
Violence against young women

A White Paper

There is an epidemic of violence against young women occurring in our schools. The statistics make the case to call it an epidemic. NBC recently reported that one in five high school women are in an abusive relationship. According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, approximately one out of every three high school women who are in a relationship, are in an abusive relationship.

Foreword

On April 2, 2006 at Nichols College an assembly of student and community leaders participated in a Forum exploring actions that individuals and leaders must make to curb the violence against women. The Forum was part of a student leadership conference, the InterState Leadership Forum, sponsored by the Student Leadership Training Program. The InterLead drew student leaders from over 80 communities in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York. They were joined by principals, town officials, legislators and a candidate for office from Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Following a performance and a thorough processing of the nationally recognized play, "The Yellow Dress," ["The Yellow Dress" is a presentation that can be arranged through the non profit organization Deana's Fund.] which is about a young woman who was a victim of relationship abuse, the assembly broke into eleven small groups. These forums were directed to consider the problem only from a solution viewpoint. The groups were not to fall back on the standard excuses such as "this is a societal issue and is far too complex to solve," nor were they to look for simplistic solutions such as "there ought to be a law."

The forums were directed to approach the problem from two angles. First, to determine what individuals must DO and SAY. Second, to determine what leaders must DO and SAY.

Inside you will find the results of their collaboration. There is no one solution to this problem. Each community, each individual must approach it as the InterLead groups did. The solution must be **shared by STUDENT and COMMUNITY** leaders working together.

The Student Leadership Training Program offers this White Paper as a starting point for fruitful discussions leading to solutions.

InterLead Forum reports

Task: To collaboratively determine what individuals should DO & SAY and to collaboratively determine what leaders should DO & SAY to stop the violence against young women.

The 11 groups were drawn from the delegation to the InterLead Conference and were randomly created. There were approximately 22 members in each group, including community leaders, student leaders, parents and legislators.

Report from Group One:

1. In order to stop the violence as an individual or as a leader, you must trust yourself to do it. You must recognize you have the ability to make a difference.
2. As an individual, you have responsibilities to yourself. As a leader, you have responsibilities to your community. In both cases, you must consciously build a strong support system to carry you through.
3. Start by raising awareness with programs such as Deana's Fund. It is important not to only raise awareness, but to also reach an understanding of violence, its victims and its perpetrators.
4. Assemblies will be more effective if the audience is prepared to listen well and it is processed in smaller groups afterwards.
5. The message to stop the violence must be displayed in different ways to appeal to different types of learners.
6. The goal of awareness and understanding is to create an atmosphere where violence is discussed frequently. Such conversations will allow friends and leaders to tell a victim or abuser 41-81 [Modern researchers agree that in order for a person to overcome the denial stage, they need to hear the truth 41 to 81 times] times to get help.
7. Leaders must work to create a safe environment for these discussions.
8. A safe environment is characterized by strong connections between teachers and students.
9. Change needs to occur by volunteers (on a smaller scale) and activists (on a larger scale).

Report from Group Two:

What can an individual SAY?

1. Persist in talking and listening to those in abusive relationships (ABR).

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2. Use physical signs of abuse or other concrete instances of abusive behavior as a way to start a conversation, to break through the habitual denial of an ABR.

What can a leader SAY?

1. As per #1 above
2. Speak to parents of those involved in ABR.

What can an individual DO?

1. Think of ways to negatively reinforce behavior of ABR: make it uncomfortable to persist by drawing attention to the risks, damage done by ABR.
2. Be approachable, ask questions, be ready to listen. For instance, ask her/him, "How are things going with you and ___?"
3. Encourage any verbalization of any aspect of the ABR.
4. Intervene verbally when ABR is seen, maintaining a safe distance.

What can a leader DO?

1. As per #3 above.
2. Form a support community within school.
3. Use connections and standing with school officials, teachers, community leaders to raise awareness of ABR's.
4. Connect with SADD, students against destructive decisions
5. Set expectations about acceptable behavior by role modeling. When you see an obvious ABR, say something from a safe distance.
6. Develop awareness among and support from designated leaders of larger community, such a legislators and other public officials.
7. Judiciously use existing societal institutions such as laws against assault, MTA campaign "See something, do something".
8. Health class curriculum can be expanded to discuss ABR's, bring up awareness and expectations.
9. Generalize role modeling to other violent behavior. For instance, when there is a fight in the hall, don't join in the chorus of "Fight! Fight!", but get help or intervene, safely of course.

Report from Group Three:

1. Peer mediation for a support network
2. Advisory for every class and ideally for all students to provide connection between students and teachers
3. Counselors and students together talk with students who have problems

4. Student freedom to find a faculty member that they connect with (not just randomly assigned to advisory groups, or ability to change)
5. Speaking up is becoming a leader, even if there is no title attached
6. Support network of both faculty, administration and students
7. Respect and listen to those who are in the abusive relationship
8. Speak up! Silence is complicity

Report from Group Four:

Discussion Points

Leader vs. Individual

- Leaders have responsibility to do something

Individual responsibility:

- Even if someone is not a friend, talk to them
- Consider your own safety
 - o Engage them in something else
 - o Attempt to bring them away
- Change the environment- it's not funny.

