

SECOND EDITION



# Safe DATES

An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum



# **Safe DATES**

*An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum*

**Second Edition**

Vangie Foshee, Ph.D., and Stacey Langwick, Ph.D.

**HAZELDEN®**

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*“In my opinion, Safe Dates is clearly the best available program. We will be taking a major step toward prevention of family violence if every teenager has the benefit of this program.”*

— MURRAY A. STRAUS  
Professor of Sociology and Co-Director Family Research  
Laboratory, University of New Hampshire

*“The prevention of dating abuse is an important step in reducing the larger problem of violence against women. Reducing dating abuse requires effective prevention tools that are scientifically based. Recognizing the lack of such tools, CDC funded the development of the Safe Dates program. We hope that the lessons learned from the program can be used by other communities in their efforts to prevent violence.”*

— DR. RODNEY HAMMOND, PH.D.  
Director, Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for  
Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention

*“Safe Dates is the best evaluated program for changing attitudes and behavior. It is a program for general use for all students in a middle or high school, and follow-up data showed that the program had effects lasting four years.”*

— K. DANIEL O’LEARY  
Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Stony Brook University

*“Domestic violence is a serious health and safety issue for our country, and it often starts in adolescence. All involved agree that prevention is one of the most important ways to address the problem. Safe Dates is one of the only tested and supported prevention programs that can be used in schools for young adolescents. I recommend it highly, and I hope it will be used widely.”*

— JACQUELYN C. CAMPBELL, PH.D., RN, FAAN  
Domestic Violence Researcher and Policy Advocate  
Author of *Assessing Dangerousness* and *Empowering Survivors of Abuse*

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## How to Use the CD-ROM

This manual comes with a CD-ROM that contains downloadable and printable resources, including all the student handouts and parent materials needed for implementing *Safe Dates*. All of the resources are in PDF format and can be accessed using Adobe Reader. If you do not have Adobe Reader, you can download it for free at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

Whenever you see this icon  in the manual, this means the resource needed is located on the CD-ROM. An SP symbol (ⓈⓅ) near the icon indicates that a Spanish version of the document is also available on the CD-ROM. All of the parent materials for *Safe Dates* have been translated into Spanish.

To access the resources on the CD-ROM, put the disc in your computer's CD-ROM player. Open your version of Adobe Reader, and then open the documents by clicking on the ones you wish to use. These resources cannot be modified, but they can be printed for use without concern for copyright infringement.



## Introduction to the Curriculum

### What Is *Safe Dates*?

The *Safe Dates* program is a dating abuse prevention program consisting of five components:

1. a ten-session dating abuse curriculum
2. a play about dating abuse
3. a poster contest
4. parent materials, including a letter, newsletter, and the Families for Safe Dates program
5. an evaluation questionnaire

All the materials needed to implement the program are included in this manual and CD-ROM. The following is a brief description of each component of the *Safe Dates* program.

#### **Ten-Session Curriculum**

The *Safe Dates* curriculum is a ten-session program that deals with attitudes and behaviors associated with dating abuse and violence. Each session can be completed in about fifty minutes. The curriculum can be presented over a period of days or weeks, depending on your program's schedule.

Each session includes detailed instructions on presenting the information, activities to reinforce the key concepts, and reproducible student handouts. Within the session outlines, all text that is **bold** is scripted text. While leading the sessions, facilitators may choose to read this text from the manual, use it as a guide, or not use it at all.

Most of the sessions provide tips for altering the activities to shorten the time required to complete the sessions. If you don't have enough time to present all ten sessions, consider using the following six-session or four-session program:

- **Six-Session Program:** Combine sessions 1 and 2; do all the activities in session 3; combine sessions 4 and 5; do all the activities in session 6; combine sessions 7 and 8; and do all the activities in session 9.
- **Four-Session Program:** Combine sessions 1 and 2; do all the activities in session 3; combine sessions 4 and 5; and do all the activities in session 9.

It is important to realize, however, that the fidelity of the product and the accompanying outcomes are best maintained by completing all ten sessions.

This program also includes an optional exam that can be given to students prior to beginning *Safe Dates* and/or after the program is completed to assess knowledge gained by the students. This exam is located on the CD-ROM.



