



My Heart Is Broken...

Yesterday at Fallbrook Church, the community met in sympathy with the extended family members of [a family of eight murdered](#) in Spring August 9th. My heart is broken by the fact that children 13, 11, 10, 9, 7 and 6 years old were caught up in the family violence. [Reports](#) say David Conley, who has a long history of violent relationships, killed each person one at a time with a single shot to the head after handcuffing them.

I want you to know that is why we are working so hard to get our Dating Violence Prevention Program in every high school. I believe giving teens the skills to recognize early red flags that a relationship is headed in an unhealthy direction is lifesaving. Teaching them what to do if they or someone they know finds themselves in a dating violent relationship may be what is needed to head off future horrific tragedies like the one in Spring.

What is Dating Violence?

Dating violence is a pattern of assaultive and controlling behaviors that one person uses in order to gain or maintain power or control in the relationship. It may be done in person or virtually. The abuser intentionally behaves in a way that causes fear, degradation and humiliation to control the other person. Forms of abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, and stalking. Physical is using or threatening to use physically assaultive behaviors including hitting, shoving, grabbing, slapping, beating, throwing things at, kicking, etc. Sexual is unwanted touch or forcing the victim to engage in unwanted sexual activity. Emotional/Psychological includes coercion, threatening to hurt self or others if the partner leaves, social isolation cutting off victims relationships with family and friends, using jealousy to justify behavior. Verbal includes name calling, cursing, put downs, criticism, anger outbursts. Stalking includes driving by, following or showing up at school, home, work, recreational activities when uninvited or asked to leave.

What Are Relationship Red Flags?

Violent partners don't strike on the first date. If they did, you would never go out with them again. The type of dating violence that requires emergency room visits and ends the lives of over 2,000 annually creeps up in the relationship over time.

There are some red flags that are indicators that there might be future danger in the relationship. Some of the red flags include:

- 1) Controlling or criticizing your appearance. Asking or telling you what you should or shouldn't wear, how you should wear your makeup or clothing, whether you should gain or lose weight, making unflattering comments on

social media, etc. about your appearance or to your social group.

2) Isolation or controlling your social environment. Asking or telling you who should be your friend, sit with, hang out with, talk to, etc. Requiring you to unfriend social media contacts and only friend specific people. Not letting you go to family or social activities and not wanting to spend any time with people you think are important or close to you. Extreme jealousy requiring you not to talk to people.

3) Fails to take responsibility for actions. Any adverse outbursts are blamed on you, alcohol, problems, feelings, etc. instead of taking responsibility for them.

4) Controlling your possessions - Telling you what you should or should not possess. Taking your possessions as your own and keeping or using your jewelry, phone, car, music, etc.

5) Threatening violence by humiliating or hurtful names or comments. Harms animals or children. History of abusing or controlling former partner. Slaps, pinches, pushes, hits, holds you down, or blocks you when you try to leave. Threatens to harm themselves or someone else if you try to leave them.

6) Uses words and threats - demands sex or affection. Calls you names until you give in.

7) Extreme mood swings. Loves and puts you on a pedestal one minute and then viciously attacks your character the next.

What Can I Do If I See Red Flags in a Friend's Relationship?

If the controlling behavior is just beginning, it is important to communicate what you are experiencing to the victim and let them know that you are concerned for them. Share the information in this article with them and let them know that you want what is best for them. Phrases like, "no-one deserves to go through that" are ways to tell your friend of your support.

If the violence is happening, the victim may be afraid that communication about the incidents will cause more pain and harm. So only connect with them in a way that the violent partner does not know. Be careful to let the victim know that you believe them and support them. If you are willing, let them know you are willing to help them get away from that partner. If you are a minor, helping another minor, always involve a trusted adult (parent, counselor, school official, law).

Leaving the relationship is the most dangerous period of time. If the victim has decided to leave the relationship, make sure that they know that they cannot ever be alone with that person again, even for a few minutes. Always take a supportive third party if they may accidentally be in proximity to the violent partner. If leaving requires housing, connect with the domestic violence hotline at 713-528-212 if possible to help plan a safe exit.

If You Are in a Dangerous Relationship

Leaving a dangerous relationship has to be one of the bravest acts you will ever do. How you are being treated is not your fault... your partner is responsible for all of his behaviors. If you are caught between staying in a relationship where you experience harm and leaving under threat of harm to yourself or someone important to you, it is a very dangerous situation. If you leave, never go back, even to pick up a belonging or pet. When you leave it is the most dangerous time in the relationship. Contact the Dating Violence Hotline at 713-528-2121 for specific advice for your

situation. They will advise about whether housing, law enforcement, etc. will be needed in your situation to keep you and your family safe.

How Can I Help Prevent Dating Violence?

In 2007, Shield Bearer was asked to respond to a local high school experiencing a high number of dating violence incidents. Since then, our Dating Violence Prevention Program has been delivered to over 20,000 students in high schools, churches and community centers. The limiting factor has always been funding.

Over half (56%) of high school students are or know someone who is a victim of dating violence. One in three teens will experience dating violence by the time they reach the age of 18 years old.

On April 25, 2012, [Lindsay Laneigh Ferrill](#)'s life was taken in a horrific dating violence incident. Her mother, Shari Nightingale, and Lindsay's family and friends have met for years in an effort to honor Lindsay's life by helping others. Thanks to a recent partnership, Lindsay's Light Fund was developed as a way to better prevent dating violence in schools. Now [Lindsay's story](#) is an important part of the Shield Bearer Dating Violence Prevention curriculum and with your help we are spreading this crucial prevention program to a larger number of high school students. Through community donations honoring Lindsay's life we are helping young people today learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. They are being equipped with "red flags" to watch out for and with what to do in case they see them in their relationships.

My broken heart is propelling me to do more about this issue right now. Please pray with me about how we can put an end to dating violence in Houston and beyond. And please keep the Jackson - Conley families in your prayers.

Sincerely,

Roy Wooten
Executive Director

P.S. - If you want to know more about hosting a Dating Violence Prevention Program at your church or high school, contact Prevention@ShieldBearer.org.

Northwest Houston
(Mailing Address)
12345 Jones Rd, STE 285
Houston, Texas 77070
(281) 894-7222

Tomball
455 School St, Suite 30
Tomball, TX 77375
(281) 894-7222

Waller County
646 12th Street
Hempstead, TX 77445
(281) 894-7222

West Houston – Cy Fair
17703 W Little York Rd.
Houston, TX 77084
(281) 894-7222