

Stopping Teen Dating Violence in New Jersey With Safe Dates

Developed and managed by New Jersey Health Initiatives

A Special Report by Lori DeMilto

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM

Unhealthy relationships can start early. Each year, one in four adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). About 10 percent of high school students nationwide report having been physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.

Physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional violence within a dating relationship, as well as stalking, are types of teen dating violence. Such behavior can occur in person or electronically, and between current or former dating partners.

"Teen dating violence is unacceptable. If we don't address this early on in a person's life, it may be with them for their whole life."— Marco Navarro, Senior Program Officer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

In New Jersey, teen dating violence had become an issue by 2008, and suicides and deaths stemming from this behavior had been reported. Middle- and high-school students were often witnessing or experiencing dating violence without knowing what it was—and without realizing that violence is *not* part of normal dating relationships.

Teens who suffer dating violence are more likely than other teens to do poorly in school, abuse drugs and alcohol, be depressed or anxious, attempt suicide, get into physical fights, and have unplanned pregnancies. They may also carry violence into their future relationships, according to the CDC.

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¹ "Understanding Teen Violence Fact Sheet 2008," Atlanta: CDC. Available online.

Causes of Teen Dating Violence

According to the CDC,² teens are more likely to have unhealthy relationships if they:

- Believe it is acceptable to use threats or violence to get their way or to express frustration or anger
- Use alcohol or drugs
- Cannot manage anger or frustration
- Hang out with violent peers
- Have multiple sexual partners
- Have a friend involved in dating violence
- Are depressed or anxious
- Have learning difficulties and other problems at school
- Do not have parental supervision and support
- Witness violence at home or in the community
- Have a history of aggressive behavior or bullying

Messages from other teens, adults, and the media about how to behave in relationships often suggest that violence in a relationship is normal. It is not.

"We see the things going on in society, the media, and the things the kids are subject to. They think many of the behaviors that they see are acceptable."—Kristine Abel, Safe Dates Teacher and Team Leader, Health and Physical Education Department, Lakeside Middle School, Millville

SAFE DATES: PREVENTING TEEN DATING ABUSE

Promoting positive relationships is the key to preventing teen dating violence. Because young people learn how to build these relationships during the preteen and teen years, this is an ideal time to use prevention programs to change the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating violence and to promote healthy relationships.

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² See the CDC website.

Safe Dates is one such program. Safe Dates is aimed at:

- Raising students' awareness of what constitutes healthy versus abusive dating relationships, and the causes and consequences of dating abuse
- Equipping students with the skills and resources to help themselves or friends address
 abusive dating relationships and develop healthy dating relationships. Skills include
 positive communication, anger management, and conflict resolution.

Designed for middle- and high-school students, Safe Dates can be part of a health education, family life skills, or general life skills curriculum. It can also be used in drug and alcohol prevention programs, violence prevention programs, support groups, and counseling or education programs, and in afterschool, community, and faith-based youth programs, such as at the YMCA or Girl Scouts.

"Adolescents want to become independent, to establish an identity, and to develop intimate relationships with people outside the family. To do that, they refuse to accept what their parents and society stand for. It is an opportune time to do Safe Dates and present them with an alternative viewpoint."—Mary-Ellen Mess, Project Director School-Based Youth Services Program, University Hospital of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey

Proven Effectiveness

Safe Dates is one of two adolescent dating violence prevention programs included in the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, maintained by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Safe Dates prevention curriculum was developed by a team of experts from the University of North Carolina School of Public Health.³

Rigorous research has shown that Safe Dates is effective in both preventing and reducing dating violence among teens. Even four years after participating in Safe Dates, students—both victims and perpetrators—reported 56 percent to 92 percent less serious physical dating violence, physical dating violence, and sexual dating violence than teens who did not participate in the program.

³ This curriculum is published and available for purchase online.

Compared with teens who did not participate in the program, Safe Dates participants also reported:

- Less acceptance of dating violence
- Stronger communication and anger management skills
- Less gender stereotyping
- Greater awareness of community services for dating abuse

Safe Dates was equally effective for males and females and for minority and non-minority students.

Components of Safe Dates

The main components of the Safe Dates curriculum are a 10-session instructional class module that targets attitudes and behaviors associated with dating abuse and violence, a play, and a poster contest designed to reinforce concepts learned through the curriculum.⁴

Each session includes interactive activities and comes with handouts. For example, during Defining Caring Relationships, session number one, students play dating bingo, describe caring people and relationships in their lives, and identify ways they want to be treated by a dating partner and treat a dating partner. (For more information on this session, see Appendix 1.)

