# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1: Background

- About Let's Be Real and Break the Cycle ........................................... 1
- Break the Cycle’s Advocacy Work ......................................................... 2
- Advocacy and Activism ........................................................................ 3
- Why You Should Get Involved ................................................................. 4
- Getting Started and Being an Ally .......................................................... 5
- Defining the Issues ................................................................................ 6
- The Issues and Statistics ....................................................................... 7

## Chapter 2: Advocacy Strategies

- Ways to Advocate and Mobilizing Groups ............................................ 8
- Petitions and Hashtags .......................................................................... 9
- Protests .................................................................................................. 10
- Lobbying and Meeting Your Representative ......................................... 11
- Testifying ............................................................................................... 12-13

## Chapter 3: After Advocacy

- Evaluate and Self-Care ......................................................................... 14
- In Real Life: Students Against HB51 ..................................................... 15
- Resources and Contact Us .................................................................... 16
1. Background

"Life keeps getting crazier and it becomes more difficult to throw myself into large scale activism projects like I used to! Ever since I joined Let’s Be Real, I feel like I have a voice again in the activist community.

As a member, I can participate as much or as little as I am able, depending on my availability. Plus, the LBR weekly challenges keep me involved in small ways to help make a big difference, and remind me to keep practicing healthy relationships."

- Nicole York, LBR member since 2016

About Let's Be Real

Let's Be Real (LBR) is a national movement by young people and for young people, about relationships. Rooted in the belief that everyone brings something unique to the table, members are provided with the platform to use their own unique skills, ideas, and creativity to help end the culture of dating abuse.

To get locally involved with LBR, you can look for more information at breakthecycle.org/letsbereal and sign up to join the movement at bit.ly/joinLBR!

About Break the Cycle

We are Break the Cycle (BTC), a national organization that inspires and supports young people to build healthy relationships and create a culture without abuse. Our organization brings together young people, caring adults, and communities in prevention and intervention efforts. The dynamic and diverse team at BTC believes that all young people deserve to live in a world where they can thrive. LBR, the youth-run branch of Break the Cycle, uses grassroots activism to spread our message.
Why do bills have to be reauthorized?

Reauthorization is the process by which Congress amends bills that are set to "expire" at certain points in time. The legislation that is developed through this process adjusts the current programs to meet changing needs. The last Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization occurred in 2013, with the next reauthorization scheduled for 2018. If a law is not reauthorized, all rights contained in it remain in effect as is. However, if Congress fails to reauthorize a law, opponents can seek to eliminate its funding. A lack of funds for VAWA = a lack of funds for prevention, intervention, and support programs for survivors.

Break the Cycle's Advocacy Work

At the federal level

At the federal level, Break the Cycle is a member of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF). This national coalition advocates for public policies that address domestic violence, dating abuse, sexual assault, and stalking. Our organization is also part of the Task Force’s Steering Committee. The Violence Against Women Act must be reauthorized by Congress in 2018, and as part of the Steering Committee of the NTF, Break the Cycle is working to help ensure the law continues to contain strong rights and solid funding for services for young survivors ages 12-24.

At the state level

At the state level: we work with state advocates to protect and support young survivors in their state. We also work to ensure all schools are properly trained and prepared to handle a dating abuse crisis, and equipped to help the student.
Become an Activist - Advocate!

An activist is a person who fights to bring about change in their community or the wider world. It doesn’t matter how old you are, where you are from, what your race, religion, or gender is, you can be an activist for a cause you care about!

Advocating means showing support for a particular cause or policy. Engaging in local policy advocacy is one way to be an activist for the causes you care about.

Why are Advocacy and Activism important?

Advocacy and activism are important because it is imperative that your voice is heard when you have something to say about an important cause, especially if it affects you directly. With enough work, you can attract attention at a local or national level. When those in positions of power hear your concerns, it can prompt them to take action.

What will I learn from this toolkit?

