

Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan hosts training to address and prevent teen dating violence

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Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan spoke to attendees at the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Training.

Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan, in partnership with Reach Beyond Domestic Violence and Respond, INC., hosted a Teen Dating Violence Training last week to help after school providers, school personnel and school resource officers identify the warning signs of teen dating violence. The training, organized during the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, is part of the District Attorney's initiative to increase education about healthy relationships and to raise awareness about available resources.

According to a report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner and more than half of women (69.5%) and men (53.6%) who have been physically or sexually abused, or stalked by a dating partner, first experienced abuse between the ages of 11 and 24.

Some tips for adults to help prevent and address teen dating violence are:

- Have the conversation about healthy relationships early and often.
- Educate yourself about the warning signs of teen dating violence, including isolation, changes in behavior and appearance and jealousy and possessiveness.
- Have conversations which model consent and communicate boundaries in everyday scenarios (for example, modeling a healthy boundary of putting away phones during family dinners).
- If you become concerned about your child's relationship, use language that communicates concern instead of judgment. Focusing on the behaviors and changes you've noticed that have made you concerned, rather than criticizing your child's partner, is most effective.

Teen Dating Violence can have a significant impact on the mental, emotional and physical health of youth, creating depression and anxiety and causing them to engage in unhealthy behaviors. If you have questions or concerns about a loved one, Respond's hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 617-623-5900.

Last year to help facilitate conversations around healthy relationships, the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, in partnership with Greater Lowell Technical High School, launched the Healthy Heart Matters App to help young people identify unhealthy or potentially abusive relationships throughout different scenarios. The app provides real-life situations and helps give guidance on what is healthy or unhealthy in a relationship. The app is available for iPhones and can be downloaded in the app store.

Recognizing that teenagers are likely to talk to a friend or peer about their relationship, the Middlesex District Attorney's office also partners with schools to encourage students to make healthy decisions and to think critically about behaviors that may become normalized among their peers. For more information about these programs, visit www.middlesexda.com.

Members of the Boys and Girls Clubs from Arlington, Stoneham, Wakefield and the Metrowest; Police Departments from Acton, Arlington, Bedford, Concord, Groton, Holliston, Maynard, Marlborough, North Reading, Tewksbury, Stoneham, Wakefield, Watertown and Westford; the Somerville YMCA; The Public Schools from Everett, Wakefield and Arlington; Winchester Coalition; Eliot Family Resource Center; and the Recreation and Parks from Natick participated in the conversation with the specialists Jessica Teperow, Director of Prevention Programs for Reach Beyond Domestic Violence, and Zoe Sachs, Community Intervention and Engagement Coordinator at Respond Inc.