What happens when leaders don't speak up?

- Makes it harder for everyone else to support
- Sets a poor example

Excuses for not doing anything:

- None of my business
- It's not my job
- They brought it upon themselves
- It's normal
- So many people are abused
- She acts 'slutty'

What can teachers do?

1. Be present
2. Create an environment against bad behavior

What can student leaders do?

1. Develop programs to educate people on what to do
2. Encourage teachers to talk to school leaders

3. encourage attendance at physical strength programs to back up mental stability
4. Classes in communication
5. Encourage leaders to be role models
6. Peer mediation
7. Focus on encouraging self esteem
8. Focus on teaching that relationship abuse not the norm, even if it is the culture we live in

Report from Group Five:

What to say as an individual?

1. Support system is there for them
2. Don't be judgmental
3. Individuals have a responsibility to intervene
4. Lt them look at the situation from an outside perspective (what would you do for me?)

What to say as a student leader?

1. Talk to them away from the situation
2. Say something to the perpetrator
3. Get them out of the situation
4. Inform authorities
5. Grab a friend to help – interrupt w/something friendly
6. Response-ability [those who have the ability must respond]
7. Talk to their friends – intervention w/abuser
8. Role-modeled responsibilities
9. Peer mediation
10. Educate about warning signs with a psa originating from students

What to do as an individual?

1. Freshman orientation starting early in jr. high
2. Two aspects – set expectations and follow up
3. Educate and enforce
4. Give people the tools to do something
5. Proactive solutions
6. Get information out- newspaper, signs
7. Start young – start basic and build up

8. Promote that student leadership is the answer
9. Promote empowering student leaders
10. Don't teach through a negative
11. Create awareness to achieve funding, through public officials, for education
12. Start education early to build a frame of reference for later on. Set expectations and enforce them because silence is complicity
13. Build a base of knowledge through education
14. Get parents involved- start early
15. Have older kids role model for younger kids

Report from Group Six:

1. Start dialogue and show a purpose behind rules
2. Recognize that Vice Principals and other administration can help
3. Rely on other resources
4. ID problem, don't pass judgment
5. Make voices heard by legislators even though we aren't all voting age
6. This is a lot like adult domestic abuse, but in schools it starts in the corridors
7. Caring adults build trust
8. Issue is about education- teach adults how to be caring
9. Programs are great but students need to see the purpose
10. Personal connections in schools between students and faculty/staff
11. Peer network promoting discussion – a hotline?
12. Teacher mentoring program
13. Stop it and tell someone
14. Make this socially unacceptable like drinking and driving by increasing peer pressure
15. Ask "why are you letting him do this"
16. We should feel we belong at school so we don't feel alone.

Report from Group Seven:

What should individuals/leaders Say & Do?

1. take them aside
2. talk as friends

3. get them to look at situation
4. raise awareness – talk to guidance
5. remind them of what things were like before
6. show by example
7. security in numbers
8. hard to make change alone
9. bring a friend
10. approach the leader of a group through comments
11. talk about it in a safe environment (class, etc)
12. role model
13. connect to personal experience: stop the gossip – don't talk about it, role model instead
14. once one gossips, another wants to top it, and it grows

Recommendations for school design:

1. eliminate congregation in corridors
2. put leadership in a central location

Personal immediate action

1. be aware
2. make a comment
3. ask friends about other's relationships
4. be on the look out
5. know that it's not just in school: you will see things in casual situation - out to eat, dances, etc.
6. do not assume that someone else will deal with it

Report from Group Eight:

Definitions:

Individual: acting on your own accord, personal level, who you are

Leader: respect, doing the right thing, community, more of a role

1. Change in schools: no one actually uses guidance for guidance, there's no trust and limited training – this needs to change
2. Leaders must learn how to use “I” statements vs. “you” statements
3. Leaders must learn to show others how they feel
4. Individuals must learn when to approach, one on one or group, timing

5. Leaders must role model stepping up, RESPECT, don't show aggression by using you statements
6. Leaders must learn how to invite people in – atmosphere: practice what to say, no silence; eye contact, names

As Individuals

1. help the person feel safe,
2. stay w/them,
3. share contact info,
4. build trust
5. invest trust in group (support),
6. show more than one person cares
7. always keep the avenues for help open
8. create support: which is help w/o judgment,
9. TAKE ACTION: following up, persistent, think about who you are talking to (keep it safe and expand)
10. build belonging through involvement in schools

Report from Group Nine:

Build support by involving praise

1. reinforcing positives
2. unconditional acceptance, not having to have them prove
3. praise should be casual, not relating to abusive boy. General praise not as good. Praise her specifically, apply it to your relationship, your life
4. make plans, get them involved
5. seeing things in writing, put time and love into a card, craft, etc. Solid reminders
6. being purposeful with consistency