Like anything important and worth doing, advocacy requires a lot of work. Throughout this toolkit you will find practical steps, inspiring examples, and helpful material on dating abuse that will help your movement reach its potential through advocacy and activism.
MORE THAN HALF

69.5% OF WOMEN & 53.6% OF MEN

who have been physically or sexually abused or stalked by a dating partner


Why You Should Get Involved

Advocates make a key impact in the fight to end dating abuse and sexual assault. If enough people speak out across the country, laws will begin to change. In 2018, we saw this in the states of Oregon and Ohio. Thanks to intense advocacy efforts, gun laws in Oregon were reformed to prevent current and former dating partners with abuse records from obtaining and owning guns. In Ohio, after years of advocacy, the law finally changed to allow victims of dating abuse to receive protection orders against current and former partners; prior to this, only couples who were married or had co-habitated could obtain protection orders.

When you use your voice with movements like Let’s Be Real, you are a taking huge step to educate individuals about dating abuse, provide the necessary support to survivors, and build a culture of healthy relationships.

As the statistics on page 7 of this toolkit make clear, it is all too common for young people, ages 12-24, to be victims of dating abuse. That makes it even more important for youth advocates to step up. As the people most impacted by this issue, your voices are the most important!
Before You Start

Being passionate about an issue is critical, but passion without facts will only get you so far. Research your issue, the communities it affects, and the people whose opinions differ from yours. Gathering the facts, interviewing people who experience the issue firsthand, and understanding the opposing points of view are important facets of your advocacy journey. These actions will help you develop solid, evidence-informed arguments.

Being an Ally

An ally is someone who shows support for the group that the legislation or problem is affecting, but is not a member of that group themselves. Allies are important voices in the movement to end violence, but it is critical to remember that you are only an expert on your own experiences. As an ally it is your job to check your privilege, educate yourself on the issue, and center the voices of those affected.

Checking your privilege is recognizing that the issue does not affect you directly, but you are able to offer support and resources without overpowering the voices of those directly affected. For example, if you are advocating for the Black Lives Matter movement, but you are not a person of color, as an ally you can support the group and offer resources, but do not speak for them. Let the people directly affected by the issue speak for themselves.

When we talk about those affected as it pertains to dating abuse and sexual assault, we are referring to victims and survivors. It is important to make sure their voices are heard and centered in the conversations around legislation.
What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term that refers to issues such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating abuse, domestic violence, stalking, etc. GBV is the result of unequal power relationships in society. This type of violence comes in many forms and can lead to physical, mental, and emotional damage.

At Break the Cycle, our main focuses are dating abuse prevention and healthy relationship education.

What is Dating Abuse?

Dating abuse is a pattern of physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive behavior over a period of time that is used to exert power and control over a current or past dating partner.

Every relationship is different, but what all unhealthy and abusive relationships have in common are issues of power and control. Violent words and actions are tools an abusive partner uses to gain and maintain power and control.

Anyone can experience dating abuse, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic standing, race, religion, or culture. It can occur in casual or serious relationships.
The Issues

What gender-based violence issues are you concerned about in your community? Think about what is happening in your community. Is there something you want to change? No matter what the issue is, you can use the basics in this guide to start your advocacy journey. Here are a few examples to get you started:

- **Civil Protection Order**: CPOs are one of the most effective tools available to help survivors leave an abusive situation. These ensure that the abuser cannot legally come near or harm the victim. In many states, minors are not able to get a protection order without the consent of their parents, making it harder for them to get help. **You can advocate for laws that allow minors to get protection without the consent of a parent or guardian.** Learn about your state CPO laws at WomensLaw.org and about special CPO protections for minors at breakthecycle.org/know-your-rights.

- **Adequate Funding for Services**: As an individual who has experienced abuse, it can be hard to find safe spaces and available resources. Programs, such as free counseling or legal services and sexual assault training for school administrations are underfunded and thus, ineffective. **You can advocate for more funding that helps ensure survivors have access to the resources they need.**

- **Prevention Education in Schools**: Laws mandating that school systems have comprehensive prevention education as part of the regular school day curriculum are essential. **You can advocate that school systems in your state make prevention education a requirement.**

- **Parental Involvement Laws**: These laws require the parents of minors who have experienced abuse to agree to legal services or other assistance a young person might need, like access to birth control. However, not all youth live in healthy and supportive households, which makes it difficult or unsafe for survivors to find solutions. **You can advocate for laws that lower the age minors must be in order to obtain service like a CPO, STD testing, sexual assault exam, or birth control without notifying a parent or guardian.**

- **Title IX**: This law prohibits gender discrimination in schools that receive federal funding, like public high schools and universities. Schools must address and resolve any discriminatory or violent gender-related incidents on campus. **You can advocate for your school to have stronger Title IX protections for survivors or to ensure your school is following the law.** Learn more about Title IX at knowyourix.org.

