

## **Teen Dating Violence**

The Mansfield Public Schools is committed to providing a learning environment in which dating violence is not tolerated. Consistent with this philosophy, the Mansfield Public Schools is committed to promoting an environment free from dating violence. Accordingly, the Mansfield Public Schools seeks to increase awareness of teen dating violence and help in responding to the needs of victims and children who are witnesses to such violence.

Teen dating violence occurring in any setting is unlawful, and teen dating violence occurring in any school setting will not be tolerated. Further, retaliation against an individual who has complained about teen dating violence or cooperated in an investigation of teen dating violence will not be tolerated. The Mansfield Public Schools will respond promptly to complaints and reports of teen dating violence or retaliation and corrective action will be taken where necessary, including disciplinary action where appropriate.

This policy applies to the extent that the alleged conduct does not fall within the jurisdiction of the District's Title IX policies. If the alleged conduct is encompassed within the District's Title IX policies and procedures, those policies and procedures would control.

### **I. Defining the Issue of Teen Dating Violence**

***Domestic Violence/ Interpersonal Violence:*** Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behavior in which one partner attempts to control another through threats or actual use of tactics, which may include any or all of the following: physical, sexual, verbal, financial, psychological abuse and/or through the use of technology (i.e. cyberbullying).

Domestic Violence affects every community across the country, regardless of ethnic group, culture, or background. People of all ages, sex, income levels, faiths, sexual orientation, gender identity, and education levels experience domestic violence.

***Teen Dating Violence:*** Dating violence (or relationship abuse) is a pattern of over-controlling behavior that someone uses against their dating partner. Dating violence can take many forms, including mental/emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or through the use of technology (i.e., cyberbullying). Someone may experience dating violence even if there is no physical abuse. It can occur in both casual dating situations and serious, long-term relationships.

***Child Witness/Exposure to Domestic Violence:*** Witnessing violence can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth, and development. Exposure can include seeing or hearing the abuse, discovering the effects of abuse (their parent's injuries or broken furniture, etc.) and/or being injured/hurt defending a parent against the abusive behavior.

***Family Violence:*** Family violence is a broader definition, including child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent acts between family members.

***Victim/Survivor/Battered:*** interchangeable terms to refer to the person who has been hurt, abused or threatened with harm, whether or not there has been actual physical abuse.

***Abuser/Perpetrator/Batterer:*** interchangeable terms to refer to the person inflicting the abuse and causing harm, whether or not there has been actual physical abuse.

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Additionally, such conduct may also constitute harassment, a form of discrimination that is prohibited by federal and state law; and/or such conduct may constitute bullying, including without limitation, cyberbullying, which is prohibited by state law. The Mansfield Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment, and the Mansfield Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy also prohibit such conduct.

### **II. Recognizing Warning Signs:**

Signs of Abusive Behavior or Victimization Include:

- Low self-esteem
- Views violence as a means of problem solving
- Belief that assault is normal
- Difficulty in establishing positive relationships
- Lack of empathy toward others
- Difficulty with social interactions
- Need for instant gratification
- Low impulse control
- Angry outbursts
- Difficulty with dating relationships
- Very degrading toward females
- Victim stance
- Difficulty with authority figures
- Inappropriate physical contact
- Inability to set goals for the future
- Has witnessed domestic violence toward their mother
- Difficulty with accepting responsibility for own actions
- Hopelessness
- Depression
- Poor decision making/problem solving skills
- Sexual harassing behavior
- Difficulty with following directions
- Little or no investment in learning life skills
- Fear of failure/anxiety

### **III. Procedure for Reporting Teen Dating Violence**

#### **Responsibility of Students**

A student, who believes that they have been a victim of teen dating violence, believes that they are in danger of teen dating violence, or has a restraining order against an individual, may report the matter to any of the following individuals: (1) principal, (2) assistant principal, (3) guidance/counselor, (4) teacher, or (5) school nurse.

Students who observe an act of teen dating abuse, or who have reasonable grounds to believe that these behaviors are taking place, should report incidents to school faculty and/or staff. The targeted student will, however, not be subject to discipline for failing to report teen dating abuse.

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The staff member who receives the report must notify the principal or his designee verbally or in writing no later than the end of the student's school day.