### **Dating Abuse Play**

Before implementing the *Safe Dates* curriculum, plan to stage *There's No Excuse for Dating Abuse*, a forty-five-minute play about dating abuse and violence, which was written by high school drama students. Before presenting the play, consider sharing local statistics on the prevalence of teen dating abuse. Following the performance, have the actors lead discussions, preferably in small groups, with the audience about the issues presented in the play.

Consider presenting this play during a schoolwide assembly, as part of your school's drama program, or at other school or community events. You don't need professional actors. Enlist the help of your school's drama department or have your own students perform the play.

When preparing students/actors for the play, familiarize them with the *Safe Dates* curriculum, provide them with local

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As part of your *Safe Dates* program, plan to stage a forty-five-minute play about dating abuse and violence.

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domestic abuse prevention resources, and/or introduce them to professionals in the field. The script for the play is located on the CD-ROM.



### **Poster Contest**

Hosting a poster contest is a great way to reinforce the concepts learned in this curriculum. Instructions for the poster contest are included in session 10 (see pages 148–149). Posters about dating abuse prevention can be displayed in school hallways or other community buildings such as libraries, city hall, or shopping malls.

Students could also use their posters in presentations to various school or community groups. Have students vote on their favorite poster. Consider giving a cash prize or nice gift to the winners of first, second, and third place.

### **Parent Materials**

As in every strong prevention effort, it is important to get your students' parents or guardians involved in your *Safe Dates* program. A letter informing caregivers of the *Safe Dates* program is located on the CD-ROM, as is a two-page education newsletter that you can send to parents and guardians or keep on hand, in case you need to talk to a caregiver about this issue. Consider mailing the letter and newsletter together.



For those teachers and families who choose to dig deeper into the issue of adolescent dating abuse, Families for Safe Dates is a comprehensive, research-based program included on the CD-ROM. Families for Safe Dates includes six booklets that contain background information and activities for caregivers and teens to do together as they learn about different topics regarding adolescent dating abuse.

More detailed information on how to deliver the Families for Safe Dates program is described in the Introduction to Families for Safe Dates file on the CD-ROM.





### **Evaluating Safe Dates in Your School**

Many organizations and schools using *Safe Dates* have expressed a desire to perform a formal evaluation of the program. Thus, included on the CD-ROM of this second edition of *Safe Dates* is the *Safe Dates* Evaluation Questionnaire that can be used to do a formal evaluation of the *Safe Dates* program if desired.

The *Safe Dates* Evaluation Questionnaire assesses the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that *Safe Dates* is designed to change. This questionnaire will be most valuable when it is administered both to students taking *Safe Dates* and to students not taking *Safe Dates*, for comparison. An ideal evaluation design is one where students, classrooms, or schools are randomly selected to receive *Safe Dates*. Because of confidentiality issues, student names should not be included on this questionnaire. Choose staff members who are not implementing *Safe Dates* in the classroom to administer and analyze the results from this questionnaire. Make sure they follow all the procedures required by your local human subjects review board. It is recommended that the questionnaire be administered after the students have been exposed to the play, the curriculum, and the poster contest.

A more informal evaluation can be accomplished using the exam mentioned on page 4 as a pre-test and post-test, or just as a post-test to assess knowledge gained.

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The *Safe Dates* Evaluation Questionnaire can be used to do a formal evaluation of the *Safe Dates* program if desired.

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### **What Are the Goals of the *Safe Dates* Program?**

This program strives to

- raise students' awareness of what constitutes healthy and abusive dating relationships
- raise students' awareness of dating abuse and its causes and consequences
- equip students with the skills and resources to help themselves or friends in abusive dating relationships

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This program strives to raise students' awareness of what constitutes healthy and abusive dating relationships.

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- equip students with the skills to develop healthy dating relationships, including positive communication, anger management, and conflict resolution

For more information on the learner outcomes for each session, turn to the curriculum's Scope and Sequence on pages 24 and 25.

### Who Is the Intended Audience?

*Safe Dates* can be used as a dating abuse prevention tool for middle and high school students, both male and female. *Safe Dates* would fit well within a health education, family life, or general life skills curriculum (see the reference to national academic standards on page 26).

