

Lesson: Protecting Our Youth In Relationships

Introduction

This lesson explores how adults can help young people protect themselves from acting on violent impulses or from becoming a victim of violence in relationships. You will explore basic risk and resiliency factors (see Glossary for definitions) in teen relationships and brainstorm about factors that might be especially prevalent in your school and community. The lesson focuses on a proposed public policy with an emphasis on *prevention* – specifically, the use of classroom curriculum designed to help prevent relationship violence. The lesson then asks you to develop an approach to school-based violence prevention that, in your opinion, will work best for young people.

Policy Focus

Should local school districts adopt a curriculum to help prevent relationship violence among young people?

Discussion Questions

- What is relationship violence?
- What factors contribute to or reduce relationship violence?
- Based on the risk and resiliency factors you have identified, do you think a violence *prevention* strategy would be more or less effective than other policy approaches, such as increased crisis *intervention* resources, or *enforcing* laws against sexual and physical abuse?

Service Projects

- Prepare a plan for a relationship violence prevention program and submit it to your U.S. Representative or U.S. Senators.
- Create a pamphlet for parents or high school students that educates them about risk and resiliency factors in teen relationships. Compile a list of teen relationship resources in your school and community and publicize it in a pamphlet and/or on the Internet.
- Interview a school or community-based teen counselor to learn what they are doing to prevent relationship violence in your community; offer to volunteer. Organize a teen relationship discussion and support group. Invite teachers and parents to attend.
- Select a television or magazine advertisement that you believe perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes. Prepare and present your analysis (written, audiovisual, both) to other students or parents. Write a letter to the advertiser explaining your views.

RISK FACTORS

Community Risk Factors

- Availability of drugs
- Gender stereotypes and social expectations
- Media portrayals of violence
- Community norms that favor violence as a way to solve interpersonal problems
- Economic and social deprivation

Family Risk Factors

- Family history of drug or alcohol abuse, crime, and/or violence
- Poor family management practices
- Family conflict
- Favorable parental attitudes toward violence as a way to solve interpersonal problems
- Family attitudes favoring gender stereotypes and behavior expectations

Individual and Peer Group Risk Factors

- Acceptance of violence as a way to solve problems
- Friends who engage in relationship violence
- Peer pressure to become sexually active
- Lack of awareness of one's emotions (such as anger, disappointment, and rejection)

Compiled from *The American Journal of Public Health*, April 1994, 84 (4): 618-22; *Journal of Adolescent Health*, July 1997, 21 (1): 11-17; *Journal of School Health*, March 1988, 58 (3): 98-100.

RESILIENCY FACTORS

Recognizing and Understanding the Causes of Conflict

- Emotions such as anger, disappointment, rejection
- Lack of self-esteem or assertiveness
- Desire to maintain control or perceived power in the relationship
- Pressure to live up to gender stereotypes and behavior expectations

Violence-Free Role Models

- Family
- Peers
- School and community leaders

Skills

- Social competence
- Conflict resolution skills
- Perspective taking

Attitudes

- Choosing to let go of stereotypes and harmful behavior expectations
- Willingness to respect the others when they say “no” to requests for sexual activity

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REDUCING DATING VIOLENCE — A Pilot Program

Program Type: School-based sexual assault and violence prevention

Target Population: Students in grades 8 & 9

Setting: Johnston County, North Carolina

Annual Budget: \$233,000

Sources of Funding: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Violence Prevention

Program Description:

About 1,200 students in grades 8 and 9 in Johnston County receive classroom instruction about gender stereotypes, conflict management skills, and social norms that contribute to dating violence. Classroom instruction is supplemented with an arts program of student-conducted dramatic performances. In addition, parents, policeworkers, and other key individuals in the community are trained to be better resources for youth who seek assistance about teenage dating violence. Partners in the project include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in conjunction with the Johnston County public schools, the Johnston County Health Department, and Harbor, Inc., a community-based organization.

Source: Partnership Against Violence (<http://www.pavnet.org>)

“HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS” CURRICULUM OUTLINE¹ — A Sample Policy

VOLUME I: DEALING WITH AGGRESSION

Exploring Emotions

- Expressing Emotions
- Anatomy of Anger
- The Art of Feeling

Nuts and Bolts of Aggression

- Don’t Shove – Communicate!
- Dealing with Rejection and Disappointment
- Managing Stress

Being Responsible

- “I” Statements
- Assert Yourself!
- Banish Bullying!

Conflict Resolution

- WADE-IN and Negotiate
- How Do You Communicate?
- Problem-Solving Strategies

VOLUME II: GENDER EQUALITY AND MEDIA AWARENESS

Exposing Gender Stereotypes

- Act Like a Man/Be Ladylike
- Biff and Bambi Role Play

Learning Gender Stereotypes

- Fairy Tales: Reading Between Lines
- Song Lyrics: Healthy or Unhealthy?
- Television: Entertaining Violence
- Heroes and Role Models

Impact of Gender Role Stereotypes

- Dying to be Thin
- Pondering Manhood’s Price
- Pornography and Objectification
- Peer Pressure
- Homophobia

VOLUME III: FORMING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

How Sexism Leads to Violence

- The Crown Prince
- Date Rape
- Power and Equality
- Sexual Harassment
- Unmasking Sexist Attitudes

Understanding Anger

- Where Anger Comes From
- Catching Anger
- Solving Problems with Force

Communication Skills

- Personal Boundaries
- Saying “NO”
- Talking it Out

¹ Excerpts from: Men for Change (1997) “Healthy Relationships” Curriculum