DATINGMATTERS®

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY TEEN RELATIONSHIPS

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

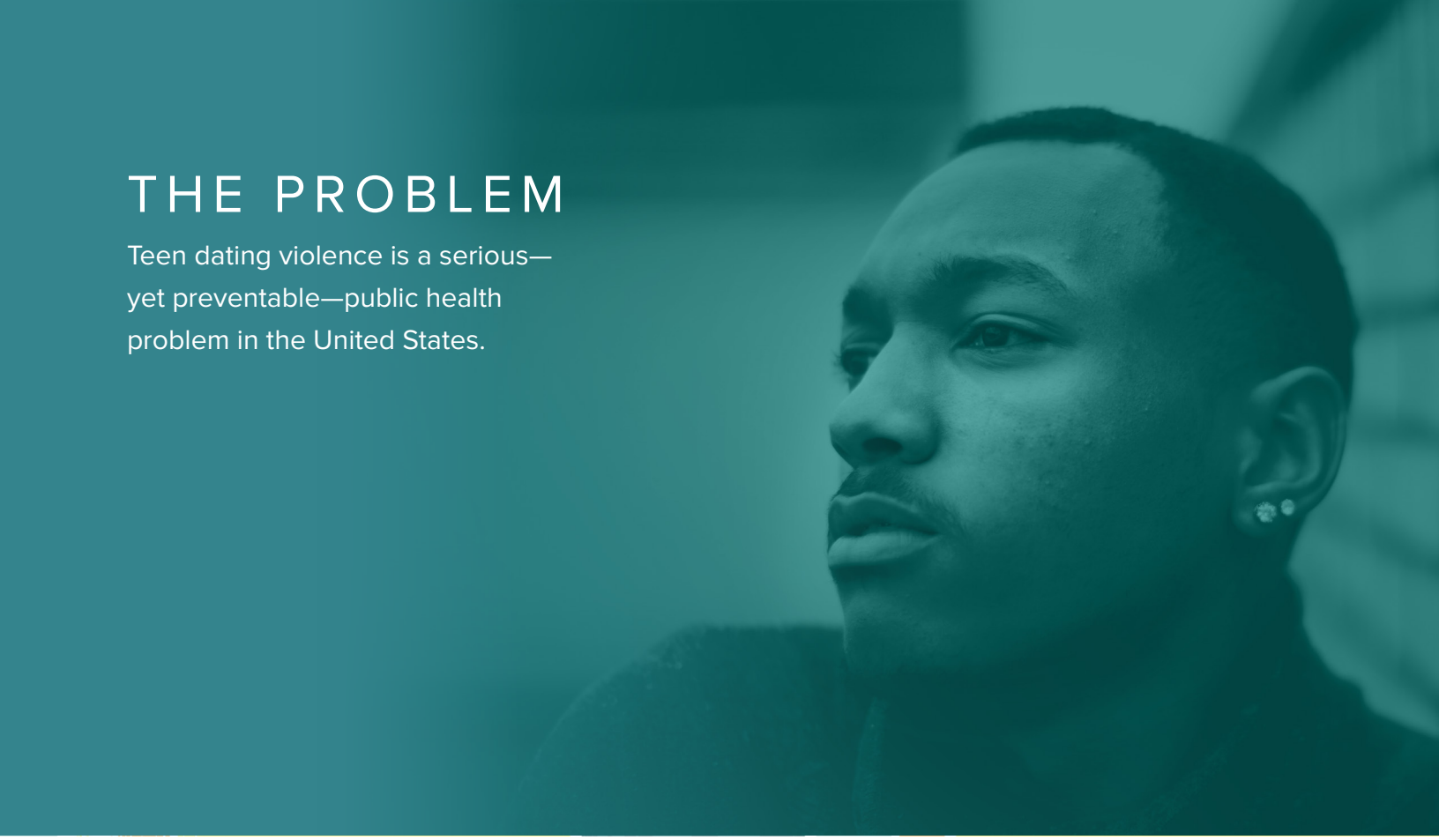
“INVESTING IN DATING MATTERS ENABLES YOU TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE AND LIFELONG CHANGE. WE’RE STARTING TO RAISE A GENERATION WHO VIEWS VIOLENCE AS NOT OKAY AND NOT NORMAL. SO, YOU HAVE ENTIRE GENERATIONS, ENTIRE COMMUNITIES, THAT ARE STARTING TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF HAVING CHILDREN, YOUNG ADULTS, AND ADULTS WHO DON’T CHOOSE TO BEHAVE IN VIOLENT MANNERS.”