Because dating abuse is often tied to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs, you may want to consider using *Safe Dates* in conjunction with drug and alcohol prevention programs, as well as any other general violence prevention programs. For example, *Safe Dates* would work well with Hazelden's high school *Class Action* curriculum when discussing the issue of alcohol and date rape.

Some schools have trained student peer leaders who could teach or assist in teaching the *Safe Dates* program. If you use peer leaders, try to select or have peers select teens whom students respect and admire. You may also want to consider having older teens teach younger teens.

A school counselor could offer *Safe Dates* as part of a support group or counseling/education program, or it could be used in afterschool, community youth enrichment (such as YMCA or Girl Scouts), and faith-based youth programs.

*Safe Dates* could also be used as an intervention tool at domestic abuse or crisis centers, in juvenile diversion programs, and with victim support groups.

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*Safe Dates* can be used as a dating abuse prevention tool for middle and high school students, both male and female.

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*Safe Dates* could also be used as an intervention tool at domestic abuse or crisis centers and with victim support groups.

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### Is *Safe Dates* a Research-based Program?

*Safe Dates* is a research-based program with strong, long-term outcomes. It has been identified as a model program in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) as well as many other federal- and foundation-funded publications.

*Safe Dates* was the subject of substantial formative research in fourteen public schools in North Carolina using a rigorous experimental design. The program was found to be effective in both preventing dating abuse perpetration and victimization and in reducing perpetration and victimization among teens already involved in dating abuse. Adolescents participating in the program, as compared with those who did not, also reported less acceptance of dating abuse, less of a tendency to gender stereotype, and a greater awareness of community services for dating abuse.

Researchers studied the same group of students four years after implementation and found that students who participated in the *Safe Dates* program reported 56 percent to 92 percent less physical, serious physical, and sexual dating violence victimization and perpetration than teens who didn't participate in *Safe Dates*. The program has been found to be equally effective for males and females and for minority and non-minority adolescents.

For more information on the research behind *Safe Dates*, consult the following journal articles:

- Foshee, Vangie A., Fletcher Linder, Karl Bauman, Stacey Langwick, Ximena Arriaga, Janet Heath, Pam McMahon, and Shrikant Bangdiwala. “The Safe Dates Project: Theoretical Basis, Evaluation Design, and Selected Baseline Findings.” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine (supplement)* 12, no. 5 (1996).
- Foshee, Vangie A., Karl Bauman, Ximena Arriaga, Russ Helms, Gary Koch, and Fletcher Linder. “An Evaluation of Safe Dates, an Adolescent Dating Violence Prevention Program.” *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 1 (January 1998).

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**Safe Dates is a research-based program with strong, long-term outcomes.**

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- Foshee, Vangie A., Karl E. Bauman, Susan Ennett, Chirayath Suchindran, Thad Benefield, and Fletcher Linder. “Assessing the Effects of the Dating Violence Prevention Program *Safe Dates* Using Random Coefficient Regression Modeling.” *Prevention Science* 6, no. 3 (2005).
- Foshee, Vangie A., Karl Bauman, Susan Ennett, Fletcher Linder, Thad Benefield, and Chirayath Suchindran. “Assessing the Long-term Effects of the Safe Dates Program and a Booster in Preventing and Reducing Adolescent Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration.” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 4 (2004).

### **How Is *Safe Dates* Different from Other Dating Abuse Programs?**

Besides being strongly research-based, *Safe Dates* is unique in several ways:

1. It can be used as both a prevention and an intervention tool.
2. It considers both boys and girls as potential abusive partners and victims of dating abuse.
3. It includes activities that address both the victim and the abusive partner.
4. It is designed for general populations of adolescents rather than only those at high risk.
5. It is structured to reach large numbers of adolescents.
6. It is theoretically based.

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***Safe Dates* considers both boys and girls as potential abusive partners and victims of dating abuse.**

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### **What Is the Theoretical Base of *Safe Dates*?**

The theoretical base for the *Safe Dates* primary prevention activities includes promoting changes in norms tied with improvements in conflict management skills. Adolescents develop behavioral norms by observing acceptable behaviors, consequences, or reactions of those close to them. Peers are a primary source of influence for adolescents. Many studies have found that adolescents

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**Safe Dates includes many activities designed to alter the perceived norms of dating abuse.**

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see few negative consequences from their peers for dating abuse. This perceived acceptance of dating abuse, which may indicate the norms associated with dating abuse, is one of the strongest causes of dating abuse. Therefore, *Safe Dates* includes many activities designed to alter the perceived norms of dating abuse by increasing adolescents' perceptions of the negative consequences of dating abuse and changing peer responses to dating abuse.

