



SRA Education: Addressing Consent, Dating Violence, and Sexual Assault

Beyond a Simple “Yes” or “No”

Is consent answered with a simple yes or no? Do teens always recognize sexual assault and dating violence in their relationships? In a culture where images, music, and events often portray unbridled sexual expression as a “freedom”, teens need clear guidance in navigating the confusing messages they often receive about sex.

SRA education employs a holistic approach to sex and healthy relationship building while focusing on the well-being of the whole person. Therefore, discussions regarding consent, sexual assault and dating violence are not new topics to SRA programs. Each of these issues seriously impacts an understanding of the components of healthy relationship development and the need for youth to recognize, escape and prevent assault and violence. In addition to practical information, **SRA programs are also careful to guide teens beyond mere consent as the arbiter for sexual activity to a broader understanding of the importance of delaying sex, preferably until marriage, mutual respect, healthy relating, and a focus on future goals.**

Cultural Impact

- 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) shows that 7.4% of high school students report having been forced to have sex¹
- Sexual Minority youth are at greater risk of being forced to have sex.²
- Nearly 12% of high school females reported physical violence from a dating partner in the 12 months before they were surveyed. For high school males, more than 7% reported physical violence and about 5% reported sexual violence from a dating partner.³

Violence is related to certain risk factors. The risk of having unhealthy relationships increases for teens who⁴:

- Believe that dating violence is acceptable
- Are depressed, anxious, or have other symptoms of trauma
- Use drugs or illegal substances
- Engage in early sexual activity and have multiple sexual partners
- Have a friend involved in teen dating violence
- Witness or experience violence in the home

While the #MeToo movement has raised awareness on this disturbing issue, vulnerable young people need the practical skills acquired in SRA education programs to successfully navigate this pervasive problem. Dating violence and sexual assault are not resolved with a simple yes or no. Youth need skills to identify healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and a broader understanding of how sexuality fits into healthy relationship formation.

How Does SRA Teach Healthy Relationship Skills?

- Students are equipped with and practice communication and refusal skills
- Components of healthy relationships are identified and contrasted against unhealthy relationships
- Age of Consent laws are shared noting that for underage minors, “yes” is still “no” by law
- Students are taught that rape is NEVER okay and never the victim’s fault
- Consent and contraception should not be the final “green light” for teen sex
- Students are encouraged to identify a safe and trusted adult to go to for support
- Students are encouraged to find help for friends experiencing unhealthy relationships.
- Universal values of trust, respect, honesty, responsibility, and compassion are defined and shared as important elements of healthy relationships

Expectations and Sexual Risk Avoidance

It is essential to include ALL students and be clear that our SRA message is for them whether they have already experienced sexual activity (by choice or force), regardless of their family structure, history, gender, race, or sexual orientation.

ALL YOUTH DESERVE THE INFORMATION AND SKILLS TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND OPTIMAL SEXUAL HEALTH.

¹ CDC. (2017). Youth Online: High School YRBS (2017)

² Ibid

³ Kann, L., McManus, T., Harris, W. A., et al. (2016). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2015. *MMWR*, 65(6)

⁴ CDC. (June 2018). *Teen Dating Violence*. Violence Prevention.

[cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html)