AIMEE WOOD

DATING MATTERS PARTICIPANT AND PREVENTION SPECIALIST AT BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

THE PROBLEM

Teen dating violence is a serious—yet preventable—public health problem in the United States.



One in four adolescents reports verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual dating violence each year. In high school who have been in relationships have experienced physical and/or sexual dating violence.

1 IN 5 GIRLS & 1 IN 10 BOYS

Youth who experience dating violence are more likely to:

- experience symptoms of depression and anxiety;
- engage in unhealthy behaviors like using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol; and
- think about suicide.

Those who experience dating violence in adolescence are at increased risk of partner violence in adulthood.

Risk factors for dating violence include individual, peer, partner, parent, and neighborhood influences. Preventing dating violence requires a comprehensive community-driven strategy to stop violence before it starts.

"DATING MATTERS IS A NATIONAL INITIATIVE THAT WORKS TO ULTIMATELY INCREASE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPING, ESTABLISHING, AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS. THERE IS A NEED TO DECREASE SIGNIFICANTLY THE NUMBERS OF YOUTH WHO ARE REPORTING DATING VIOLENCE ISSUES."

ERICA B. DAVIS

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

THE SOLUTION

To promote healthy relationships as a method for preventing dating violence, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed Dating Matters®: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships.

Designed for use by local entities (e.g., health departments, boys and girls clubs), Dating Matters employs evidence-based strategies and a community-driven approach to educate youth, parents, educators, schools, and neighborhoods about healthy relationships to stop dating violence before it starts. The focus on healthy relationships reflects a recent shift in public health from an emphasis on disease prevention to one on health promotion.

Dating Matters Components:

- Youth Programs: School-based programs delivered to students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades
- Parent Programs: In-person, group sessions and at-home parent-child activities for parents of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade youth
- Educator Training: Free online training that helps educators understand the risk factors and warning signs of teen dating violence, as well as their role in promoting healthy relationships.
- Youth Communications Program: i2i: What R U Looking 4? uses communications strategies to reinforce messages from the youth programs using technology and language that appeals to middle school youth. The program is delivered through Brand Ambassadors (15–18 year old “near peers”) who engage younger teens by events, social and digital media, and engaging written materials.
- Community-Level Prevention Activities: Local health departments work at the community level to monitor local indicator data, inform policy efforts on dating violence, and build community capacity to implement comprehensive prevention for teen dating violence.

THE IMPACT

When we teach teens skills for healthy relationships, we create safer, healthier communities for everyone now and in the future.

Teaching teens skills for healthy relationships can help them:

- Know what a healthy relationship looks like
- Believe they deserve healthy relationships
- Engage in positive behaviors

Positive, healthy, and safe teen dating and peer relationships have many benefits for youth and communities, such as:

- Improved school performance
- Reduced antisocial and unhealthy behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use
- Positive self-image and leadership skills
- Improved interpersonal skills, communication and negotiation skills, and empathy

Learn more about the science behind Dating Matters and its effects at **https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters/science.html**

> "If we do our job, if we do what is necessary for the young person who we love, who we work with, who we believe is important to us, we will have outcomes that will be mind blowing."
>
> **Erica B. Davis**
>
> Program Director, Chicago Department of Public Health

"KIDS COME WITH NO MANUALS. IF PARENTS KNOW THE SIGNS AND CAN THEMSELVES TALK TO THEIR YOUNGSTER AND SCHOOLS ARE MORE AWARE, THE TEACHERS ARE TRAINED, THE STUDENTS ARE TRAINED, THEN DEFINITELY THERE IS AN INFLUENCE IN THE COMMUNITY THAT TEEN DATING VIOLENCE IS UNACCEPTABLE."

RUTH STENNETT

TRAINER AND PARENT EDUCATOR

SUCCESS STORIES

OVERALL PROGRAM SUCCESSES

Healthy relationships benefit communities:

- Addresses teen dating violence by trying to prevent problems before they occur
- Builds a community of support by engaging youth, parents, schools, and communities
- Replaces cycle of harmful behavior with healthy behavior

Addresses the problem by trying to prevent problems before they occur.

> "Addressing these types of issues now in a proactive and preventative manner with middle school students is really critical. There's a lot of dysfunction, a lot of violence within the families themselves, so working not only with the young people but also with the families. That's a real critical piece of really getting to the root cause of what's going on."
>
> **Deborah Forshaw**
>
> Assistant Director of Program Services, Children's Service Council of Broward County

Builds a community of support by engaging youth, parents, schools, and communities.

