

Healthy Relationships

Youth awareness & prevention campaign to define healthy relationships

Led by Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, the Governor's Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence — in partnership with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Massachusetts State Legislature — is increasing prevention efforts, with the goal of reducing the number of individuals who experience sexual and domestic violence in their lives. One of the Council's strategies is the launch of RESPECTfully, a public awareness and prevention campaign. RESPECTfully promotes healthy relationships to young people and is the first statewide initiative in almost twenty years.

RESPECTfully Campaign Goals

Created with extensive input at every stage of development from experts and youth from across the state, the RESPECTfully key message is that everyone deserves respect, honesty, and open communication. The campaign aims to:

- Increase awareness about what constitutes a healthy relationship by defining characteristics using examples of acceptable vs. unacceptable behaviors.
- Emphasize that respect is essential for maintaining healthy friendships and romantic relationships.
- Help teens identify the escalating behaviors that lead to unhealthy or unsafe relationships and safely remove themselves from those relationships.

Target Audience

Primary audience: Massachusetts youth between the ages of 12-18

Secondary Audience(s):

- Youth-serving individuals and organization
 - Coaches, mentors, schools, camps, rape crisis and domestic violence organizations
- Parents/caregivers of children aged 12-18

Campaign Development

Extensive formative research was conducted to understand the issues and pressures that young people are facing with regard to friendships and relationships, as well as ensuring that the messaging developed was appropriate and engaging.



The following steps were taken in the development of the campaign:

- Key informant interviews with various stakeholders
- Online survey of youth
- Online survey with Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence advocates
- Youth focus groups across Massachusetts
- Online survey with parents/caregivers of teens aged 12-18
- Statewide Youth Advisory Group

Learning from Massachusetts Youth

When asked about their view of friendships, relationships, and the challenges with each, young people from across the state shared similar themes:

- Healthy friendships are developed with people they can trust, who have their back, and allow them to be themselves.
- While teens are aware of unhealthy behaviors in relationships, they are not always able to recognize those behaviors in their own relationships.
- Healthy romantic relationships are characterized by mutual respect, support, and recognition of personal boundaries. They also involve feeling safe and comfortable.
- Youth needed guidance on what to say to their friends who might be in an unhealthy friendship or relationship.
- Teens want to be in relationships for a variety of social and individual reasons.

Getting the Message Out

Strategies to increase awareness about healthy behaviors in relationships include using animated videos delivered to youth where they are:

- The bulk of the ads will be shown where young people spend much of their time— on social media and online. Short videos will be served to young people on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube, as well as on websites frequented by young people.
- Additional ads will be placed in areas visible to youth around the state such as convenience stores and major public transportation areas.

Call to Action

The videos demonstrate scenarios in which problematic behaviors are addressed and include a call to action to treat everyone “RESPECTfully”. They also include the tagline, “It starts with us.” Chosen by the Statewide Youth Advisory Group, it encourages youth to become part of the change. The message is simple: Everyone deserves to be fully respected, and teens have the power to set a new standard of respectful behavior.

Information and Resources

For more information visit Mass.gov/respectfully.