Statistics

- **One in three** high school students experience either physical or sexual violence, or both, that is perpetrated by someone they are dating or going out with.

- Among high school students who have experienced sexual and physical abuse by a dating partner, **over one quarter** (nearly 25% of males and 50% of females) have seriously contemplated suicide, and almost as many have attempted suicide.

- **More than half (58%) of college students** do not know how to help someone who is experiencing dating abuse, and **nearly all (89%)** are not confident in their ability to recognize the warning signs.

- An estimated **20 - 25 percent of female college students** will experience attempted or completed rape before graduation and those are only the ones who self-disclose.

*References found at breakthecycle.org/statistics.*
2. Advocacy Strategies

Ways to Advocate

LBR members are encouraged to find the advocacy techniques that work best for them — advocacy looks different for everyone! Invest in the techniques that work for your community and cause.

In this toolkit, we will discuss the following advocacy strategies:

- Mobilizing groups of people
- Creating petitions
- Utilizing social media and hashtags
- Protesting
- Lobbying, meeting with, and testifying to policy makers

Start at School

A good place to start your advocacy work is at school - consider the issue we discussed earlier, Title IX.

Title IX is not just for the protection of college students against sex discrimination, it is also for those who attend K-12 schools. It is important to talk not only with your parents about Title IX, but to look into your school's policies and procedures to make sure students' rights are not being violated. Title IX ensures that all students have the right to education in a harassment-free, violence-free environment. If your policies contradict that, you can take action.

Mobilizing Groups

Start educating your peers about the issues on page 7. You can reach out to clubs, hand out fliers in the hall, hang up posters, or use other strategies to grab people's attention. You can also do the same thing in your local community. Build a coalition of people who share your passion — consider who else might care about your issue: parents, teachers, or principals? Bring them together by conducting meetings in your school, house, or any other local location.
Petitions

A petition is a document that contains signatures from people who agree with you on a certain issue. It is usually used to show people in power the strength of your movement. A good petition will have a compelling description of the issue, have a clear goal for the outcome, and rally supporters around your cause with a story and statistics.

Before the invention of the internet, this meant finding people in person to hand-sign a piece of paper. Today, petitions can be shared and signed by people all over the world. Try using a website like change.org to make yours.

In order to obtain as many signatures as possible, send the link to your online network and ask them to sign and share on social media. Once your goal is reached, you can email the petition to the appropriate decision-makers or print it out and bring a tangible copy.

Hashtags

Hashtags (#) are an extremely effective way to recruit people to follow a movement and give your supporters updates in real time. You can live tweet from a hearing, livestream a protest, or summarize updates on a bill in a text post. The short and catchy nature of hashtags can grab the attention of thousands or even millions of people on social media if your topic “trends.”

When creating a hashtag, use a catchy phrase that does not have a lot of characters. You want to leave enough space to provide more information in the moment, especially if you are using a platform with text limits, like Twitter. You should also search the hashtag to see if it is already associated with another cause or event. A few hashtags examples from previous and ongoing movements are #DearBetsy, #StudentsAgainstHB51, and #MarchForOurLives.
Protesting, the act of gathering with a group of like-minded people to demand change, can be an effective way to attract the attention of power players at the core of your issue, as well as the media. It is a great way to practice your constitutional right of Freedom of Assembly. Here are some things to keep in mind when protesting in public spaces:

- **Create Signs** - Stay on topic, but be creative. When dealing with issues that pertain to gender-based violence, you can include statistics, personal stories, affirmations, statements that you are for or against the bill, or catchy phrases.
- **Marches** - Gather some people and start walking! Individuals often march on the sidewalk or in the street depending on what they are comfortable with or the size of the crowd. Depending on the size of the crowd and location of your protest, you may need a permit. Make sure you research permit laws in your city before planning.
- **Policy Platform** - Having a written copy of your policy platform before protesting is helpful, but not always necessary. Consider creating talking points for your fellow protesters so everyone knows what changes you want to see as a result of your protest. Letting the power players know what you want can help form a compromise or even spark change in a bill.

