



Dating Violence Prevention Project

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Introduction

Your Community Engagement Project

Gender and Women's Studies as a discipline was founded on activism and social change. Women's Liberation activists used the phrase "the personal is political" to explain how personal experiences are shaped by social and political policies. They used consciousness-raising groups to express the social and political injustices they felt on a personal level and then devised strategies to resist. These sessions were critical in the development of feminist theory. Today, students engage with that theory in the classroom to understand how systems of power and privilege shape our individual lives.

"Women's studies has developed a vast body of scholarship and a collection of pedagogical approaches that bridge theory and practice for students," says Catherine Orr, in the paper "Women's Studies as Civic Engagement: Research and Recommendations," published by the National Women's Studies Foundation. This paper explains that women's studies classrooms, because of their commitment to social justice issues, are the optimal location for one to learn how to put theory into practice. Community engagement projects are designed to allow students the space to use this knowledge to identify a problem or need, design and implement, or participate in, an individual or collective project and then reflect on that experience.

KSU's Office of Community Engagement borrows the definition from the Carnegie Foundation: community engagement (also civic engagement) is "the collaboration (among) institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and the resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity."

Civic and community engagement means identifying a problem or a lack and taking the responsibility for acting on it. At its heart, engagement is managing the resources available to you in order to enact the change that you seek. It doesn't need power. It doesn't need experience. It takes passion and commitment. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, authors of *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*, define activism as both a term and a process. They explain, "The two of us define activism as consistently expressing one's values with the goal of making the world more just."

What counts as engagement?

In *Leading the Way: Young Women's Activism for Social Change*, Mary Simonson writes,

“We need to stop questioning what is and what is not true feminist activism, what counts and what doesn’t count, which acts are the most important and which don’t matter at all [...] As we each act in our own ways, staking claims, naming fields and works as places for feminist change, we redefine what it means to be feminists in our time,” (220).

For many students and young activists, it can be quite challenging to overcome the fear that one does not have the power, knowledge, skills, education, or experience to participate in social change.

In *Leading the Way*, Mary Trigg compiled a volume of personal essays penned by young women, all graduates of the Rutgers University Institute for Women’s Leadership program. The essays in this collection all serve to clarify the process of their activism. Each woman found feminist theory and gender and women’s studies education as the foundation for their work. The language they learned in the classroom gave them the vocabulary to confront issues of social, political, and economic injustice in their own lives, giving them the drive needed to make change. Their projects were varied and all rooted in different disciplines: advocating for marriage equality in a conservative town, leading a poetry workshop for women in low-income communities, distributing clean needles to intravenous drug users, working to support women filmmakers, categorizing a library in Uganda, and many more. These activists found their projects in their everyday lives and responded where they were able.

Your civic and community engagement project should respond to a problem, need, or lack that you passionately care about. Look at your life and ask yourself what types of opportunities are available to you. Take inventory of your skills and material resources. After you have identified the project, then you can decide which type of engagement is appropriate to meet the ends that you have envisioned.

In an excerpt from *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*, authors Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards provide a detailed explanation of what constitutes activism and engagement.

“Activism should be of you, not outside of you. This is a critical message for readers of this book as well as for the representatives of organizations - the ones that are so anxious to get people involved. We can't always be looking to enact change through organizations or even movements - we have to look at ourselves and start with the individual.

We sometimes ponder what it would take to get people protesting and active the way they were in the ‘radical sixties.’ We used to think it would have to be some major world event - a war, for instance - something very public that would get us angry and scared and out of our homes. We have gone to the streets, amassed the masses - especially since September 11th - and more and more we see that the last frontier is the individual. Therefore, it's not

getting everyone in the United States to protest the war on the same day with the same point of view - it's getting everyone to do *something*. As Harleen Kaur Singh, a girl who attended our lectures at the University of Maryland, put it in a note she slipped to us, 'I enjoyed your lecture and learned that I can do something small and be a feminist. Suggestions for a word for this: collective activism.' She defined this as, 'If everyone does a little, it adds up to a lot.'"