To cope with frustration leaders can:

1. create discussion groups to raise awareness
2. show movies, find texts
3. write and share newspaper articles

On a daily basis leaders can"

1. be conscious of surroundings

2. be purposeful in observations, watch body language
3. speak to groups and individual
4. talk to teachers
5. educate your friends
6. enable others to do the same thing

Report from Group Ten:

1. bring "The Yellow Dress" to schools- use the introduction to show its importance, break students up into groups for effect
2. find an easier way to talk about abuse, such as with an. important teacher, or talk through different people, if you are uncomfortable
3. stand up for others- break up conversations by changing the subject
4. ask questions
5. don't say anything, force a subject change
6. peer counseling

What would you say to an abuser?

1. ask why
2. try to get an understanding of what they going through, but don't put yourself in danger
3. talk to their friends
4. if someone comes to you in confidence because they are abused: it is better to say something to people like the parents, administrators and other friends.

Best ideas

1. bring "The Yellow Dress" to schools
2. peer counseling – people have someone to talk to
3. ask questions- say something instead of doing nothing at all
4. if you are the friend who is spoken to, make sure you have a friend to relay to
5. one out of three people have their own project – a collection of stories, English dept. week, art therapy, mural, collage
6. Fundraise to sponsor organizations like Deana's fund and SLTP

Report from Group Eleven:

Discussion points for communities & schools:

- How do we start?
- Do we stop it first?

- Do we say something first?
- How do we get the word out? Drama club?
 - Sequel to the play? That addresses how parents/faculty/friends can intervene?
 - Provide tools for how to help
- Difficult because people don't recognize the signs. How do we approach it? Outside resources? Ask how they feel about it?
- Awareness through: movies, discussion groups, built into curriculum.
- It's more prominent than we think it is: starts with disrespect.
- Want to get parents more involved. Key – communication outwards and inwards too – open up and talk about it
- Easier to talk to people with eating disorders/drugs vs. abusive relationships?
- U.S. vs. foreign ideas: wanting vs. wanted
- Gender relationships
- Girls wanting to be wanted
- What we don't want is people wanting to be possessed
- Nothing's being done because that's "just the way it is"
- Is this how girls are seeing their relationships?
- Once a person feels wanted, they don't want to get out of that cycle
- Is it because of two working parents? Want more attention?
- Media shapes what goes on, is a sphere of influence

Solutions:

1. Public Service Announcement
2. Peer listeners
3. Internalizing certain signals: "I want to be loved, but I'm not that desperate"
4. Talk to the perpetrators
5. Maybe a class specifically for guys – hear the opinions of girls?
6. Talking to store clerks that sell material suggesting violence or boycotting
7. Be accepting of people in the situation. Don't wash your hands of it
8. Raise awareness, letting them know it's wrong

The Consensus:

Violence against women: we can stop it!

Student and community leaders play an important role in our nation's efforts to stop violence against young women. We have the opportunity to serve as role models for other women, girls, men and boys in regard to the treatment of women and girls. Silence is complicity. Boys need to be taught at a young age that using violence against women is wrong and will not be tolerated. Leaders are in a unique position to communicate this message in a strong, compassionate, and meaningful way. Working in partnership, student leaders and community leaders together can make enormous strides toward changing attitudes and perceptions surrounding relationship abuse, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

- **The first step is awareness.**

Promoting awareness will require persistence. Many simply do not want to believe the reality. Many want to fall back on the excuse that it is the victims fault. Assemblies and training programs are a necessity. Included among the recommendations of almost all of the groups are awareness outreach ideas which vary from presenting "The Yellow Dress" to Public Service Announcements.

- **The second step is the acceptance of responsibility.**

This is not about finding fault. This is not about shifting blame. Leaders must accept the responsibility to act. This is not a school problem, it is not a community problem, it is not a problem for the police – it is an epidemic.

- **The third step is to arrange a conversation about solutions.**

The conversation should include ALL of the community leaders. Representatives of every community group should partake in the discussion from elected officials to clergy and including student leaders. The task is the same as we assigned the groups at the InterLead, namely to determine what can be SAID and what can be DONE.

- **The final step is putting the plans in motion.**

This means doing whatever it takes. There are lives at stake. Not just the lives of the women in danger, but all the lives of those whom they touch. As the plans are created, they must be implemented. Since training will be necessary for teachers, students and administrators – begin there. Get the training. Make the plans. Save the lives.

Recommended resources:

- Office on Violence against women: <http://www.takethepledge.gov/>
- Sports Leadership Institute: <http://www.adelphi.edu/communityservices/sli/>
- Defense task Force on Domestic Violence: <http://www.dtic.mil/domesticviolence/>
- Emerge: Counseling and Education to stop Domestic Violence: <http://www.emergedv.com/>
- The White Ribbon Campaign: <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>
- Deana's Fund / "The Yellow Dress": <http://www.deanasfund.org/>