

Youth Protection Meeting Guide

Personal Safety Awareness

Introduction

We are pleased to present these materials, developed to address personal safety concerns of our nation's teenagers. The intended audience is young men and women, 14 through 20 years of age. This age group represents the transition period between childhood and adulthood, during which youth learn how to fulfill their adult roles. The learning process often creates perilous situations; to avoid harm, teens need to recognize and react to them appropriately.

This video contains four dramatizations of incidents typical of those encountered by many teenagers. The dramatizations are intended to serve as catalysts for discussion by teen audiences.

When planning to present this video, you should allow sufficient time for each topic. Each topic is composed of three parts: (1) viewing the vignette, (2) engaging the group in a discussion of the issues presented in the vignette, and (3) closing the discussion with a video summary of the more important points. Venture leaders who have used the video recommend separate sessions for each topic to permit more comprehensive coverage of each issue.

The four topics and their run times are

- ✎ Suicide Prevention (9:35)
- ✎ Internet Safety (14:00)
- ✎ Sexual Harassment (5:06)
- ✎ Date Rape (8:02)

We recommend that the discussion facilitator become familiar with the vignettes by viewing each of them, reviewing the material in the relevant section of this meeting guide, and then viewing the videotaped summary. Then, to present each vignette, the facilitator should

- ✎ Introduce the topic.
- ✎ Show the appropriate video.
- ✎ Lead the group's discussion.
- ✎ Show the video summary.

Discussion guides for each vignette follow.

Vignette 1: Suicide Prevention

Introduction

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for America's teenagers. (Accidents and homicide are the first two.) Suicide happens when teens get to a point that the pain of living becomes greater

than their fear of death. Unfortunately, many teens do not have the experience to realize that most of life's problems are transitory and with the passage of time will get better.

In this video, Maria is experiencing a multitude of problems that seem to pile on top of each other until she reaches the point of considering suicide. One of her friends—Rick—recognizes signs that Maria is experiencing difficulties and may be considering hurting herself. Let's see how these young people respond to the situation.

Pause One—Discussion Questions:

- What were some of the signs that Maria exhibited which led Rick to suspect that Maria was considering harming herself?

(Depression, using drugs, giving away items of importance to her, ambivalence about attending the debate team meeting the next day.)

- Recognizing that people respond to life's challenges in different ways, what are other signals that may indicate suicidal thoughts?

(Statements of the individual, preoccupation with death or dying, changes in behavior, changes in eating habits, hopelessness—things seem so bad that they will never get better.)

- It's much easier for people who are not experiencing Maria's problems to identify better ways to address her problems than suicide. Placing yourself in Maria's shoes, how might you have addressed these problems without resorting to suicide?

(Maria may have benefited from an advocate—someone who could help her to sort out problems, set priorities, and address each problem. Due to her parents' conflict, she probably felt unable to access her usual support system. She needed someone older with whom to share her problems and advise her—another adult relative, spiritual leader, counselor, or parent of a close friend.)

In the next part of the video, we see Rick acting on his concerns by calling the local suicide prevention lifeline. The information he receives from the lifeline operator is very important. Let's watch the video.

Continue the video.

Pause Two—Discussion Questions:

- What was the most important information given to Rick by the operator?

(Rick should not assume any responsibility if Maria decided to commit suicide. The

decision is Maria's; Rick did what he could to get her the help she needed.)

- ✎ If you were in Rick's position and trying to get help for a friend, where might you go in your community to get the help?

(The answer to this question will depend on the resources that are available in your community. **NOTE:** As the discussion facilitator, you may need to do some research to identify community services available to help prevent teen suicide.)

- ✎ How would you find out more information about teen suicide?

(The Internet has a wealth of information that can be accessed by using any of the search engines. Look for Web sites that are government-sponsored or operated by a professional organization. Beware of information that may not be reliable.)

Continue the video and watch the "Reality Check" segment. There is also an optional "Expert Discussion on Suicide Prevention" segment.

Vignette 2: Internet Safety

Introduction

Technology is changing very rapidly. Because of those changes, new challenges are presented to the safety and well-being of Internet users. In this vignette, a group of teens decide to maintain a blog on the Internet. Through their blog, they discover some unfortunate consequences of unwise postings on their blog.

Watch the video.

Pause One—Discussion Questions:

- ✎ There is a balance between having fun on the Internet and creating risks. What are the risks that this group created with their blog?

(Personal identification was compromised by posting pictures, e-mail addresses, real names, and the school name; this enabled individuals who may be dangerous to use the information to locate their homes and school.)

- ✎ How can you have fun with the Internet and avoid these risks?

(Keep personal information to a minimum. Allow only people you know to have access to your Web pages. Review messages from others before allowing them to be posted on your blog. Block anyone who seems threatening.)

