



The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the first time since the survey has been widely administered, the 2017 YRBS optional question list included two questions pertaining to homelessness. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 17 states¹, comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

Many studies, including SchoolHouse Connection’s YRBS research, have found that youth experiencing homelessness are disproportionately likely be raped and sexually assaulted. For high school students experiencing homelessness, this heightened risk transfers into intimate partner relationships.

High school students experiencing homelessness were 5.03 times more likely to be victims of sexual dating violence compared to their stably housed peers.



The risk rose even higher for physical dating violence, with high school students experiencing homelessness 5.88 times more likely to be victims of physical dating violence compared to their stably housed peers. **One in four high school students experiencing homelessness reported being a victim of physical dating violence.**



Youth who are victims of physical or sexual dating violence are more likely to:

- Experience symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol
- Exhibit antisocial behaviors, like lying, theft, bullying or hitting
- Think about suicideⁱⁱ

Schools can help prevent dating violence among all students.

Action Steps for Schools

1. Incorporate education about dating violence and safety into existing curricula. Infuse the school and district culture with messaging about healthy relationships. As one young person who experienced homelessness stated:

“Educate [students about] what physical and sexual dating violence looks like so they can identify whether they are in a violent relationship. Explain prevention methods, how to deescalate a physically and sexually violent person, [and] how to leave such a relationship without promoting any more violence. When I was experiencing sexual violence in a relationship, I did not realize right away that it was abuse even though I knew I was being coerced.”

2. Create targeted resources for female students, male students, and LGBTQ and non-binary youth. Ensure resources and curricula are culturally competent, recognizing that sexual minority groups and some racial and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected.

3. Develop comprehensive school policies addressing healthy relationships and abuse intervention and response. The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence offers [sample policies](#).
4. Implement programs like [Expect Respect](#) or the [Relationship Abuse Prevention Program](#) in your school.
5. Create safe spaces in schools for students to discuss dating violence. Ensure that McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons, school counselors, teachers, nurses, and other staff have time to build trust and have conversations with students. Such investments in students' emotional and physical health must be valued and prioritized.
6. Educate teachers and staff about [warning signs of dating violence](#) and [what to do](#) if they suspect a student is in an unhealthy relationship. In the case that a student discloses concerns about dating violence, advise all staff members to withhold judgement; explain the limits of their confidentiality; empower the student to make their own decisions by providing resources; and never to approach the suspected abuser about the situation, even if they have a relationship with that person.
7. Partner with community-based health organizations to make helpful resources such as healthcare, counseling, or legal aid accessible to all students.

Resources

[Break the Cycle](#).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Preventing Teen Dating Violence](#).

Futures Without Violence, [National Domestic, Sexual, and Dating Violence Resources and Referrals](#)

Futures Without Violence, [That's Not Cool](#)

[Love is Respect](#) (866-331-8452; Text loveis to 22522).

National Domestic Violence Hotline, [What is Domestic Violence?](#)

Thorne Harbour Health, [Power and Control Wheel](#)

VetoViolence, [Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention](#)

Youth.gov, [Victim & Survivor Resources](#)

ⁱ AK, AR, CA, CO, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, ME, MT, NH, NC, PA, VA, WI.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). [Preventing Teen Dating Violence](#).