

Intimate Partner Violence: Facilitating the Recognition of Yellow Flags as Early Indicators of Red Flags

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to share classroom teaching methods for introducing and teaching the recognition of the progression of intimate partner violence patterns. **Methods:** Students are taken through activities to facilitate the recognition of yellow flags and red flags in intimate partner relationships. Students are assessed for knowledge retention and understanding as well as practical application of the information. **Conclusions:** After completing this lesson, students are able to identify and apply the progression of yellow flags to red flags in interpersonal relationships. The students are able to successfully retain knowledge and demonstrate the practical application of the information.

Key Words: Intimate Partner Violence, Dating Violence, Red Flags, Yellow Flags

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious, preventable public health issue and is defined by the Center for Disease Control (2015) as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner.” This includes the intentional use of fear and humiliation by one partner to gain and maintain control another intimate partner person (US Department of Justice, 2016) and is not limited to heterosexual relationships nor is it limited to a particular gender as the victim. Obvious examples of intimate partners include spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends, dating partners, or sexual partners, but sexual intimacy is not required.

Intimate partner violence is widespread in the college population although much of the literature focuses on the female victim in the heterosexual relationship. Both women and men have been reluctant to report sexual and

physical violence for fear of embarrassment, feeling ashamed, and victim blaming. Even with the reluctance of reporting, it is documented that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have been victims of some form of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime (CDC, 2015; loveisrespect.org, 2016). Specifically women aged 16-24 experience the highest per capita rate of intimate partner violence (US Department of Justice, 2016). According to Loveisrespect.org (2016) “one in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.”

Typically, intimate partner violence is divided into broad categories (US Department of Justice, 2016): physical violence (hitting, punching, beating, biting, etc.), sexual violence (unwanted sexual experiences, not limited to rape), and psychological violence (stalking, intimidation, coercion, emotional, isolation, blaming, economic, and digital or electronic). It is easy for students to identify physical and

sexual violence, but there is confusion for students when identifying psychological violence until it gets to an extreme form.

Students recognize without much difficulty that if they were to get punched in the mouth or are forced to have unwanted sex on the first date that these are clearly violent events. But, that is not how abusive relationships start. There are traditional “red flags” in intimate relationship. These red flags focus on psychological violence. And clearly, students can also identify being called a name is a red flag, but victims are not being called stupid on the first encounter either. There is a progression to psychological abuse and this lesson attempts to have students recognize very early yellow flags in relationships and what these look like before they progress to red flags. Note that all red or yellow flags may not be indicative of an abusive relationship, but they are indicative of a potentially unhealthy relationship and demands further discussion.

TEACHING METHOD

Target Audience

This lesson is designed specifically for high school and college personal health classes. It can also be used in the community and public health setting when there is a need to address intimate partner violence.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this experiential lesson, students will be able to:

1. identify yellow flags that have the potential to become abusive,
2. identify the progression from an unhealthy relationship to an abusive relationship,
3. identify different examples of behaviors for the same red flag, and
4. identify the campus and community support available for intimate partner violence victims.

Materials and Resources

Sets of index cards (8 per set) which have a different red flag on each one. This way, the class can be broken down into groups of 8 for better participation. Each set should have 8 different examples of abuse. For example (these are only suggestions and can be changed depending upon the audience).

1. Stop getting me so angry or I'm going to have to hit you.
2. You are so fat you look disgusting in those jeans.
3. You need to change your clothes before we go out.
4. You have to pay the rent this month since I don't have the money.
5. You are not leaving this house until you agree with me.
6. Who are you eating lunch with today?
7. If you hadn't been talking to Sam, I wouldn't have left you at the party.
8. I don't care that you have tickets for the concert. I have to work on Friday night so you can't go to the without me.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

Overview

This activity requires approximately 50-75 minutes to complete and is divided into two parts. Timing can be lengthened or shortened by adjusting the group discussion. If this lesson does not fit into one session, it is suggested that each part be a separate class. This class would then be followed by a class on effective communication and or a session on dating violence.

This experiential lesson focuses is constructed using the best practices: guided classroom discussions, checking for understanding in a variety of ways, and employs elements of self-reflection.

Note: Before this activity begins, I do announce that I am a mandated reporter at the University for abuse and if students disclose to me publicly or privately that they are the victims of abuse, I must report it to the proper University officials.

Activity One

Before this activity begins, students are divided into groups of about 8 students. Each group of 8 students will be given the same set of statements. Listed are a few examples of statements:

1. You need to change your clothes before we leave.
2. I'm sorry I hit you, but you made me so mad.
3. Who are you texting?

