

## Topic 6. Teaching and facilitating these issues

### A: Your role as a discussion leader

The issues of violence against women and healthy equal relationships are emotionally charged and personal in nature. Since studies show that one in 8 children witnesses violence in his or her home, this is an issue that has touched many youth. Chances are that each year, some of your youth have been or are being sexually or physically abused. What's more, some youth will have experienced violence or the threat of violence in dating relationships.

Therefore, unlike a normal lesson or gathering, the teacher, staff resource person or community leader who is leading an exercise or organizing an activity about this topic has a particularly important role in helping create a safe environment.

**Safety and ground rules:** This isn't a normal group discussion. So you might ask the youth to develop some discussion guidelines. What do they need from you and from each other in order to feel safe when they talk about these issues? Do they require that the youth agree to confidentiality? That no one has to speak who doesn't want to? That time is shared? That discussions are respectful and people listen to each other? Another way to provide safety for certain discussions is to have a question box where youth can pose questions anonymously. We have provided a sample set of ground rules near the beginning of Part II.

**Model respect:** It's important to encourage participation in the discussion and model the type of behaviour we expect from youth.

**Sharing the time:** If a few people monopolize conversation on these issues, the experiences and insights of many youth will remain hidden. Providing safety means encouraging participation, stopping anyone from monopolizing the discussion, but not putting anyone on the spot who might feel uncomfortable talking about these issues.

**Generalizations and judgments:** Be careful to avoid generalizations, stereotypes and judgments, such as "boys will be boys," "girls are powerless victims" or "all men are violent".

**Single-sex groups:** We suggest that for some discussions, a class be divided into single-sex groups to provide more safety and let certain things come out that might not in a mixed group. If you do this, make sure they don't become sessions to dump on the other sex, and also make sure that when you come back together, the groups listen to each other. We also suggest that if you're dividing the group, you would ideally want to have a male and a female group leader. We also suggest, if possible, that the class/group be lead by both a male and a female facilitator/teacher for groups of male and female youth.

**Diversity:** If applicable, try to mix together youth into groups that reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of your class. If someone wants to talk about his or her own culture's experiences in terms of violence against women or gender relations, that's great, but be careful not to put someone on the spot.

**Disclosures:** Since many youth have experienced violence, these exercises and activities sometimes provide the safety they need to come forward and disclose their experiences. Section E (later in Part 1) looks at dealing with disclosures.

## **B: Discussion tips for teachers and youth**

We suggest you brainstorm ground rules (and consequences for breaking these ground rules) with your group before starting any Campaign in a Box activities.

Consider experimenting with an anonymous 'question box' so youth can ask questions they want to have answered but may feel embarrassed to ask in front of their peers. Near the end of each learning activity, you could give everyone the same size paper to write their questions on.

Suggested ground rules for youth discussions:

**1. Listen.** Share time. Respect others' opinions. Everyone has a unique perspective and contribution to make to our learning. Respect and listen to what others have to say, how they say it and the experiences they bring to the group. Ask yourself if the way you are speaking or acting towards this person is the way you would like to be treated.

**2. Non-judgmental.** There is a great deal of diversity, knowledge and wisdom in this group. The only way we can learn about each other is through open, non-judgmental and peaceful communication. Only one person can speak at a time.

**3. No put-downs.** Discussion and debate are great. Hurtful words are not. Words or ideas that put down a person or group don't help us learn from each other. Sometimes people mix up opinions with facts. You can disagree with a person without name-calling or insults. You can start your sentence with the word "I"- for example, "I don't agree with that point..." or "I think that...".

**4. Respect confidentiality.** If you want to tell the class something that is confidential (not to be told to anyone outside the class), say so before you speak.

**5. Respect the ground rules.** You are an equal, valuable member of this group. You have a responsibility to point out to the class if these ground rules are broken. Raise your hand immediately if you think the ground rules have been broken.

**6. Outside class,** find someone to talk to. Learning about violence can remind us of violence that we or someone we know has experienced. If you or someone you know has suffered violence, please talk to a friend, teacher or adult who you trust so you can get the support you need. If you still don't get the support you need, tell another person. It isn't your fault.

