

WHEN LOVE GOES WRONG

Students experience dating violence, abuse and trauma

According to the National Coalition Against Dating Violence, nearly 1.5 million high school students in the United States are physically, sexually or emotionally abused by dating partners every year. 1.5 million.

That's 1 out of every 10 high school students in the entire country. So, statistically speaking, that means that if you know of five couples, one of them is likely to include an abused partner.

Broward County is no exception. A district-wide survey in 2015 reinforced this statistic, finding that out of all students surveyed, 9.8 percent of them reported experiencing dating violence and relationship-related sexual abuse in the year prior, with a markedly higher percentage for women affected than men. This is an issue that affects us all—students, teachers and administration alike—and yet it is an issue that often times goes unacknowledged and undiscussed.

And yes, it does happen at our school.

"When someone tells you enough times that

you're worthless, you start to believe it," *Jane said. "I think that's probably the worst part of it. It's not even the hurting or the name calling or the cheating, it's the fact that he would still make me feel like a terrible person or that it was my fault when he did those things. He would tell me that he loved me, and that I was ungrateful for all that he did. It's a special kind of torture—learning to hate yourself more and more, until you don't even care who you are."

Young girls aged 16-24 experience about three times the national average of dating violence by their partner. Since adolescence is the time when teenagers grow the most emotionally and mentally, the people around them influence them greatly as they develop and experience things for the first time. When one's first experience with relationships is physical and mental abuse and anxiety, it is devastating to the growth of the victim.

"We've had incidents here in the past where student relationships had become violent—with one being abusive to the other, or even both,"

Vice Principal Winfred Porter said. "It's always a difficult predicament, but it's something that we as administrators and teachers are trained to look for and properly deal with."

Every year, Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) mandates that all of its employees go through a dating violence training course, where they are shown how to spot, address and manage the issue. They are given the "look-fors" to identify unhealthy or unsafe relationships, so that teachers and administrators can help students—both actively dating and not—understand what a healthy relationship truly is. According to Porter, examples of such identifiers include erratic conduct, argumentative interaction and overbearing and overprotective actions.

Administrators also must punish perpetrating students according to the district's Discipline Matrix, which does not explicitly acknowledge dating violence, but does regard the main aspects of it: harassment, verbal threats, battery, physical and sexual abuse and rape—all of which are treated as extremely serious offenses.

*Names indicated were changed to protect students' anonymity

Effects of Dating Violence



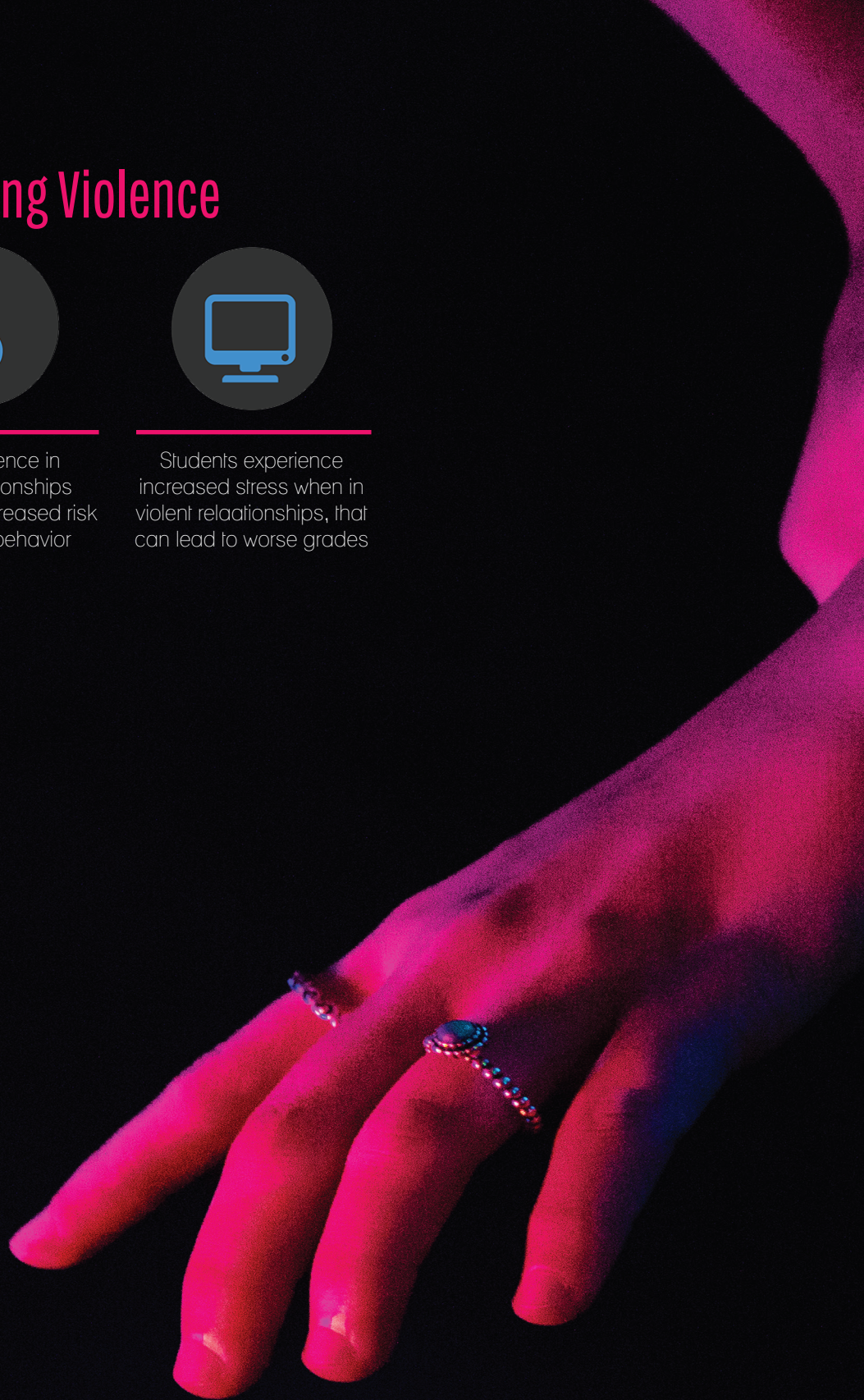
Those who are in abusive relationships are more likely to abuse alcohol and other substances