As another indicator of dating abuse acceptance, cognitive-development theories suggest that adolescents form norms related to how males and females should act, and then strive to become like those categories they have created. In fact, gender stereotyping is stronger during adolescence than at any other time. Many studies have found that norms related to gender roles are associated with partner abuse. Thus, *Safe Dates* also includes many activities to change norms related to gender roles and stereotypes.

*Safe Dates* also includes two full sessions that teach conflict management techniques, because violent couples report using flawed conflict management and negotiation techniques that leave a conflict unresolved, which can lead to the use of physical and psychological abuse.

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**Safe Dates also includes many activities to change norms related to gender roles and stereotypes.**

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Changes in dating abuse, gender-role norms, and conflict management skills are also important for secondary prevention (such as encouraging victims to leave abusive partners and perpetrators to stop abusing their partners). In addition, the *Safe Dates* secondary prevention activities are guided by principles of Weinstein's Precaution Adoption Theory. This theory suggests that before someone will take a preventive action (such as leaving an abusive partner, seeking help for dating abuse, or stopping the perpetration of dating abuse), the person needs to believe that he or she needs help and that the efforts for getting help will be successful. As a result, *Safe Dates* includes activities designed to increase victims' and perpetrators' beliefs that they need help and to increase their awareness of community services from which they could seek help.

## How Can I Address Dating Abuse on a Schoolwide Level?

Whenever possible, *Safe Dates* should be taught within a school or organizational environment that supports healthy dating relationships and doesn't tolerate dating abuse. Sometimes adults downplay the seriousness of teen dating abuse. The truth is, teen relationships can become as abusive and violent as adult relationships.

Here are some ways schools and community organizations can promote and support the message that dating abuse is not tolerated:

1. Set clear school policies about reporting dating abuse or violence of any kind, whether it occurs on campus or not.
2. Work to create a school environment where respect and responsibility are promoted and violence and sexual harassment are not.
3. If a student has obtained a restraining order or other court order due to dating abuse, take the situation seriously and proactively enforce the order on campus.
4. Train staff to recognize the signs of dating abuse and to intervene appropriately.
5. Teach the *Safe Dates* program to all students. Make program participation mandatory.
6. Perform the *There's No Excuse for Dating Abuse* play for all students and possibly parents and other community members.
7. Host a schoolwide dating abuse prevention campaign. Involve students in making posters, announcements, and other promotional events on this important issue.
8. Make young people aware of dating abuse prevention resources at school or in the community. Invite community representatives to speak to students about this issue.
9. Involve parents by hosting a parent education program, such as the evidence-based Families for Safe Dates program (included on the CD-ROM), sending home the

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Whenever possible, *Safe Dates* should be taught within a school or organizational environment that supports healthy dating relationships and doesn't tolerate dating abuse.

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parent education newsletter (included on the CD-ROM), or talking directly with parents of students you suspect are either victims of dating abuse or abusive partners.

10. Offer school events that promote group activities rather than individual dating (such as community service projects and class parties).

### **What Resources Are Available in My Community to Help with This Topic?**

You don't need to be an expert on dating abuse to teach *Safe Dates*. However, you may want to turn to community resources for help in presenting this issue or to learn more about it.

Most communities have a domestic abuse crisis center or hotline. Check your local phone book or call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). These services will provide emergency and nonemergency referrals to teen dating abuse and domestic violence resources in your area. Also check with your county's mental health service agency or local university.

Most crisis centers offer brochures or other informational materials you can hand out to students. They may also have staff who can teach or team-teach the curriculum or provide you with local statistics (to be used in session 2).

### **If I Work for a Domestic Violence Prevention Program, Could I Provide *Safe Dates* in My Area Schools?**

Often domestic violence crisis centers or community programs are looking for ways to partner with area schools on the issue of dating abuse prevention. *Safe Dates* may provide an avenue for this partnership.

