Our future depends on PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Learn what domestic violence prevention looks like and how you can help.
WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a serious, widespread, and preventable public health issue that impacts individuals, families, the workforce, and society.
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE, and does happen to people of every age, race, gender, sexual orientation, income, and occupation.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONSISTS OF ABUSIVE AND COERCIVE BEHAVIORS that one person uses to establish and maintain power and control over another person in a relationship.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS NOT JUST PHYSICAL ABUSE, which may or may not be present in an abusive relationship. Abuse can also be sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological, financial, or digital.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS NOT ONLY VICTIMS, but also their children, family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. It happens where Rhode Islanders live, work, and play.

Everyone has the right to feel safe in their relationship. No one deserves to be abused.
All of us. Rhode Island communities are close-knit, so with 1 in 4 Rhode Islanders experiencing domestic violence in their lifetimes, we have all witnessed the suffering caused by domestic violence, or know someone who has.
129,000 women and 76,000 men in Rhode Island are survivors of domestic violence.¹

Think about 20 people you know. It’s likely that of these people, 5 women and 3 men will experience or have already experienced domestic violence by a partner.²

Abuse does not only impact adults—nearly 1 in 10 Rhode Island high schoolers has already experienced physical dating violence.³ In fact, national statistics show that most victims first experience dating violence between the ages of 11-24.⁴

Violence in relationships starts early. It can begin to seem normal. **But it isn’t.**
Domestic violence is deadly to Rhode Island’s future.

We have lost too many of our friends, family, and neighbors at the hands of violent abusers.

Even when it does not escalate to homicide, domestic violence is hurting our loved ones and threatening our communities.
CHILDREN WHO WITNESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE suffer many negative outcomes during their childhood and into their adult years, including chronic disease, substance abuse, dropping out of school, employment challenges, and even early death. Growing up in a home with domestic violence is the single best predictor of a child becoming a perpetrator or victim of domestic violence.

TEENS WHO EXPERIENCE DATING VIOLENCE are at a higher risk for drinking, drug abuse, attempted suicide, eating disorders, forced sex, and bullying or cyberbullying.

ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE suffer serious negative impacts to their health and well-being, including chronic illness, substance abuse, lost wages, and employment challenges.

COMMUNITIES THAT EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE see increases in crime, higher healthcare costs, reduced workforce productivity, and decreased economic success. Domestic violence threatens the safety of our schools, places of employment, and the fabric of our communities.

Just because you’re not being hit doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt.
WHY DO WE TOLERATE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Social norms.
SOCIAL NORMS ARE CULTURAL CUES, STANDARDS, AND RULES OF BEHAVIOR in a group or society. Too often, these norms influence—and in turn are reinforced by—attitudes, beliefs, and misconceptions that allow for violence.

Even though most people do not commit domestic violence or believe it is okay, we’ve all heard or thought things that uphold unhealthy social norms that contribute to the problem, such as:

“I should stay out of it.
It’s none of my business.”

These kinds of attitudes keep domestic violence private and make it unlikely that bystanders will intervene. As long as we turn away from the problem, it will never go away. But if we each believe that it is our individual and collective responsibility to do something, we can stop the violence!

Change your thoughts, change our world.
WHAT CAN WE DO TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Some people believe that domestic violence will always exist. But think about it: smoking in public places and even around children used to be the cultural norm. Now, it’s hard to imagine tolerating something so unhealthy.
More than ever, people are becoming aware of and outraged by the harmful impacts of domestic violence. This is progress! Yet the problem still continues to plague our communities. **How can we stop the violence before it happens in the first place?**

Public health research has shown that if we use prevention strategies at multiple levels—from individual to communal to societal—we can create widespread social change.

**PREVENTION STRATEGIES HAVE WORKED FOR OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES:**

» *Smoking is at the lowest rate since researchers began tracking this figure in 1965.*

5

» *Since 1980, the number of drunk driving deaths has been cut in half.*

6

» *Seatbelt use has risen dramatically—from only 14% in 1983 to 89% in 2015.*

7

*Why have these behaviors improved?* We have changed the environment by conducting public awareness campaigns, improving our systems’ responses, and passing laws. We have changed our social norms, saving countless lives. We can do the same with domestic violence.

**Prevention is the key to a future free from violence.**
WHY DO WE NEED BOTH INTERVENTION & PREVENTION?

A person experiencing domestic violence today needs help now. Yet without prevention, today’s children are at risk of becoming tomorrow’s victims.
**INTERVENTION** *is the necessary response to domestic violence when it is already occurring.* Whether it is a bystander calling the police, a court advocate helping a victim of domestic violence navigate the court process, or an agency providing shelter for a victim and their children, appropriate interventions are critical to saving lives and helping those impacted by abuse.

