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### A Curriculum that Matters

Teen dating violence and bullying education is often presented in schools, yet only through conventional textbook situations. Formal education trivializes highly intricate issues, like domestic violence and bullying, into “rare” occurrences that always involve physical red flags, a female victim and a male abuser, or “schoolyard lunch money” scenarios. A school curriculum that would provide the necessary emphasis on teen dating violence and bullying would include methods to erase the stigma associated with intimidation. Furthermore, the second pillar of this curriculum would focus on specifically clarifying misconceptions and promoting comprehension of how domestic violence and bullying occurs. The third concept would identify ways to help someone out of a harmful relationship or environment.

The first step in this curriculum would be addressing the stigma attached to domestic violence. The opinion formed beforehand that writes off victims of abuse as weak for “just not walking away” would be addressed. Students could air out any preconceived notions they have concerning violence between partners and one by one, any harmful ideas that contribute to the stigma will be corrected. No student will be shamed for what they know, but rather encouraged to learn more about domestic violence and why this stigma exists. With this first part, students will learn that if you have not been a victim of domestic abuse, you cannot know what victims have endured. Leaving an abusive situation is more than just physically departing. Students will

learn the emotional toll, risk factors, potential for death, and physiological manipulation that play roles in trapping someone in their relationship with their abuser. With bullying, the same intimidation tactics used to keep someone in a state of fear would be discussed.

Moreover, the next part of the curriculum would dissect the various forms of teen dating violence and bullying to illuminate the different ways someone can become a victim. Students should have the ability to hear different survivors come forward about their situations. Through this section of the curriculum students will acknowledge some of the stereotypes linked to domestic abuse. They will learn that men can be victims, it is not always physical, and that difficulty leaving stems from many sources. They will comprehend that an abusive relationship is not always episodes of rage, but it is also gradual isolation from loved ones. Students will recognize that domestic violence does not discriminate, it is possible to love someone who abuses you, and signs of abuse are not always obvious. Not only will this part of the curriculum clarify misconceptions, but it will also aim to address the increased chance of experiencing domestic violence if in the LGBTQ+ community. The benefit of hearing these stories from real people is that the issue becomes humanized.

The last component of the curriculum would be how to help and the resources available to someone struggling with both teen dating violence and bullying. Students will be instructed on confronting a victim, creating a safe environment that conveys concern, and how to avoid judgment in this scenario. Students will be reminded that they need to support the victim through the long process of leaving, reflect back their worth and what they deserve, and provide local services, hotlines, and organizations. They will be taught that the most important part of helping the victim regain control is through methods that are not forceful. The road to recovery from

disempowerment is lengthy and requires unconditional love and a lack of judgment; no matter the victim's decision.

The goal of this curriculum would be to inform students, not frighten them. Students need to learn that no two situations are alike and the different forms abuse and bullying can be disguised in. If more people knew how to be an ally to anyone going through teen dating violence or bullying, as well as recognize signs and express empathy, more outlets would be available to those who suffer. Identifying the characteristics of a healthy relationship is a skill young people need as they navigate the dating world and social interactions. Supplying a better curriculum regarding teen dating violence and bullying creates more opportunities to save a life, even if it's one's own.