Schools may be seeking community professionals to train teachers in using the *Safe Dates* program or to directly teach the curriculum to students. In some cases, schools may even be willing to pay a stipend for this expertise.

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You don't need to be an expert on dating abuse to teach *Safe Dates*.

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## What Are Some Things I Should Be Aware of in Teaching *Safe Dates*?

Here are some helpful tips on teaching the *Safe Dates* program:

1. During the first session, it's important to create a sense of trust and safety in your group. Be sure to discuss the need for ground rules (as outlined in session 1). Make sure students abide by these rules throughout the program.
2. Make sure students do not use real names or too many details when talking about other people.
3. Be aware that some students in your class may be experiencing dating abuse or other abuse, perhaps at home. Don't force students to answer questions if they're uncomfortable doing so.
4. It's difficult in a class environment to guarantee complete confidentiality. Warn students of this fact, so they don't reveal too much.
5. Maintain respect during discussions. Allow people to offer opposing views, but do so respectfully.
6. When doing role-plays, do not allow students to act out abusive or violent behavior. The role-plays in the curriculum are written to prevent this, but you should guard against this as well.
7. When talking about sexual issues, be respectful of all students. Some students will feel comfortable talking about sexual violence, and others may not. Use discretion in how you approach this subject in session 9.
8. Be aware of the important role that culture plays in addressing dating abuse. Some students may come from cultural backgrounds that make it more difficult to address this issue (for example, in some cultures dating is frowned upon; if a student is dating secretly, it may be hard to seek help for abuse).

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During the first session, it's important to create a sense of trust and safety in your group.

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### Other Guidelines as You Teach *Safe Dates*

**1. What if a student reveals she or he or a friend is a victim of dating abuse or other type of abuse or is an abusive partner?**

While you're teaching *Safe Dates*, a student may reveal that he or she is either a victim of dating abuse or some other abuse or an abusive partner. It's important at the outset of the program to let students know what you'll do upon learning this information, so they don't feel set up or betrayed by the action you take.

Before teaching *Safe Dates*, check whether your school has a policy on reporting abuse of any kind. Also contact your local domestic violence crisis center or county officials for guidance.

If a student reveals information during a class discussion, do not continue discussing the issue with everyone present. Invite the student to talk privately with you afterward. Write down any information the student provides.

Don't try to solve the problem on your own. Consult with appropriate school officials and the student's parents or guardians.

Also use these steps (as outlined in session 4) when someone reveals dating abuse:

- a. Don't gossip.
- b. Believe the story.
- c. Tell the person that he or she didn't deserve to be abused.
- d. Let the person make his or her own decisions.
- e. Make a safety plan.
- f. Give help.

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If a student reveals personal information about dating abuse during a class discussion, do not continue discussing the issue with everyone present.

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**2. What if you believe a student is in imminent physical danger?**

A student may reveal that she or he is in imminent danger of being harmed by a dating partner. Take these confessions seriously. Take action to help the student by talking with the appropriate school officials, as well as the student's parents and law officials.

**3. What if parents are uncomfortable with the topic and don't want their children involved?**

On rare occasions, parents may express reservations about the *Safe Dates* program. Sometimes, this is because they're unfamiliar with its content. Allow parents to review the curriculum. *Safe Dates* doesn't contain any sexually explicit information and it doesn't promote or push dating. Some parents may not want their children dating until an older age. Be sure to respect and support their decision.

Tell parents about the prevalence of dating abuse among teens and the importance of addressing the issue in a preventative way. Discuss any additional concerns they may have. If parents still voice reservations, it may be best to have the students complete an alternative project on a related topic.

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*Safe Dates* doesn't contain any sexually explicit information and it doesn't promote or push dating.

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## Introduction to Teen Dating Abuse

**Why is it important to teach students so early—even in middle school—about dating abuse and its prevention?**


### JENNIFER'S STORY\*

Jennifer met Tony in the eighth grade. They started dating shortly after they met and were soon inseparable. As time went on, Tony became more and more possessive of Jennifer. He would meet her after each class, so she couldn't spend time with her friends. Jennifer thought this was just Tony's way of showing how much he loved her.

