A free App that prevents violence before it happens
Winner of the 2011 HHS / White House “Apps Against Abuse” Challenge
www.circleof6app.com • circleof6app@gmail.com • facebook/circleof6 • @circleof6app
Adolescent dating violence (ADV) can range from verbal abuse to physical abuse to rape and murder. Ten to 40% of high school students in the US are victims of teen dating violence and 45% of teen girls know someone who has been coerced into having sex. One in 3 teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, or otherwise physically hurt by a partner. Survivors of ADV have higher risks of injury, binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fights, risky sexual behavior, and their educational outcomes tend to be poorer than those of their peers. ADV may also lead to higher incidence of HIV infections and unintended teen pregnancies.

Many of these teenagers will become victims of abusive relationships in adulthood. Girls and women between the ages of 16 and 24 are most at risk for intimate partner violence, and it is important that education starts early.

Preventing and responding to adolescent dating violence can break the cycle of violence in romantic relationships that starts early in life.
1. How do teens understand dating violence?

- What’s the difference between “drama” and danger?
- How kids define drama
- How to help them understand danger

Relationships in most teen media are presented as rife with drama, stress, and intrigue: from the love triangles and controlling behavior portrayed in Twilight to the violence-tinged, on-again-off-again relationship between Chris Brown and Rihanna that is constantly profiled in the tabloids, young people are repeatedly shown that “real” love includes control, jealousy, and drama. It can be hard for students – and even for teachers – to tell when “drama” crosses a line into abuse. Students may feel that relationships should come with a certain amount of trouble and that if their boyfriend or girlfriend is jealous or controlling, it is a sign of love. They may believe relationships should be hard. But this isn’t true! Relationships should be more fun than strife. When you’re in a healthy relationship, you feel GOOD and safe and confident when you’re with your boyfriend or girlfriend, not stressed, or angry, or upset.

**RELATED ACTIVITY**

**Objective:** Have students consider what it means to be and feel jealous, versus what it means to be and feel loved and supported.

**Step 1** Draw four squares on the blackboard.
**Step 2** Top left corner box: Ask your students how they feel when they feel jealous – not just in relationships, but any time. Mad? Sad? Angry? Write those words in the top left corner box.
**Step 3** Top right box: Ask students how they feel when someone is jealous of them?
**Step 4** Bottom left box: Ask students how they feel when they love someone else?
**Step 5** Bottom right box: Ask students how they feel when someone loves them – friends, family, partners?

**Compare the words.** How does a relationship where both parties love each other (the bottom two boxes) compare to a relationship where one or both parties are jealous (the top two boxes)?

Is constant jealousy really a part of healthy, positive relationships? Discuss alternative ways to show admiration and affection.
WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS OF DATING VIOLENCE?

The CDC defines teen dating violence as “physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship, as well as stalking. It can occur in person or electronically and may occur between a current or former dating partner.”

This means that:
- Abuse can be verbal, physical, or a mix of both.
- Abuse can be carried out via technology: insisting on reading partners’ text messages, emails, Facebook accounts, is a sign of abuse, as is non-stop texting/calling/messaging.
- Password swapping, when people share their social networking passwords with their boyfriends or girlfriends, may also be a sign of abuse, as it removes a person’s ability to have a space that is private. Discourage students from sharing passwords with one another.
- Isolating a partner or trying to control who your boyfriend or girlfriend hangs out with is a sign of abusive behavior.

For a young person, comments from a boyfriend or girlfriend may sound like:
- “If you keep hanging out with that person I’m going to break up with you.”
- “You spend more time with your friends than me. I don’t want you to go out with them.”
- “If you loved me you wouldn’t hang out with so-and-so.”
- “Why do you like those other people more than me?”
- Coercion into physical or sexual activity is a sign of abuse. For example, not taking “no” for an answer, continually pressuring someone to go further physically than they’re comfortable with, or saying things like “if you really loved me you would have sex with me” are all signs of an abusive relationship.
- Emotional abuse can involve a variety of behaviors including put-downs and “the silent treatment.”
People are abused or sexually assaulted because someone decides to abuse or sexually assault another – and that someone can be a friend, a boyfriend, or a girlfriend. No one brings assault or abuse onto themselves. We live in a culture that almost inherently puts the blame on victims by telling girls to “buddy up,” dress a certain way, or not go out alone. Blaming the victim makes it less likely that victims will reach out for help, and more likely that abuse will escalate. Here are some examples of victim blaming:

- She shouldn’t have gone to his house; she knew what he wanted.
- She shouldn’t have provoked him or tried to make him jealous.
- He can handle her crazy drama, he’s a guy.
- Why was she dressed like that if she didn’t want that attention?