The first step is determining your cause. Consider your talents, materials, abilities and commit to a social, political, economic, or environmental issue. Then, research your local, regional, national and global community to see what type of work is being done in this field already. If there is already an organization that is working to achieve the ends you have envisioned, advertise your skills to the leadership and determine whether or not you can be useful. If there is no such organization or similar grassroots movements, you have the complete freedom to establish one as you imagine it to be.

The Gender and Women's Studies Interpersonal Violence Prevention Project Dating Violence

In this case, you have chosen to participate in the Gender and Women's Studies Interpersonal Violence Prevention Project. This project seeks to make connections with local communities in order to address the social and systemic barriers that fail to protect victims of dating violence, particularly teens and college students. As it is explained below, these individuals face unique challenges and barriers when it comes to legal protection and many young people are unaware of the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

Georgia law requires the Board of Education to create programs for educating students on dating violence and ways to ensure healthy relationships. The implementation of these programs has been left up to the discretion of local school boards. Some communities across Georgia have taken the lead. For example, in Troup County, the local Family Connection Authority formed a team of existing local programs to design and implement the Teen Maze program. Teen Maze is similar to a life-sized board game that participants "play" by responding to real-life situations that are dangerous to their health and safety. Students grapple with issues regarding drug and alcohol abuse, unplanned pregnancy and childcare, sexually transmitted diseases—and more recently, abusive relationships¹.

As you might well imagine, the uptake on implementation of dating violence awareness programs has been slow. The KSU Gender and Women's Studies Program seeks to change that by educating our students on how to take the lead in their own communities and educate the public on the importance of dating violence awareness and prevention measures.

How to Use this Tool Kit

¹ Source, *Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project, 11th Annual Report, 2014*. Published by Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Accessible online here:
<http://georgiafatalityreview.com/reports/report/2014-report/>

For your project, you will identify a community (your hometown, high school, church group, sorority, club, etc.) and deliver a fun and informational workshop to teens and young adults that educates them on the signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationships, ways to seek help, and ways to help a friend.

Utilize the information, resources, and videos to design your own dating violence prevention workshop unique to the needs of the community that you are addressing. For example, if you are choosing to deliver your workshop at a high school, you might want to focus more on building healthy relationship behaviors and how to recognize the signs of abuse. Students at this age are often forming their first romantic bonds. This is a very confusing time and teens are unsure what makes a good boyfriend/girlfriend. If your community is a college social club or sorority/fraternity, you may focus on sexual assault in relationships, consent, and how to find help if you are being abused and are away from home the first time.

Unique Barriers Young People Face in Relationships

Young people face many unique challenges that make having healthy, safe relationships that much more challenging. Some of the challenges are purely social. Teenagers and young adults are heavily influenced by the way the media portrays relationships, often confusing jealousy and control with love and devotion. Young people are isolated in their social environments. Their social circles typically do not extend past their immediate school or college community. This creates an environment of isolation in which teens that are in unhealthy relationships do not feel safe speaking out against their abuser. They may have classes with their abuser, or live in the same dorm. Plus, if their friends fail to recognize the behavior as abuse, they may fear speaking out against their partner. Most teens and young people are always connected to the digital world. Social media and text messaging provide unlimited opportunities for abuse and make controlling behavior much easier.

Other barriers are environmental, cultural and legal. Teens and young adults rarely have complete control over their personal safety at home, school, work, after-school activities and social outings. The places that young people go, the friends they hang out with, and the things that they do are dynamic and constantly changing. Teens and young adults lack access to money, transportation, or stable housing. If the victim lives on a college campus, they lack the protection that living with their parents offers. Victims can be heavily influenced by culture. Particular historically inscribed beliefs regarding power and gender or religious beliefs may keep victims from seeking help.

Under the Family Violence Act, victims of violence in dating relationships are unable to file for Temporary Protective Orders (TPO), unless they currently live together, formerly lived together or share a child. The law fails to specify whether minors' abusers must adhere to the TPO and minors are unable to petition for a TPO without a parent or guardian. Minors that are unprotected by the Family Violence Act may

be able to find relief under Georgia's stalking statute, but these orders are often hard to obtain. Victims must prove a pattern of stalking or harassment that is persistent and invasive. Cyberharassment currently does not count as a persistent or invasive behavior. So, if the abuser is utilizing technology to control their partner, as many abusers now do, the victim fails to be protected under the law.