- Keep in mind that the point of the exercises in this kit is to encourage dialogue and self reflection about dating behaviours and healthy equal relationships.
- Start a dialogue with open-ended questions that prompt reflection. These are usually questions starting with "how," "what" and "why." For example, "How does this affect you?" "Why is this issue?" "What can be done to change this situation?"
- Acknowledge different opinions. When a student introduces a controversial point, try to separate fact from opinion. Should a disagreement occur, encourage youth to challenge the ideas without putting down the person expressing them. Communicate to the youth that the purpose of these discussions isn't to win an argument but to share information and ideas. Understand that a boy might make outrageous statements to be provocative or because he thinks it will impress other boys.

- Encourage lively discussions, but avoid arguments. Violence and relationships are emotional topics so discussions can become heated. Consider discussing why this is happening.
- Stay focused. When discussions get off track, try to reintroduce the original issues. (For example, “Terry, I think you have a point there, but can we get back to talking about ...”)
- Listen. Ask everyone to listen to each person’s point of view before responding. It’s important to understand what a person is trying to say, but also to provide safety and trust in the group.
- Don’t feel you have to be an expert on the issues. If you can’t answer a question, say so. Ask others if they know. If it’s important, promise to look into it.
- Consider holding single-sex discussion groups. This can provide safety and, if it’s a class where boys talk more, it gives girls a chance to speak. When the two groups join, make sure the discussion doesn’t become a face-off.
- State that abusive, hurtful or insulting language or behaviour isn’t acceptable in these discussions. The environment will be poisoned for everyone by words and ideas that are sexist, racist or biased against particular groups based on their nationality, age, sexual orientation, religion or physical abilities. (In case any youth think you are being arbitrary, our provincial human rights codes protect people from discrimination or harassment based on these characteristics.)

### **C: Answering difficult or hostile questions**

Youth and teachers will get a lot of support for organizing White Ribbon activities. But there will be some people who are hostile to what you are doing.

Youth who will be organizing events or leading discussions might want to practice answering typical questions with a friend or at a meeting. Acquainting yourself with a few statistics from this kit can be a great help because they show how serious the problem really is.

#### **Answering the serious question**

- Always listen with attention and interest.
- Remember that the purpose of any encounter — whether the person is very sympathetic or a bit hostile — is not to “win” an argument. It is to listen to other people’s concerns, correct inaccurate ideas and encourage guys to get involved. Try to be friendly and positive and try not to get defensive.

#### **Answering the hostile question**

- When someone is hostile and trying to bait you, don’t sink to that level. Stay cool. Be respectful. But be firm.
- Don’t let that person dominate a discussion. Don’t get into an endless debate. After the person has expressed his or her concern, say, “Thank you,” and then something like, “Let’s see what other people have to say,” or pose a new question to the group.

- In many such encounters, the people you really want to reach are those listening to the discussion. Being firm yet calm and polite will serve you well. Challenge what the person asking the hostile question says, but never be insulting.

### **Responses to some typical hostile questions**

*“You’re exaggerating the problem.”*

Response: Canadian Studies tell us that the problem of violence against women is bigger than anyone thought. In 1993, In Canada, in 1998, 82.6% of victims in reported cases of sexual assault were women; 98 per cent of the accused were men.<sup>27</sup> In 2004, there were nearly 28,000 incidents of spousal violence reported to the police: 84% of victims were female; 16% of victims were male. Women were more likely than men to report being targets of 10 or more violent spousal episodes.<sup>28</sup>

*“I’m sick of hearing about violence against women. Don’t you care about violence against men?”*

Response: Of course, I’m concerned. By far the most violence against males is committed by other males. At the same time, there is violence by women against men, but there are a few things to know about it. A 2005 Statistics Canada survey showed that violence by women against men in relationships is much less likely to cause physical injury than violence by men against women, and also much less likely to leave the man living in fear. What’s more, in many cases the woman is responding to past or current abuse by the man. However, unless it’s self-defense, all violence in relationships is wrong.

*“You guys are just anti-male, you’re male-bashing.”*

Response: No, I like being a man [or, if you are a girl or woman, I like guys]. I just don’t like some of the things that too many guys are doing or saying. Those things are hurting the women I care about. I’m not anti-male because I believe you don’t have to be sexist or violent to be a real man.

*“Just because someone cracks a joke about women doesn’t mean he’s a rapist.”*

Response: That’s true. But sexist jokes, put-downs, porno shots and harassment in the hallway all help create an atmosphere where women are degraded, where males learn to be in control, and where violence against women has been socially acceptable.

