

Teen Dating Violence Awareness

Dear Colleagues –

Did you know that one in every three teens will experience some form of dating abuse in their lifetime? These teens and young adults experience the same types of relationship abuse as adults do in the form of physical, verbal, emotional and sexual mistreatment. Adolescents often have the added pressure of digital abuse that comes from texting, emailing or social media sites like Facebook and Instagram.

To raise awareness of this issue, February has been declared Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, a national effort to highlight the need to educate young people about dating violence prevention and the importance of healthy relationships.

The reality is teen dating violence has become far too common. According to published statistics, girls and young women between 16 and 24 years of age experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence, and violent behavior has been shown to begin as early as age 12. Since nearly three-quarters of eighth and ninth grade students report they are “dating,” the need to educate our children on the value of healthy relationships at an early age is paramount.

Dating violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner. While each situation is different and unique, one common factor to most abusive dating relationships is that the violence escalates over time and becomes more and more dangerous.

Some common warning signs of dating violence include extreme jealousy or insecurity; mood swings; possessiveness; making false accusations; belittling; becoming isolated from family and friends; or being physically hurt.

It is important to recognize these signs and symptoms, and reach out to victims to offer help. Violent relationships at an early age can have long-lasting effects, putting the victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky behavior and further domestic violence.

The New Jersey Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline provides 24-hour, seven-day-a-week assistance to domestic violence victims and others seeking information about domestic violence. The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) Hotline is also a 24-hour hotline which connects individuals affected by sexual violence with professionals that provide assistance and referrals.

If you, or someone you know is the victim of teen dating violence, domestic violence or sexual assault, I strongly urge you to call the numbers below to receive more information and access to referral, counseling, support groups and other services located in your own community. You can also access additional information on our DCF web site at the links listed below.

Warm regards,

Allison

Allison Blake, PhD, LSW

Commissioner

NJ Department of Children and Families

NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

1 (800) 572-SAFE (7233)

<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/women/domestic/>

NEW JERSEY COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE

1 (800) 601-7200

<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/women/svp/>