



COMMUNITY



*Next***STEP**
of Central Louisiana

A FIGHT WE CAN WIN
Teen Dating
Violence
Awareness
Month

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NEXT STEP OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

A FIGHT WE CAN WIN



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Founder and Executive Director**

February – A time when one's thoughts turn to flowers, candy, cards, and gifts. Interestingly, the month also holds the distinction of being recognized as *Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month*, bringing a national focus to a troubling, growing issue and highlighting the need to educate youth about healthy and unhealthy relationships.



A growing body of research reveals that dating violence among teens is shockingly common, with as many as one in three falling victim to verbal, emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Studies indicate those in unhealthy relationships may suffer long-term, negative behavioral and health consequences, including poor school performance, engaging in risky behaviors, suffering from eating disorders, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Tragically, young people involved in abusive relationships early in their dating lives are more likely to carry the patterns of abuser/victim behavior into future relationships; thus, the dangerous, destructive cycle continues – a cycle that plagues family life across Louisiana.

Teens do not have the experience, nor are they equipped to handle the consequences of abusive, controlling dating partners. Recognizing the gravity of the issue, the Louisiana Legislature passed House Bill 46 in 2010, requiring public schools to provide instruction relative to dating violence and healthy relationships to students in grades seven through twelve.

In response to the legislative mandate, NextSTEP of Central Louisiana implemented its original school-based awareness and prevention initiative, *A Fight We Can Win*, to help schools meet their safety obligations and to empower teens by raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and changing attitudes and behaviors linked to dating violence.

To date, NextSTEP has educated more than 30,000 Central Louisiana middle and high school students in 23 schools in four parishes, including cadets enrolled in the National Guard's Youth Challenge Program. The initiative is expanding to two new parishes this spring, with three more waiting to launch next academic year.

For twelve years, NextSTEP has conducted dating violence surveys, vetted by the State Department of Education, to learn what middle and high school students know about the issue and to determine its prevalence in Central Louisiana. Local findings reflect national statistics. Last year, of the 2,030 students surveyed and taught, 95% indicated dating violence is a serious issue. Of



the 1,310 responding to a question related to abusive relationships, 12% (193) answered that they were or have been in one, while 7% (92) were not sure.

Many of the stories students share are chilling – accounts of physical abuse, strangulation, sexual assault, sexting, stalking, threats of suicide, or harm to family members and pets. For many teens, dreams of romance and storybook relationships have been replaced by fear, dread, abuse, and control.



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[Student responses when asked on the pre-lesson survey to share their thoughts about dating violence](#) [NCPHST](#) [KARDS FOR KIDS](#) [ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#)

- *"It really can change the way some people specifically kids view what love really is suppose to be like."*
- *"My mom was in a abusive relationship and I was afraid she was going to die. . ."*
- *"I think a lot of kids have seen their parents be domestic so as they get older they're either the abusive one or they're tolerating being abused."*
- *"It's becoming more and more normalized, and some times people don't even realize their doing it or a victim of it."*
- *"I think it's a super big issue. It can change the way you think about relationships. It is short term hurt your feelings and long term affects your ability to trust. That's my experience at least."*

A sample of student feedback, post-lesson:

- *It encouraged me to go seek help.*
- *"It will help people understand what to do."*
- *"Helps you understand relationships better."*
- *"It gave me a huge wake up call."*
- *"I best like how it taught be new things about dating relationships I would need to know ahead of time."*



- *“It was interactive and included recent things that happened.”*
- *“This needs to be shown to students starting in kindergarten.”*

The Legislature has twice recognized NextSTEP for its work in schools. Financial support for its mission is through sponsorships from Central Louisiana businesses, a Federal Victims of Crime Act Grant, funneled through the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, and for the past two years, from NFL great Peyton Manning and his PeyBack Foundation.

Students are given an opportunity to provide feedback to PeyBack Foundation on their post-lesson surveys:

- *“Thank you Mr. Manning! For, having this program. It’s taught me things! And, has pushed me to talk to someone if I’ve ever need help!”*
- *“Thank you, this is an incredible chance for others to be aware that their not the only one’s suffering.”*
- *“Thank you so much for this huge opportunity. We have learned so much from this program and now we are aware. Thank you for your service.”*
- *“Great advice important for learning and giving teens the awareness of the bad signs and to avoid the cycle.”*
- *“Thank you mr manning this helps many people in need. Many lives are saved.”*
- *“Peyton Manning thank you for providing funding for this very helpful program. This program is amazing and it was a fun lesson.”*
- *“Thank you for bringing the dating violence program to schools. It helped me realize my dating rights and what a healthy relationship really is. Thank you for caring about young people. You’re one of the best! i think you and Brady are goats!”*
- *“An honor to have you help us learn this stuff!”*
- *“Thanks so much you bout saved my life.”*



According to Department of Justice research, the good news is that school-based interventions are beginning to reduce the incidence of dating violence. By reaching teens at a critical time in their development, when they are laying the foundation for behaviors related to dating relationships, NextSTEP's vision is to see a decline in the rate of intimate partner violence when this generation reaches adulthood.

It is truly a fight we *must* win!

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Art provided by Pineville High School students

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can **WIN!**

Teen Dating Violence
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