

Study Guide Sample

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Your Life

Your Body

Your Rights

Study Guide



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INTRODUCTION

Dating Violence is the intentional use of abusive tactics and physical force in order to obtain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

University of Michigan Sexual

Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, Ann Arbor, MI

Experts say that one out of four teens may be in a relationship where abuse occurs. This abuse may include the use of or the threat of emotional, physical or sexual behavior that has the purpose of causing injury or pain to another individual. Young people need to know what constitutes abuse, and what is appropriate in a dating relationship. If young men and women are not taught that abuse is wrong and that partners are to be treated with love and respect, they can not be expected to enjoy healthy relationships, or be responsible spouses/partners to one another. If young people are not given the proper skills and support to recognize and interrupt violence and abuse in their relationships, the cycle of violence will continue into their adult relationships. They need to have the knowledge to recognize the signs of abuse, and the skills and resources to get help if they are experiencing abuse.

During class discussions students may realize that they are currently involved in a relationship where abuse occurs. It will be best to set a tone within the classroom to help students deal with any awkwardness or embarrassment they may feel. It is important that the classroom be perceived as a safe environment for students to voice their questions, concerns and opinions about dating relationships.

It is also very important that local resources be identified to help anyone in need of immediate assistance. Familiarize yourself with the resources on dating violence/domestic violence available in your own community in order to offer these services to students who may seek help. For information on your state and local resources call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TDD). You can also consult with a school counselor or school psychologist about these resources.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Teen dating violence, like adult domestic violence, is about power and the desire to control. The dynamics of abuse and victim responses to abuse are also similar. The same mechanics of control and coercion are at work in teen abusive relationships. The abused may feel that it is their "fault" that the abuse occurred, and may feel that it is not their responsibility and that someone else made them abusive. Teen dating violence, like adult domestic abuse, is prevalent in all communities and is not unique to one class, race or culture. Although both males and females may experience dating violence the great majority of victims, as in adult abuse, are females. There are however, several important issues that are uniquely characteristic of dating violence.

Peer Approval - Teens experience more reliance on peer approval and the need to conform to peer norms. If these norms characterize dating violence as "normal" behavior then teens may think it is acceptable for abuse to occur in a relationship. The victim is unable to judge if the abuser's behavior is out of line or unacceptable.

Gender Role Expectations - Teens may rely on perceived gender differences, often reinforced by the popular media, which emphasize stereotyped ideas of male dominance and female passivity. There may be an expectation that her status depends on her attachment to a male and on his status. Female socialization also can lead women to take primary or sole responsibility for problem-solving in a relationship.

Lack of Experience - Teens have less experience in dating and in sexual relationships that can lead to misunderstandings about appropriate behavior in intimate relationships, the inability to make good decisions and to trust themselves to take action on their behalf in a relationship. In addition, excessive jealousy and possessiveness by the abuser can be idealized by their partner as proof of love, and the abuser can use this rationalizing as proof of their love. Even though teen's relationships are more transient than adult relationships they are often felt to be just as intense, and teen's inexperience prevents them from putting the relationship into a larger context.

Little Contact with Adult Resources - Studies show most teens in violent relationships have not spoken to any adult about the violence. (Worcester, Nancy, "A More Hidden Crime: Adolescent Battered Women, The Network News, July/August, 1993, p.7) Young people may feel that adults will not take them seriously, and that adult intervention may result in loss of independence or trust.

Less Access to Resources - Teens often have less access to health care professionals, and shelter space may be scarce for teens.

Legal Issues - Legal options may be different and less available than options open to adults. Teens generally have less access to court and police. There may be difficulties in obtaining Orders of Protection which may not come within Family Court guidelines. Parents or guardians may need to be involved in legal actions or for permission for medical treatment, and for teens this may be a barrier for those who do not want to involve their parents regarding the abuse.

Pregnancy - Pregnancy may be part of the abuse. For example, a teenager may be forced into having sex or their partner may refuse to use birth control. Teens, like older victims, are also at a risk of experiencing abuse while they are pregnant. They are often blamed or harshly judged for their pregnancy and may have difficulty accessing resources available to them. These factors can lead to feelings of isolation, helplessness and self-blame, and make it easier for them to be manipulated and controlled.

Homosexuality - The dynamics of abuse in gay or lesbian relationships are similar to those in abusive heterosexual relationships. In addition to the normal confusion about gender roles and social norms, homosexual teens may be more isolated due to coming-out issues. Homophobia, absence of visible role models, and fear may prevent

homosexual victims, both teens and adults, from disclosing their abuse or seeking help.

Culture and Race - Both culture and race can strongly impact a victim's tolerance of abuse and their feelings of isolation and helplessness. For instance, victims from strict cultures that disapprove of dating and sexuality may be desperate for help but may refuse to seek assistance from family members out of fear of reprisal or shame. Seeking outside help may produce further conflict within the family.

Issues of race are also influential in a victim's decision to report an abuser or to get help. For example, young women who believe their future or opportunities are limited due to racism or discrimination, may base their future on their relationships. Individuals raised in a different culture or prejudiced by racism or discrimination may be unwilling to discuss an abusive relationship with others outside of their culture, racial community or family. A desire to protect their partner stems from having shared with their partner a common understanding or common experience as a racial or cultural minority.

Sexual Abuse - In addition to date rape, which accounts for 67% of sexual assaults among teens, young victims of dating violence also describe continuous forms of "sexual slavery". Teen abusers may physically force sex upon their victims, threaten or manipulate them by use of other coercive tactics, such as accusations that attack their acceptability as women or lovers. Feelings of worthlessness, degradation, humiliation and shame usually follow. Over time these emotions gradually undermine the victim's ability to escape. Since victims of dating violence are relatively young, inexperienced and their sense of themselves as sexual beings may be new or fragile, their vulnerability at this time is magnified.

Substance Abuse - Substance abuse, though not the cause of dating violence, may increase the chances of abuse. Alcohol and other drugs reduce inhibitions and the capability to demonstrate self-control and good decision-making skills. For victims, alcohol and drugs may act as a substitute for positive and effective coping strategies. Substance abuse and violence must be confronted simultaneously. Adapted from "Domestic and Dating Violence - An Information and Resource Handbook", Metropolitan King County Council, 1996

DATING VIOLENCE STATISTICS

One in four, or 25% of high school and college students surveyed said that they had experienced violence in a dating relationship. Levy, Barrie, 1991, Dating Violence: Young Women in Danger, Seal Press.

Women age 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence.

US Department of Justice, 1998

As many as 50% of dating women suffer physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from their dating partners. McShane, Claudette, 1988, WARNING! Dating May Be Hazardous to Your Health, Mother Courage Press.