

# BEST FRIENDS FOUNDATION

## VIOLENCE AND ABUSE PROTOCOL

### **Best Friends Foundation Mission Statement**

The Best Friends Foundation strives to provide a nationwide network of programs that is dedicated to the physical and emotional well-being of adolescents. It provides scientifically researched and developmentally sound curriculum designed for high school students. The Foundation promotes self-respect through self-control and provides participants the skills, guidance and support needed to avoid risk behavior that is destructive to relationships. In the spirit of true friendship, the Best Friends Foundation provides positive peer groups for adolescents and creates an environment that raises aspirations and promotes achievement.

### **Purpose of the Protocol**

The dating violence protocol was developed to ensure that the Best Friends Foundation will address dating violence in a comprehensive and appropriate manner. In 2005, the Teen Health “Am I in a Healthy Relationship” survey reports, 20% of American girls reported having been hit, slapped, or forced into sexual activity by their partners. Young men also experience violence, but they are much less likely to report. And 40% of all teens said they know someone at school who experienced dating violence.

### **Definition of Dating Violence**

Dating violence is any intentional sexual, physical or psychological attack on one partner by the other in a dating relationship.

### **Identifying and Responding to Dating Violence Issues**

We ask that all Best Friends Foundation replication sites coordinators and instructors be alert for the following signs that a teen may be involved in a relationship that is or has the potential to become abusive. When these changes happen suddenly, or without explanation, there may be cause for concern.

- Does the individual have unexplained bruises, scratches or injuries?
- Do you see signs that the individual is afraid of his/her boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Does the boyfriend or girlfriend lash out, or insult the individual?
- Has the individual's appearance or behavior suddenly changed?
- Has the individual stopped spending time with friends and family?
- Has the individual recently started using alcohol or drugs?
- Have you seen the boyfriend or girlfriend become abusive towards other people or things?
- Does the individual seem to have lost interest or to be giving up things that were once important? Has he/she lost interest in school or other activities?
- Does the boyfriend or girlfriend seem to try to control the individual's behavior, making all the decisions, checking up on his/her behavior, demanding to know who the individual has been with, and acting jealous and possessive?
- Does the individual apologize for the boyfriend or girlfriend's behavior to you and others? Has the individual casually mentioned the boyfriend or girlfriend's temper or violent behavior, but then laughed it off as a joke?
- Have you seen sudden changes in the individual's mood or personality? Is the individual becoming anxious or depressed, acting out, or being secretive? Is the individual avoiding eye contact, having “crying jags” or getting “hysterical?”

## Protocol

1. The Diamond Girl / Best Men Leadership School Coordinator is informed by or suspects that a student has experienced abuse or violence in the home or dating relationship from a boyfriend or a girlfriend.
2. Ask the student about his/her relationship.
  - a. Be specific about why you are concerned. (i.e. "I saw a boy push you hard. Is he your boyfriend? Why did he do that?")
  - b. If the student does not want to discuss this, encourage him / her to talk to a trusted adult (i.e. parent, school guidance counselor, Diamond Girl Leadership Coordinator / Mentor, or Best Men Leadership Coordinator / Mentor).
  - c. Give the student the National Domestic Violence Hotline number – **1-800-799-SAFE**.
  - d. If the student does want to talk, do not criticize or attack the abuser. Ask, "What can I do to help?"
  - e. The school coordinator must report the conversation to the school guidance counselor immediately. (Refer to step 3)
3. The Diamond Girl / Best Men School Coordinator immediately reports abuse and violence to the school guidance counselor and the school principal as it is their legal obligation as defined by the DC Law 2-22 (Child Abuse Act). The law states the following: School employees are directed not to try to resolve or investigate a suspected case of student abuse, violence, or neglect. Rather, an employee's legal obligation is to orally report such knowledge or suspicion to either the Metropolitan Police Department ("MPD") Youth Division, **202-576-6763**; MPD non emergency, **202-727-1010**; or, if a crime is in progress, 911, or the Child Protective Services Division of the Department of Human Services ("CPSD") **202-727-0995**. A written report is required if requested from MPD or CPSD, or if the abuse involves drug related activity.

[The law provided that any employee who willfully fails to make a report when he or she suspects student abuse, violence or neglect shall be fined or imprisoned for not more than 30 days, or both.]

**Note:** Best Friends Foundation replication sites follow the abuse and violence protocol as determined and adopted by their respective school systems.

# STOP THE SILENCE – PREVENT THE VIOLENCE