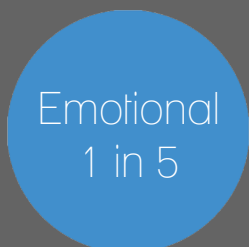
Dating violence in student relationships leads to an increased risk for suicidal behavior



Students experience increased stress when in violent relationships, that can lead to worse grades

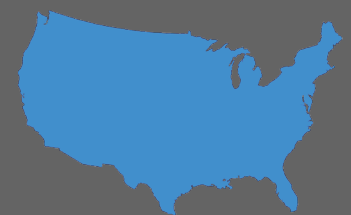


3 Main Types



Dating abuse is a controlling behavior in which a partner uses the relationship to gain power over the other partner

It Happens **EVERYWHERE**



1 in 3 high school students have been in an abusive relationship

80% of Girls continue dating their abuser



Only **67%** of adolescents who were abused in a relationship tell someone

Source: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence



Gender Doesn't Matter



1 in 4 men have been victims of physical violence and abuse by an intimate partner, and 5.1 million men have reported being stalked



1 in 3 women, mostly between the ages of 18-24 years old, have been victims of physical violence and abuse by an intimate partner



February is national dating violence awareness month, make sure to wear orange on the 14th to show your respect

Yet, while serious steps are taken by BPCS administrators in reaction to such behavior, that does not stop it from happening at the student level.

To address this issue, each year, all of the school's English teachers show their classes a video on dating violence and abuse so that students know what it looks like, how to report it and how to get out of such relationships.

"It's really important for us to teach these kids how to handle their problems calmly and appropriately," Porter said, "in order to show them what it means to have a healthy, safe and loving relationship."

The 2015 district-wide survey also showed that out of the just under 1,400 students who participated, about 6 percent of students reported that they had been "physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to." In other words, these students reported that they have been sexually assaulted.

In addition, freshman, sophomore and junior girls all reported this happening more to them by varying (though still

small) margins, while only in the senior group did boys show a slightly higher percentage.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), someone that is a victim of dating violence is more likely to perform poorly in school, binge drink and smoke, become pregnant, contract an STD, attempt suicide, feel hopeless and depressed, develop a negative body image and enter into violent adult relationships.

"The lasting effects of abuse are many and varied," said Aimee Wood, Prevention Specialist at the Diversity, Prevention and Intervention Department of Broward County Public Schools. "But the biggest concern for me is that over a person's lifetime, even if they change partners, on average whether abused or an abuser, people tend to not change this learned pattern of relationship behavior, so unhealthy relationships can start early, but last a lifetime."

While this cycle of abuse is hard to break, effective ways to survive and heal

from it do exist.

"The most important thing is to remove oneself from the situation and be surrounded by a caring, non-judgmental support system," said local marriage and family therapist Dawn Kravitz. "The victim should have someone help them reach into their positive side and someone to teach them positive self talk, whether that be a professional or a relative. This way, slowly but surely, they can open up again and heal."

According to Wood, there are also ways to prevent the violence from happening in the first place.

"The key to the reduction of dating violence is the teaching of social and emotional skills early and throughout the course of students' lives. To have healthy [relationships] we need to know how to manage our emotions, deal with conflict in a healthy way, and examine our biases in regards to gender role stereotypes," Wood said.

The Diversity, Prevention and Intervention Department, a part of the

Broward County Public School System, is one of many organizations that aims to help students with such problems they face. They provide counselors and services for students who are victims of dating violence and sexual abuse. Additionally, they provide programs promoting tolerance, non-violence and general peer counseling. For students seeking assistance, they can be reached at (754) 321-1650.

There are many resources available at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as well. School Psychologist Audrey Wong and Social Worker Marianne Dubin provide an oncampus support system. Students can report dating violence to a teacher or a school administrator.

Students can also anonymously report incidents to the BCPS Special Investigative Unit (SIU). SIU can be reached by phone at (754) 321-0911, by text at CRIMES 274637 (begin message with SBBC), by email at school911@browardschools.com or by anonymous tip form at <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/siu/>

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