In the next segment, the bloggers' decisions create a different kind of problem, while the girls continue to cope with Keith.

Watch the video.

Pause Two—Discussion Questions:

- ✎ Jeremy's decision to post an embarrassing picture of Scott on their blog may seem mild compared to a lot of the material posted on social networking Web pages. Why is it becoming more common for universities and employers to google applicants as part of their screening processes?

(Information on social networking Web sites can often reveal the maturity of applicants. It may give insight into the quality of judgment they use when making decisions. In Jeremy's case, he seems to have been denied admission to the college he wanted to attend because of adverse information in his school record. When creating personal Web sites, it's a good idea to think about how the information, language, and pictures would look to a potential employer or college admission's officer.)

- ✎ Why should the school be concerned about a blog that is maintained during the students' free time?

(In this case, the broken policy had more to do with the invasion of privacy in the school's locker room than with the blog posting. Schools are under a lot of pressure to cope with emerging technologies that place students at risk or facilitate dishonesty.)

In the final section of this vignette, we see the results of Jennifer and Corey's correspondence with Keith.

Watch the video.

Pause Three—Discussion Questions:

- ✎ Jennifer's mistakes are self-evident so we don't have to dwell on them. What does she need to do now to stop Keith's harassment?

(Keith may constitute a physical danger to Jennifer. By continuing to contact Jennifer after she asked him to stop, he is demonstrating threatening behavior for which Jennifer needs to seek adult help. It may be embarrassing, but she needs to ask her parents for help or to report Keith to a law-enforcement agency. She can also contact her Internet service provider and report his behavior. Harassment of this kind is often illegal.)

- ✎ What should you do to protect yourself from this kind of harassment?

(Most blogs have privacy features that allow the owner of the blog to control who has access to the blog. These privacy features are used to ensure that sensitive information can be shared only by individuals you know. Remember, people you meet online are people you really do not know—are they really who they say they are?)

Continue the video and watch the "Reality Check" segment. There is also an optional "Expert Discussion on Internet Safety" segment.

Vignette 3: Sexual Harassment

Introduction

Most of us have experienced teasing as just another part of our life experience. The question is, when does teasing cross the line and become harassment? This is an important question, because unlike teasing, harassment can have significant negative effects on the individuals who are subjected to it. They may feel humiliated, degraded, or threatened.

By definition, sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual conduct that either creates a hostile environment or is presented as a demand in exchange for getting something in the workplace or school. It is illegal both in workplaces and in schools.

Sexual harassment may occur between peers, or it may be a misuse of power, such as by an employer to an employee or a stronger individual harassing a weaker one.

No specific behaviors are associated with the term “sexual harassment.” Instead, it encompasses a broad spectrum of behaviors, including the following. (**NOTE:** You might want to list the bold-faced words on the chalkboard or a flip chart.)

Visual—Ogling, staring, posters or pictures, magazines, and fliers

Verbal—Repeated requests for dates, questions about personal life, lewd comments or jokes, and whistling

Written—Love letters, obscene letters, bumper stickers, and cards

Touching—Violating personal space, patting or grabbing, pinching, caressing, and kissing

Power—Using one’s position to request dates, sex, etc.

Threats—Quid pro quo demands (if you sleep with me, I’ll give you that promotion), loss of job, selection process

Force—Rape or physical assault

In the video, several forms of sexual harassment are depicted. Ask the youth who will be viewing the vignette to see how many forms they can identify.

Watch the video.

Discussion Questions:

What was different about this situation than you might have expected?

(The target for the sexual harassment was male. In most depictions of sexual harassment, a female is the target. The role reversal depicted in this vignette may not be typical of most sexual harassment, but it may make males more sensitive to sexual harassment situations.)

Does the fact that the target is male make a difference whether or not it is considered sexual harassment?

(Sexual harassment is not gender specific. The issues of sexual harassment include affirmative answers to the following questions: Is a hostile environment created? Is there a sexually related demand being made in exchange for a reward? In the vignette, it is fairly apparent that the attention Lance received was unwelcome; the owner’s niece, Kimberly, threatened him with fewer hours or even the loss of his job if he was not more responsive to her demands.)

How many forms of sexual harassment behavior did you notice when watching the vignette?

(**Visual**—We definitely saw ogling and staring.

Verbal—We heard repeated requests for dates, questions about personal life, lewd comments or jokes, and whistling.

Written—We didn't see any written forms of sexual harassment.

Touching—There were several touching situations, including violating personal space, patting or grabbing, and caressing.

Power—There were power-related forms of harassment.

Threats—Kimberly threatened to cut back Lance's hours or have him fired.

Force—Rape or physical assault would be unlikely in this vignette.)

Arnie (the restaurant owner) told Lance that as far as the owner was concerned, Lance didn't have a problem. Was his attitude legal?

