



PREVNet

**PREVENTING TEEN DATING  
VIOLENCE: HOW EDUCATORS  
CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Educators can make a difference in teen dating violence (TDV) by:

- Educating their students and the people who work with them. Students need to know the impacts of dating violence, how to recognize it, and how to effectively support either themselves, their friends, or other peers involved in dating violence.
- Developing students' relationship skills through social emotional learning in childhood and adolescence. This involves learning and practicing emotional regulation, stress management, and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Intervening. This could be in the form of progressive policy change, providing advice and help directly, as well as linking students to effective community resources.

## THIS DOCUMENT IS A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS:

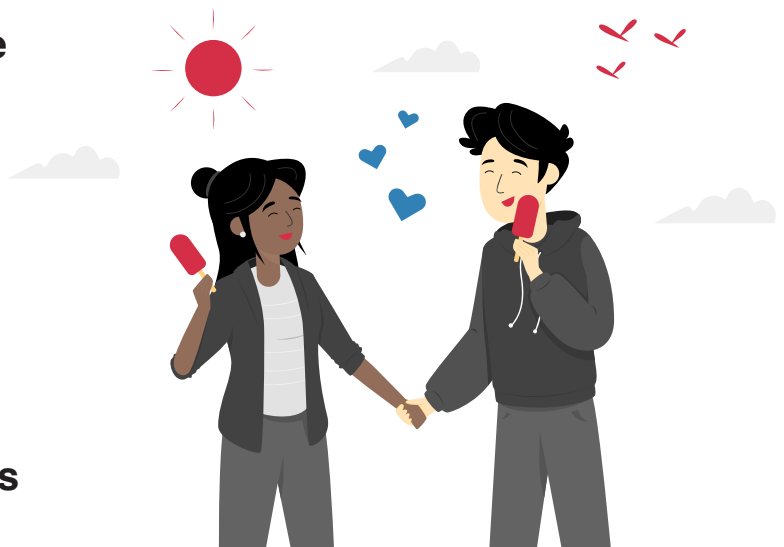
- TDV is a serious problem in Canada, but steps can be taken to prevent it from occurring.
- Educators can support those in need of healthy relationship solutions.

### • LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- The characteristics of a healthy relationship
- How TDV develops
- The pyramid of discrimination and violence
- Self-assessment of your own values and beliefs, your culture, and your social norms/how you have been socialized.
- The four competency buckets

## 7 CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

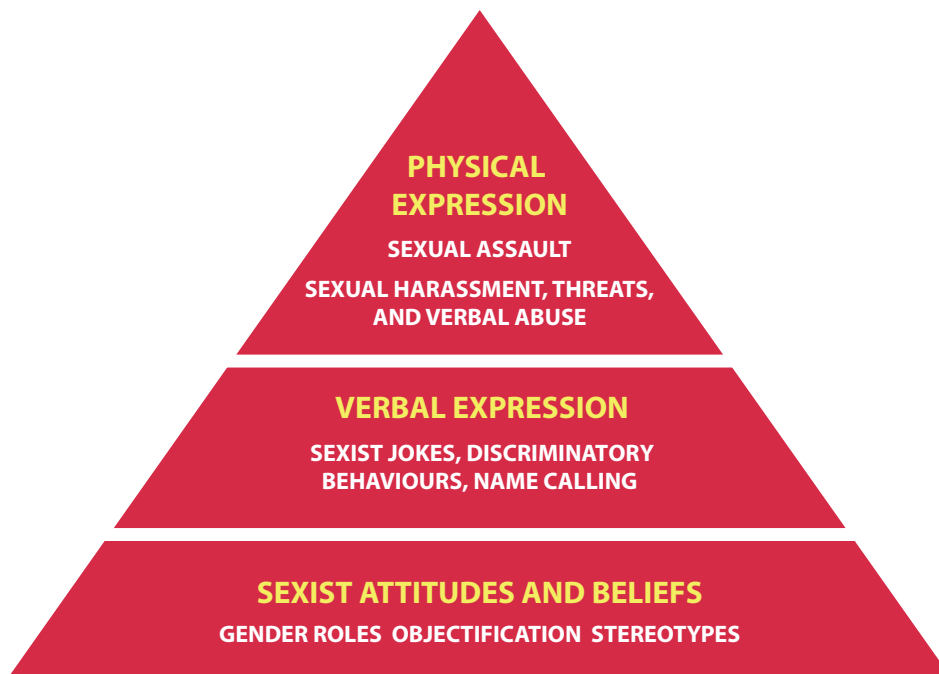
- **Respect is at the core**
- **Trust**
- **Safety**
- **Caring**
- **Fun**
- **Communication**
- **Autonomy/Boundaries**