Safe Dates sessions can be used in both daily and weekly programs. Each session is designed to last about 50 minutes. (See Appendix 2 for descriptions of all the sessions.)

Reinforcing Safe Dates Messages

A 45-minute play about dating abuse, originally written by high school drama students as the program was developed, and a poster contest spread the message that dating violence is never okay among other students in a school, among parents or other community members. Students participate in these two components after completing the curriculum.

The play, "There's No Excuse for Dating Abuse," features seven characters, all students at a middle or high school. The main characters are dating partners Emily and Jason. Jason is abusing Emily emotionally and physically. The other characters include Emily's friends (three girls and a boy named Derrick) and a student who breaks up a fight between Jason and Derrick. As with all parts of the curriculum, issues of cultural and ethnic sensitivity can be readily addressed through minor revisions to the script.

⁴ In 2008, when the New Jersey Health Initiatives began its Safe Dates project, the curriculum had nine sessions.

Seven scenes show how Jason abuses Emily, such as by screaming at her, making unrealistic demands (telling her to stay away from all other guys at school), and throwing her against a wall. Emily's friends make her aware that Jason is abusing her and help her, by calling a dating abuse hotline and asking a male friend to talk to Jason about his behavior. Friends also try to help Jason deal with his anger and possessiveness. The play ends with Emily's friends telling her that they want her to be happy and safe, and that she can change the situation with Jason. Emily agrees to go to a support group.

Students in a school's drama department can present the play at a school-wide assembly, or at other school or community events, or students participating in Safe Dates can read the script in class as a group exercise. Before the play, teachers may share local statistics on teen dating abuse. Afterward, the actors often lead discussions with members of the audience, preferably in small groups, about the issues presented in the play.

The Poster Contest

Students also design posters describing key points in the Safe Dates curriculum. For example, posters could depict abusive behaviors, the warning signs of abuse, or how to help a friend in an abusive relationship. Posters may be developed as part of a class assignment, an art project, or school-wide contest.

Students can display the posters in school hallways or other community buildings, such as libraries, city halls, and shopping malls. Students can also use their posters when giving presentations on teen dating violence to various school or community groups.

Safe Dates also provides an outline for teacher training, a letter that program leaders can send to parents informing them about Safe Dates, and a brochure that leaders can send to parents or use when discussing teen dating violence with them.

RWJF TARGETS TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

In 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) launched two programs focused on teen dating violence: *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships*, and the *New Jersey Health Initiatives*' Safe Dates program.

"The destructive cycle of violence between close partners affects so many of our young people and their families. To break this cycle, we must focus on the development of healthy, positive relationships that are mutually safe and supportive. And we must start with our youth."—James Marks, MD, MPH, Senior Vice President and Director, RWJF Health Group

Start Strong

RWJF launched *Start Strong*, an \$18 million national program, in 2008, in collaboration with Futures Without Violence⁵ (which has had more than 30 years of experience in programming to prevent dating and other types of violence) and Blue Shield of California Foundation.⁶

Under *Start Strong*, 11 communities nationwide are identifying and evaluating best practices in preventing dating violence and abuse. *Start Strong* targets 11- to 14-year-olds, and brings entire communities together to promote healthy teen relationships.

These communities are using innovative strategies to:

- Educate and engage youth in and outside of schools.
- Educate and engage teen influencers, such as parents and other caregivers, and teachers and other mentors.
- Change policy and environmental influences that promote harmful teen relationships.
- Implement effective communication and social marketing strategies that promote healthy relationships.

Communities participating in *Start Strong* are implementing either Safe Dates or the Fourth R, a program that promotes healthy relationships and targets dating violence, high-risk sexual behavior, and substance abuse among middle school students.

NJHI's Safe Dates

RWJF's *New Jersey Health Initiatives* (*NJHI*) supports innovative community-based projects that improve the health and health care of residents of the Foundation's home state. Established in 1987, *NJHI* funds projects that relate to an RWJF program area and that either:

- Provide an opportunity to implement proven concepts that have been used elsewhere.
- Offer access to opportunities to test innovative ideas.
- Build health and health care expertise in New Jersey.

Many *NJHI* projects focus on the most vulnerable New Jersey residents, and the program works closely with RWJF's Vulnerable Populations Portfolio team. That team looks at factors outside of the health care system that make people healthy or unhealthy, and funds projects that create new opportunities for better health where it starts: in homes,

⁵ Formerly the Family Violence Prevention Fund

⁶ RWJF is funding 10 sites around the country, and Blue Shield of California Foundation is funding one site in California.

schools, and jobs. That focus includes preventing intimate partner violence among adults and teens. (Read the Program Results Report on *NJHI*.)

