel. A thorough description of what a policy should entail is provided below.

### **Policy Can Prevent, Not Just Respond!**

Effective policies can prevent and reduce abuse and violence in adolescent dating relationships by promoting healthy relationship behaviors among students. Policy that fosters healthy adolescent relationships in addition to responding to incidents of violence creates a safer more respectful learning environment (a positive school climate) and highlights the importance *and* normality of healthy relationships.

- School climate is based on patters of young people’s experiences of school life, including interpersonal relationships and feeling social, emotionally, intellectually, and physically safe.
- Positive school climate is strongly correlated and predictive of student academic achievement.

**Policy must highlight the behaviors we wish to promote, not simply focus on those to be avoided.**



In addition to supporting a positive school climate and changing social norms, school policies promoting healthy adolescent relationships and the intervention, response, and treatment of adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault:

- Send a clear statement to students, parents, staff, and teachers that healthy relationships matter, supportive adults care about students' well-being, and that abusive behaviors are not the norm and will not be tolerated in the school.
- Encourage and support students, administrators, teachers, and other school staff to intervene early when unhealthy behaviors are beginning in a relationship.
- Provide positive behavior expectations and guidance for students and parents when those expectations are not met.
- Promote healthy adolescent relationships throughout school, by showing that healthy relationships are the norm while empowering students to act as bystanders and address unhealthy or abusive behaviors they may notice among their peers.

### Components of Effective Prevention Policies

For a comprehensive prevention policy to work it must have certain key elements. These elements work together to promote healthy adolescent relationships and change school and social norms. Essential elements of a comprehensive prevention policy include:

- **Definitions of key terms** – healthy adolescent relationships, bullying, sexual harassment, unhealthy adolescent relationships, abusive dating relationships, and sexual assault.
  - When possible, definitions should refer to other definitions included in pre-existing school policies (for example, definitions of bullying and sexual harassment).
  - Definitions should be in a student-friendly language. Schools are encouraged to work with students in the development of the definitions for local policies to ensure that the definitions are relevant and will be understood by the student body. Additionally, all definitions should be consistent with state and federal laws.
- **Positive expectations for adolescent relationships.** Policy should always highlight what is expected of students and not simply focus on what will happen if adolescent

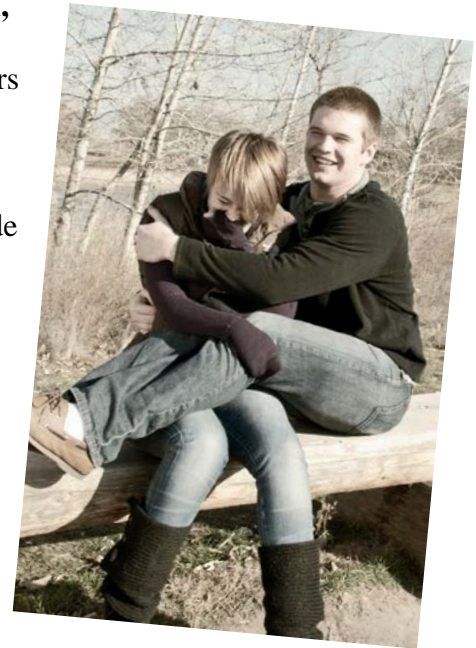


dating abuse or unhealthy relationships are apparent. Focusing on positive behaviors and having positive expectations for bystanders provides clear guidance for everyone in the school on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

- **Primary prevention coordinator/point of contact.** Similar to Title IX, effective policies require the assignment of a prevention coordinator and main point of contact. The prevention coordinator/point of contact is responsible for engaging students and the school as a whole in the promotion of healthy adolescent relationships and provides a single point of contact for teachers, staff, students, and parents to express concerns and make reports of unhealthy or abusive relationship behaviors.