(Legally, employers must intervene if an employee lodges a complaint that another's behavior creates a hostile environment. The legal issue is this: Was Lance being reasonable when he sought Arnie's help?)

What should you do in a situation in which you were being harassed? Why is it important to act?

(Anyone who believes he or she has been sexually harassed should first make it clear to the offender and/or to a person in authority that such action is unwanted.

If the behavior persists, you should report it to your school counselor or principal [if the harassment occurs at school] or to your employer [if the harassment occurs in your place of employment].

You should not blame yourself for the harassment. This is not something you deserve or ask for. The harasser is the one who deserves blame.

Your actions should be quick. Trying to wait out the problem will allow the harasser to continue and make it more difficult for you to take action.)

Should there be a different standard when men are targeted for sexual harassment than when women are targeted?

The response for this question is the opinion of the respondents. Proponents of one side or the other should defend their views.

Continue the video and watch the "Reality Check" segment. There is also an optional "Expert Discussion on Sexual Harassment" segment.

Vignette 4: Acquaintance Rape

Introduction

A common misconception is that most rape and sexual assaults are perpetrated by individuals who are unknown to their victims. According to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Justice, more than half of the rape victims in the United States were under 18 years of age at the time it occurred. Most were assaulted by someone they knew, such as a family member or a person they dated.

The fact that the perpetrator of a sexual assault is known to the victim does not make the incident less traumatic. Often, victims of this kind of crime are more affected because of the violation of trust that the sexual assault leads to.

Rape is the sexual expression of power. Rapists dominate their victims. In a dating situation, even when both partners seem to agree to sexual activities, once one of the partners resists or says “no,” the use of force or coercion to consummate sexual intercourse is rape regardless of the nature of the relationship or of prior sexual activity. Rape is a crime!

The risk of acquaintance or “date” rape is greater when behavioral boundaries are not clearly established. As you will see in this vignette, expectations can change. What may have initially been fantasized as a desired outcome may not be desirable when it actually happens. Either party should be able to say at any time, “No, I am sorry, this is not what I want to do.” Once one person makes that statement, the other person should not attempt to persuade or force the first person to have sex.

Watch the video.

Discussion Questions:

What were some of the warning signs that this relationship might have an undesirable outcome?

(Both Travis and Amber were focused on the prospects of a sexual encounter. Neither expressed any interest in the other’s personal characteristics beyond good looks and sexiness. Amber violated her parents’ trust in order to go to the party at Travis’ house while his parents were out of town. The use of drugs and alcohol helped lower inhibitions and affected both Travis’ and Amber’s judgment.)

What are the legal ramifications for anyone who commits date rape?

(Any kind of rape is a crime. Anyone who commits date rape may be prosecuted for rape. Perhaps by reporting the rape, a rapist would be held accountable and might not respond the same way in the future. If found guilty, the rapist would have to register as a sex offender and might even go to prison.)

What can victims of date rape do to help decide the best course of action?

(Most communities have rape crisis centers or telephone hotlines. The counselors who staff these programs are trained to help sexual assault victims identify options and decide upon the best course of action. If a victim decides to file a complaint with the police department, many rape crisis centers will assign an advocate to give emotional support while the case is being processed. A rape crisis center would also make a referral to a medical doctor.)

What should the rapist do?

(There is very little information offered for appropriate after-the-fact behavior by a rapist. Individuals in this situation, however, often do not see themselves as rapists; therein lies some of the problem. If it is the first reported offense, the rapist [or the rapist’s attorney] may negotiate participation in a counseling program to increase awareness of the need to respect personal boundaries and to respond appropriately when those boundaries change.

Some might suggest talking to the victim. The choice of whether or not to talk to the rapist is the victim’s. Anything a rapist might say at this point would not change the facts. If, for example, Travis were to initiate contact with Amber, he should not try to manipulate her to avoid his responsibility. A sincere apology could be appropriate, along with an inquiry about what he could do to help her.)

How could incidents similar to this be avoided?

(Do not place yourself in situations where you know that adequate supervision will not be present to help protect you [e.g., don’t go to parties when you know parents are not going to be there].

Remember that alcohol and other drugs compromise your ability to make decisions. When you say “no,” make your message clear. Don’t be embarrassed to yell, make a scene, or run away. Don’t worry about offending your partner; remember, you are being humiliated.

If you are uncomfortable with a date, you can choose to end it. Take your own vehicle or meet at the destination. Carry money for a phone call or fare home. Avoid parties where men greatly outnumber women. Don’t accept rides from new acquaintances.

Trust your instincts—believe your inner feelings when you get uncomfortable about a person or situation. Respond as soon as you feel uncomfortable!)

Continue the video and watch the “Reality Check” segment. There is also an optional “Expert Discussion on Acquaintance Rape” segment.