In 2008, when *NJHI* began targeting its grant-making to address specific health challenges in the state, staff from *NJHI* and RWJF chose preventing teen dating abuse as the first challenge to tackle—and Safe Dates as the way to do it. With the help of the *NJHI* national advisory committee, experts in violence prevention and teen behavior, and RWJF staff, *NJHI* chose eight organizations to receive Safe Dates grants totaling \$2.8 million in 2008.

The grantees included organizations that specialize in prevention programs, school-based health centers, one staff training organization, and one school district. The nonschool grantees partnered with middle and high schools. Grantees also worked with community organizations such as prevention programs, libraries, and local art organizations. (See Appendix 3 for grantee organizations and information on the grants.)

NJHI Works With Start Strong

Program staff from *NJHI* collaborated with *Start Strong*'s national program office staff at Futures Without Violence on designing requirements for Safe Dates grants, using the curriculum, and working in schools. This was a two-way street. Because *NJHI* Safe Dates grants started before *Start Strong* communities began offering Safe Dates or Fourth R in middle schools, *NJHI* program staff shared the experiences of Safe Dates grantees with staff from *Start Strong* communities and Futures Without Violence.

To help schools and their partners implement Safe Dates, the *NJHI* program office organized eight workshops and two web conferences.

BRINGING SAFE DATES TO SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE STATE

From July 2008 to June 2011, some 23,000 middle and high school students in 47 schools in 12 counties across New Jersey participated in Safe Dates—usually as part of the health curriculum. The core of the program is the series of in-class learning sessions, now contained in 10 modules (see Appendix 2). Teachers and school-based youth services staff—some of whom worked for outside agencies—participated in a one-day training session that included practice in leading interactive activities, such as class discussions.

⁷ RWJF is also funding work to prevent intimate partner violence among immigrants and refugees through *Strengthening What Works*, a national program launched in 2009. See the Grantee Profile of the program's directors, Cathleen Crain and Nathaniel Tashima.

The Reach of NJHI's Safe Dates Program

GRANTEE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS ⁸	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF STAFF TRAINED
Princeton Center for Leadership Training	8,114	13	97
Prevention First	5,756	13	184
Millville Public Schools	2,143	6	43
Inwood House	1,750	3	57
University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey/University Hospital	1,468	4	39
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese Newark	1,442	5	54
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of Middlesex County	1,211	2	5
Education Information & Resource Center	1,200	1	14
Totals	23,084	47	493

Some of these staff members helped teach Safe Dates, while others provided services to students who became aware of dating violence through the program. In all, some 260 teachers and staff, as well as 233 student leaders, known as peer leaders, received Safe Dates training. (See Appendix 4 for a list of counties and types of schools covered by each project.)

In the first year, Hazelden Publishing (Center City, Minn.), the distributor of the Safe Dates curriculum, provided most of the staff training. Hazelden then selected the Princeton Center for Leadership Training—which had developed a relationship with Hazelden as an NJHI Safe Dates grantee—as the trainer in New Jersey.

In 2010, Hazelden revised Safe Dates, adding a tenth session to the curriculum. Some of the schools used the new curriculum, while others continued using the nine-session curriculum.

"More students are talking to me about relationships, and learning how to handle conflict in a mature way."— Teacher, Long Branch Middle School, Monmouth County

⁸ Because of difficulties with data collection, these figures may not be exact.

Getting Buy-In for Safe Dates

Sparking the interest of administrators and teachers in preventing teen dating violence—a necessary step to integrate Safe Dates into school curriculums—proved easier than expected. "When I think about dating violence and the many things schools have on their list to accomplish in a given year, getting administrators to devote the time to a topic like this was remarkable," said Chavonne Lenoir Perotte, DrPH, project director for the Princeton Center for Leadership Training.

Offering an easy-to-use, fully developed curriculum helped gain buy-in for Safe Dates. "The schools appreciated having a curriculum that was handed to them that they could take and disseminate in the classrooms," said Lenoir. "Once educators got used to the curriculum, they were impressed with its depth, especially for the in-class activities," added Gretchen Hartling, co-director of *NJHI*.

Teachers also have the flexibility to add content to the Safe Dates curriculum. For example, Kristine Abel and other teachers at Millville's Lakeside Middle School used the story of singers Chris Brown and Rihanna to illustrate dating violence. In 2009, Brown beat Rihanna the night before the Grammy Awards. Pictures of a bloodied and bruised Rihanna appeared on the Web, and Brown was charged with assault.

