

Imagine a safer, healthier Massachusetts Healthy Relationships- Sexual Respect – Equality

“With its focus on primary prevention, this report outlines a concrete plan to keep children from developing problem sexual behaviors, help parents and educators teach children that sexual respect is expected, and assist adults in changing the climates in our diverse communities and institutions so that healthy relationships between all people can be the state norm. I hope that this report will be a guide for state and local leaders as we continue not only to improve our responses to incidents of sexual violence, but also toward shaping a safer, healthier future for all.”

--Governor Deval Patrick, September 2009

The challenge that we face in Massachusetts:

Sexual violence hurts us all. Someone you know has experienced it and the cost to each of us, our families, and our communities is unacceptable.

- ◆ Nearly 13% of adults ages 18-65 years old in Massachusetts have had unwanted sexual contact at some time in their lives.
- ◆ 18% of girls and 7 % of boys in MA high schools report ever having unwanted sexual contact.
- ◆ Massachusetts residents with disabilities, who are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), all children and adolescents, and women of color, are at significantly increased risk for sexual violence victimization.¹

Sexual violence can be prevented. First, we need to

understand the problem, know what can be done, and have a clear vision for change.

Definition:

Sexual violence is any sexual activity where consent is not freely given. ‘Sexual violence’ includes a wide range of behaviors from a violent rape to drug assisted sexual assault to sexual harassment to sexual exploitation (e.g., downloading child pornography from the Internet). It includes sexual harm to people of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities and abilities. Consent cannot be given when someone is: a minor, incapacitated, or has certain disabilities.

Domestic violence is physical, sexual, psychological or financial harm caused by a current or former partner or spouse, dating partner or household member.

Vision:

To move beyond sexual violence, we must also hold a clear vision for what is healthy and not just what we don’t want in the lives of our family and community.

Sexual respect means honoring personal boundaries and developmental stages, and nurturing connection. Sexual respect stems from basic respect for the integrity of other people, and is inclusive of diverse cultures, disabilities, gender identities, sexual orientation and ages.

Healthy relationships and healthy sexuality are respectful, mutual, and based on equality and open communication.

In many cases, preventing sexual violence will be tied to domestic violence issues, so it is important to think about the full complexity of these problems when deciding what to do about them.

Massachusetts now has the information and knowledge to make a difference. Here is what can be done:

- ◆ Work together with our families, social groups, workplaces, and government to promote sexual respect and healthy relationships.
- ◆ Help all communities in Massachusetts to get involved in sexual and domestic violence prevention efforts.

Individuals, communities and institutions have a unique opportunity to address the prejudices that can unintentionally promote violent ideas and actions, including sexual and domestic violence.

Protective and Risk Factors for Sexual and Domestic Violence

Research suggests that we can prevent sexual and domestic violence by increasing the factors that protect people from developing violent behaviors. We can also decrease factors that create risk for violence. Together, these are called protective factors and risk factors. Here are selected protective and risk factors to focus on in Massachusetts:

Individual factors

- ◆ **PROTECTIVE:** emotionally healthy youth and adults
- ◆ **RISK:** knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that see rape and other forms of sexual violence as normal
- ◆ **RISK:** childhood history of abuse or witnessing family violence
- ◆ **RISK:** traditional beliefs about men and women (examples: women are the weaker sex, men should be tough)

Interpersonal and family factors

- ◆ **PROTECTIVE:** positive connections with emotionally healthy peers and adults
- ◆ **RISK:** friendship with sexually aggressive peers
- ◆ **RISK:** marriage conflict

Community factors

- ◆ **PROTECTIVE:** community connections
- ◆ **RISK:** high rates of unemployment
- ◆ **RISK:** weak disapproval or consequences in community
- ◆ **RISK:** lack of or no enforcement of policies against sexual harassment

Societal factors

- ◆ **PROTECTIVE:** low tolerance for crime and for violence
- ◆ **RISK:** a sense of male entitlement over women
- ◆ **RISK:** belief that men should have dominance over others
- ◆ **RISK:** cultural beliefs that violence can solve disagreements

GOAL #1:

Youth and caregivers will value and develop skills for respectful relationships.

