

Tuscarawas County Public Schools
*Domestic Violence and Children-
Suggested Guidelines for Teen Dating Violence*

PURPOSE:

The primary purpose of the Tuscarawas County Schools Domestic Violence and Children Guidelines is to support the academic achievement of children. Secondly, the guidelines will promote school safety and awareness regarding:

- Domestic Violence.
- Teen Dating Violence.
- Children witnessing violence in their homes.
- Mandated Reporting for suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Restraining Orders.

Violence in the home and between teens in a dating relationship can severely impact a child's safety and ability to learn. Providing appropriate support and resources for the child and their family, is the preferred way to protect children and promote academic success.

GOALS:

To educate and support staff regarding the effects of domestic violence on children. (I.e., ways to recognize changes in behavior, level of functioning in school, etc.).

To create a safe and welcoming environment within school for children to disclose to an adult regarding domestic/dating violence.

To provide guidance and support to staff and identify a series of steps to follow providing appropriate support and referral for the student and their family. (I.e., referral to Compass, Harbor House, Victim's Advocate at Prosecutor's Office, Children's Protective Services, etc.).

To encourage full utilization of resources inside and outside school to help staff and student deal with domestic/dating violence.

To maintain safety of all parties including the child, their family, and school department personnel.

Definition:

Teen dating violence mirrors adult domestic violence in terms of existing on a continuum of controlling behaviors. These behaviors range from verbal and emotional abuse, physical assault, to murder and rape. In addition, teen-dating violence is seen by some as a stage in the intergenerational cycle of violence, linking witnessing or experiencing violence during childhood to perpetrating or experiencing intimate violence in adulthood.

Abusive teen relationships, similar to adult domestic violence, generally exhibit a pattern. The major elements of which are:

- Violence that affects people from all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups.
- Repeated violence that escalates.
- Violence that increases in severity the longer the relationship continues.
- Violence and abusive behaviors are interchanges with apologies and promises to change.
- Increased danger for the victim is when trying to terminate the relationship.
- Occurrence in heterosexual and gay and lesbian relationships.

Teen dating violence happens within the context of adolescent development, therefore, certain developmental aspects characteristic of adolescence are affected, differentiating it from abuse in adult relationships. Typically the teen victim is isolated from her/his peers because of the controlling behavior of her/his partner.

The following developmental tasks are interrupted because of this isolation:

- Achieving new and mature relationships with peers of both sexes.
- Social role achievement.
- Emotional independence.
- The ability to develop personal values and beliefs.

In addition, academic progress is often hindered.

Because teens lack the experience with intimate relationships, those in abusive relationships, often have difficulty in defining abuse as problematic. Incidents of the adolescent victim using physical violence toward her/his partner occur with more frequency than between adult victims toward adult perpetrators. Young people may perceive possessive jealousy and controlling behavior as loving devotion.

Teens are reluctant to seek help from adults. They fear, rightly or wrongly, that if they tell someone about the abuse they will be seen as having done something wrong. They may also fear the newly won privileges of independence will be taken away.

Training for the School Community to Increase Awareness

Provide awareness training and education for the school community that would include defining the issue of teen dating violence, recognizing warning signs, identifying issues of confidentiality and safety, and appropriate school-based interventions. These trainings should reach all members of the school community including students, educators, administrators, custodian and food service staff, and parents. Ideally these trainings would be facilitated by a school staff person and a representative from a community agency that services victims of intimate partner violence, such as a victim advocate. The following is recommended:

- Provide annual workshops which are made available for school administrators, teachers, health educators, school nurses and other staff. These workshops should include the opportunity for staff to address school incidents that they have heard about, observed, or participated in and discuss how to intervene in an appropriate and consistent way. In order to respect the privacy of students hypothetical facts or actual scenarios absent of identifying information should be used.

- Display Domestic Violence pamphlets, brochures and other materials which are made available to the school in the counselor's office, nurse's office, school library, locker rooms, classrooms, etc.
- Provide resource information which is made available to the school to students at the beginning of each school year with local emergency/agency telephone numbers and information on safety planning, support groups, counseling, etc.

It is important that school staff are knowledgeable about community resources and making appropriate referrals. For example, staff can help students and their parents understand their legal rights by supporting referrals to the court system.

- Teach on-going curriculum or educational presentations to students on teen dating violence, sexual assault, and acquaintance rape prevention. This curriculum should have multiple sessions that include:
 - a) defining abuse in teen dating relationships including rape;
 - b) identifying societal expectations of males and females that support sexism and homophobia;
 - c) examining the role of the media in supporting sex role stereotypes and how these stereotypes, if believed, are a set-up for abuse and violence in relationships;
 - d) exploring how teens can help themselves or a friend and;
 - e) defining healthy and respectful relationships.

In addition, to curriculum sessions this education can be accomplished through peer training programs, special seminars, or theater presentations combined with discussion groups or workshops.

Consideration:

Maximum confidentiality must be maintained for all students. Peer mediation is not appropriate and students involved should never be brought together before an incident has been investigated.

Identification and Referral

What to do if a student reports or a staff member sees or hears about a pattern of harassment, stalking, physical or emotional intimidation, threats, fear of safety on behalf of a student.....

- Immediately establish physical and emotional safety of reporting student. Provide student with a safe and comfortable place and call security if there is a safety concern. It may be appropriate to contact the local police department for appropriate emergency intervention. The Domestic Violence Resource Person (Theresa Benson at Compass) may also be contacted for purposes of additional consultation.
- Staff member should report incident to the Principal and/or school administration.

Intervention

- Investigate the reported incident and determine appropriate intervention.
- Assess situation, safety and determine parties involved.
- Determine if security, medical help, and/or police intervention is necessary.
- Determine whether parent/guardian should be notified.
- Determine if a mandated report must be filed with the Department of Job and Family Services.

Referral

- Principal will consult with school counselor to plan appropriate strategies and facilitate counseling for any students involved.

While it is critical that the victim's safety be considered at all times, school staff are required by law to comply with statutory reporting obligations for suspected physical and sexual abuse, and to report instances of criminal violations of existing orders to the local police.

Putting victim safety as your first priority means considering the impact or possible impact of your actions on the victim. It is important to ask the question: will s/he be endangered by anyone as a result of your actions? Safety planning with the victim and her/his support providers is a necessary part of reporting, disclosing to or notifying others on behalf of the victim.

Should Parents be notified by school representatives of their concerns regarding dangers in a teen relationship?

- If there is no active restraining order in place, determine if it is safe and appropriate to contact parents. If contact is appropriate, it is important to talk with the student about notification of parents, exploring any concerns about safety that may arise.
- If there is a restraining order, parents should automatically be contacted and involved in the "safety planning" for both the victim and the defendant.

How should the school intervene if there is awareness of an abusive situation with a student and there has not been a restraining order?

- Principal or School counselor should meet with the student who is the target of the abuse, share her/his concerns, and develop a safety plan.
- Determine appropriate referrals, if needed, for counseling, batterer treatment, support groups, police/court assistance, or notification to parents.