Understanding the many unique challenges and barriers teens and young people face in dating relationships makes it clear that our approach to educating students and promoting social and legal change must be creative, self-motivated, and active. The next section will familiarize you with the current statistics regarding dating abuse and violence to prepare you to build your curriculum.

Get Informed

Dating Violence Statistics and Information

Dating violence happens when one partner in a relationship abuses the other partner. Much like domestic violence between spouses, dating violence is about one person gaining and maintaining power and control over the other through a pattern of physically, sexually, verbally, and/or emotionally abusive or controlling behavior². Abuse can happen anywhere—even in the digital world. This section will teach you what counts as abuse in a relationship, how to recognize the signs of violence, and how to find help for yourself or a friend. Plus, this chapter will explain why teens use violence in relationships and why people become violent in general.

The final section will provide information on how to teach teens and young adults to have healthy relationships and other types of interpersonal interactions.

What Counts as Abuse?

Abuse comes in many forms—physical, emotional, and sexual.

Physical abuse refers to any unwanted contact with the other person's body and it does not have to leave a mark, bruise, or scratch. Examples of physical abuse include:

- Scratching
- Biting
- Punching
- Kicking
- Strangling
- Pinching
- Shoving
- Burning
- Pushing
- Pinning, i.e. physical restraint
- Pulling hair
- Spitting
- Using a weapon
- Choking

² *Love is Not Abuse* curriculum provided definitions and examples for this chapter.

- Slapping

Sexual abuse includes any unwanted sexual behavior or any behavior that restricts a person's right to say "no." The absence of "no" does NOT mean "yes." Sexual abuse includes:

- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Date rape
- Forcing or coercing someone to go further sexually than they want to
- Rough or violent sexual activity that is not wanted
- Not letting your partner use birth control, condoms, or other protections
- Forcing someone to pose for photos or videos in the nude or partially naked
- Forcing or coercing someone to take naked or partially naked sexual images of themselves and share them
- Forcing someone to watch others engage in sexual acts in real life or in videos or photos
- Videotaping, photographing, or recording a sexual act or naked image of someone without their knowledge or permission
- Sending someone unsolicited sexual photos or videos
- Altering an image of a person in order to make it seem as if they were posing in the nude or engaging in a sexual act.

One of the biggest myths surrounding abuse is that if there is no physical mark, it doesn't count as abuse. Nothing could be further from the truth! Verbal and emotional abuse has serious negative effects on a person's self-image and feelings of self-worth. Emotional and psychological violence is the most common type of abuse in teen relationships (Alverno College Report). Verbal/emotional abuse occurs when one partner causes the other partner to feel afraid or have lower self-esteem. This includes manipulating a person's feelings and/or behaviors and making them feel that they somehow deserve the abuse. This can, and often does, include digital communications—such as texting, social media networking, and instant messaging. This topic will be covered in greater detail later. Threats, harassment, and attempts to embarrass someone are all indicative of verbal/emotional abuse. Other forms include:

- Name calling and put-downs; insulting someone in front of their family/friends
- Yelling and screaming or other intimidation
- Harming, or threatening to harm, a partner, his/her family, friends, pets, or property.
- Making racial, ethnic, or religious slurs about a partner, their family, or someone they care for.
- Embarrassing or intimidating a partner in front of their friends or family
- Spreading rumors
- Telling someone what to do

- Manipulating a partner into believing they are responsible for abusive behavior
- Making a partner feel guilty about wanting to leave the relationship (talking about how hard their life is, how alone they would feel, threatening to commit suicide)
- Threatening to expose embarrassing secrets
- Threatening to expose other personal information (sexual orientation, immigration status, etc.)
- Sharing or threatening to share naked photos or videos of a person
- Excessive or unwanted text-messaging, emails, calls, or instant messages to “check up” on someone
- Posting fake or photoshopped pictures of a person designed to embarrass, shame or belittle them
- Posting nasty, false, or abusive comments on the person’s social media profile