**PREVENTION** *addresses the root causes and conditions that make domestic violence possible.* According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, domestic violence is preventable. Emerging public health strategies call for collaboration across sectors to address social, environmental, and structural determinants of health—because improving how we live, learn, work, and play can prevent domestic violence, as well as enhance our overall health and wellness.

Our future depends on preventing domestic violence. Let’s start now!
What does domestic violence PREVENTION look like?

**TERTIARY PREVENTION** aims to lessen the long-term negative effects after domestic violence has occurred, e.g. police intervention, counseling, and shelter.

**SECONDARY PREVENTION** aims to reduce the impact of domestic violence that has already begun, e.g. home visitation programs and support groups.

**PRIMARY PREVENTION** aims to stop domestic violence before it starts.

Let’s take a closer look at primary prevention...
Connected communities experience less domestic violence.

In order to build community, we can:

- create opportunities for our neighbors to get to know and trust one another;
- increase access to quality affordable housing, education, employment, healthcare, healthy food, and safe spaces for play and recreation;
- ensure that our environments and relationships support our overall health and wellness.
We must work to **end gender inequality**. Studies show that closing the gender pay gap is one way to reduce violence in women’s lives. Supporting more women in politics and leadership roles is another.

We must **challenge confining gender roles**. Limiting people by their gender hurts everyone—we must embrace full human expression and allow each person to be their whole self.

We should **empower girls and young women** to build leadership skills and social support systems by encouraging their participation in sports and other healthy activities.
Legislative changes have the widest-reaching and longest-lasting impacts on our communities. When we pass laws to encourage healthy behaviors, discourage unhealthy behaviors, and improve quality of life for all people, social norms begin to change.

Examples of potential legislation:
- Fund domestic violence primary prevention programs and initiatives.
- Increase the minimum wage to improve quality of life for everyone.
- Improve education, including access to childcare and pre-K for every child.
We should engage men and boys to create healthy expressions of manhood and increase peer support for men to speak out against violence and harmful gender norms.

We need to develop healthy relationships based on equality and respect, not power and control. We must do this in all areas of our lives—with our parents, children, neighbors, friends, and coworkers, as well as with our intimate partners.

We must build communication and conflict resolution skills with youth and adults—not only in school, but also through community programs and in our daily lives with family and friends. If we teach our children these skills at an early age, they will carry forth healthy behaviors into adulthood.
We can create the cultural change needed to end domestic violence when we:

- promote healthy and equitable behavior through public awareness campaigns;
- transform our organizational practices and policies to create safe and healthy workplaces;
- become more media conscious, question our pop culture’s unhealthy messages about gender and violence, and encourage others—especially young people—to do the same;
- get involved in social justice movements through online campaigns and local community efforts;
- support young people by creating opportunities for them to become community leaders.
There are things I can do every day to help create a world free from domestic violence. For primary prevention to be effective, it must be done by ordinary people collectively making changes in their daily lives.
What can I do TODAY to prevent domestic violence TOMORROW?

» I can be an active bystander—if I see something troubling, I will say something.
» As a person of faith, I can take part in an event that promotes equality and social justice.
» As a parent, I can talk to my children about healthy relationships.
» As a neighbor, I can get involved in my community and get to know the people around me.
» As a teacher, I can model respectful behavior and open communication.
» As an employer, I can create workplace policies that address domestic violence.
» As a legislator, I can be a champion for positive change to protect our future.

We have reached a turning point in the work to end domestic violence. We have come a long way in responding to the problem after it has occurred. Now, we must also focus on stopping domestic violence before it starts.

Through our collective efforts, we can create a future free from violence. But only if we start NOW and invest in domestic violence primary prevention TODAY.

Together, we can END domestic violence.
Acknowledgements & Resources

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To learn more about national-level domestic violence primary prevention, visit:
CDC.gov/ViolencePrevention | PreventConnect.org | PreventIPV.org | VetoViolence.CDC.gov/apps/pop

End Notes:
1, 2, 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey* (2010).
The Meaning of Trees

In many cultures, trees hold deep importance, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all things.

They must be cared for at all levels—from roots to leaves, from individual trees to entire forests—in order to grow healthy and strong.

Humans, too, must be cared for holistically. Just as trees need the right conditions to flourish, so do healthy people, relationships, and communities. If we each do our part, we will cultivate a safer world and more peaceful future for us all!