# DEVELOPMENT OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

1. Adolescent development depends on many environmental and biological interactions
  - » Individual, family, peers, community, and society all play a role in TDV risk
2. Violence develops and continues over an entire lifespan
3. TDV can be prevented through developing healthy relationships skills & intervention

## THE PYRAMID OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE



- When thinking about ways to prevent TDV, there needs to be an understanding of the root causes of violence. The pyramid of discrimination and violence helps to describe the ways in which unhealthy attitudes and beliefs are linked to the act of TDV
- Unpacking the Pyramid
  - » The attitudes and beliefs at the bottom of the pyramid are most common and widely held in our society. Moving up the pyramid, the behavioural expression of these attitudes become progressively less common, but concerningly more and more harmful.
  - » Inward unhealthy attitudes, beliefs, and values lay the foundation for the onset of unhealthy outward behaviour.
  - » Sexist attitudes and beliefs, strict gender roles and expectations, objectification, gender-based stereotypes, the acceptance of male dominance or coercion – lay the foundation for outward behaviours like sexist jokes, discriminatory behaviour, and name-calling. These outward behaviours then lay the foundation for abusive behaviour like sexual harassment, threats, and verbal abuse, which lay the foundation for sexual assault.
  - » It is important to highlight that not all disrespect leads to violence, but all violence starts with disrespect. So, people do not start at the top of the pyramid without first going through the lower levels of the pyramid.

# PERSONAL REFLECTION: HOW VALUES, BELIEFS, CULTURE, SOCIAL NORMS AND SOCIALIZATION AFFECT PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATIONS

An important step for teachers in their goal to prevent TDV is to engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, to become more self-aware of the ways in which our values and beliefs, culture and how we've been socialized play out in the classrooms and practices

## VALUES AND BELIEFS

- **ACTIVITY:** Reflect on Our Own Values and Beliefs. Thinking about how personal values might influence professional obligations
  - » If we know that sexist attitudes and beliefs are linked to TDV, we are encouraged to reflect on our own values and beliefs around relationships. What are our own values and beliefs around gender roles and around violence, for example? We bring these values and beliefs into our classrooms every day, and if we want to help prevent TDV and promote healthy youth relationships, it is critical that we are aware of the ways in which our values and beliefs influence our practices.
  - » This activity is meant to promote reflection on attitudes and values related to youth relationships. It's important to keep in mind as we go through this activity that the purpose is for your own personal reflection - to better understand how you feel about these issues.
  - » Some of the statements shared may be very personal, and may even trigger some emotions, because our values are deeply rooted in our personal experiences.
- **INSTRUCTIONS**
  - » You are going to think about the following statements and reflect on them – do you agree? Disagree? Or are you unsure?
  - » Statements:
    - \* Stereotypes exist because there is some truth to them
    - \* Students who are disruptive should feel welcomed, respected, and cared-for in schools.
    - \* Some forms of violence are more okay than others.
    - \* In the staff room and classroom, I am comfortable addressing sexism when I see it.
    - \* As a teacher, I am willing to challenge unhealthy relationship attitudes learned at home.
    - \* Teen dating violence is a big problem at my school.
- **REFLECTION**
  - » How are your values shaped by your personal experiences?
  - » Would you have responded differently if people knew what you were agreeing with or disagreeing with?
  - » What does this indicate about our values?
- **ACTIVITY TAKEAWAYS**
  - » First, even though there were no right or wrong answers, there may be some more socially accepted values, and we can likely identify how we are “supposed” to feel; but if we are honest with ourselves, they may not align with what we actually feel or believe.
  - » Second, if we want to promote healthy attitudes and beliefs around relationships in our classrooms and schools, we may discover that some “unlearning” around unhealthy attitudes and beliefs may need to happen. This unlearning needs to be approached without judgment.