Lakeside students watched a DVD of an Oprah show on this assault, wrote about what they learned, and then discussed it. Teachers and students also talked about problems related to how middle school students date, such as by using texting.

"Safe Dates was a resource that could be provided to schools fairly quickly and make an immediate impact. It is evidence-based, has a clearly defined curriculum and other components, and offers teacher training."— Gretchen Hartling, Co-Director, NJHI

Producing the Play

The schools approached the play about dating abuse in different ways and performed it for difference audiences. Some performed or read the play in the Safe Dates classroom, while others performed it for the entire student body, the community, or both.

Middle and high school students in Middlesex County's Carteret School District performed the Safe Dates play for the entire student body during Red Ribbon/Violence Prevention week in October, while Lakeside students performed it for other students and the community. The Women's Shelter and the Cumberland County Guidance Center set up tables during the community performance to talk to people and give out information on dating violence.

An after-school club at Lakeside Middle School produced a DVD version of the play, which is available on YouTube. Some teachers at Lakeside show the DVD to their classes, while others show the DVD and also read the play aloud.

Promoting the Posters

Students who created posters describing key points of the Safe Dates curriculum, presented their posters in class, and discussed what they had learned. Two examples of posters:

- A large heart filled with the qualities of a good dating partner, such as respect and love, surrounded in black by the qualities of a bad dating partner, such as jealousy and punching.
- Relationship Red Flags: 15 signs of an abusive relationship (e.g., verbal abuse or controlling behaviors), with a sign on each red flag.

"Safe Dates is very scripted so you get the information out, but you can add things the kids can relate to. You have to put it into perspective so they understand why it's important to do something."—Kristine Abel, Safe Dates Teacher and Team Leader, Health and Physical Education Department, Lakeside Middle School, Millville

In Monmouth County, the arts council helped teachers work with students to develop posters that focused on the message that dating violence is not okay. Students judged the posters and selected the winners. The schools then invited students, parents, and community members to view all the posters.

Local art galleries and a community college also featured the Stop Dating Violence posters, thanks to a partnership between Prevention First (Ocean, N.J.), which implemented Safe Dates in 13 middle and high schools, the Monmouth County Arts Council, and the schools. During an event at an art gallery displaying the posters, staff from 180: Turning Lives Around—an agency that focuses on helping families affected by domestic violence and sexual assault—answered questions and provided information on dating abuse and domestic violence, and linked teens and families who needed help with resources.

"When you discuss a topic such as dating abuse, you should always have additional resources for those who are in need of help. 180 was able to meet these needs on a much

⁹ Part 1 is available online. Part 2 is available online.

greater scale than Prevention First," because it specializes in providing those services, noted Shannon L. Murphy, director of youth services at Prevention First.

Schools in other districts used the posters in other ways:

- Four vocational high schools in Essex County held a public awards ceremony for contest winners and displayed the posters in Essex County Hall of Records during Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
- Willingboro High School displayed Safe Dates posters in the cafeteria, the principal's office, and the local library.
- Five Catholic schools in Hudson and Union counties displayed posters at local libraries and community centers.

Getting the Message on Calendars, Notebooks, and Wristbands

Some schools also found others ways to raise awareness of dating abuse, such as by using artwork from the poster contest in calendars. The calendars also included dating tips and resources for students in abusive relationships, such as local hotlines. The schools gave most of the calendars to students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Some also gave them to local libraries, community centers, and malls.

Dating tips in the Lakeside Middle School calendar:

"Date someone you know."

"Set up a password with your parents in case you're in trouble."

The Carteret School District created two notebooks with covers showing the top 12 posters, and distributed the notebooks to the poster contest winners, other students, and teachers. Willingboro High School and Cumberland County schools gave students Safe Date wristbands with the saying, "There's No Excuse for Dating Abuse."

Students Teaching Other Students

Several projects relied on older students as peer educators. In Essex County, 26 tenth-to-twelfth-grade students at four vocational high schools served as Safe Dates peer educators. They did so under the auspices of Teens Networking Today for Tomorrow, a peer-leadership program run by School-Based Youth Services Program of the University Hospital of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, which managed the Safe Dates project.

"When you work with adolescents and they see an adult figure, that person is detached from their regular life. When they see their peers, here is somebody who walked in their shoes and shares their experiences. There is a connection."—LaDonna Young, Coordinator, Safe Dates project in four Essex County vocational high schools

The Inwood House team at Buena Regional High School trained 57 peer educators to help facilitate Safe Dates both at the high school and at two middle schools in Atlantic County, where the peer educators also made presentations on preventing dating abuse. The peer educators also served as community health advocates and role models on challenges beyond teen dating violence, including preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, stress, academic pressure, and substance abuse.