Tony's possessiveness and jealousy continued to grow. He accused Jennifer of flirting with other guys. One day, he even hit her. Jennifer was confused. Was this the same Tony she had fallen in love with? The next day Tony showed up with flowers, asking for forgiveness.

The relationship became more abusive over time. Eventually, Jennifer tried to break up with Tony, but he threatened to harm her and himself if she did. Jennifer's parents got a restraining order against Tony, but it was very difficult to follow through on. After all, Jennifer and Tony were only teens; they weren't married or living together.

Even with a restraining order, Tony followed Jennifer around at school because school officials didn't try to enforce the order. After all, dating abuse isn't a big issue for teens, or so school officials thought.

The story tragically ended one day when Tony attacked Jennifer after school with a knife, stabbing her to death. Everyone wondered what had gone wrong, why they hadn't seen how serious the situation was. But how could they have known? After all, Tony and Jennifer were only teens. 

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*\* This story is loosely based on a true story of a young woman who died due to dating violence.*

All kinds of people suffer from abuse in dating relationships: girls and boys; whites, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians; students born in rich neighborhoods and students born in poor neighborhoods; people who come from abusive homes and people who do not; people who have dated a lot and people who have just begun dating. Children as young as twelve years old can be in abusive dating relationships.

Dating abuse is a very real issue for many students:

- In the United States, approximately 12 percent of heterosexual high school boys and girls report having been physically victimized by a dating partner in the previous year. This percentage is as high as 40 percent in some areas of the country.<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately 13 percent of gay adolescent girls and 9 percent of gay adolescent boys report having been physically victimized by a dating partner in the previous year.<sup>2</sup>
- Victimization from psychological dating abuse is even higher, with approximately 29 percent of heterosexual high school students and 20 percent of gay high school students reporting having been psychologically abused by a date in the previous year.<sup>3</sup>
- Dating abuse is beginning as early as the sixth grade.<sup>4</sup>
- Adults who use violence with their dating partners often begin doing so during adolescence, with the first episode typically occurring by age fifteen.<sup>5</sup>
- Young women between the ages of fourteen and seventeen represent 38 percent of those victimized by date rape.<sup>6</sup>
- Rapes by acquaintances account for 60 percent of all rapes reported to rape crisis centers.<sup>7</sup>
- Both girls and boys are victims of dating abuse, though girls receive more severe injuries from dating abuse than boys.<sup>8</sup>
- Both girls and boys are perpetrators of dating abuse, though girls tend to use less severe forms of dating abuse than boys.<sup>9</sup>

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**Adults who use violence with their dating partners often begin doing so during adolescence.**

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- Abuse almost always recurs in a relationship. It doesn't just go away.
- Most abuse gets more severe over time.
- The consequences of being a victim of dating abuse for both boys and girls include depression, cigarette smoking, and suicide attempts. Additional consequences for girls are marijuana use, illicit substance use, and antisocial behavior; an additional consequence for boys is suicide ideation.<sup>10</sup>

### What Is Dating Abuse?

Dating abuse includes any behavior by a dating partner that

- is used to *manipulate*
- is used to *gain control*
- is used to *gain power over* someone
- makes a person *feel bad* about himself or herself or other people who are close to this person (such as friends or family)
- makes a person *afraid* of her or his boyfriend or girlfriend

Abusive behaviors may include the following.

#### PHYSICALLY ABUSIVE:

- hitting
- pinching
- shaking
- throwing things
- scratching
- choking
- shoving
- pushing
- using a weapon
- biting
- threatening
- spitting
- pulling hair

#### PSYCHOLOGICALLY/EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE:

- ignoring a date's feelings
- insulting a date's beliefs or values

**PSYCHOLOGICALLY/EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE** *continued:*

- acting in an intimidating way
- using sexually derogatory names
- calling a date names
- isolating a date from others
- driving recklessly to scare a date
- displaying inappropriate anger
- damaging personal property
- scaring a date
- keeping a date from leaving
- putting down family and friends
- humiliating a date in public or private
- telling lies
- purposefully injuring an animal
- threatening to hurt oneself

**SEXUALLY ABUSIVE:**

- forcing a date to have sex
- forcing a date to do other sexual things he or she doesn't want to do

It's important to realize that an abusive boyfriend or girlfriend can use physical or emotional attacks and that emotional abuse can be as serious as physical abuse.