The Cycle of Violence

Break the Cycle, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending dating violence and abuse, explains that many teens who experience dating abuse and violence find that the abuse happens in a pattern, a cycle that may end in an act of physical violence. The first phase is the tension-building phase. In this phase, the couple may argue a lot and begin to make accusations about the victim. The victim might feel that they are not able to please their partner. The second phase is the explosion phase. The tension that has been gathering is released in a physical, sexual, or verbal assault on the victim. The third phase, the honeymoon phase, is the stage in which the abuser makes apologies, promises to change, or otherwise tries to manipulate the victim into staying in the relationship. Sometimes the abuser may shift the blame onto the victim. This stage lasts until the tension begins to build again. Every relationship is different, but understanding the cycle of violence can make teens more aware of potential abusive behavior in a relationship.

The Critical Role of Bystander

Peers and community members must be educated on the dangers of violence and abuse in dating relationships and the signs to spot these behaviors and actions. Teens experience unique barriers to reporting abuse and violence in relationships. Some young people are afraid to report abuse to adults because they are afraid of embarrassment or disapproval. They may not want to get their partner “in trouble” or disclose their sexual activity or other behaviors to adults. Some teens may even feel the behaviors are normal and the controlling behavior of their partner demonstrates their love and devotion. Young people often feel pressured by their peers to be in relationships and may not want to leave their partner for fear of being alone. These reasons and their lack of knowledge concerning available help and resources contribute to the underreporting of dating violence.

Certain behaviors may indicate an unhealthy dating relationship. Victims may be afraid to upset or anger their partner and makes excuses or apologizes for his/her behavior. Teens may spend an excessive amount of time with their partner and stop hanging out with friends and family. Excessive phone calls, text messages, or other social media contact may indicate controlling behavior, especially if the teen feels they must be available to their partner at all times. Substance abuse or failing grades may indicate a teen is in a troubling or abusive situation. Unexplained physical marks and bruises can also indicate violence in a relationship.

It is important to stress in workshops the critical role of the bystander in recognizing violence. Young people are more likely to go to their friends for help or advice if they are in an abusive dating relationship. Bystanders can help friends who are being victimized by their partners by listening attentively and believing what their friend is telling them. If a friend tells you that they are in an abusive relationship, you should encourage them to report the abuse to an adult and seek out help from organizations that deal specifically with dating violence and abuse. Finally, teens should report the abuse to a trusted adult.

Why do Teens use Violence in Relationships?

In a 2014 study published in *Psychology of Violence*, three distinct motives were found to precipitate violence: emotional expression/dysregulation, control/tough guise, and self-defense. There was no gendered difference when considering dating violence as a self-defense response, but it was discovered that females most often resort to violence when they do not know how to correctly manage their emotions and, specifically, feelings of anger and jealousy. For males, it was discovered that the need to maintain control was most often indicated as a predictor of violent behavior (Kelley 61).

These findings suggest that teen dating violence prevention programs must focus on teaching teens how to navigate the complex emotions that come with being in a relationship in a healthy and responsible way. It is also critical to dismantle patriarchal beliefs and unhealthy ideals of what a relationship would be like. These two goals, along with raising awareness of the prevalence of dating violence, should be the central aims of your workshop.

How to Prevent Dating Violence: Teaching Healthy Relationship Behaviors

Schools, community leaders, and advocates must come together to work in order to effectively challenge dating violence in any community. We must educate young people on how to treat partners with respect and manage their emotions in a way that does not turn abusive or violent. As you prepare your workshop, keep these points in mind:

Do understand the issues related to dating violence, including predictive behaviors and signs of trauma in a relationship. Learn how to recognize the behaviors of the

victim and the perpetrator. Review the resources below to educate yourself on dating violence awareness initiatives and prevention methods.

Do establish rules in your workshop that allows for a safe discussion. Judgement is not tolerated and all speakers are given equal respect.

Do understand mandatory reporting laws in the state. If a victim comes forward to you, you may be obligated to report the abuse.

Do encourage teens to report dating violence in their own relationships and those of their peers. Explain the critical role of bystander.

Do understand that some of the students in your session may be the victims of or the perpetrators of violence in relationships. Help your students learn to manage difficult emotions such as anger, jealous and rejection.