About 150 eleventh- and twelfth grade students at Colts Neck High School in Monmouth County facilitated Safe Dates for freshman health classes.

"Training peers on how to reach out to other teens is a win-win situation. Victims [of dating abuse] are more likely to go to the peer leaders," said Murphy of Prevention First. "Teens in general will tend to pay more attention to what a peer has to say about the topic than an adult." She noted that the peer leaders can also help students in abusive relationships and continue to spread the message that dating violence is wrong.

Reaching Out to Parents

Along with inviting parents to some performances of the Safe Dates play and poster exhibitions and giving them calendars, schools also used workshops and presentations to raise parents' awareness of teen dating abuse.

THE IMPACT OF SAFE DATES ON NEW JERSEY TEENS

Students who participated in Safe Dates through *NJHI*'s program were more aware of teen dating abuse and violence and changed their attitudes toward it. Some projects measured this, although this was not a requirement since the focus of NJHI: Safe Dates was to implement this evidence-based program with fidelity to the design. Others obtained informal feedback and anecdotes indicating these results.

"I know how to act, how my partner should act, and how to get out of an abusive relationship, if need be."— Eleventh-grade student in Monmouth County

Largest Project Finds Evidence of Awareness and Change

The Princeton Center for Leadership Training—which reached 8,144 students in 13 high schools through the largest NJHI Safe Dates project—assessed its impact using logs completed by instructors after each session, student surveys and focus groups, and surveys and focus groups with instructors and stakeholders. The center found that the percentage of students who could identify 10 abusive behaviors rose from 27.4 percent before they participated in Safe Dates to 53 percent afterward.

Students who completed Safe Dates also showed significant changes in their attitudes about dating abuse, according to the Princeton Center. They:

- Showed an increase in attitudes that suggested greater disapproval of abusive behaviors
- Retained key messages, including the understanding that abuse includes more than physical assault

However, student perceptions of the negative consequences of dating abuse did not increase, and they showed little improvement in their likely responses to anger.

"The program increased their awareness of dating abuse, and that some of the things they have been seeing are dating abuse. Students learned that they don't have to stand for it as a part of a normal relationship."—Alaina Renson, Project Coordinator, Princeton Center for Leadership Training

Students uniformly agreed that Safe Dates should continue at their schools. Administrators, teachers, and school-based youth services staff also thought Safe Dates was good for both their students and their schools:

- 87.5 percent of these stakeholders saw positive changes in their schools as a result of the program, including greater student awareness of dating abuse and willingness to speak up about it.
- Most stakeholders felt that the topic was important, the activities engaged students, and the curriculum was easy to use.

Informal Feedback Reveals Effect on Students

Anecdotal feedback also showed how Safe Dates has affected students. For Mary-Ellen Mess, director of the Safe Dates project in four Essex County vocational high schools, the

most startling result was a sudden realization among some teens that they or their mothers were in an abusive relationship.

Once the students realized they could make a different choice, they felt empowered to do so. "That choice may be very different from what they knew and where they came from. And it can be a little frightening, and not necessarily reaffirmed by the family, but if they do it, it is really exciting to watch," said Mess.

"It was as if a light bulb went off in their heads, because they now had a reference point to say, 'This is not okay.' "—Mary-Ellen Mess, Director, Safe Dates project in four Essex County vocational high schools

According to Catholic Charities, which implemented Safe Dates at five high schools in Hudson and Union counties, 1,442 students had an average score of 92 on a quiz about healthy relationships. Project staff also reported informal feedback from teachers and administrators indicating that students had more respect for each other, were fighting less, and were more aware of their behavior.

Teachers at Lakeside Middle School and other participating schools in Cumberland County made similar comments, and also noted that students could better identify abusive behaviors in themselves and others. Students reported that they were more aware of dating violence and knew someone in a bad relationship. Some felt that the school's attitude toward dating violence had changed.

Focus groups with middle and high school students in the Carteret School District showed that the students retained what they learned through Safe Dates, and thought the information was valuable. Students also reported that Safe Dates made them think differently about their relationships, and that they were better able to identify abusive behaviors.

"We are just getting our independence and going out to do what we want. Safe Dates teaches us to do that safely."— Eleventh-grade student in Monmouth County

"Now I know how to help a friend if they're in an abusive relationship."—Ninth-grade student in Monmouth County

Most Projects Implemented Safe Dates With Fidelity

NJHI staff used teachers' logs, "fidelity" checklists, and surveys to examine to what extent schools adhered to the Safe Dates program—known as fidelity. Schools in seven of the eight projects delivered Safe Dates with fidelity, program staff members reported. They did not have enough data from the eighth project to determine its fidelity.

