

Preventing Dating Violence: Be the Change You Want to See



Everybody knows that Valentine's Day takes place in February, but did you know that this month is also [Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month](#)? That's right, this month celebrating love provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on what love is and isn't, as well as what you can do about dating violence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines dating violence as "physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a dating relationship, including stalking." It goes by many names: dating violence, relationship abuse, and domestic violence, just to name a few. Whatever you call it, there's a good chance that you or someone you know has experienced it, because relationship abuse affects an estimated 10% of U.S. teens.(1)

This is a frightening statistic, but young people across the country are stepping up to make a change. For example, [Tenaj](#) is a 24-year-old domestic violence survivor. Motivated by personal experience, she created a program on her college campus to help others:

When I went to my freshman orientation at Wesley College, I remember being told that students could create a program on campus and possibly get funded by student government. By that time, I was already very passionate about preventing domestic violence. I thought alone about my idea for Light to Life for a while. Eventually, I recruited classmates to serve as the vice

president, treasurer, and secretary. I knew it was something that I could offer and that it could help change people's lives for the better.

Tenaj is a shining example of one person making a big difference. You can, too!

Here are some ideas of steps that *you* can take to make a difference:

Start a club or program in your school raising awareness about dating violence, including some of the [red flags](#) to watch out for. Creating a safe, supportive environment where you and your peers can share experiences might help remove some of the stigma and isolation in which unhealthy relationships thrive. Check out [this blog](#)

[\(link is external\)](#)

to learn more about how to start your own student club.(2)

Create a social media page or group about dating violence prevention where you can share resources on [dating abuse](#) and show support for young people outside of your school.

Organize a food drive or bake sale to collect essential supplies or raise money to donate to a domestic violence shelter in your community. It's easier than you think, and helping abuse survivors in need is a rewarding experience. Here are some steps to take to organize a school food drive:

- 1** Identify a teacher, advisor, or coach who will help you with your food drive.
- 2** Identify a person in your group who will be in charge and others who will help organize the event.
- 3** Decide the date and duration of the food drive.
- 4** Decide what foods and/or supplies you will need to collect.
- 5** Set a goal of how much food you want to collect and keep track of your progress. Aim high!
- 6** Choose a collection method (e.g., decorated boxes, bins, etc.).
- 7** Gather your supplies. For example, you might need poster paper, markers, flyers, tape, collection boxes, colored paper for decorating the boxes, small but sturdy boxes for transporting the food, etc.
- 8** Promote your drive with posters and flyers; through announcements over the intercom at school, in the school newspaper, and on the school website, on Facebook and other social media, in local newspaper articles, etc. The more you get the word out about your drive, the more items you will collect!
- 9** When the food drive is complete, sort the food and, if possible, deliver it to your charity.
- 10** Thank everyone who participated in the event.(3)

Talk openly with a trusted adult — like a parent, teacher, or another role model — who has experience with healthy relationships. If you or someone you know is involved in an abusive relationship, ask for help. Break the cycle by breaking the silence.

These are just a few ideas, but don't be afraid to get creative and come up with others!

Like Tenaj, you too can be a change maker by helping to shine a spotlight on relationship abuse:

[Y]ou are a product of your experiences, but you can [still] change things for the better. You can use your struggles as your motivators to be a better you and to help the world become a better place to live. Power is within and is therefore under your control. You are the designer of your destiny.

References

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Teen dating violence. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html
- 2 IvyWise. (2013, October 2). How to start your own student club. Retrieved from <https://blog.ivywise.com/blog-0/bid/153051/How-to-Start-Your-Own-Student-Club> (link is external)
- 3 Our Neighbors' Table. (n.d.). *School food drive manual*. Amesbury, MA: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ourneighborstable.org/uploads/2/8/8/1/28816211/school_food_drive_manual.pdf (link is external)