Listen and support students that volunteer information about dating violence they have experienced or witnessed. Always **believe the victim**.

Resources

www.loveisnotabuse.com Information and resources to learn about dating violence and how to help end it

www.loveisrespect.org Resource for young people to prevent dating abuse and build healthy relationships

www.acalltomen.org Men's organization dedicated to partnering with women's organizations to end domestic and sexual violence and promote healthy definitions of masculinity

www.athinline.org MTV digital abuse awareness and prevention program

www.breakthecycle.org National non-profit that engages and empowers youth to end violence in their own communities; provides information and resources for educators and activists

www.vetoviolence.com/datingmatters Center for Disease Control online resources for interpersonal violence prevention.

www.dayoney.org Provides education and legal services to young people related to dating abuse and violence

Engaging Your Community

Successful campaigns require the contributions and cooperation of multiple organizations and advocates. In this project, you will identify where there is a need for a dating violence workshop and deliver your curriculum to that group of young people.

Step One: Finding Your Community

Using the information that you have gathered regarding dating violence and abuse, consider what group of people you are most interested in serving. Middle school students? High school students? College students? Understand that these groups have unique relationship needs because they face unique barriers. Choose a few topics that you would like to focus on in your workshop and draft an outline for your two-hour dating violence course. For example, if you would like to focus on dating abuse in middle school relationships, you should teach your students methods of communicating their emotions in healthy, non-violent ways in order to set them up for successful relationships in the future. For college students, you may consider focusing your workshop on understanding consent and healthy sexual relationships between romantic partners.

Step Two: Build Your Workshop

Using the information and resources provided, create a lesson plan for a two-hour dating violence prevention program.

1. *Start in the folder labeled “Scholarship and Research”* Review the research in the field and take note of what researchers have found to be successful/unsuccessful in the programs that have already been implemented.
2. *Develop a list of goals/objectives for your program* An effective strategy for developing a lesson plan is to begin at the end—what do you want students to know? What should be the ultimate takeaway?
3. *Review the existing lessons and resources guides in the folder marked “Resource Guides”* This folder has a few different teen dating violence programs that have been developed by experts and delivered to students. While some of them are quite long and require multiple face-to-face lessons, they are invaluable resources for helping you to structure the content of your lesson. Read through and make note of the topics and activities that seem most aligned with your objectives.
4. *Build your lesson plan* A great resource for building effective lesson plans is available [here](#). You are free to use any combination of videos, handouts, and

other supplemental materials found in their respective folders on the homepage.

Step Three: Find a Venue and Fill Your Seats

Next, you need to consider how you are going to get a group of students into a common space. Choose groups that are already connected for the easiest way of filling seats in your workshop. Sports teams, religious groups, and sororities are good examples of communities that are already connected. Look at your own life and try to utilize the connections that you already have. If you attended high school locally, connect with an old coach or guidance counselor and pitch your workshop.

Choosing groups that are already connected will also make it easier for you to find a venue for your workshop. Other great places to hold a workshop for free include libraries, churches, and residence halls (on college campuses).

Step Four: Advertise

The final step in preparing your workshop is filling seats! Find out how many students you can accommodate in your space. Depending upon your community, you may not need to advertise very much. If you have acquired the space, but not the students, connect with teachers, administrators and community leaders who have the power and means to advertise your workshop. Create a flyer for your program and distribute in local places that teens frequent. If you are focusing on the dangers that high school students face, visit administrators and ask if teachers can distribute flyers. Or, give flyers to church leaders and ask them to distribute to their youth groups.

If possible utilize social media. Post on county and community group threads and connect with local leaders via social media, if possible. Ask them to advertise your event on their pages. Invite these leaders to attend the workshop and review your program.

Again, utilize the resources that are available to you in your own life. Ask your friends, family, and neighbors if they know a teen that would benefit for your program. Have *the teens themselves* help you advertise. Tell them to bring their friends—its free!

Be sure to emphasize the positive nature of the program. Tell your students that this workshop will teach them how to be a better boyfriend/girlfriend, instead of focusing on simply preventing violence. Relationships should be fun *and* safe.

