

EIS EQUALITY



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

DATING ABUSE

Dating abuse can occur in any relationship and is the physical, emotional, sexual or mental abuse of an individual by someone within a current or former relationship. Dating abuse is a continuous pattern of abusive behaviour used to control someone and limit their choices.

Child Protection

EIS members working in educational establishments must follow the guidelines of their authorities to protect children who are subject to direct abuse/violence or emotional or sexual abuse. Local authority guidance on Child Protection will be readily available in all establishments.

EIS members may well be the first port of call for a young person in an abusive situation. Children and young people in such a situation are very vulnerable and require support. The EIS advice is to supplement, not replace local authority Child Protection Guidelines. Members must follow local authority guidance on Child Protection which should be readily available.

DATING ABUSE

Introduction

It is a myth that domestic violence in intimate relationships is confined to relationships between adults. Violent and abusive relationships can and do occur among young people.

The phase where young people begin to build and have romantic relationships is an important stage. As they go through the process of experiencing these relationships young people will establish the knowledge bases upon which their future relationships will be built. A limited knowledge of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in relationships can put them in a vulnerable position when they find themselves in an abusive relationship. It is therefore an important and influential stage in life that understandably will have an impact not only in their present situation but also on their behaviour as adults. Teachers have a key role to play in supporting this development phase for young people.

What is Dating Abuse?

Dating abuse can occur in any relationship and is the physical, emotional, sexual or mental abuse of an individual by someone within a current or former relationship. Dating abuse is a continuous pattern of abusive behaviour used to control someone and limit their choices.

'A third of teenage girls suffer unwanted sexual acts in a relationship and a quarter physical violence'

'Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships' - NSPCC (2009)

The victims of dating abuse are almost exclusively young women. However, it can be experienced by boys and young men. The same NSPCC survey also found that whilst most young people did not divulge details about the abuse, those that did talk about their experiences to friends were often given inappropriate advice that condoned violence and abuse. This has very obvious implications for educational establishments.

Some of the methods used to dominate and influence the victims of dating abuse include;

Threats: Making threats to hurt, threatening to leave, threatening to tell teachers/parents/friends about the relationship or behaviour, threatening to "out" them about aspects of their sexuality

Intimidation: Making them afraid, hurting them physically, destroying property, threatening or hurting pets or children

Using social status/societal expectations: Making all the decisions, saying it's a "man's world" to control them, using music/TV to excuse name calling

Anger or emotional abuse: Using instant messaging to harass them, putting them down, name calling, humiliating them, using guilt to control them

Peer pressure/community pressure: Using religion as an excuse for abusive behaviour, spreading rumours and writing offensive graffiti, posting pictures online, forwarding explicit text messages to friends or making them do something they don't want to, using popularity against them, trying to turn their friends against them

Controlling behaviour: Hacking into online accounts, taking away their phone, telling them what to wear, displaying compulsively jealous behaviour, checking their text messages/emails without their permission

Isolation/exclusion: not allowing them to see their friends, the young person being worried if their partner finds out they have seen their friends

Sexual coercion: Manipulating or making threats to get sex, getting them drunk or drugged to have sex, being made to watch pornography, told they "should" do something sexual that they don't want to do, making them do something sexual with friends

Minimising: Making light of abuse, not taking responsibility, humiliating them

Challenges for Schools

Whole School Approach

Dating abuse, like domestic abuse, is based on prejudice, gender stereotyping and discrimination.

A whole school approach to inform teachers should be developed, within local authority guidelines, to support the victims of dating abuse. This would support existing school and local authority policies and also take account of any need for partnership working.

This should address, amongst others, the following factors;

- Peer influence
- Media influence
- Social expectations
- Sex and relationships
- Technology

It is important that the school and local authority policies and advice are influenced by the views of young people. This is particularly relevant when you consider that some of the dating abuse methods adopted are often outwith the parameters of 'adult understanding' and within specific youth cultures, such as "sexting" (using mobiles to capture and forward explicit pictures) or cyber bullying.

Any policies should enable schools to respond appropriately and quickly to any issues that arise when dealing with sexist/gender based bullying and dating abuse.

Support

As with bullying, victims should feel able to safely talk about their experiences without fear of retribution or blame.

If a victim discloses that dating abuse has occurred, teachers should ensure that their response is non-judgmental, supportive and that the victim understands that they are not at fault.

Teachers working with young people play a vital role in their lives. Dealing with disclosures can sometimes leave teachers feeling helpless and anxious.

Teachers should be aware of the support structures provided by both their own establishment and their local authority to help them deal effectively with the stresses that can arise.

The support of external organisations may be sought to enhance that provided by local authorities.

The Curriculum and the role of educational establishments

Pupils should be given every opportunity to examine the issues surrounding dating abuse. Dating abuse can be integrated into the curriculum through its relevance to:-

- CfE Health and Wellbeing experiences and outcomes
- GIRFEC principles and values
- Scottish Government National Performance Framework and National Outcomes 1-16 (Outcomes 4,5,7,8,9,11 & 15)

It is important to challenge prejudice, gender stereotyping and discrimination. The EIS believes that it is possible to discuss these issues with children and young people sensitively and effectively.

The ethos of educational establishments should:-

- Promote self respect and respect for others
- Promote positive skills for healthy relationships
- Present alternatives to models of masculinity and femininity which encourage or condone coercion or abuse
- Promote understanding of power relationships that provide the context in which abuse and victimisation occur
- Challenge and reduce tolerance of abuse/violence within relationships
- Help children and young people know what help and support is available to them

Educational establishments can also provide accurate information about abuse/violence and challenge prevalent misinformation, stereotypes and attitudes that contribute to the acceptability of abuse/violence in relationships.

Practical steps to take:

- Examine establishment policies
- Make appropriate information available
- Be aware of the seriousness of date abuse/violence
- Request suitable CPD on date abuse/violence and its impact on learning and teaching
- Raise staff awareness of existing support mechanisms within local authorities

The EIS believes that this issue should be addressed by ITE institutions as well as it forming part of the CPD requirements for newly qualified teachers and other staff.

Resources

- SafeHub Scotland: www.safehubscotland.org/
- Domestic Abuse Resources and Training for Schools in Scotland:
www.dartsscotland.org/
~ CRUSH DVD/movie & Teaching Materials
- Scottish Women's Aid:
www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/help-and-info-for-young-people/dating-abuse
- Zero Tolerance: www.zerotolerance.org.uk/
~ RESPECT Education Resource
- Love is Not Abuse: www.loveisnotabuse.com/
- That's Not Cool: www.thatsnotcool.com/
- Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE):
www.thehideout.org.uk/default.aspa
- Lessons from Literature (Futures without Violence) – Responding to Relationship Abuse:
www.lessonsfromliterature.org/relabuse.html
- Preventing Violence Against Women (Scotland):
www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/
- RespectMe: www.respectme.org.uk/
- The Impact on Children and Young People of Abuse/Violence in the Home (EIS Advice Paper)



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