When dealing with dating violence, it’s important to disrupt the conversation about what victims “should” or “shouldn’t” have done. Instead of asking questions or making judgments about why such situations arose in the first place, focus on helping students who feel threatened or uncomfortable leave the situations or relationships that are making them feel that way.
Most victims of teen dating violence don’t report the violence, and if they do, they are much more likely to tell a peer than an adult. For this reason, it’s important for teens to be open and supportive with their friends on a day-to-day basis. It can be hard to know what to do when you see physical or emotional abuse, especially when someone you love is the victim. Guide your students by explaining to them what does and doesn’t help in these situations.

HERE ARE THINGS THAT DON’T HELP

• **False assurance.** Never encourage a friend to accept violence in a relationship as “no big deal.” If your friend is coming to you with something, listen to her/him – if s/he thinks it’s a problem, you should too.

• **Ultimatums.** It can be frustrating and painful to see someone you love stay with someone who is hurting them, but saying things like “if you don’t break up with this person, we can’t be friends anymore” plays directly into abusers’ hands. Abusers get their power from isolating their victims, so the most important thing you can do is stay close with your friends.

• **Rudeness or “tough love.”** Saying things like “you’re dumb/stupid/silly for staying with this person” or “this person is so bad for you” contributes to isolation. If your friend feels ashamed, s/he will not confide in you.

• **Being a martyr.** Don’t physically intervene when you see violence, and don’t try to carry out “revenge” in the form of violence or harassment.

• **Insincerity.** Don’t laugh at a friend who comes to you with a problem in her/his relationship, and don’t accuse her/him of lying. Try your best to believe what they are saying is true, because things could become serious very quickly.

HERE’S WHAT DOES HELP

• **Talk to your friend about your concerns in her/his relationship.** Don’t be accusatory or rude (“You’re stupid for staying with this person, they treat you like crap”) or set up an ultimatum (“it’s him or me.”). Instead, try something like, “hey, I noticed that your boyfriend/girlfriend/partner is being kind of weird, is there anything you want to talk about?”

• **Know your adult allies at school or on campus.** Who do you trust? Who are the teachers or coaches you can talk to about this? It doesn’t have to be the guidance counselor or the nurse – it can be anyone who makes you feel safe.

• **Knowing resources:** where can your friend go if she/he wants to report the abuse? Offer to go with her/him: “Do you want to talk to someone together? I can go with you to the nurse or to talk to your aunt/mom/sister/cousin if you want.”

• **Always being there to listen.** Again, abusers get their power from separating their victims from friends, and it’s very important that you make yourself known as a “safe” person that your friend can always count on. Say things like “I’m your friend no matter what” or “I’ll always be here for you,” and mean it.

• **If you see violence, tell a trusted adult.** This can be anyone: parents, teachers, counselors. Stay with your friend to give support. If you see violence in the moment, run and find a trusted adult to intervene. **Do not intervene yourself.**
4. What is Circle of 6, and why is it important for students?

Circle of 6 is an app that builds upon the accountability, respect, and trust of tight-knit friendships to help prevent sexual abuse and dating violence. Students with smart phones can pre-program six of their closest friends’ phone numbers into the app, and with two taps, ask for an interruption, to be picked up from an uncomfortable or dangerous situation, or just let each other know that they’re supported. The app provides an easy way to ask for help without victims feeling the need to explain themselves.

You can see a demo video for the app at www.circleof6app.com.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS WHEN THEY THINK THEY MIGHT USE AN APP LIKE CIRCLE OF 6:
- At a party when someone won’t leave them alone?
- When they need a ride home from somewhere that’s creeping them out?
- When they feel unsafe taking public transportation?
- When they need to exit a conversation with someone who is making them feel uncomfortable?

USE THEIR ANSWERS TO GUIDE THE CONVERSATION TOWARD TALKING ABOUT DATING VIOLENCE.
Some guiding questions might be:
- What is the line between someone being creepy and someone making you feel unsafe?
- Have you ever witnessed violence or boundary-crossing among your friends, including unwanted touching or sexual comments?
- Do you think these things are a problem?
5. How should a student choose his/her circle?

