



Human Resources Administration
Department of Social Services
Robert Doar, Commissioner

Governor Cuomo Declares February Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Domestic Violence is often associated with adults and families, but abusive behavior can begin much earlier, often in adolescence when young people begin exploring relationships for the first time. Teens do not always have the experience to recognize a healthy relationship, and early abusive relationships can lead to patterns of behavior that last through victims' and abusers' entire lives. In recognition of this serious issue, congress and New York State have proclaimed February Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.

Like other kinds of abuse, teen dating violence is not just physical – it can include verbal, sexual, emotional and economic abuse as well. Trying to keep someone isolated from his or her family, or constantly monitoring his or her movements through phone calls and text messages is also a form of abuse. Teen dating violence is a problem for teens of all backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic background or sexual orientation. In New York City, 1 in 3 teens report experiencing some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships, including verbal and emotional abuse. *

HRA's Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP), part of the Office of Domestic Violence and Emergency Intervention Services (ODVEIS), works with NYC teens to help them distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships and recognize that they deserve to be respected. RAPP is a school-based program, offering classes and counseling in 65 middle and high schools throughout the city. RAPP also partners with community groups and offers a summer peer leadership program, where students learn more about relationship abuse and how to prevent it, and pass the information on to their friends.

"It's an important national issue with a lot of passion behind it," said Tracey Thorne, Director of Program and Policy Analysis at ODVEIS. "In New York City, people are creating conferences and task forces because it is so important to get the word out, and coordinate our efforts."

RAPP has also branched out to address related problems NYC teens face, such as teen pregnancy and reproductive health. "RAPP's program teaches self respect, strong boundaries and assertive communication all of which support good decision making," said Ms. Thorne. "These skills are effective in ending relationship abuse as well as reducing teen pregnancy."

"What I've gotten most out of RAPP is knowing more about myself," said one RAPP program participant. "I know what I want and how I want to be treated."

"I am a relationship abuse survivor," said another participant. "Because of RAPP, my life has completely transformed. I graduated from college two years ago. I'm in graduate school right now."

* Halpern, C.T., Oslak, S.G., Martin, S.L., Young, M.L., & Kupper, L.L. (2001). Partner violence among adolescents in opposite-sex romantic relationships: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(10), 1680.