### **Responsibility of School Staff**

School staff will take all reasonable measures to prevent teen dating abuse.

Any employee that witness, hear of, or have reasonable grounds to believe that these behaviors are taking place, is obligated to report such behaviors to the principal or their designee. Additionally, any employee who observes an incident of teen dating violence on school property or at a school-related event on or off school property must immediately notify the principal or their designee.

This report should be made verbally or in writing as soon as possible but no later than the end of the student's school day. All staff members are required to report all acts or incidents of dating violence.

These could include:

- Witnessed or reliable information concerning acts or incidents that are characterized by physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.
- Digital or electronic acts or incidents of dating violence.
- Patterns of behavior that are threatening or controlling.

When a report of teen dating violence is received, whether it occurred off school property or has occurred on school property, on the way to or from school or at a school-related event, or a violation of a restraining order on school property, on the way to or from school or at a school-related event is received, the Mansfield Public Schools will act promptly to notify the appropriate authorities of the alleged incident. Reporting of any such incident will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances. Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of dating violence will be subject to disciplinary action.

It is important to take third party information seriously where teen dating violence is concerned. It is recommended that an appropriately trained member of the school staff approach the student to discuss what has been heard and potential concerns. If abuse is acknowledged, a "safety plan" should be worked on, in addition to recommending and sharing referrals for counseling, support groups, and police/court assistance.

Additionally, school staff must remember to comply with all statutory reporting obligations for suspected abuse and neglect (51A reporting). Filing of 51A complaints should be done by following the Mansfield Public Schools Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Guidelines, including notifying the principal of the suspected abuse and neglect. Furthermore, school staff may need to report all crimes to the police. Staff should notify the principal, who will notify the Superintendent and the School Resource Officer. The SRO will coordinate notification to the police. Reporting of any such incident will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

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### **IV. Ensuring Confidentiality**

Under state law, any information about a student's status as a target or perpetrator of dating abuse or as the petitioner or respondent of an order of protection and other related information that is either generated by or provided to school officials, regardless of its form, is part of the individual's student record (*see* Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00). The information is confidential and must be kept private and secure, and may not be disclosed to third parties without the written consent of the parent or eligible student, except in limited circumstances. An "eligible student" is a student who is 14 years of age or older or who has entered the 9th grade, unless the school committee has extended rights to younger students or those who have not yet entered 9th grade (603 CMR § 23.02). Once the student reaches the age of 18, the student or the parent may consent to the disclosure of information from the student's record to third parties unless the student has limited the parent's right in that regard. (Although a student 18 years of age or older has authority to limit the parent's right to consent to disclosure of their student records, the student cannot limit the parent's right to review them.)

Authorized school personnel may have access to student records of students to whom they are providing services when access is necessary to perform their official duties (603 CMR §23.07(3)). In these circumstances, written consent of the eligible student or parent is not required. For example, if the student or student's parent has provided the school a copy of a court order of protection issued on behalf of one student against another student in the same school, they may need to inform the assistant, the school nurse, teachers, and the student's guidance counselor for safety planning and other related purposes.

A school may disclose information to parties in connection with a health or safety emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of the student or other individuals. 603 CMR 23.07

### **Parental Notification and Disclosure**

If school personnel determine that a student is currently in danger or there is potential for danger related to dating abuse, a parent/guardian must be notified. School counselors and administrators will work together with students experiencing dating abuse to find ways of involving parents/guardians in increasing their child's safety. If students choose to notify their parents that they are experiencing abuse, school personnel will assist the student in developing a plan for such disclosure, including meeting with students and parents as needed. The student may disclose the name of the alleged offending student to their parent, but the school may not be able to disclose the name depending on the circumstances and safety plan put into place.

### **Procedures When the School Is Provided With a Copy of a Restraining Order**

When a student has a restraining order against an individual and provides a copy of the order to the school, the school should hold a meeting with the student and their parents/guardians to review the restraining order and its implications. A "safety plan" should be worked out to address the victim's needs and concerns, including staff to which the student may report if any concerns arise or any violation of the restraining order occurs while the student is on school property or at a school-related event. If the restraining order is against another member of the school

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community, a separate meeting should be held with that individual to review the restraining order and its implications, expectations, and the consequences for violation of the order. The development of the “safety plan” will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

### **V. Investigations and Disciplinary Action**

The Assistant Principal or designee investigates promptly all reports of teen dating violence and, in doing so, considers all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved. Investigations will be handled in accordance with state guidelines.

