



ESTHER BUSH

Healthy Relationships

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on healthy relationships. Vianca Masucci, health advocate at the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, speak on this topic.

EB: Good morning, Vianca. With Valentine’s Day just around the corner, it’s the perfect time to talk about healthy relationships.

VM: Hi, Ms. Bush. This is a good time to focus on the topic of healthy relationships. But I think that this is a topic that we should discuss all the time, at every level. Relationships are an important part of our wellness.

EB: They surely are. Our social and romantic relationships influence our overall health and quality of life. Relationships that promote good health are respectful, loving and mutually beneficial, meaning that both you and your partner are supporting each other’s needs. Unhealthy relationships are controlling and abusive in some way—physically, sexually, emotionally, financially, etc.

VM: Unhealthy relationships in the context of domestic or intimate partner violence is not a new topic to the “Take Charge” series. As I’m sure you remember, Ms. Bush, we’ve covered it a few times before on this page. The reason that it keeps coming up is because this continues to be a persistent and prevalent issue across all walks of life. That’s why I’m happy that we could feature Dr. Miller’s research this month. Her work is focused on solutions and preventing violence by teaching youths about healthy relationships. It’s a good jumping-off point for a conversation about how we can tackle this problem head-on as individuals in our close circles and as community members in our bigger circles.

EB: Yes, Vianca. It’s everyone’s responsibility to have this conversation about what we can do to prevent domestic violence, not just treat it. This is especially critical in the Black community because the conversation focuses on changing our cultural view so that we are not tolerant of violence but, instead, expect and emulate healthy relationships. As a community, we need to talk about how our attitudes influence our views of violence. Because of our exposure to violence against Blacks and the prevalence of violence in Black communities, the Black community has built up a great tolerance to violence. That feeds our cultural acceptance of violence. We must regularly challenge that notion that violence is inevitable and work together towards creating more safe and peaceful communities. At the same time, we need to talk about our cultural view on relationships.

VM: So, let’s talk about what works. What can community members do to help prevent domestic or intimate partner violence?

EB: Dr. Miller’s research has shown us what works—talking early and often with children about healthy and respectful relationships. Teach children and youths in your life about the ingredients that make up a healthy relationship. We need to give youths the skills to see harmful behaviors and to safely interrupt their peers when they see abusive behaviors. Model those qualities for our youths in your relationships by displaying mature, productive and positive ways to resolve conflict with your partners, friends and family members. Make time to have regular conversations with them over the course of their childhoods about good relationships, so that when they’re ready to form their own relationships, they expect respect, love and support.

VM: Great advice, Ms. Bush. I’d also add that it’s so important to call out negative relationship models in the media that the children in your life consume. If they’re watching a movie, listening to a song or even playing a game that features an abusive character or depicts an unhealthy relationship, talk to them about why it’s wrong and explain what’s right. Because there are so many negative relationship models shown in mainstream media—nowadays, even on political news outlets—you can use these opportunities to talk to the children in your life about healthy relationships.

EB: Thank you for sharing your insight, Vianca. I encourage everyone to take action, on individual and community levels, to help prevent intimate partner violence. We must all participate to make a change.

If you need more information on ways you can get involved, check out the partners on this page or visit <http://southwestpasaysnomore.org/>. If you have any questions about what you see on this page, contact the Community PARTners Core at partners@hs.pitt.edu.

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

Stopping Adolescent Relationship Abuse

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness month.

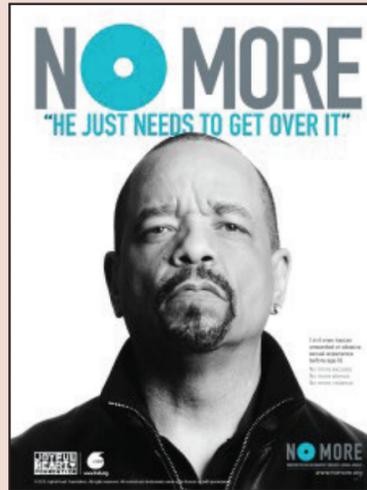
According to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, teen dating violence (also called adolescent relationship abuse) is unfortunately common. The abuse can be verbal, emotional, physical or sexual. It can happen in person or electronically. Unfortunately, many teens have experienced violence in different forms at the hands of someone they consider to be a romantic partner. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that about 1.5 million high school-age teens have suffered physical abuse by a partner. In 2013, a CDC survey found that about 20 percent of girls and 10 percent of boys in the United States had experienced physical or sexual violence in a dating relationship in the past year.