CHALLENGES FACED AND WHAT THEY TAUGHT

The projects encountered some challenges in implementing Safe Dates.

The Curriculum Needed to be Tweaked to Make It Relevant to Different Student Populations

Some teachers in urban schools felt that the population for the original Safe Dates evaluation did not reflect the diversity of their students. The *NJHI* program office encouraged teachers and instructors to change elements of the curriculum, such as the ethnicities of students used as illustrations, to better represent their students, or to add lessons on cell phone and Web safety because teens spend so much time texting and online.

The project director of Prevention First worked with individual schools to help them implement Safe Dates without hurting the fidelity of the curriculum. As a result, collaborating schools became creative in tweaking Safe Dates to make it work for them. For example, one school had students write a play for use as a public service announcement during Violence Prevention Week.

Time Constraints Lead to Adapting Class Schedules

Sometimes teachers could not complete all nine sessions of the curriculum because of time constraints, competing events, absences, and other priorities. Some teachers modified the activities to fit the class schedule or pulled students from other classes to complete Safe Dates.

Project staff at Millville Public Schools noted that the program takes longer than the prescribed nine sessions, because of discussions and their decision to tie the curriculum to current events. The staff members suggested planning on at least 11 sessions to complete Safe Dates.

Project staff of the School-Based Youth Services Program of the University Hospital of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, which implemented the project in Essex County, noted that classroom discussions were crucial. Safe Dates "is an interactive program, and the real learning comes from classroom discussions," said Project Director Mess. "Activities need to encourage students to talk about feelings."

Fortunately, school principals and teachers participating in Safe Dates were enthusiastic about it and willing to adapt class schedules to complete it.

Time and Logistics Hamper Completing the Play

Presenting the play was a challenge for some schools. Teachers mentioned that they ran out of time after completing the nine sessions. Many teachers also experienced logistical challenges in putting on the play.

Transitions in School Leadership Mean Orientations for New Staff

Project leaders often had to orient new principals, administrators, and other staff to Safe Dates and its components during the project. Some schools changed the way they implemented Safe Dates after leadership transitions, and a few even discontinued it.

Difficulties With Collecting Data Creates Problems in Assessing Impact

Although teacher logs were designed to take less than a minute to complete after each class, many teachers were not accustomed to completing them, and some schools faced challenges in submitting them to *NJHI* as a result. A database that compiled information in the logs was unavailable until about midway through the first year, so local project staff could not immediately assess the impact of implementing Safe Dates in their school. Such challenges may also have affected the accuracy of tallies of participating students.

Give Schools More Lead Time

The Safe Dates grants started on July 1, 2008, which did not give schools enough time to implement the curriculum that September—they had to wait until January. One site reported that teachers had to begin doing Safe Dates before completing their training and before peer leaders completed theirs.

Be Specific About Bringing the "Right People" to the Table

NJHI staff found that being "incredibly specific" about requiring grantees to "have the right people at the table" in bringing Safe Dates into the schools was important. These participants included both leaders—superintendents and principals—and the "delivery system"—teachers.

"When going into a school system, have the leaders and delivery system involved. Take the time to understand who can make a decision" on whether and how to implement Safe Dates, said *NJHI* Co-Director Hartling. Some project leaders met with principals and district-level staff before applying for a grant, to gauge their interest in participating in Safe Dates and gather their input into the program.

SAFE DATES LIKELY TO EXPAND

A brief *NJHI* survey of project directors found that 85 percent of participating schools (40 of 47) expected to continue offering Safe Dates in the next school year (2011–2012), although fewer than half expected to continue the play and the poster contest. Many of these schools have institutionalized the program by writing it into the standard health curriculum.

New Dating Violence Law

In 2011, New Jersey passed legislation requiring schools to include age-appropriate information on dating violence in the health curriculum, and to establish policies to help prevent dating abuse among students in grades 7 to 12. The law became effective with the 2011–2012 school year.¹⁰

"We're all familiar with the saying, 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' In this case, it can save lives."—
Anthony M. Bucco, New Jersey Assemblyman

New Jersey Assemblywoman Mary Pat Angelini, MPA, executive director and CEO of Prevention First, co-sponsored the legislation. It "sends a consistent message to our youth and their families that dating violence in any form will not be tolerated or accepted," said Angelini.

As a result of this new mandate, in 2011 the New Jersey Department of Education issued a model policy and guidance to help school districts develop and implement policies, procedures, and educational programs on dating violence. According to this guidance, an educational program must define dating violence, explain how to recognize its warning signs, and describe characteristics of a healthy relationship. The model policy lists Safe Dates as one of the educational resources on dating violence. (See Appendix 5 for more on the policy.)