THINK
Take time when choosing which six friends to add to your Circle.

KEEP IT LOCAL
Make sure that most of your Circle lives close by, so when you need them, they’re just a short trip away.

TALK IT OVER
It can be helpful to talk to the people who you want to add, to make sure they understand the responsibilities involved.

TRUST
Your Circle should be made up of the people you trust the most, who have proven themselves to be reliable friends.

REVISE
Remember, you can change who is in your Circle at any time, with a few taps.
4. Other Questions

DO I HAVE TO ADD MY PARENTS?
This is up to the individual student: not all students have trusting, safe relationships with their parents, so adding a parent is not always a possibility. Encourage students to add trusted peers and adults – adults might include friends’ parents, older siblings, a coach, a counselor, etc. **We strongly urge students to add at least one trusted adult per Circle. School employees are encouraged to add names and numbers here.**

IF I’M NOT IN SOMEONE’S CIRCLE, ARE WE NOT FRIENDS?
There are a lot of things that go into making a decision about who to put in your circle: location, relationships, access to a vehicle, smartphone access (for the GPS features), etc. Remind students that just because they’re not in someone’s Circle doesn’t mean they’re not that person’s friend! Students should continue to look out for one another and be supportive, and expect that their friends do the same, regardless of whether or not they have or are in the app.

WHAT IF I DON’T HAVE A SMARTPHONE?
**Circle of 6** is available on iPhones and Android devices, but not everybody has access to these things. Students can set up a similar messaging tool on their regular phone by creating an SMS group and putting their most trusted friends into it, and then creating pre-written messages like “come and get me” or “please call me, I need an interruption.” **Circle of 6** is also **just one tool** in the fight against dating abuse. Even without the app or an SMS group, it’s important that you encourage students talk with their friends about their relationships and stay open and accountable with one another. It’s also important to **make yourself available as a safe person to come to about these issues.**

**Dear School Employee:** If you decide to print this toolkit, please share the following with students:

- Phone number of your school resource officer
- Phone number of your city police chief

---

**www.circleof6app.com** • **circleof6app@gmail.com** • **facebook.com/circleof6** • **@circleof6app**
5. Foundations of Circle of 6

The foundations of the Circle of 6 App lie in the Social-Ecological Model (a framework for violence prevention). Circle of 6 intends to prevent sexual assault and teen dating violence by promoting a self-driven understanding of factors that influence teen dating violence and the safety measures to be taken. Circle of 6 is a prevention tool based on a thorough use of avenues like relationships, communities, and societal factors.
Circle of 6 was developed based on the multiple levels of influence on today’s young people and how each of these levels of influence could be used to prevent teen dating violence. This approach is multifactorial, explores the interplay between several factors affecting teens and their safety, and is more likely to generate a comprehensive sexual violence and teen dating violence prevention and response effort.

INDIVIDUAL
Circle of 6 starts with the individual. Because of individual differences – age, gender, race, socioeconomic standing, etc.– every individual will use Circle of 6 differently. Regardless of these differences, the app provides an opportunity for individuals to start talking about and understanding dating violence

INTERPERSONAL
The second level of the model refers to the relationships between individual students and their friends and peers. The App creates a network of people who can intervene to prevent violence, whether they’re friends, parents, teachers, or other trusted individuals.

ORGANIZATIONAL
This level of the model is all about setting – in what settings do violence occur? Circle of 6 allows students to take control of their surroundings in a new way by linking settings that may be uncomfortable or scary (a party where you don’t know anyone; a bedroom of someone you don’t want to be with) with settings that are more comfortable (school; home) through the ability to quickly contact people they trust.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL AVENUES
As more individuals, peers, and settings are linked together through the app and through students’ and educators’ anti-violence efforts, students can look outside their immediate communities for other resources, like anti-violence hotlines, professional advocates, or law enforcement officials.

PUBLIC POLICY
The fifth and outermost level of the model surrounds the Circle of 6 App user and his or her physical and social environment. Circle of 6 App enhances the knowledge of users about their rights, laws and regulations to prevent teen dating violence, and policies aimed at responding to the incidents of teen dating violence. In addition, by using Circle of 6 App teenagers gradually acquire insights about policies and activities that are intended to prevent and reduce the problem of teen dating violence through engagement in regulation, communication, promotion, development, and implementation of local and national policies to prevent teen dating violence.