Adolescents also use cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging (IM), text messages, Web chats, blogs, and social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook to abuse dating partners. These technologies are being used to send insults, show private and embarrassing pictures of dating partners to others, monitor the activities of dating partners, spread rumors about dating partners, and frighten and threaten dating partners.

## Why Is Dating Abuse Such a Prevalent Issue with Teens?

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Teen victims tend to minimize the seriousness of the situation.

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### ***Teens May Not Take the Issue Seriously***

The prevalence of dating abuse among teens may be partly attributed to their view of it. Teen victims tend to minimize the seriousness of the situation. Many of them see abuse as a “normal” part of relationships. Romanticizing about love, teens may interpret jealousy, possessiveness, and abuse as signs of love. *Safe Dates* addresses this issue in sessions 1 and 2 by defining what is a “normal,” healthy relationship and what is abuse.

Teens may also experience a lot of pressure to be in dating relationships. Consequently, a teen may remain in an abusive relationship just to have someone to date. The fear of not being liked may also prompt a teen to comply with an abusive partner’s requests.

In addition, teens’ communication skills are less developed than those of adults, and gender stereotyping, which has been associated with dating abuse, is stronger during adolescence than at any other time in life.

### ***Adults May Not Take the Issue Seriously***

Adults also confound the problem, as they often fail to take teen dating abuse seriously, believing teens will just grow out of it. However, teen dating abuse can be as violent as that of adults, and rather than growing out of the violence, teens are more likely to grow into it—establishing lifelong abuse patterns.

Also, many young people are reluctant to talk to adults. Although this is a normal part of adolescence, such hesitation can prevent them from seeking help for abuse. Teens in abusive relationships will often confide in a friend first. This is why *Safe Dates* spends two sessions (sessions 4 and 5) talking about how friends can be helpful.

Due to this teen reluctance, it’s important that adults be proactive rather than wait for teens to ask for help. If an adult suspects dating abuse, she or he should address the issue right away.

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Adults often fail to take teen dating abuse seriously, believing teens will just grow out of it.

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### **The Legal System May Not Help Either**

Adolescents struggling with dating abuse sometimes face obstacles in the legal system. Many domestic violence laws do not include dating abuse in their definition, and in many courts, minors do not have a legal presence. Minors sometimes cannot file a civil case or ask for a restraining order unless a guardian appears with them in court. However, these obstacles are rapidly decreasing as more and more courts are becoming aware of the importance of protecting teens from dating abuse. Check with your court system to find out the local laws in your area related to protecting teens from dating abuse.

### **What Can We Do to Prevent Dating Abuse?**

If abuse occurs once in a relationship, it's likely to occur again. Both men and women identify jealousy and uncontrollable anger as the main reasons for dating abuse. Abuse and violence are often used to establish power and control in a relationship. Any challenge to this power is seen as a threat.

The *Safe Dates* curriculum looks at why people abuse (session 3) and then identifies the key ways of preventing dating abuse, including changing gender stereotypes (session 6); dealing with feelings, particularly anger, in healthy, nonviolent ways (session 7); and promoting healthy communication and equal power in relationships (session 8).

Session 9 addresses the serious issue of dating sexual abuse and date rape. *Safe Dates* teaches teens how to protect themselves from dating sexual abuse, while stressing that the victim is never to blame.

Dating abuse is a serious issue that should be taken up with students as early as possible. Showing students how to develop positive, healthy dating relationships will help prevent dating abuse, not only when they're teens but in their future adult relationships as well.

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## SESSION 10 OUTLINE

**PART 1**

20 minutes

**OPTIONAL**▶ **Administering the Post-Test**

The post-test is not a required part of the *Safe Dates* program, but because *Safe Dates* is often delivered in school settings where teachers want or need to assess student learning, a post-test is included on the CD-ROM. If you choose to deliver the post-test, it is suggested that it be administered before reviewing the program in part 2 of this session, as most of the answers to the questionnaire will be discussed during the review.

