

# Call to Youth

The statistics included in this toolkit show what you already know; that dating and sexual violence are issues relevant to your lives. Research and common sense show that youth would often rather speak to and hear from other youth rather than adults regarding these issues. Therefore, it is up to you as youth leaders to utilize this kit and take on this issue if you want any measure of success in raising awareness about and bringing an end to these forms of violence.

The creation of this toolkit would not have been possible without the involvement and knowledge of youth leaders and youth survivors of dating violence from across the country. Consequently, the use of this toolkit in schools across Texas will be most successful with your involvement and leadership. Our hope is that you, the youth of Texas, will feel empowered to use this toolkit to bring awareness of the issues of dating and sexual violence to your peers, and continue the work to prevent these forms of violence across Texas.

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Included in the toolkit are some discussion questions to help you facilitate meaningful conversations with your peers to prepare for the National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week. It is important for you and your group to understand these issues and how to help your peers in order to successfully utilize this kit and create activities for your school. In addition, a brief description of several different activities youth across Texas have used in their schools to raise awareness about dating and sexual violence is attached. Please feel free to make changes to any of the activities to make them more appropriate for your school or community. Creativity is encouraged, so create your own activity to let your peers know about these issues.

Sincerely,

*Texas's Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Team*

## Outreach and Education Ideas

**Create a clothesline of decorated t-shirts:** Have a table set-up where students can come and decorate a t-shirt or a cardboard cut-out in the shape of a t-shirt. Then, hang them on a clothesline or on multiple clotheslines throughout the school. If you want to use real t-shirts, you can hold an old t-shirt drive where students, teachers and staff donate old t-shirts or ask for donations from the community.

Potential prompts for the activity could be:

- ★ How has violence or harassment impacted you?
- ★ How do you see a world without dating or sexual violence?
- ★ What does it look like to be a survivor?
- ★ What does a healthy relationship look like?

**Create a pathway to a violence-free school:** This can be done using a green carpet, yellow brick road, or other type of pathway. Include road signs or components of the road where necessary steps to achieving a violence-free school are written or symbolized. At the end of the pathway could be a poster or banner where students write their thoughts on what their school would be like if it were completely free of violence and harassment.

**Statistical/Informational Signs:** Using butcher paper or posterboard, make large signs to hang around the school that contain statistics and information related to dating and sexual violence. Focus on including information that is especially relevant to the age group you are targeting and have other students think of creative, appropriate ways to make the signs eye-catching. Smaller versions can be produced by hand or on a computer to distribute or to hang in places where space is more limited (e.g., bathroom stalls). Recent statistics on dating violence and sexual assault can be found on our website ([www.taasa.org](http://www.taasa.org)) or the website for the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network ([www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)).

**Critiquing Mass Media Messages:** Critique messages from TV, radio, magazines, movies, billboards and other advertisements. Discuss with classmates how these messages may or may not reflect the principles of equality, respect, dignity and non-violence. You can have students bring in their own examples, or you can provide examples for them. Here are some examples of what to look for and discuss:

1. Examples of power and control such as women being in inferior positions to men.
2. Examples of the objectification of women or men.
3. Examples that support myths about dating or sexual violence (e.g., victim blaming, “she was playing hard to get,” or “He shouldn’t have made her mad.”)
4. Examples that enforce rigid gender roles.

# Art, Poetry, Essay and/or Song Lyric Contest

This section includes guidelines for a contest that can be organized by school teachers, student organizations, or community members. This is an opportunity for creative expression through which students may share concerns, their stories, and/or personal safety tips using graphic art, song lyrics, essays, poetry, button and/or bookmark designs. Possible themes include:

dating violence	gender respect
words can hurt	personal boundaries
bystander intervention	rigid gender expectations/assumptions
Speak Up. Speak Out.	flirting vs. sexual harassment

Depending on the type of contest you choose to organize, prepare registration forms for the entrants detailing all specifications for their entry. Teachers can help students identify areas of the school policy or student code of conduct that could also be highlighted on the poster to affirm student rights. Judges for the contest can be prominent members of your community, including the school principal, superintendent, or the executive director of the local rape crisis center or domestic violence service center. If you don't have a budget that allows you to purchase prizes for the contest, ask local businesses if they would be willing to donate a prize. For example, local restaurants might offer gift certificates or movie theaters might offer a few free movie passes.

## Getting the word out

- ★ Make sure to target your audiences with age-appropriate letters and flyers.
- ★ In addition to targeting schools, local newspapers, community newsletters, as well as local youth organizations may help you get the word out.
- ★ Make the deadline for entries early enough to allow time to judge materials.

## Releases

Make sure to provide and collect parental release forms; this will allow you to keep all art and written entries for future use and will allow you to announce and recognize the artists publicly, if desired. In the release, include information about how materials might be used.

## Recognition/Distribution

Besides using local newsletters, newspapers, or magazines, the entries could also be reprinted in youth organization newsletters and in your program's future publications. Graphic designs could be used for buttons, bookmarks, mouse pads, agency calendars, school book covers or banners. Remember, both the students and the schools deserve recognition. Groups such as Partners In Education and school parent networks may also help with recognition activities.

## Peer Education Organization

Start a peer education club or organization. Gather a group of committed students who want to spread awareness about sexual and dating violence, and who desire to make their school and community healthy and safe.

Call the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault to find out more about the Students Taking Action for Respect (STAR) program. The STAR program is targeted to junior high and high school students and is designed to develop leadership and prevention skills around issues of school safety such as sexual harassment, dating violence and sexual assault. TAASA provides support to teams who are newly forming, training through the annual Students Taking Action for Respect Conference, and presentation curriculum to help youth leaders talk to their peers about dating and sexual violence.

To find out more about the program, or to see if a STAR team is already active in your community, please visit the Students Taking Action for Respect website at [www.taasa.org/star](http://www.taasa.org/star), or contact TAASA at 512-474-7190.