Equally alarming is the fact that studies show that three out of four parents have never spoken to their children about dating violence.*

Why is abuse in adolescent relationships so common? Adolescence is a time when young people are beginning to explore their sexual and gender identity, attractions, relationships and dating. They are also exposed to violence and abusive relationships in the media, their communities, and sometimes in their own homes. The middle school years are a key time to discuss relationship abuse and sexual violence and, more importantly, to emphasize healthy and respectful relationships.

So, what can we do to keep our young people safe? There are many answers to that question. One solution lies in how we tackle the problem in our communities. One of the studies led by Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD—professor of pediatrics, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and director of the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC—is a violence prevention program called Coaching Boys into Men. Created by Futures Without Violence (www.coachescorner.org), this program trains athletic coaches to talk to their male athletes about their role as upstanders in their community. “Upstanders” means being the person who stands up and speaks out when peers are engaging in disrespectful and harmful behaviors. The program also emphasizes respect in relationships, consent and nonviolence. It challenges traditional stereotypes of what it means to be a man. The program has already been shown to work with high schoolers. At the end of the sports season, male athletes who got the program were more likely to intervene when they saw their peers engaging in harmful behaviors. One year later, the program’s effects were still there. The boys were less likely to ignore or go along with disrespectful behaviors they saw among their peers. They were also much less likely to abuse a dating partner.

With funds from the CDC and in partnership with the Center for Victims and Pittsburgh Action Against Rape, as well as 40 middle schools in the Pittsburgh region, Dr. Miller and her team are studying whether the program might be helpful for middle school athletes. Half of the middle schools received the program (fall, winter and spring sports). Half did coaching as usual. They are now collecting one-year, follow-up information from the students who participated in the program. The goal is to see less sexual harassment, less homophobic teasing and more positive bystander behaviors.

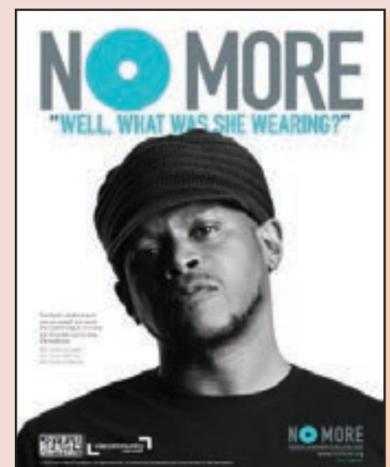


Results from the study should be available in early 2018.

In addition to related studies about healthy relationships (see box), Dr. Miller and her team also work with health care providers (including school nurses) to talk to their teen patients about the importance of respectful relationships. Abusive relationships are bad for the health of young people in many ways and can lead to depression, suicide, eating disorders, drug use, sexually transmitted infections and even pregnancy. The research from Dr. Miller’s team has focused on helping providers talk to their adolescent patients (and their parents) about healthy relationships. During a clinic visit, the provider will offer educational information to every young person (regardless of whether or not she or he is in an abusive relationship), saying that they are talking to all their patients about the importance of healthy, respectful relationships. Providers also say that the information may be useful to young people so they know how to help a friend. This approach has been well-received by youths. Studies by Dr. Miller’s team show that this approach of offering education during a clinic visit to all youths increases how much they know about relationship abuse. In some instances, for those experiencing abuse, the approach can reduce the likelihood of abuse. See Futures Without Violence for relevant materials (<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/hanging-out-or-hooking-up-2/>).