- **Youth engagement.** Active involvement of students is essential to the promotion of healthy adolescent relationships in schools. Every policy should include guidelines for ensuring that youth are actively involved and engaged in planning activities that promote healthy adolescent relationships and prevent unhealthy or abusive dating relationships as well as in the development and implementation of policy. By engaging youth in policy development and implementation, schools ensure that policies are relevant, understood, and have buy in from the student body.
- **Parent/caregiver and community engagement.** Parents and caregivers may not realize it, but what they say and do does matter! While adolescence is a time of growing independence, parents and caregivers still play a huge role in modeling acceptable behaviors for their children. Policies that include engaging parents in policy implementation help ensure that students are receiving the same messages at home and at school. In the same vein, policies that engage the broader community increase the likelihood that healthy relationships and behaviors will become the social norm at school and be reinforced at home and in the community.
- **Awareness and notice of policy.** Students, parents/caregivers, and school-based personnel must be aware of the policy and understand what the definitions in the policy mean.
  - Effective policy requires that a notice of the policy be published in a readily accessible section on the school’s website and in all items of general distribution, including student handbooks and parent newsletters. The notice should provide a statement outlining the intent of the policy – e.g., at this school, healthy relationship behaviors are expected at all times and all students have the right to an education free of abusive or unhealthy relationships. The notice should also include information on the school-based point of contact, along with how to file a complaint or report of unhealthy or abusive behavior.
  - Effective prevention policies also require that students and parents understand and can identify the behaviors listed in the definition section of the policy. And remember, a policy should include students in the development and implementation of awareness activities and informational publications.
- **Training school personnel.** Training of school personnel on healthy adolescent relationship characteristics, bystander intervention skills, warning signs of abusive adolescent dating relationships, skill-based tools to intervene, and on the policy itself is essential. Just as students and parents/caregivers need to know about the policy and the types of behaviors it covers, teachers and other school personnel must know how the policy will affect the school and understand their role and responsibilities in implementation.
  - Schools and communities have training resources! Health teachers, counselors, and nurses as well as community-based domestic and sexual violence programs, and health care providers, are valuable resources to provide school personnel training.
  - Training should include lessons on how to incorporate the promotion of healthy adolescent relationships into the classroom or other school-based activities.
  - Training should also include clear instructions on how to intervene early if unhealthy relationship behaviors are witnessed or suspected.

- Training should include a protocol for communication between teachers/staff, school administrators, and law enforcement to coordinate school-based efforts to increase safety.
- **Prevention education curricula.** Research-based adolescent dating abuse prevention education curricula should be integrated into the regular school curriculum not only in health education classes but also in a cross-curricular approach that provides comprehensive, age-appropriate education and skill development with regard to building healthy relationships, communicating effectively, and resolving conflicts appropriately.
- **Adult and peer reporting mechanism, documentation, and confidentiality.** Any policy should allow and encourage the reporting of unhealthy or abusive behaviors from anyone in the school, including adults such as parents, caregivers, and others who have a connection with the school. Full documentation of every report should be kept in a secure location. Policy should include a statement that all reports should remain confidential to the extent possible and shall be investigated in a timely manner. Student complaint forms should be easily accessible.
- **Early intervention and treatment in addition to response.** Every policy should include a mechanism for early intervention and treatment when unhealthy or abusive behaviors are suspected or witnessed by school personnel, or reported through a formal complaint. Allowing for early intervention stops unhealthy or abusive behaviors from escalating, and provides assistance for students participating in those behaviors.
  - Intervention, treatment, and response should include a spectrum of remedies and interventions – such as one-on-one mentoring or counseling, school-based support groups, school-based stay away orders and court-based protection orders, and active involvement of law enforcement.
- **Social norms change through communication strategies.** Promoting healthy relationships and preventing adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault require communication strategies that are based on positive social norms. Policy should require schools and students to jointly develop a plan to create a communication strategy that is relevant, student friendly, and implements current technologies.
- **Monitoring.** Finally, any policy should include a protocol for monitoring the effectiveness of the policy. Monitoring may include tracking changes in attitudes regarding dating relationships and sexual assault and/or the number of reports and/or interventions made per year. Monitoring should be a way to evaluate whether or not the policy is working. If a policy is not working, amend it as necessary to better promote healthy adolescent relationships and prevent, intervene, respond, and treat adolescent dating abuse and sexual assault.



