

Cambridge Public Schools Policy Against Teen Dating Violence

I. Introduction

The Cambridge Public Schools is committed to providing a learning environment in which dating violence is not tolerated. Consistent with this philosophy, the Cambridge Public Schools is committed to promoting an environment free from dating violence. Accordingly, the Cambridge Public Schools seeks to increase awareness of teen dating violence and help in responding to the needs of victims and children who are witnesses to such violence.

Teen dating violence occurring in any setting is unlawful and teen dating violence occurring in any school setting will not be tolerated. Further, retaliation against an individual who has complained about teen dating violence or cooperated in an investigation of teen dating violence will not be tolerated. The Cambridge Public Schools will respond promptly to complaints and reports of teen dating violence or retaliation and corrective action will be taken where necessary, including disciplinary action where appropriate.

The Superintendent shall develop administrative guidelines consistent with this policy.

II. Defining the Issue of Teen Dating Violence

Domestic Violence/ Interpersonal Violence: Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behavior in which one partner attempts to control another through threats or actual use of tactics, which may include any or all of the following: physical, sexual, verbal, financial, psychological abuse and/or through the use of technology (i.e. cyberbullying).

Domestic Violence affects every community across the country, regardless of ethnic group, culture, or background. People of all ages, income levels, faiths, sexual orientation, gender, and education levels experience domestic violence.

Teen Dating Violence: Dating violence (or relationship abuse) is a pattern of over-controlling behavior that someone uses against their partner. Dating violence can take many forms, including mental/emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or through the use of technology (i.e., cyberbullying). Someone may experience dating violence even if there is no physical abuse. It can occur in both casual dating situations and serious, long-term relationships.

Child Witness/Exposure to Domestic Violence: Witnessing violence can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth, and development. Exposure can include seeing or hearing the abuse, discovering the effects of abuse (their parents/guardians/caregivers' injuries or broken furniture, etc.) and/or being injured/hurt defending a parent/guardian/caregiver against the abusive behavior.

Family Violence: Family violence is a broader definition, including child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent acts between family members.

Victim/Survivor/Battered: interchangeable terms to refer to the person who has been hurt, abused or threatened with harm, whether or not there has been actual physical abuse.

Abuser/Perpetrator/Batterer: interchangeable terms to refer to the person inflicting the abuse and causing harm, whether or not there has been actual physical abuse.

Additionally, such conduct may also constitute harassment, a form of discrimination, that is prohibited by federal and state law; and/or such conduct may constitute bullying, including without limitation, cyberbullying, which is prohibited by state law. Such conduct also is prohibited by the Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment, the Cambridge Public Schools Anti-Violence Policy and the Cambridge Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy.

III. Recognizing Warning Signs

Signs of abusive behavior include: acting really jealous if their partner talks to others, trying to dictate what the other should do, blowing disagreements out of proportion, constantly threatening to break up, losing their temper verbally, blaming the other for their own problems, physically and emotionally hurting their partner, or acts of cyberbullying.

Signs of victimization include: constantly cancelling plans for reasons that do not sound right, always worrying about making their partner angry, giving up things that are important to them, showing signs of physical abuse, such as bruises or cuts, getting pressured into having sex or feeling like a sex object, having a partner that wants them to be available all the time, and becoming isolated from family or friends, or being cyberbullied.

IV. Procedure for Reporting Teen Dating Violence

Students who believe that they have been a victim of teen dating violence, believe that they are in danger of teen dating violence, or have a restraining order against an individual, may report the matter to any of the following individuals: (1) principal/head of upper school, (2) assistant principal, (3) dean, (4) teacher, or (5) school nurse.

The person who receives the report must immediately notify the principal/head of upper school.

Additionally, any employee who observes an incident of teen dating violence on school property or at a school related event, must immediately notify the principal/head of upper school.

The principal/head of upper school must immediately do the following: (1) notify the parents/guardians/caregivers of the victim, and (2) notify the Office of Safety and Security.

The principal/head of upper school must also refer the student and/or the student's parents/guardians/caregivers to the Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and

Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment which addresses procedures for informal resolution and filing of formal complaints and the Cambridge Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy and provide copies of the same upon request.

When a report of teen dating violence is received, whether it occurred off school property or has occurred on school property, on the way to or from school or at a school related event, or a violation of a restraining order on school property, on the way to or from school or at a school related event is received, the Cambridge Public Schools will act promptly to notify the appropriate authorities of the alleged incident. Reporting of any such incident will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

It is important to take third party information seriously where teen dating violence is concerned. It is recommended that an appropriately trained member of the school staff approach the student to discuss what has been heard and potential concerns. If abuse is acknowledged, a "safety plan" should be worked on, in addition to recommending and sharing referrals for counseling, support groups, and police/court assistance.

Additionally, school staff must remember to comply with all statutory reporting obligations for suspected abuse and neglect (51A reporting). Filing of 51A complaints should be done by following the Cambridge Public Schools Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Guidelines, including notifying the principal/head of upper school of the suspected abuse and neglect. Furthermore, school staff also must remember to report all crimes to the police. Staff should notify the principal/head of upper school, who will notify the Director of Safety and Security, and who will coordinate notification to the police. Reporting of any such incident will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

V. Procedures When The School Is Provided With A Copy of a Restraining Order

When a student has a restraining order against an individual and provides a copy of the order to the school, the principal/head of upper school should hold a meeting with the employee or with the student and the student's parents/guardians/caregivers to review the restraining order and its implications. A "safety plan" should be worked out to address the victim's needs and concerns, including staff to whom the student may report if any concerns arise or any violation of the restraining order occurs while the student or employee is on school property or at a school related event. If the restraining order is against another member of the school community, a separate meeting should be held with that individual to review the restraining order and its implications, expectations and the consequences for violation of the order. The development of the "safety plan" will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

VI. Disciplinary Action

If it is determined that inappropriate conduct has been committed, the Cambridge Public Schools will take such action as it deems appropriate under the circumstances. Such action may range from counseling and/or discipline up to and including suspension or expulsion from school.

VII. Other Remedies

In addition to reporting a teen dating violence incident that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school, or at a school related event in accordance with the procedures above, students who believe that they have been the victim of teen dating violence on school property, on the way to or from school, or at a school related event, may also file a complaint of harassment and/or bullying in accordance with the procedures set forth in either the Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment and/or the Cambridge Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy. Furthermore, students who believe that they have been the victim of teen dating violence that has occurred off school grounds and/or during non-school hours may report the alleged incident to the police.

Students who believe that they are in danger may also seek a restraining order to protect a person from physical pain or injury or the threat of pain or injury by filing an application for a restraining order at the local courthouse.

Adopted: May 15, 2018