4. My last partner was crazy. I was served with a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA), but my partner just had it out for me and would do anything to make my life miserable.
5. I want to spend every waking minute with you, just you and me.
6. I have to work on Friday night, so I don't want you going to that party without me.
7. Just because you are captain of the soccer team doesn't mean you have to go to practice every day. I am feeling ignored with all that time away.
8. I can help you with math, you don't have to waste your time with a study group.
9. I don't see why you keep asking your mother for advice. You are 19 years old and need to start making your own decisions. If you need help, I will help you.
10. I really don't like the way other people look at your butt. You need to wear baggier clothes.

Procedure:

- a. Each group will have the same eight statements written on individual cards and each group will put the statements in order from worst to least worst. Students will need about 5 minutes. Encourage students to negotiate in their group why one is worse than the next. Also students can discuss the context for the same red flag having the potential to be in different spots. Have students record a 1 on the card for the "least-worst" examples and 8 for the "most-worst" example. Also if time allows encourage student to discuss how one example might be viewed in different ways depending upon the context. For example, the statement "You need to change your clothes before we go out", might be perfectly acceptable if a messy outdoor activity is planned and one partner is not wearing the appropriate footwear or protective outerwear if it is cold or rainy.
- b. When students are finished in their groups, have all of the number 1s get together, 2s, etc. all the way to all of the 8s. As a group, discuss why students placed the example where they did.

Activity Two

- a. The following list of psychological red flags (NNEDV, 2017) is presented to the class:
 - i. Quick involvement in a relationship.
 - ii. Excessive jealousy and possessiveness.
 - iii. Abusive family history or previous battering.
 - iv. Rigid expectations and controlling behaviors.
 - v. Isolation from family, friends and support.
 - vi. Verbal abuse and criticism.
 - vii. Blaming others for problems.
 - viii. Restraining or controlling movement in any way.
- b. Alone or in smaller groups, students can be assigned one of the red flags or they can freely choose one red flag.
- c. After choosing their "red flag", students are assigned the task of brainstorming what this red flag looks like as an extreme example and what it might look like early on or as a yellow flag. (See Figure 1 for common examples.) Note that students are often challenged by the "yellow flag" example. It is my experience that students will be challenged to consider the yellow flags as potentially abusive since many see those yellow flags as examples of "love at first sight".
- d. Students report back to the group their examples.

ASSESSMENT

A variety of methods can be used to assess the degree to which students comprehend the content of this lesson. For example, the ability of students to think of a range of examples and the quality of the examples given is one way. For example: Give three different examples of isolation. Or, explain how the statement "I don't want you to wear that" could be adjusted to make it an acceptable statement, a questionable statement or yellow flag, and a definite red flag. Additionally, students in the small groups can discuss and report either orally or in writing their responses to objectives 1-3. The instructor also can consider using open ended oral or written quizzes addressing objectives 1, 2, and 3.

Students can be verbally questioned or complete a survey about where to find support on campus. Students will be graded using Pass/Fail. Additional examples can be given on an objective test and students can be evaluated if they can correctly identify the potential red flag. For example a matching activity where the red flags are listed in one column and the example of the red flag is in another. It might look like Table 1.

PROCEDURES AND EVALUATION

Students will be asked to complete a post lesson survey. See Figure 2. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about the practical use of knowledge gained during this lesson.

RESULTS

This lesson has been used with hundreds of students each semester. Assessment not only addresses retention and understanding of knowledge, but also practical use of the information. With the additional of a reflection piece (Figure 2), students who have been or are currently in unhealthy or abusive relationships (both victims and offenders) report that they wish they would have been aware of this progression before they were in too deep. More directly correlated are those students in new relationships who have reported taking this information and discussing with current partners and reevaluating if the relationship should continue. Additionally, students report sharing this information with friends and family to create another layer of awareness. The CDC (2017) recommends that "prevention efforts start early, and continue through adolescence and adulthood."

DISCUSSION

Experience (Figure 2) demonstrates that this lesson is an effective means of promoting an awareness to a sensitive personal health topic that receives little early intervention education. It is imperative that resources for victims of current and past intimate partner violence be available. Both female and male students have reported

that they currently use or have used in the past many of the yellow flag behaviors. They further state they can understand how they did not mean the behaviors to be abuse, but these behaviors are systematic of an unhealthy relationship and need to be addressed.