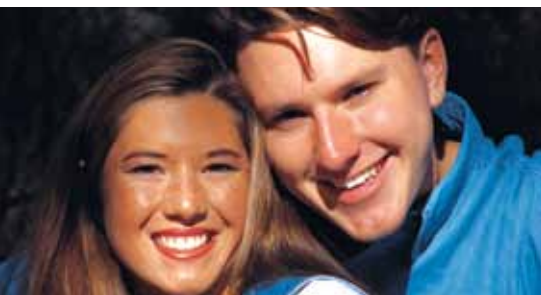
Youth is a key period for development of relationship values, attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, there is a need to promote healthy, respectful relationship and sexuality norms—and behaviors—with children, adolescents, and young adults in Massachusetts.

ACTION STEPS:

1) Educate parents and caregivers to help them support children’s healthy sexual development and safety.

2) Support organizations working with children and adolescents in their efforts to prevent violence through new policies, increased staff training, stronger parent involvement, and educational programs for children and teens. Specifically address the needs of youth with disabilities and LGBT youth.

¹ Citations available online at http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/com_health/violence/sv_prevention_plan.pdf.



3) Teach adolescents about healthy sexuality and healthy relationships through school policies and programming.

Strengthen college and university policies and programming on healthy relationships and sexual and domestic violence prevention.

Goal #2:
Promote healthy LGBT relationships and sexuality to prevent violence against LGBT people.

LGBT people are at increased risk for sexual violence victimization as compared to their heterosexual peers.

ACTION STEPS:

1) Train programs to promote healthy LGBT relationships and sexuality and prevent violence against LGBT people.

2) Develop partnerships for additional research about sexual and domestic violence against LGBT people to inform prevention strategies.

Goal #3:
Promote healthy sexuality and relationships among people with developmental disabilities.

According to the majority of published reports, individuals with disabilities are more likely than those in the general population to experience sexual assault victimization.

ACTION STEPS:

1) The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) will identify needs and resources to improve healthy sexuality and relationship training and programming for DDS providers and people with developmental disabilities.

Develop cross-training and partnerships between sexual and domestic violence programs, sexual health programs, abuse prevention programs, and DDS-funded programs.

GOAL #4:
Government, community groups, and institutions will build leadership for the prevention of sexual and domestic violence.

ACTION STEPS:

1) Support staff and volunteers of organizations doing sexual and domestic violence prevention to plan, carry out and evaluate primary prevention. Focus on primary prevention with youth, racial/ethnic populations, LGBT people, Deaf people and people with disabilities.

2) Expand opportunities for males to engage in sexual and domestic violence prevention. Promote healthy relationships and sexuality through responsible fatherhood and other initiatives for men and boys.

3) Improve media reporting on sexual and domestic violence to include promoting healthy relationships and sexuality.

Everyone can help prevent sexual and domestic violence and promote healthy relationships and sexuality

Here are some things WE ALL can do to prevent sexual and domestic violence:

(1) Talk about healthy relationships and sexual respect with our friends, neighbors and co-workers.

(2) Speak up and act when we see behaviors that worry us about someone doing harm or getting hurt.

(3) Listen to children, talk with them about healthy relationships and share what we hope for them.

(4) Write a letter to the editor or contact the sponsors of sexually violent messaging and marketing.

(5) Invite a local rape crisis center to discuss violence prevention with faith and/or community organizations.

(6) Ask school boards and other officials for policies that prevent violence and promote healthy sexuality.

(7) Be a mentor. Support local youth programs and ask about their sexual harassment policies.

(8) Contact local sexual or domestic violence programs to find out how we can get involved.

(9) Share this plan with someone else and take action together.

Who developed this plan:

The Massachusetts Sexual Violence Prevention Team represents a range of state and community-based agencies. The Team is brought together by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Team heard from many people across the state to make a plan to prevent sexual violence.

How we will know if this plan works:

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Jane Doe, Inc., and the State Prevention Team will monitor the plan activities, to learn what is working and why. We are committed to continual and sustainable improvements.

MASSACHUSETTS STATE PREVENTION TEAM

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To download the complete MA Sexual Violence Prevention Plan: http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/com_health/violence/sv_prevention_plan.pdf

For information about local sexual and domestic violence services in Massachusetts, please visit: www.mass.gov/dph/sexualassaultservices or www.janedoe.org

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HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN MASSACHUSETTS

