

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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JOIN EFFORTS TO PREVENT TEEN DATING VIOLENCE IN TENNESSEE *February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Love shouldn't hurt. Healthy relationships consist of trust, honesty, respect, equality and compromise. It's important to help young people learn how to build and recognize healthy relationships to support their development and keep them safe. The Tennessee Department of Health is taking part in **Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month** to help prevent dating violence among Tennessee teens.

"Teen dating violence is a widespread issue across Tennessee and it comes with serious long-term and short-term health effects," said TDH Assistant Commissioner for Family Health and Wellness Morgan McDonald, MD. "We are determined to end teen dating violence and want to stress the importance of talking with your pre-teen or teenager about why healthy relationships are important."

Teen dating violence occurs when one or both partners, in an attempt to control the other, use abusive acts to make that person do what he or she wants. This may involve physical violence, but teen relationships can be abusive without any physical abuse. Teen dating violence can also be verbal, emotional, sexual or a combination of these.

Signs of abuse in a teen relationship may include:

- Name calling; extreme jealousy; threatening to hurt the partner, family or him or herself
- Shoving, punching, slapping, pinching, hitting, kicking, hair pulling and/or strangling
- Unwanted touching and kissing
- Forced sex or sexual acts

Teen dating violence can be prevented when teens, families, organizations and communities work together to implement effective prevention strategies. The **TDH Rape Prevention Education Program** offers training and support for community agencies, schools and sports teams to implement evidence-based prevention programs. These include Coaching Boys into Men, Safe Dates, Athletes as Leaders, Safe Bar and Bystander intervention strategies. Learn more at www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/fhw/vipp/rape-prevention-education.html.

"There are numerous programs, services and resources available across the state to educate individuals, communities and organizations with skills to build and support healthy teen relationships," said TDH Rape Prevention Education Director Kristyn Long. "Together, when we teach skills for healthy relationships we can create a healthy and safe future for all youth in Tennessee."

Teens' experiences in their relationships have great influence on their emotional development. Healthy relationship behaviors can have positive effects on teens' emotional development; unhealthy relationships can have severe consequences on a developing teen.

Teens that experience dating violence are more likely to:

- Experience depression and anxiety
- Engage in unhealthy behaviors such as using tobacco, drugs and/or alcohol

- Exhibit antisocial behaviors
- Think about suicide
- Have increased risk of victimization during college

Teen dating violence affects millions of American teens each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Youth Risk Behavior Survey found nearly one in nine female teens and one in 13 male teens reported having experienced physical dating violence in the last year. These experiences are not limited to adolescence: more than half of men and women who report ever having experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse or stalking by a dating partner had their first incident of violence between ages 11 and 24.

Find resources for youth and teens to help prevent dating violence at www.protectrespecttn.org/. Parents can find tips and other resources for talking with their children and helping them make healthy choices at www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Expect-Respect-Healthy-Relationships.aspx and <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence>.

To find a sexual assault center in your area please visit www.tncoalition.org/help-in-your-area.

If you need help, call The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or go to www.TheHotline.org.

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee. TDH has facilities in all 95 counties and provides direct services for more than one in five Tennesseans annually as well as indirect services for everyone in the state, including emergency response to health threats, licensure of health professionals, regulation of health care facilities and inspection of food service establishments. Learn more about TDH services and programs at www.tn.gov/health.

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