### In Real Life

Originally started as individual Facebook events encouraging women to march on Washington, DC the day after the inauguration of Donald Trump, the Women's March became so massive that it expanded to a global movement addressing everything from reproductive rights, LGBTQ* rights, and funding for programs preventing violence against women, to climate change, gun control, and immigration.

On January 21, 2017, millions of women and their male allies marched in cities across the globe to express their support for a world that is safe for everyone (see photo below). The Women's March showed how one action can become an unstoppable force.
Lobbying

Lobbying is when one or more people who have the same position on a bill or issue attempt to persuade a government official to agree with them. Before lobbying, consider who your audience is.

Research who is making the decision that you want to impact.

- Is it the Board of Education, your principal, the city council, your mayor or governor, your state legislator, or your representatives to the US Congress?

If you are focusing on a certain piece of legislation, find out who is (or who should be) working on the bill that you are passionate about.

- Find the contact information for your representatives at USA.gov.
- State government websites have information on state bills, the committee the bill is assigned to, committee members, co-sponsors (supporters), and the contact information for all representatives. You can find the name of the bill and its status there.

Meeting Your Representative

Meeting with your representative can be intimidating, but having confidence and being excited to discuss your issue will work in your favor. If you stay calm and organized, it is a very rewarding and unique experience.

- **Be organized.** Prepare your best talking points in a formal document and give a copy to the legislator during or after the meeting.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Having a script is practical, but don't forget to be yourself too.
- **Go to bed early.** Getting a full night's sleep the day before will help you be more engaged and focused during the meeting.
- **Stay calm.** Take a deep breath, text a friend that has your back, and know that you can do it!
- **You may meet with a staff member.** Don't be disappointed - staff members are the ears of the representative! Take down the names of the people you speak to, as well as their contact information and remember to thank them for taking the time out of their busy schedule to hear your concerns. Leaving a good impression will help them remember you and your issue!
- **Challenge them respectfully.** Whether you meet with a Representative or staff member, take time to completely understand their perspective on the issue and ask questions. Don't be afraid to challenge them, ask for their commitment, or question exactly where they stand on the issue.
- **Evaluate.** Take time to debrief with your fellow activists after the meetings to strategize and determine next steps.

Dress to impress. Avoid casual clothing like shorts if you can, but make sure you are comfortable and confident in what you wear!

**LBR PRO TIP**
Testifying

After educating your high school, college, or local community and meeting with a legislator about your issue, you may have the opportunity to testify at a hearing on the issue that you are concerned about.

Testifying is giving a personal statement based on your knowledge and opinion on an issue. When you testify, you are considered a “witness” or “concerned citizen” at a public hearing. A public hearing is when a congressional committee, council committee, or other legislative body, like the Board of Education, lets the public share their opinions on an issue being considered by the committee or board.

Usually, anyone can sign up to be a witness. This is a great opportunity for people who feel strongly about the issue to voice their concerns in an open setting. If you are too nervous to testify, you may ask the committee to take one person up to the microphone with you for support.

Successful testifying looks different for everyone because each story brings a new perspective to the table. On the next page, you will find tips for writing, presenting, and defending your testimony.
LBR Pro Tips

- Take a deep breath to steady your breathing. This will help you remain calm during your speech.
- Avoid disruptive behavior if possible. Disruption may lead to you being removed from the space.
  If you are not present, you can’t discuss your points.
- Speak loudly, slowly, and clearly so everyone can understand you. Try not to rush, but be mindful of the time because most testimonies are capped at four minutes or less.
- Make eye contact with whomever you are speaking to. It is a great way to keep their undivided attention!

Preparing a Successful Testimony

- **Introduce yourself.** Start with your name, organization or school (if you are affiliated with one), and the issue you are testifying about.
- **Explain the issue.** Mention how it can help or harm you and/or your school or community.
- **Share a story.** You can share your personal connection to the issue and the impact it has had on you or your peers’ lives.
- **Use statistics.** Find facts to support your speech. A few examples are provided on page 7.
- **Quote the legislators.** Sometimes politicians make statements that contradict what is stated in a bill. For example, if a legislator made either an offensive or positive public comment in the past on the issue you are testifying about, it would be a great idea to include that in your testimony. This can lead committee members to change their perception of the issue. If a legislator has been a champion of the issue, note that and thank them.
- **Always end with solutions.** Focus on moving forward, i.e., tell the legislators what you want them to do! Ask people who are unfamiliar with the issue if your solution makes sense to them; remember, not everyone is as well-versed on the topic as you. This helps you be certain that your solution is clear to a variety of people.