<sup>27</sup> Juristat: Canadian Crime Statistics, 1998, vol. 19, no. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Family Violence: A Statistical Profile, 2006, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-224-XIE/85-224-XIE2006000.pdf> pg 11

## **D: Homophobia, Sexism and Men's Fears**

Classroom discussions on these issues can bring up sexist remarks against boys and young men. The form that this often takes is homophobic comments. (For example, "He looks like a fag!" "That's so gay," "He throws like a girl.") This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the issue of someone's actual sexual orientation. Rather, they are comments that say someone isn't a "real man," especially if he doesn't "fit in the box."

There is an important link between homophobic teasing of boys and violence. Because boys and young men fear not being a "real man," some will use verbal and even physical violence against girls or boys to prove themselves. Not only does such taunting hurt boys and young men, it also directly feeds into sexism. Much of the problem is based on the belief that anything a male does that is remotely "feminine" is a negative thing. Because of this, homophobic harassment contributes to sexism.

You play a very important role in challenging homophobic and sexist remarks. Always remember that if we are silent, our youth will perceive this as tacit agreement. And because boys take their cues for behaviour from other boys and men, male teachers have a particularly important role to play. They can set the bar for how to live in a respectful and peaceful way with girls and women and towards their fellow men. Male teachers certainly don't need to prove to their male youth that they're "one of the guys" if it includes sexist or homophobic comments.

## E: Dealing with Disclosures of Abuse

We encourage you to consult your school board (for teachers) or community organization (for community leaders) policy specific to youth disclosures of abuse.

If you have concerns about a child, please call your local Children's Aid Society **immediately**. All CASs have emergency service 24 hours a day, so you can call anytime. For your local CAS office, consult the list at the end of this section.

Ontario's Child and Family Services Act was created to protect the best interests and well being of children. The Act recognizes that each of us has a responsibility for the welfare of children. It states clearly that members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report promptly to a children's aid society if they suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection. If a youth says he or she wants to tell you something but asks you to promise not to tell anyone, you cannot do this.

If a student has chosen to disclose to you what is likely the most horrible thing she or he has ever experienced, consider yourself honoured to be held in such trust and high regard. It is not only a personal issue: the impact of abuse has a huge impact on the capacity of a student to learn. If a student's basic need (and human right) for safety is not being met, it is impossible for learning to take place.

When a student discloses abuse or other painful memories to you, you are not only a key person for support. You will also play a key role in the student's recovery.

Remember 18-month-old Baby Jessica, who fell down an abandoned well in Texas in 1987? Her family received thousands of letters and teddy bears. No one doubted her story, her innocence or questioned her motives or vulnerability. The world saw the situation unfold as she was trapped for over fifty hours. This girl will not doubt her memory of what happened and, now an adult, she has apparently made a full recovery except for mild claustrophobia.

But when it comes to the common forms of abuse that far too many children suffer from, the opposite is true. They are not believed. They don't know whom to talk to. They get little attention (or find destructive ways to get attention.) They suffer over and over again.

An important determinant of how a person will recover from experiencing violence or abuse is the reaction of the person with whom they first shared the information. How you react to a student's disclosure will have a significant impact on how she (or he) will view the abuse, whether or not she will blame herself for the incident, and her overall recovery from the trauma. More important than any policy is your empathetic, non-judgmental and supportive response.

### Child and Family Services Act CFSA s.72 (1)

Despite the provisions of any other Act, if a person, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, has reasonable grounds to suspect one of the following, the person shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information on which it is based to a society:

