

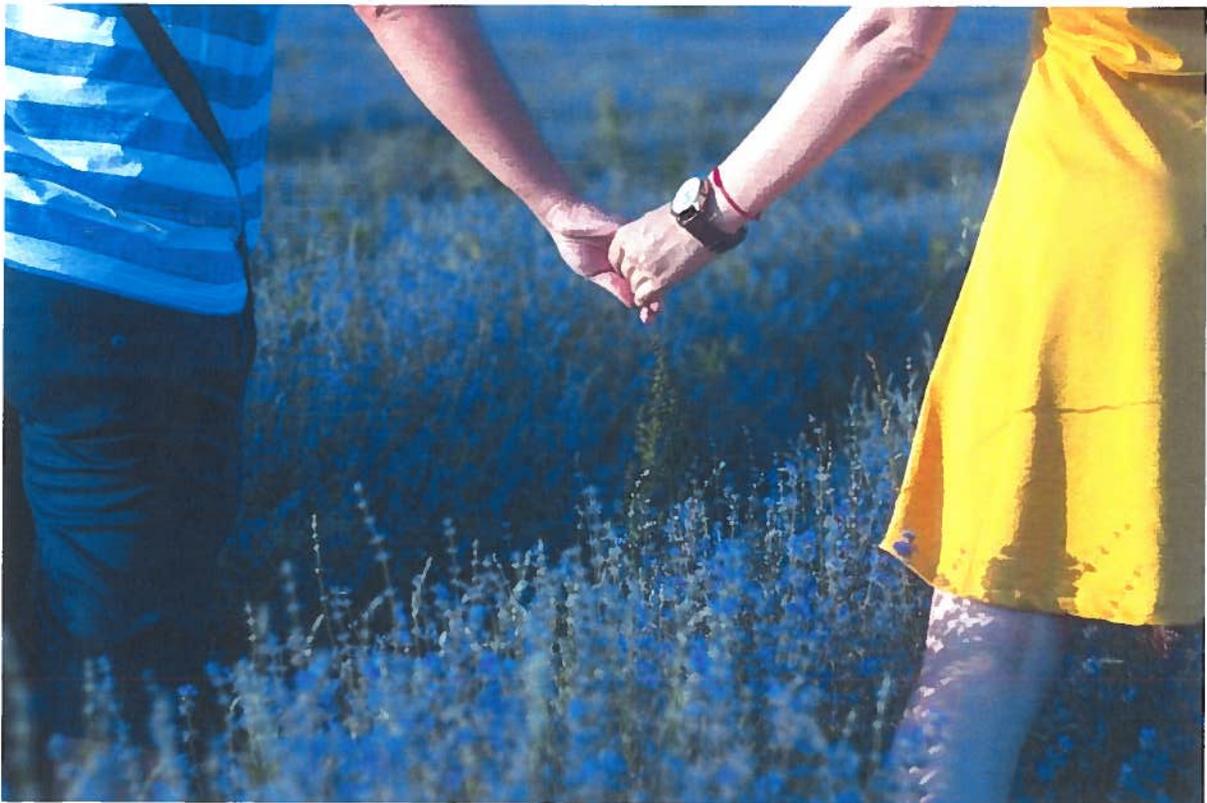
Alaska Dispatch News

Opinions

Violence of any kind has no place on a date

✍ Author: Donna Walker | Opinion ⓘ Updated: 1 day ago 📅 Published 1 day ago

Too many of Alaska's youths have experienced sexual dating and physical dating violence. According to the Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in 2017 alone, 1,000 students in Alaska's traditional high school programs reported sexual dating violence one or more times during the past year, and nearly 1,300 reported physical dating violence one or more times during the past year. These numbers show that unhealthy dating relationships among Alaska's youths start early in life and include serious forms of violence that – without intervention – can escalate in severity, and even lead to the loss of life.



(Pixabay)

Each February, we recognize Teen Dating Violence Awareness and throughout the month, the office of the governor invites all Alaskans to learn more about the issue and what they can do to prevent teen dating violence.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing teen dating violence. As parents, adults and community leaders, we play a key role in helping teens understand what a healthy relationship looks like. We do this by treating youths and

adults with respect and by modeling fairness, honesty and equality in our personal and professional relationships.

[Safe, sound Alaska calls for no tolerance of domestic violence, sexual abuse]

As parents, we must talk to our children about healthy relationships early and often. We know that many teenagers start to have their first serious romantic relationships during high school and early college. Parent-child conversations help prevent teen dating violence and help our children identify us as a "safe person" for these important talks.

Several resources exist to help get the conversation started, including "Talk Now Talk Often," a statewide effort to increase conversations with teens around healthy relationships. Download conversation cards at tntoak.org to help prepare your teen for the ups and downs of dating relationships.

Learn the warning signs of teen dating violence so you can tell the difference between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. Does your teen apologize for their partner's behavior? Is one person in the relationship controlling the other? Has your teen lost interest in their favorite activity or become isolated from you or their friends and family? Do you notice unexplained injuries?

When talking with your teen about their relationship, let them know you love them and you want them to be safe. Focus on the concerning behavior instead of blaming the individual. Remain open to talking about the relationship even when your teen chooses to remain in a relationship you would like them to leave.

If you believe your teen may be in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, access available resources through loveisrespect.org, through the Stand Up Speak Up Alaska website at standupspeakupalaska.org or through your local victim service program. For a complete list of programs and contact information, you can visit the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault website at on.adn.com/2EIY5Cd.

In July 2015, Gov. Bill Walker signed the Alaska Safe Children's Act into law. Since then, educators and experts in childhood health from around the state have provided age-appropriate, evidence-based curricula for school districts to adopt. In grades seven through 12, training for teachers and education for students relating to dating violence and abuse is underway.

Last November, I had the honor of speaking to youths from over 20 Alaska communities at the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) Lead On Conference. Lead On, a youth-based movement, designed successful and sustainable projects that benefit local communities, and continue ANDVSA's mission to prevent domestic and sexual violence in Alaska.

[For parents behind 'Bree's Law,' a blunt education in Alaska politics]

Alaska's youths are also taking the lead to prevent sexual dating and physical dating violence. This past year alone, youths in over 13 communities engaged in youth-led, adult-supported initiatives to prevent teen dating violence.

Juneau teens hosted their third annual "Be the Change" conference on racial and gender equity, drugs and alcohol, and healthy relationships. Nome teens hosted several community events that use local culture and language to promote healthy relationships and discuss the effects of alcohol. Cordova youths created an app that teaches relationship basics and provides a supportive online community that students can access, locally, to get help. Atmautluak youths hosted community gatherings that emphasized education on healthy relationships and included guest speakers and elders and the list goes on as our youths statewide work to promote healthy relationships and end violence.

As parents, caring adults, educators and community leaders, let us use the many resources available to step up our efforts to engage, educate and empower our youth to make safe decisions and build violence-free lives and communities. Together, we can increase awareness, empower our youths, change attitudes and stop the violence.

Donna Walker is Alaska's first lady, the honorary chair of the Alaska Children's Trust, a former caseworker for the Office of Children's Services, an attorney, mother and grandmother.

The views expressed here are the writer's and are not necessarily endorsed by the Anchorage Daily News, which welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, email commentary@adn.com. Send submissions shorter than 200 words to letters@adn.com or [click here](#) to submit via any web browser.

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Donna Walker is a mother, grandmother, attorney and business woman. She and independent candidate for governor, Bill Walker, celebrate their 37th wedding anniversary this month.

Comments