During the investigation, the Assistant Principal or designee, among other things, interviews students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Assistant Principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) reminds the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and results in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the Assistant Principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the Assistant Principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. To the extent practicable, and given their obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Assistant Principal or designee maintains confidentiality during the investigative process. The Assistant Principal or designee maintains a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of teen dating violence are consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the Assistant Principal or designee consults with legal counsel about the investigation. The procedures for investigating reports of teen dating violence align with the disciplinary guidelines and procedures as outlined in the student handbooks.

The Mansfield Public Schools is committed to creating a campus environment that promotes timely and fair adjudication of teen dating violence cases. If it is determined that inappropriate conduct has been committed, the Mansfield Public Schools will take such action as it deems appropriate under the circumstances and that is consistent with the school’s student code of conduct. Such action may range from counseling and/or discipline up to and including suspension or expulsion from school.

### **VI. Prevention: Training & Education**

#### **Staff Training**

The Mansfield Public Schools will provide annual training on the district’s teen dating abuse policy and on the topic of teen dating abuse to all administrators, teachers, nurses, and mental

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health staff at the middle and high school levels. Upon the recommendation of the superintendent, other staff may be included or may attend the training on a volunteer basis; thereafter, this training will be provided yearly to all newly hired staff deemed appropriate to receive the training by the school's principal.

### **Student Education**

Ongoing age-appropriate education on healthy relationships will be provided to all students in grades K-10, with specific instruction relating to teen dating abuse taught yearly in grades 7 –10 through the health curriculum. This curriculum will include, but not be limited to, defining teen dating violence, recognizing warning signs of abuse, and characteristics of healthy relationships. Additionally, students will be provided with the school district's teen dating abuse policy in the student handbook.

### **Parent Education**

The District will inform parents of the policy against teen dating abuse and provide them with any additional relevant information and local prevention resources through the Mansfield Public Schools website. The Committee encourages the use of parent workshops at the secondary level on the topic of preventing teen dating abuse.

## **VII. Other Remedies**

In addition to reporting a teen dating violence incident that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school, or at a school-related event in accordance with the procedures above, a student who believes that they have been the victim of teen dating violence on school property, on the way to or from school, or at a school-related event may also file a complaint of harassment and/or bullying in accordance with the procedures set forth in either the Mansfield Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment and/or the Mansfield Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy. Furthermore, a student who believes that they have been the victim of teen dating violence that has occurred off school grounds and/or during non-school hours may report the alleged incident to the police.

Students who believe that they are in danger may also seek a restraining order to protect a person from physical pain or injury or the threat of pain or injury by filing an application for a restraining order at the local courthouse.

## **VIII. Administrative Plan and Guidelines**

The Superintendent will oversee the development of administrative plans consistent with this policy, in consultation with the District's Bullying Prevention Committee.

The Superintendent or designee will review and update the Teen Dating Violence Policy and Administrative Plan by December 31 each year.

## **IX. Notice**

Notice of this policy will appear in all district publications that discuss comprehensive rules, procedures, and student conduct, including but not limited to student handbooks and the Mansfield Public Schools website.

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REVISED: August 30, 2022  
January 26, 2021  
December 19, 2017

ADOPTED: December 15, 2015

CROSS REFS: ACAB, Sexual Harassment  
JBA, Student-to-Student Harassment  
JICFA, Prohibition of Hazing  
JICFB, Bullying Prevention and Intervention

REFERENCES: *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Updated Guidance for Schools and Districts on Addressing Teen Dating Violence* (2013)  
*Melrose Teen Dating Abuse Policy and Implementation Guide: A Comprehensive Guide to Addressing Teen Dating Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Stalking* (2015)  
*A Guide to Preventing Bullying, Teen Dating Violence, and Sexual Violence in Rhode Island Schools*, 2012 as amended

LEGAL REFS: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972<sup>[17]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>  
*The Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Reform Law*, Chapter 256 of the Acts of 2010 as amended  
*An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools*, Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010  
MGL Chapter 71, Section 1  
MGL Chapter 71, Section 2C