## **Policy Implementation Challenges for Schools**

The biggest barrier to implementing new policy is the fact that schools are already expected to do so much. However, it is important to remember that a policy promoting healthy relationships and preventing, responding, and treating adolescent dating abuse should make the school function better. Kids that don't feel safe simply can't learn. Policy promoting healthy relationships and the prevention, intervention, response, and treatment of adolescent dating abuse should work together with already existing policies to ensure that the school climate is a positive one in which students feel safe and secure enough to fully take advantage of the school's programming. Additionally, policy work in this area will be closely connected to Title IX compliance, potentially reducing school liability under Title IX gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment claims.

Another challenge to policy implementation might be the cost of a prevention coordinator. However, for schools that are already taking an active role in fostering a positive school climate, the promotion of healthy relationships and the prevention, intervention, response, and treatment of adolescent dating abuse could be assumed by someone already assigned responsibilities in other associated areas. For example, a comprehensive school health coordinator, Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinator, school counselor, nurse, or Title IX coordinator would be able to integrate adolescent dating abuse prevention/intervention within their current roles. In fact, many requirements of Title IX mirror the components of a comprehensive adolescent relationship policy outlined above.

A final challenge to policy implementation may be the perceived lack of information and resources on the promotion of healthy relationships and response to adolescent dating abuse. To overcome this barrier, any school, district, or state looking at implementing policy should conduct an asset assessment. Readily available resources include local domestic violence and sexual assault programs, youth organizations, health care providers/public health departments, and law enforcement. These organizations can provide insight into the issue, awareness materials, prevention curricula, guest speakers, policy support, response, and more.

### **No Need to Re-Create the Wheel**

In addition to the barriers named above, policy makers may hesitate to work on a policy addressing healthy relationships and adolescent dating abuse because they simply do not know where to start. Sample policies, while not always comprehensive, provide a good starting place for policy makers. There are many model policies and existing policies already available that policy makers can tailor to meet their school, district, or state needs. Readily available sample policies are listed in the resource section at the end of this section.



## **Conclusion**

Prevention of adolescent dating abuse through the promotion of healthy teen relationships works and it is vital for adolescent's health and safety. Prevention programs must be youth lead, and at minimum engage and educate youth and adults, include a communications and marketing campaign that moves at the speed of teens, and ensure that social change is made formal through the implementation of policy at the school, district, and/or state level.

Drafted by Kelly Miller, Executive Director, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, Project Director Start Strong Idaho and the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Annie Kerrick, Attorney, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, Center for Healthy Teen Relationships and Start Strong Idaho.

### **Contributions and assistance from**

Barri Rosenbluth, SafePlace; Brandy Sutherland, Program Manager, Center for Healthy Teen Relationships; and Patrick Brady, Program Specialist, Center for Healthy Teen Relationships.

For more information contact Kelly Miller, Executive Director, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, [kelly@engagingvoices.org](mailto:kelly@engagingvoices.org), or 208 384-0419, ext. 306.

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- *A School Policy to Increase Student Safety: Promote Healthy Relationships and Prevent Teen Dating Violence Through Improved School Climate*, produced by Futures Without Violence and Break the Cycle. This policy was developed for schools serving student 11- to 14-years old. It was designed to assist schools in creating plans of action for the promotion of healthy teen relationships and the prevention and response to adolescent dating abuse. Available at <http://www.startstrongteens.org/resources> under the “Policy” hotlink.
- *Indiana’s Model Teen Dating Violence Education Materials and Response Policies for Schools Guidance Document*. The policy, beginning on page 25 of this document, was created for schools with grades 6 through 12. The model was created to “assist school personnel in the development of guidelines and policies which will be specific and appropriate for their school []; and will contribute to a safe environment where students will have the opportunity to benefit fully from the school’s programs, activities and instruction.” (Indiana Department of Education, 2011, 25). Available at <http://www.doe.in.gov/sservices/violence/> under the “Guidance Document” hotlink in the first paragraph of text.

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