

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**DATE: February 4, 2010**

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## **THE ALARMING REALITY OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE**

*Local and National Organizations Lead Efforts for Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month*

*Emily and Ryan met in third period English class. They hit it off right away and have been dating for over six months. Ryan is a very big part of Emily's life. He drives her to and from school every day. It seems like when they aren't in each other's presence, they are always talking or texting on their cell phones. Ryan sees Emily talking with Mike, her friend since elementary school. Ryan storms up to them and pulls Emily away from the conversation. He yells at her for talking with Mike and calls her names. Ryan walks Emily to her next class and tells her to wait for him after class so he can drive her home. On the way, Ryan tells Emily that he was upset with her and that she should know better than to talk with Mike. That night, Emily calls Mike to tell him they can't talk anymore. Mike tells her that she doesn't have to put up with Ryan's demands and that she deserves better. They hang up the phone and she sees Ryan's car on the street in front of her house. She goes out to see him and he asks who she has been on the phone with.*

This story is a real-life, everyday occurrence for many teens. Just as in many adult relationships, teen dating relationships have a high rate of abuse. Dating abuse is not arguments every now and then or being in a bad mood once in a while. It is a pattern of controlling behaviors, whereas one person has power and control over the other. The abuse can be physical, emotional or verbal, and sexual. Recent studies show that one in three teenagers know a friend or peer who have been punched, hit, slapped, choked, kicked or physically hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend. Furthermore, forty-five percent of girls report knowing a friend or peer who has been forced or coerced into having intercourse or oral sex. The studies also show that one in five younger adolescents (ages 11 to 14) know a friend who is in an abusive relationship.

A new development within teen dating violence in recent years is the use of technology to carry out the abuse. Teen abusers often use cell phones, instant messaging, social networking pages and email to harass and stalk their partners. One in four teens in relationships report they have been harassed, put-down, or called names by their partner through texting and cell phones. "Sexting" is using the sending of sexually explicit or suggestive photos and messages through texting. One in five teens ages 13 to 16 say they have electronically sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves. Over half of girls say pressure from boys is a reason why they send explicit images or messages. Not only is this damaging to the victims, but can have serious consequences for the abuser. Several teens across the country have been arrested for child pornography after receiving sexts.

Teen dating violence can have several consequences beyond bruises. Teen victims are more likely than their non-abused peers to use drugs or alcohol, smoke, engage in unhealthy diet behaviors, engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or commit suicide. Abuse can also lead to depression, eating disorders, poor self-esteem, poor grades, and other issues. According to U.S. Department of Justice statistics, 22% of homicides of females between the ages 16-19 were committed by an intimate partner from 1993-1999.

Because of the alarming statistics, Governor Jennifer Granholm and the U.S. Congress have proclaimed February as Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. Several national organizations are working to raise awareness of teen dating violence and empowering teens to speak out against the violence. National organizations such as the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, Liz Claiborne, Inc., Family Violence Prevention Fund and Break the Cycle are all campaigning against teen dating violence and act as a resource for statistics, information, and ways to spread the message. *A Thin Line* sponsored by MTV and *That's Not Cool* sponsored by Family Violence Prevention Fund are two campaigns focused solely on technology harassment and abuse.

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services (DASAS) in Three Rivers has also joined in the campaign to raise awareness of teen dating violence. DASAS offers a *Healthy Relationships* course for middle and high school students. This course is taught in schools and emphasizes developing healthy relationships, encouraging students to report and reach

out to safe adults when they experience or witness violence at school and at home, and providing useful, engaging information about the realities of dating violence and sexual assault. The organization sent packets of information and brochures on teen dating violence to middle and high schools in St. Joseph and Cass counties to distribute to teachers and students. DASAS also offers non-residential advocacy and supportive counseling, court accompaniment, support groups and other services for victims of relationship abuse and sexual assault. This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> year DASAS has been supporting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

***For more information on Healthy Relationships, contact Mallory Dowd, Sexual Assault Program Coordinator at (269) 273-6154 extension 106. Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services is leading efforts to end domestic violence and sexual assault in Southwest Michigan. DASAS assists domestic violence and sexual assault survivors in clarifying their options, accessing community services that support personal choice, and providing a safe place for survivors and their children. Please contact us at (269) 273-6154, [dasainfo@dasasmi.org](mailto:dasainfo@dasasmi.org), or the 24-Hour Helpline at 1-800-828-2023. Serving Cass, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties.***

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