## CULTURE

- One way to approach the unlearning of unhealthy attitudes and beliefs from a non-judgmental place is to understand that many of the attitudes and beliefs that we may have around relationships – both healthy and unhealthy – were taught to us, either explicitly or more
- Each of us has been in a process of socialization since birth. We're all born into a particular culture – our understanding of our culture and unspoken rules helps us to navigate everyday life
- Some characteristics of culture are visible (e.g., food, dress, music, etc.), but deeper levels are the unspoken rules, notions of modesty, what makes “good” parents, concepts of time, etc. – These are more difficult to see and are what shapes our attitudes and beliefs.
- Socialization is a process of learning the unspoken rules of culture.

## SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL NORMS

- An example of socialization is how we are taught to think about violence. What are the rules around an adult using physical aggression towards a child to punish? What are the rules around aggression in competitive sports? When someone cuts you off on the highway?
- Social Norms
  - » They're often invisible but they shape and influence our values, attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences.
  - » If the unspoken rules of a culture tell us that violence is normal and acceptable, then we often shape our personal values, attitudes and beliefs around these rules.
- In sum, an important step for teachers in their goal to prevent TDV is to engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, as this helps us to be more self-aware of the ways in which our values and beliefs play out in our classrooms and practices.

# THE FOUR COMPETENCY BUCKETS

## SUPPORT STUDENTS TO UNLEARN UNHEALTHY ATTITUDES AND HELP THEM TO CULTIVATE HEALTHY SOCIAL NORMS AROUND RELATIONSHIPS

- Knowing that acts of violence stems from unhealthy attitudes and beliefs, teachers play a powerful role in supporting students to unlearn unhealthy attitudes around relationships and promote healthy social norms around relationships.
- The four following competency buckets can be examined with students to look at the ways that unhealthy social norms are linked to unhealthy relationships, while also encouraging students to cultivate healthy attitudes and beliefs around relationships.

### 1

#### Support students to examine their identities, assumptions and biases

- Help students to investigate complexities around stereotypes and reveal why it is important that we all challenge biased assumptions.
- **Activity: Reviewing Pictures of People**
  - » Ask students to review pictures of different people. Have a collection of diverse photos
  - » Once each student has seen each photo, ask the students to choose one photo and have them imagine and write down details about the person (i.e., assumptions based on appearance).
  - » Collect the comments and photos and randomly attach a page of student comments to each photo.
  - » Pass the photos out again and have students read aloud the comments while showing the photo to the class.
  - » Then, discuss the way we make snap judgments about people without knowing whether our assumptions are accurate at all.

#### Resources

- » [Teachingtolerance.org](http://Teachingtolerance.org)
- » [Humaneeducation.com](http://Humaneeducation.com)
- » [Facinghistory.com](http://Facinghistory.com)



### 2

#### Help students examine their power and privilege

- Help students investigate the ways in which our identities and power imbalances are linked to unfair treatment between groups of people.
- Discuss our identities, power imbalances, privileges, and inequalities to open the opportunity to better understand each other and encourage students to support and empower others.
- We all have biases, but deep biases held by groups who have power in society can lead to unequal access to resources of the society and unfair treatment of people. We use the word oppression here.
- Deep Bias + Power = Oppression and Inequalities

- Examples to use from real history: indigenous studies, history internment, women's suffrage movement, holocaust
- It's important to highlight the ways in which our multiple identities can influence our power, privileges, and experiences of inequality.
- Think about intersectionality – how people can belong to multiple groups and how the intersection of those attributes/identities can impact one's position of privilege and power in society.

- **Resources**

- » Book: "Is Everyone Really Equal?" – Sensoy and DiAngelo
- » Book: "Foundations in Social Justice for Parents and Educators"



### 3 Work with students to examine gender stereotypes and gender norms

- Gender socialization – our conception of what girls and boys are is rooted in our culture.
  - » Sex refers to the biological, physiological, or genetic characteristics
  - » Gender is the roles, behaviours and expectations our culture creates and assigns to those bodily differences
- Gender socialization involves learning the social norms around what a society deems to be appropriate for males and females