Because adolescence is a time of change and growth, young people are also learning how to be in intimate relationships. They may need guidance that does not come from a parent or caregiver. If you are concerned about adolescents in your life or just want to make sure they know where they can get support or help, talk to a health care provider.

If you or someone you know needs free, confidential help, call the Teen Dating Violence hotline at 1-866-331-9474, text “loveis” to 22522 or go to <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>. * <https://www.avonfoundation.org/programs/domestic-violence/>



Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Is your teenager in a healthy relationship? How do you know if she or he is safe in a relationship? After reading these articles, these may be some of your questions.

Parents and caregivers know that open communication with their teen is a good way to establish trust and know what is going on in their lives. Research shows that parents or caregivers who consistently talk about healthy relationships with their teens can help protect them. If you are concerned that a young person in your life may be involved in an abusive relationship, here are some general tips:

1. **Discuss what healthy relationships are**—long before you think your teen might start having relationships.
2. **Discuss abusive relationships**—what abuse looks or feels like, if they have

seen a friend abused or how abuse is represented in the media.

3. Ask about their relationships—Listen to what they have to say.

4. Let them know they can come to you for help—If they feel they cannot talk with you about their relationships, let them know about hotlines or other sources of support (health care providers, relatives, church leaders, etc.) to which they can go.

National Dating Abuse Helpline: 1-866-331-9474; 1-866-331-8453 (TTY); www.loveisrespect.org
National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); 1-800-787-3224 (TTY); www.ndvh.org
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673); www.rainn.org

Project MEND addresses abusive behaviors

How do we stop domestic abuse? We start by addressing the behaviors that children learn at home. Boys who see abuse at home are more likely to be abusive toward their romantic partners as adults. Therefore, we need prevention that teaches boys how not to repeat the cycle of abuse. Such efforts are vital to stopping domestic abuse before it begins.

Penelope Morrison, PhD, MPH, assistant professor of behavioral health and health and human development at Penn State New Kensington, and colleagues conducted a two-year study called Project MEND. Their study tried to understand what would help adult men who had been abusive change their behaviors. The men

were also asked them what they would do to prevent boys from repeating the cycle of abuse. The men shared their experiences as children seeing abuse in their homes. They told researchers how these experiences had influenced them and their own abusive behaviors.

“My dad was physically abusive. That was normal, and I carried it into my relationship,” one man explained. Having seen abuse in the home, the men thought it was important for boys to understand what abuse was and how not to be abusive. The men also thought boys needed to learn about respect for women and gender equality. They suggested that prevention efforts provide outlets

for boys or healthy ways to express anger. Prevention needed to reach boys outside the home, in places like at school. Additionally, the men felt that boys need positive male role models—as one man described, “Men of character who can reach out to them and show them how to do the right thing.”

The men in the study believe that boys who see domestic abuse at home need help dealing with that issue. Efforts to help them should address their experiences of abuse and give them the tools they need to have healthy relationships.

For more information on Project MEND, please e-mail [Penelope Morrison at pkm20@psu.edu](mailto:Penelope.Morrison@pkm20@psu.edu).

Research study for young men

YOUNG MEN. BE A LEADER IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

The “Manhood 2.0” and “Job Skills” training programs focus on young men ages 13-17 (up to age 19) in the Pittsburgh area. Researchers are seeking ways to support young men to thrive, succeed and be healthy. The study is looking at two different ways to help prevent violence—a job readiness training compared with a program on healthy relationships, respect and nonviolence. Young men attend six sessions. Each session is three hours long. Youths who complete the program are eligible for gifts and a certificate of completion. This program may also be eligible for commu-

nity service hours.

Youths complete surveys at the beginning and end of the program. There will be two more follow-up surveys after the program ends. Participating in the surveys is voluntary. No names are attached. Food is provided. Please contact Irving Torres at 412-944-4949 if you want to participate and to find a site near you.

This research study is supported by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD, professor of pediatrics at Pitt and director of the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC. She can be reached at 412-692-8504 with any questions.

