



National Council of Jewish Women Pioneered Teen Dating Abuse Prevention and Awareness that is Now Law in New Jersey

New Jersey "Safe Dating Bill" Signed into Law on May 5, 2011

Livingston, N.J., May 12, 2011—When New Jersey Governor Chris Christie signed the Safe Dating Bill into law on May 5, the National Council of Jewish Women, Essex County Section was gratified.

For close to 20 years, NCJW's Linda & Rudy Slucker Center for Women has been providing a teen dating abuse prevention and awareness program in Essex County high schools, suburban and urban. The program dispatches trained dating-abuse educators to conduct two-day workshops in high school health classes. Students learn how to recognize signs of abuse, how to end abusive relationships, and how to develop healthy dating relationships.

"Teen dating abuse – whether physical or emotional abuse – is a problem that is present in every type of community, among all types of teenagers from families across the economic and social spectrum," said Jill Sorkin Johnson, President, NCJW, Essex County Section. "NCJW is thrilled to know that now all students throughout the state will be exposed to this important information to help them recognize and avoid abusive relationships."

The New Jersey law, enacted on May 5, requires schools to educate students about dating abuse. It directs the Department of Education to develop a school district dating violence policy and requires districts to provide dating violence education as part of the health curriculum. The NCJW Teen Dating Abuse program is available to fulfill the requirements.

In the early years, the TDA program was designated for high school juniors. Now it's primarily presented to freshman classes because teens are maturing earlier and the problem is happening at younger ages. In recent years the curriculum has been updated to include information about the use of texting, social networking sites, and other digital technologies in dating abuse.

This year, more than 60 trained volunteers have presented the program to about 3,000 teenagers. More than 50,000 students have received the program since its inception, in 1992.

In addition to working directly with kids in schools, TDA runs a program for parent and community groups -- such as PTAs, churches, and synagogues – called *Teen Dating: the Untold Story*.

Teen Dating Abuse is Prevalent and Pervasive

NCJW developed the TDA program in response to the growing body of evidence that teen dating abuse is prevalent and pervasive. The numbers paint a disturbing picture. Studies* have found that:

- One in three adolescents who has been in a dating relationship has experienced verbal or physical abuse from a dating partner.
- Nearly 80% of girls who have been physically abused continue to date their abusive partner.
- 19% of teens in a 2010 survey confessed to committing violence against a dating partner
- 15% of teens who have been in a relationship report having been hit, slapped, or pushed by their dating partner.
- 21% of teens who have been in a relationship say their partner tried to prevent them from seeing family or friends.
- 43% of those in a “serious” relationship say that it’s “good” or “okay” for a dating partner to behave in a jealous or controlling manner.

[*References available upon request.]

“The statistics on teen dating abuse are staggering and speak for themselves,” said Doris Spector, chairperson of the NCJW Teen Dating Abuse program (TDA). “This is why NCJW is committed to continuing the TDA prevention and awareness program and bringing it to as many high schools as possible.”

One Volunteer’s Story

Marylu Valenzano understood the value of the message on teen dating abuse. Over the years, the former Livingston High School health teacher listened on the sidelines as experts from a local volunteer group on teen dating abuse presented their powerful educational program to her students -- two days a year, five times a day for 11 years. When she retired, in 2006, Marylu seized the opportunity to volunteer with the program she had observed so many times.

Marylu is now completing her fifth year as a teen dating abuse educator for the NCJW TDA program.

“I like interacting with the students, and I knew I would miss that when I retired,” Marylu said about her teaching career at Livingston High School. “Over the years, I had gotten to know so many of the volunteers who presented the program in my

classroom, and I thought the information was so vital for teens. This gives me a way to continue that part of my profession, but as a volunteer.”

She has presented the TDA program more than 40 times, in many Essex County high schools, including those in Caldwell, West Essex, Montclair, West Orange, Millburn, Livingston, and Columbia High School. She’s also been in such private schools as Montclair Kimberly Academy, Mt. Saint Dominic, and Seton Hall Prep.

“I see the impact it has on the students. That’s why I wanted to be involved,” Marylu said.

The subject of teen dating abuse is more talked-about now than it was when she first heard the program presented 16 years ago.

“I think the current high schoolers really understand that it *can* happen and it *does* happen. It wasn’t in the news as much 10 or 15 years ago – it’s in the news a lot more now. We collect articles and share some of those with the students about situations that have occurred in local areas – and the students know it can happen anywhere, in any town. Teens understand the reality more now. Not only have there been a few high profile cases, but the students actually know of some instances within their own group of friends where there have been unhealthy behaviors,” said Marylu.

Marylu says that volunteering for TDA is rewarding. She would welcome the day when the program is no longer needed.

For information about how to have a TDA presentation in your school or for your parent group, or if you are interested in becoming a TDA volunteer, please call the NCJW office at 973-740-0588.

Please visit http://www.centerforwomennj.org/teen_dating_abuse.html for additional information.

###