- **Resources**

- » "Prism" from Alberta Teacher's Federation

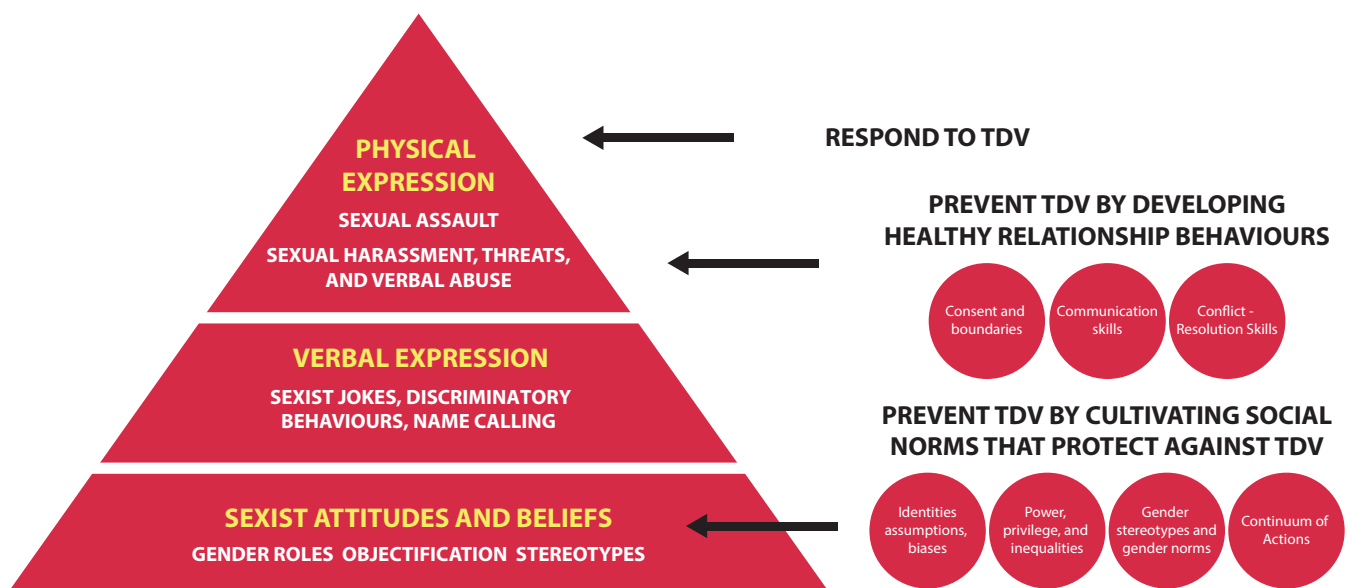


### 4 Encourage students to reflect on their position on the Continuum of Action towards equity

- Continuum of Action - Refers to participation in oppression or prejudice
  - » Actively Participating -> Denying/Ignoring -> Recognizing/No Action -> Recognizing/Action -> Educating Self -> Educating Others -> Supporting/Encouraging -> Initiating/Preventing
- How we move along the **CONTINUUM**
  - » Call out sexist, racist, homophobic jokes, slurs and language anywhere we see or hear it
  - » Analyze classroom materials and recognize how they might endorse or combat social norms that are linked to TDV
  - » Include classroom materials that reinforce your support for gender equity, inclusion, respect and safety

# IN CONCLUSION

- Social norms in unhealthy relationships involve:
  - » Using power over others to coerce them to do things they don't want to do
  - » Accepting aggression
  - » Promoting rigid gender stereotypes and female objectification, which can make aggressive and violent behaviour seem "normal" and "acceptable"
- On the other hand, social norms that promote healthy relationships and protect against TDV involve:
  - » Respecting each person's free will and right to physical and mental safety
  - » Affirming gender equity, inclusion and acceptance
- So, what can teachers do to prevent TDV?
  - » Reflect on our own values and beliefs around relationships
  - » Support students to unlearn unhealthy attitudes and help them to cultivate healthy social norms around relationships. We can encourage students to examine: their identities and biases; the connections among power, privilege, and inequalities; gender stereotypes and gender norms; and their position on the Continuum of Action.



- When we encourage students to examine their identities, biases, positions of power and privilege, as well as their values around gender norms (the four competency buckets that we just covered), we begin to disrupt the unhealthy social norms at the bottom of this pyramid. And remember, we need to start at the bottom tier of the pyramid because people do not go to the top of the pyramid without first going through the lower levels of the pyramid.
- Now, let's move up the pyramid and focus on how we can help our students develop competencies that promote healthy relationships and prevent unhealthy relationship behaviours. In other words, how can we support our students in developing the knowledge and competencies that help to prevent unhealthy relationships behaviours like sexist jokes, name-calling, verbal abuse, and sexual and physical assault?