Answering Questions on Your Issue

After you finish speaking, it is possible that legislators will ask follow-up questions. The purpose for this can be because they are concerned about the issue and are looking for more information. Other times a question’s purpose is to challenge you in an attempt to decrease the impact of your powerful testimony.

If you feel comfortable answering the question, you can do so. If you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse to answer. Use a polite response such as, “Thank you for your question, but at this time I don’t feel comfortable answering,” or “I don’t have access to that information, but can try to provide it at a later date.” **Remember, you have the ability to control the conversation.**
3. After Advocacy

Evaluate

Take time to debrief with your fellow activists after your advocacy efforts. This is an important step in building a successful movement. Discuss what went well and what did not work for each of your strategies, then implement your learnings into future advocacy efforts. We can always learn from the past, but each new action is another chance to change the world.

Self-Care

Being an activist can take a toll on your mental health - actions that seem easy for some may be difficult for others, especially if you are a survivor. This is why practicing self-care is key. Stepping away from the movement in order to take care of yourself is totally okay. It is a necessity to help you avoid burnout and should be a priority.

There are different forms of self-care such as:

- Unplugging from social media
- Coloring
- Sleeping
- Listening to your favorite music
- Going on a hike
- Venting to a friend

These are only a few examples - do what brings you peace.
In Real Life

This is the story of Venkayla Haynes, student activist and LBR member, who is fighting to reduce barriers to sexual assault reporting in her home state of Georgia.

HB51 is a bill in the state of Georgia that is trying to change the way sexual assault is handled on college campuses by enforcing mandatory reporting. This means that if a survivor discloses to certain school employees about their experiences with sexual violence, it would lead to a mandatory police investigation. This also means a school disciplinary hearing could not take place until a criminal investigation was launched. Sexual assault is already an underreported crime, and since many survivors are opposed to or not comfortable with police involvement, this would stop even more survivors from coming forward. If survivors don't come forward, they are not able to receive accommodations provided under Title IX.

As the appointed HBCU (historically black college or university) lead for fighting against the passing of HB51, Venkayla made sure the voices of marginalized groups and those affected such as: black women, survivors from the LGBTQ* community, and those with disabilities were heard. Venkayla had the opportunity to work with students on other college campuses affected by this issue in Georgia.

"Meeting with Senators and Representatives, testifying at committee hearings, and protesting was a great experience. Through advocacy, we were able to successfully stop the bill twice!"
- Venkayla Haynes
Find Resources

If you or someone you know have experienced gender-based violence, you are not alone.

Here are some national resources where you can find help:
- Dating Abuse Hotline: 1-866-331-9474 or text "loveis" to 22522
- Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- Suicide Prevention Helpline: 1-800-273-8255
- Trevor Lifeline for LGBTQ+ youth: 1-866-488-7386
- Center for Victims of Crime: 1-855-484-2846
- Street Harassment Hotline: 1-855-897-5910

Contact Us

The fight to end gender-based violence is a tough one, but it begins with you! We must take action and advocate for ourselves and those who are unable to come forward. Be confident in your leadership abilities, and do not be afraid to stand up to those in power when you truly believe in a cause.

Tell Break the Cycle and Let's Be Real about how you are creating a culture without abuse through advocacy. Email us at info@breakthecycle.org with the subject line Advocacy In Action and we may feature you in our future materials.

Connect with fellow advocates!
Join Let's Be Real - visit bit.ly/joinLBR.

Facebook: facebook.com/breakthecycle
Twitter: @breakthecycledv
Instagram: @breakthecycle
Website: breakthecycle.org

The Dating Abuse Advocacy Toolkit was written by Let's Be Real members Venkayla Haynes and Madeleine Frank, assisted by Break the Cycle staff. The toolkit was edited by Let's Be Real member, Lauren Allen, and Break the Cycle staff. All rights reserved to Break the Cycle.