Safe Dates Grantee Helps Schools Comply With the Law

The Princeton Center for Leadership Training provided a policy kit and other resources to help schools across the state, including those that participated in Safe Dates through *NJHI*, comply with the law. For example, the center is conducting training sessions on the law through the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association. The center has also been working with *NJHI* to develop a strategy for helping schools statewide comply with the law, including by using Safe Dates.

¹⁰ N.J. Assembly Bill 2920, 2010–2011

"The NJHI Safe Dates initiative is likely to reach many more students in the future."—Gretchen Hartling Co-Director, NJHI

Chavonne Lenoir Perotte, project director for the center, noted that some schools have delayed responding to the law (as of March 2012)—in part because it passed shortly after an anti-bullying law. "Schools were focused on complying with the anti-bullying law and then comes the dating violence legislation. It's one more thing they have to do, and they're not really sure what to do."

The center offers training on Safe Dates for a minimum of 10 teachers and staff at a school, and also trains teachers and staff from many schools at sessions in locations in central New Jersey. The center provides some onsite technical assistance, as well as assistance through email and phone, to schools implementing Safe Dates.

Bringing Safe Dates to Ocean County

In 2012, *NJHI* awarded Prevention First a \$30,000 grant¹¹ to bring Safe Dates to schools in Ocean County.

Prepared by: Lori De Milto

Reviewed by: Sandra Hackman and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Marco Navarro

Grant ID # NJH

Program area: New Jersey

RWJF Special Program Results Report - Stopping Teen Dating Violence With Safe Dates

¹¹ ID # 69952

APPENDIX 1

Session #1 of Safe Dates

In Dating Bingo, students think about the most important qualities of a dating partner (e.g., funny, a good listener, nice to other people, and outgoing) by circling five boxes on a bingo card. Then they find other students who have circled one of the same qualities and ask them to sign the box. The first student to get five different people to sign the five boxes shouts Bingo and wins.

Next, students think about caring people and relationships in their lives. They list people who helped them feel good about themselves (such as family, friends, or teachers), and what these people did to make them feel good. The teacher puts their responses on the board.

Those exercises lead into helping the students think about how they want a dating partner to treat them, and how they want to treat a dating partner. From a list of feelings that dating partners can engender in each other (respected, trusted, protected, treated as an inferior, controlled, loved, abused, or needed), students choose the two that are most important to them, and five other important characteristics. Finally, from another list, they choose five ways they want to treat a dating partner (so she or he feels loved, afraid, supported, or controlled, for example).

APPENDIX 2

The Safe Dates Curriculum

Session 1: Defining Caring Relationships. Through a Bingo game (see Appendix 1) and class discussions, students are introduced to the Safe Dates program and evaluate how they would like to be treated in dating relationships.

Session 2: Defining Dating Abuse. Students clearly define dating abuse by discussing scenarios and reviewing statistics.

Session 3: Why Do People Abuse? Students identify the causes and consequences of dating abuse by reviewing various scenarios and participating in large- and small-group discussions.

Session 4: How to Help Friends. Through a decision-making exercise, a dramatic reading, and the introduction of the "Friend's Wheel," students learn why it is difficult to leave abusive relationships and how to help a friend if she or he is in an abusive relationship.

Session 5: Helping Friends. Students use stories and role-playing to practice skills for helping friends who are victims of abuse or confronting friends who are perpetrators of abuse.

Session 6: Overcoming Gender Stereotypes. Students learn about gender stereotypes and how they can affect dating relationships through a writing exercise, small-group discussions, and scenarios.

Session 7: How We Feel, How We Deal. Through the use of a feelings diary and a discussion of "hot buttons," students learn effective ways to recognize and handle their anger, so it doesn't lead to abusive behavior.

Session 8: Equal Power Through Communication. Students learn the eight skills for effective communication and practice them in a variety of role-plays.

Session 9: Preventing Dating Sexual Abuse. Students learn about sexual assault and how to prevent it by taking a quiz and holding a caucus and a panel of their peers.

Session 10: Reviewing the Safe Dates Program

APPENDIX 3

Grantee Organizations and Their Projects

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark (East Orange, N.J.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum to ninth graders in Hudson and Union Counties, N.J.

ID# 64606 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$388,600

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark provides services to help people in need in Essex, Hudson, Union, and Bergen counties, including services for adults, children, and families, educational programs, HIV/AIDS services, housing services, and workforce development.