1. The child has suffered physical harm, inflicted by the person having charge of the child or caused by or resulting from that person's,
  - i. failure to adequately care for, provide for, supervise or protect the child, or
  - ii. pattern of neglect in caring for, providing for, supervising or protecting the child.
2. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer physical harm inflicted by the person having charge of the child or caused by or resulting from that person's,
  - i. failure to adequately care for, provide for, supervise or protect the child, or
  - ii. pattern of neglect in caring for, providing for, supervising or protecting the child.
3. The child has been sexually molested or sexually exploited, by the person having charge of the child or by another person where the person having charge of the child knows or should know of the possibility of sexual molestation or sexual exploitation and fails to protect the child.
4. There is a risk that the child is likely to be sexually molested or sexually exploited as described in paragraph 3.
5. The child requires medical treatment to cure, prevent or alleviate physical harm or suffering and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, the treatment.
6. The child has suffered emotional harm, demonstrated by serious,
  - i. anxiety,
  - ii. depression,
  - iii. withdrawal,
  - iv. self-destructive or aggressive behaviour, or
  - v. delayed development,and there are reasonable grounds to believe that the emotional harm suffered by the child results from the actions, failure to act or pattern of neglect on the part of the child's parent or the person having charge of the child.
7. The child has suffered emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the harm.
8. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 resulting from the actions, failure to act or pattern of neglect on the part of the child's parent or the person having charge of the child.
9. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 and that the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, services or treatment to prevent the harm.
10. The child suffers from a mental, emotional or developmental condition that, if not remedied, could seriously impair the child's development and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, treatment to remedy or alleviate the condition.
11. The child has been abandoned, the child's parent has died or is unavailable to exercise his or her custodial rights over the child and has not made adequate provision for the child's care and custody, or the child is in a residential placement and the parent refuses or is unable or unwilling to resume the child's care and custody.
12. The child is less than 12 years old and has killed or seriously injured another person or caused serious damage to another person's property, services or treatment are necessary to prevent a recurrence and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, those services or treatment.
13. The child is less than 12 years old and has on more than one occasion injured another person or caused loss or damage to another person's property, with the encouragement of the person having charge of the child or because of that person's failure or inability to supervise the child adequately.

For more information visit The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies at <http://www.oacas.org/index.htm>

## Here are some things to say and not to say:

- 1. Believe, listen to and validate the child.** Tell them you are proud they survived the abuse and commend them for talking to you about it. Say, "I will do whatever I can to support you on this." Acknowledge how difficult it must be to talk about this. Sometimes you may hear something that is hard to believe. Your job is not to play police officer or judge or psychologist. It is to give support and to help make sure the child is safe and gets the help he or she needs.
- 2. Reflect back what you have just heard:** "So you are saying that you feel ..."
- 3. Identify immediate medical needs,** including pregnancy and STD/HIV concerns. If it's an older student, give him or her local sexual assault/shelter crisis telephone numbers for future support and counselling.
- 4. Follow their lead in the conversation.** Don't say things like, "Did you go to a club after the party?" or, "Why didn't you tell right after it happened?". Offer your help and ask how you can be most helpful. Avoid playing investigator and pressing for specific dates, times or places.
- 5. Don't blame them.** Be careful of questions that sound like blaming, such as, "Didn't you try to stop it?" or "Did you tell him you didn't like it?" or "Why did you hang out with him in the first place?" or "What did you expect?" Even when you think they used poor judgment and was in a dangerous situation, it's important to remember that this child did not want or expect to be abused.
- 6. Avoid minimizing the effects of the abuse** with statements like, "That just doesn't sound that bad," "Is that all?" or "I just can't believe he would do something like that."
- 7. Offer some hope for the future** (without negating the impact). You could say some thing like, "This must be a very difficult time for you and I'm glad you spoke to me about it. You've been very brave. I think one day you will look back with a lot of pride in yourself for having taken the steps you have. I know I'm very proud of you right now."
- 8. Offer local counselling resources** where a youth can get support. The Kids Help Phone offers a 24 hour counselling service to youth across Canada. The phone number is 1-800-668-6868 or visit [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca).

Youth will sometimes make disclosures "about a friend" that are actually about themselves. Laws and protocols vary, so please review your school board's or community group's policy on dealing with a disclosure of abuse. It is the responsibility of the person who received the disclosure to report it to child protection services. If you are not sure if a situation is reportable, phone your local child protection services and ask to speak to a child protection worker (there is usually at least one worker on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week). Anonymously describe the scenario to the worker to determine if you need to report it.

While your memory is fresh, you may want to take (and keep in a safe place) some basic notes on any details the student has shared with you. If either the local child protection services or the police become involved, in order to protect the student (and yourself) you will want to refer to any date, time or name information that the student may have volunteered during the disclosure. In some jurisdictions, these notes may be subpoenaed by a court of law. It's important to remember that your role is not to investigate the disclosure information, but to be a support person who is receiving the information. Your report to police and/or local child protection services is a very important part of the system that will end the abuse.