If the test was given prior to beginning *Safe Dates* as a pre-test, the answers can be compared to this post-test administration to assess changes in students' knowledge and attitudes. Or it can be given only after being exposed to *Safe Dates* and graded. Allow approximately twenty minutes to administer the post-test. If a more formal evaluation of *Safe Dates* is required, the *Safe Dates* Evaluation Questionnaire can be used in place of the post-test.

**PART 2**

20 minutes

▶ **Reviewing the *Safe Dates* Program**

1. Explain:

**This is our last session of the *Safe Dates* program and I'd like to take some time to review what we've learned.**

2. Spend a few minutes reviewing some of the key concepts of the *Safe Dates* program. You may want to ask students to tell you what they learned. To guide this discussion, ask students some of the following questions:

- a. **What are some things you'd look for in a caring dating relationship?**
- b. **What are some examples of physical dating abuse?  
Emotional dating abuse?**
- c. **Why do people abuse in dating relationships?**

- d. What are some of the key steps to helping a friend in an abusive dating relationship?
  - e. How do gender stereotypes affect dating relationships?
  - f. What are some positive ways to handle anger in relationships?
  - g. What are the four SAFE skills for effective communication in dating relationships?
  - h. What are some ways to protect yourself from being a victim of dating sexual abuse?
  - i. What are things you can do to prevent yourself from using dating sexual abuse?
3. Review with students where they can go for help if they or their friends are victims or perpetrators of dating abuse. Review both school and local community resources.

### **PART 3**

8 minutes

#### ► **Describe the *Safe Dates* Poster Contest**

Hosting a poster contest is a great way to reinforce the concepts learned in this curriculum. The poster contest is an activity that's best done after completing the curriculum. Posters on the theme of dating abuse prevention can be displayed in school hallways or other community buildings such as libraries, city hall, and shopping malls. Students could also use their posters in presentations to various school or community groups. A key aspect of the poster contest is that the posters are displayed in locations where other students taking the *Safe Dates* program can see them. Having students in the class or school vote on the best posters is a good way to ensure that students are exposed to the messages in the posters. Prizes can be offered for first, second, and third place. The sample poster contest flyer on the CD-ROM can be changed to accommodate the type of contest your school or agency desires. For example, instead of creating posters,



students could develop media messages, Web sites, or text messages, as long as students taking *Safe Dates* have an opportunity to view or hear the messages created.

1. Hand out the poster contest flyer you have created. Read through this flyer together so students know the guidelines for the contest.
2. If there's time, allow students to begin creating their posters. After this session, students will work on the posters on their own time.

**PART 4**  
2 minutes

► **Conclusion**

1. Congratulate all students for the hard work they put into learning the *Safe Dates* program.
2. *Optional:* Allow students to keep their journals. Encourage them to review the material in their journals regularly. It will remind them of the key things they should do to prevent dating abuse.

**Hazelden**, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden offers a comprehensive approach to addiction that addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

A life of recovery is lived “one day at a time.” Hazelden publications, both educational and inspirational, support and strengthen lifelong recovery. In 1954, Hazelden published *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the first daily meditation book for recovering alcoholics, and Hazelden continues to publish works to inspire and guide individuals in treatment and recovery, and their loved ones. Professionals who work to prevent and treat addiction also turn to Hazelden for evidence-based curricula, informational materials, and videos for use in schools, treatment programs, and correctional programs.

Through published works, Hazelden extends the reach of hope, encouragement, help, and support to individuals, families, and communities affected by addiction and related issues.

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Listed by



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, every year, 1 in 4 adolescents experiences verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner.

It is imperative to stop dating violence before it ever starts. **Safe Dates**, second edition, can help with that. This evidence-based program helps teens recognize the difference between caring, supportive relationships and controlling, manipulative, or abusive relationships. It is during the critical pre-teen and teen years that young people begin to learn the skills needed to create and foster positive relationships. With **Safe Dates**, young people are given the tools needed to build these skills.

Highly engaging and interactive, **Safe Dates** reflects the issues faced by today's teens. The curriculum includes

- Updated statistics and facts
- Information on dating abuse through technology
- All handouts and parent resources on CD-ROM
- New Families for Safe Dates program to get families talking about healthy dating relationships and dating abuse

**Safe Dates** has been designated as a Model Program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and was selected for the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), receiving high ratings on all criteria.

Cover design: David Spohn

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