Project Director

Shelley C. Steinberg LCSW (973) 266-7963 ssteinberg@ccannj.org

Educational Information & Resource Center (Mullica Hill, N.J.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum in all ninth grade health classes and through additional projects at Willingboro, N.J. High School

ID# 64601 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$250,000

The Educational Information & Resource Center is a public agency specializing in education-related programs and services for parents, schools, communities, nonprofit organizations, and privately held businesses throughout New Jersey.

Project Director

Patricia Bruder (856) 582-7000 pbruder@eirc.org

Foundation of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey – University Hospital (Newark, N.J.)

Integrate the Safe Dates curriculum into the Essex County, N.J., vocational schools' health education program

ID# 64598 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$396,857

University Hospital's School-Based Youth Services Program, which provides counseling, employment, health education, and other services to encourage teens to make positive life choices, managed the Safe Dates work.

Project Director

Mary Ellen Mess (973) 972-6353 messama@umdnj.edu

Inwood House (New York, N.Y.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum in three public schools in Atlantic County, N.J., and the Egg Harbor Township Family Center.

ID# 64605 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$324,759

Inwood House is a nonprofit organization focused on teen pregnancy prevention, youth development, and teen family support.

Project Director

Kashif Iqbal (646) 794-1462 kiqbal@inwoodhouse.com

Millville Public Schools (Millville, N.J.)

Implement Safe Dates and a family life program in schools in Cape May and Cumberland Counties, N.J.

ID# 64610 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$300,000

Millville Public Schools in Cumberland County partnered with five other school districts that included nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools.

Project Director

Nancy Laurelli, MA (856) 293-8203

nancy.laurelli@millvillenj.gov

National Council on Alcohol & Drug Dependence of Middlesex County, Inc. (NCADD), (East Brunswick, N.J.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum in the Carteret, N.J., public schools ID# 64615 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$324,083

NCADD of Middlesex County is a nonprofit, community-based organization providing prevention, education, information, and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies.

Project Director

Lauren K. Balkan (732) 541-8960

lauren@ncadd-middlesex.org

Prevention First (Ocean, N.J.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum in Monmouth County, N.J.

ID# 64617 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$358,720

Prevention First's services include advocacy, prevention education, professional certification training, information and referral, technical assistance, program development, research, and coalition-building/collaboration.

Project Director

Shannon L. Murphy (732) 663-1800 ext. 224 smurphy@PreventionFirst.net

Princeton Center for Leadership Training (Princeton, N.J.)

Implement the Safe Dates curriculum in seven high schools in six New Jersey counties ID# 64616 (July 2008 to June 2011) \$400,000

Princeton Center for Leadership Training develops and promotes peer leadership, advisory, and other science-based K–12 solutions that enable educators to more fully engage students in learning, better connect to their schools, motivate and equip students to make responsible decisions, and accelerate academic achievement.

Project Director

Chavonne Lenoir Perotte, DrPH (609) 252-9300 x109 cperotte@princetonleadership.org

APPENDIX 4

Types of Schools and County Location(s) Covered by Each Project

- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark
 - Five high schools in Hudson and Union counties
- Educational Information & Resource Center Foundation
 - One high school in Burlington County
- Foundation of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-University Hospital
 - Four vocational high schools in Essex County
- Inwood House
 - Three schools: One high school and two middle schools in Atlantic County
- Millville Public Schools
 - Six districts: Two high schools and two middle schools and nine elementary schools in Cumberland and Cape May County
- National Council on Alcohol & Drug Dependence of Middlesex County
 - Two schools: One high school and one middle school in Middlesex County
- Prevention First
 - 13 schools: Six high schools, five middle schools, one alternative school, and one charter school in Monmouth County
- Princeton Center for Leadership Training
 - 13 high schools in five counties: Somerset, Camden, Hunterdon, Middlesex, and Mercer County

APPENDIX 5

New Jersey Department of Education's *Model Policy and Guidance for Incidents Involving Dating Violence*

Each district board of education/ board of trustees must adopt its own policy or one created by the Department of Education's Task Force on incidents involving dating violence at school. The policy shall contain the minimum:

• A statement that dating violence will not be tolerated;

- Dating violence reporting procedures;
- Guidelines for responding to at-school incidents of dating violence;
- Discipline procedures specific to at-school incidents of dating violence;
- Warning signs of dating violence;
- Information on safe, appropriate school, family, peer, and community resources available to address dating violence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Communication or Promotion

Grantee Website

www.njhi.org. Website of New Jersey Health Initiatives, which includes descriptions of the Safe Dates projects. Camden, NJ: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.