Additionally, this lesson can be piggy-backed with lessons on healthy communication. For example, if a student identifies a yellow flag, how is this subject discussed with a partner to determine if this is a yellow flag or simply the result of inexperience in a healthy relationship? Although the evaluations are consistently favorable, a follow up study to see if students used the information in future relationships to evaluate early warning signs is unknown. While these areas of future work are important, the findings suggest that the lesson(s) can and do lead to health-enhancing awareness and potentially positive behavior change. Intimate partner violence is a private and underreported health issue and prevention begins with education.

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Table 1: Red Flag and Matching Comments

Directions: Match the statements in Column B with the potential Red Flag in Column A. You can use a red flag as many times as you want or not at all. By adding the last option (example of a healthy relationship), the instructor can review if the student understands the multiple levels of potential abuse.

Column A: Red Flags	Column B: Statements
1. Quick involvement in a relationship	a. "Aren't you cute! You are taking a Poli. Sci class this semester, and think you know something about politics.
2. Excessive jealousy and possessiveness	b. Yeah, I hit my old boyfriend when I got mad, but he was so much bigger than me, I didn't hurt him or anything.
3. Abusive family history or previous battering	c. I want you to text me as soon as you get out of every class so I know you are ok.
4. Rigid expectations and controlling behaviors	d. I don't want to meet your friends after class, I want it to be just us.
5. Isolation from family, friends and support	e. I can't believe I flunked the test. That professor is so out to get me.
6. Verbal abuse and criticism	f. I don't care how tired you are, you are not leaving until we straightened out this disagreement.
7. Blaming others for problems	g. I don't want you going to that party. There will be a bunch of pigs there that will just be salivating over your body.
8. Restraining or controlling movement in any way	h. Do you really think you should be ordering French Fries with that?
9. This is an example of a healthy relationship	i. I know we just met tonight, but you are so perfect!!!! I never thought I would meet someone like you.

Figure 1: Examples of What Red and Yellow Flags Look Like in IPV Progression

Flags	Obvious Red Flag	Potentially Problematic Yellow Flag
Quick involvement in a relationship	I know we only met this past weekend, but will you marry me?	I can't believe we just met yesterday. I feel like I have known you forever and think I am in love with you.
Excessive jealousy and possessiveness	I want to know where you are at all times so I expect a text anytime you change locations.	I get so worried about you when I text you and you don't immediately respond. If you didn't mean so much to me, it wouldn't matter. But, I just need to know that you are safe.
Abusive family history or previous battering	I hit my last partner but it was her fault for not being on time. I had to teach her a lesson.	My mother would always hit my Dad when she was mad, but she is so tiny, we would just laugh.
Rigid expectations and controlling behaviors	You can't go to the pool anymore because I don't want anyone else to see you in a bathing suit.	You look so hot in that shirt. How about you only wear it when we are together, because this view is only for my eyes.
Isolation from family, friends and support	I don't want you hanging out with your friends if I am not there.	You are 22 years old. Don't you think it is time you made your own decisions and stopped consulting with your mother? Besides, I am here and you can always bounce ideas off of me.
Verbal abuse and criticism	I don't care what you think. You are too stupid to have an opinion.	You are so cute. You take one Poli Sci class and you think you understand our judicial system. You really are cute.
Blaming others for problems	Stop getting me so angry or I'm going to have to hit you.	I can't believe I flunked this test and you passed. What, did the professor give you the questions when I didn't go to class? They were stupid questions anyway.
Restraining or controlling movement in any way	When I leave for work, you cannot leave this house. I am taking the car keys with me, your money, your phone, and locking you in this bedroom.	We can't go to bed angry, so you can't leave until we get this disagreement settled.

Figure 2: Post Yellow Flag Presentation Survey

Please complete this anonymous survey as completely and honestly as possible.

- 1. Please list up to three things you already knew about this topic before today’s lesson:

- 2. Please list up to three things you learned about this topic from today’s lesson:

- 3. Have you personally experienced any of these yellow flags as a victim or as a perpetrator?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 4. Will you address this topic or share this information with (circle as many as apply)
 - a. Current partner (because I now have some concerns)
 - b. Current partner (because it is an interesting topic)
 - c. Friends (who I am concerned about)
 - d. Friends (because it is an interesting topic)
 - e. Family (who I am concerned about)
 - f. Friends (because it is an interesting topic)

- 5. I know where to get help or more information if I need it or a friend needs it.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 6. How can you use this information going forward?

- 7. Do you identify as
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgendered
 - d. Other
 - e. Prefer not to answer