> "When you work from the perspective of the parents and you work from the perspective of the children and you give them what they need, they'll meet in the middle and find that's the happy medium."
>
> **Jason Madison**
>
> Parent Program Facilitator

Replaces cycle of harmful behavior with healthy behavior.

> "I am certain that the people involved in the program right now will be reinforcing this information and teaching it to their children, and I think that the information will continue to tree out and spread in our community. This is going to have an impact on these youth and help stop that cycle."
>
> **Ellen Feiler**
>
> Director of Health Promotion & Social Marketing, Florida Department of Health

STUDENT SUCCESSES

Healthy relationships benefit students:

- Provides them with the dating guidance they're seeking (but may not be asking about)
- Teaches them about what healthy relationships should look like and about the signs of unhealthy relationships
- Makes it easier for youth to communicate with their parents

Provides them with the dating guidance they're seeking (but may not be asking about).

> "The community has a ton of youth who date but have not had any type of experience on dating. And so Dating Matters makes sense because these young people, they're looking for guidance."
>
> **Torrey Barrett**
>
> Executive Director, Kleo Center, Chicago, Illinois.

Teaches them about what healthy relationships should look like and about the signs of unhealthy relationships.

> "We talk to them about healthy dating relationships and what it feels like to be respected in a relationship...not just in a relationship boyfriend- or girlfriend-wise, but with your mother, your father, and how you should respect it and how you should respect others."
>
> **Sarah**
>
> Youth Ambassador

“IN DATING MATTERS, I’VE LEARNED HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A RELATIONSHIP, WHAT TO DO IN A RELATIONSHIP, AND WHAT’S RIGHT TO DO IN A RELATIONSHIP.”

DANIEL

YOUTH PARTICIPANT

"WE'VE HAD SCHOOLS ACTUALLY COMMUNICATE TO US THAT THEY'RE VERY EXCITED; THAT THEY'RE STARTING TO SEE CHANGE IN THE BEHAVIORS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, CHANGE IN ATTITUDES AND WAYS IN WHICH THEY SEE THEMSELVES IN RELATIONSHIPS."

ERICA B. DAVIS

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

STUDENT SUCCESSES

Makes it easier for youth to communicate with their parents.

> "Dating Matters has helped me have a better relationship with my mom, because now I can go talk to my parents about anything."
>
> **Aquarius**
>
> Youth Participant

> "I think Dating Matters has made it easier for having a good relationship with my parents, because I'm not afraid to talk to them about things that I wouldn't have normally wanted to talk about before Dating Matters."
>
> **Ivonne**
>
> Youth Participant

> "It changed my relationship after using those skills at home. We got closer."
>
> **Vashti Means**
>
> Parent Program Participant & Facilitator

> "The Dating Matters program has been a positive influence in our lives... bringing us all closer."
>
> **Virginia Castillo**
>
> Parent Program Participant

PARENT SUCCESSES

Healthy relationships benefit parents:

- Equips parents with tools to have important (but sometimes uncomfortable) conversations with their children
- Builds parental knowledge and confidence
- Provides an opportunity for improved communication and relationships between parents and their children

Equips parents with tools to have important (but sometimes uncomfortable) conversations with their children.

> "I feel like not only has it empowered me, but it made me feel comfortable with being uncomfortable...It gave me tools and conversation starters and topics that I can discuss with my kids that I might not have wanted to discuss before, but they do it in a way that helps me not to be so uncomfortable."
>
> **Paula Moore**
>
> Parent Program Participant

Builds parental knowledge and confidence.

> "I've seen all different kinds of successes. You begin to see these different light bulbs go off in their heads...And we get to see parents leave the experience feeling much more informed, much more comfortable in their parenting, and much more confident in their ability to do it and do it well."
>
> **Dedra Layne**
>
> Parent Program Facilitator

> "I believe Dating Matters can help stop the cycle of violence. If more parents are being involved and informed, they can begin to see some warning signs, some things they didn't see and say 'you're not going to do this here.' But if they're not empowered with the tools, then they won't know, and the cycle will continue. So empowerment is the best option; I have gotten that through Dating Matters."
>
> **Karen Clark**
>
> Parent Program Participant

"DATING MATTERS PROVIDES PARENTS THE TOOLS TO HAVE HARD CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR CHILDREN. IT ALLOWS PARENTS TO BECOME EQUIPPED ON HAVING CONVERSATIONS AS IT RELATES TO SEX, PEER PRESSURE, TEEN DATING VIOLENCE SO THAT THEY CAN HAVE THE HEALTHY CONVERSATIONS BEFORE SOMEONE ELSE HAS THE CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR CHILDREN."

JASON MADISON

PARENT PROGRAM FACILITATOR