



BREAKING CYCLE OF ABUSE MUST START WITH OUR YOUTH

DEAR ABBY: Your recent letters regarding domestic violence bring important attention to the dangers of this problem. Unfortunately, every year thousands of Americans lose loved ones to this terrible epidemic, and most are left wondering what they could have done to prevent it.

Too often we assume that violence happens only to other people -- people of a different race or culture, people who live in a different community, or people in a different type of relationship. But domestic violence does not discriminate. It can touch everyone -- through friends, co-workers and family members who are suffering silently without our even knowing it. Many of us also know abusers -- people who may seem charming and likable on the surface but cause fear, self-doubt, pain, even death, to those they claim to love.

Recent studies show that as many as one-third of teens experience abuse in a dating relationship. And, more than half of teens say they know friends who have been physically, sexually or verbally abused. The need for early intervention to change these shocking statistics is clear.

We must reach out to youth and talk openly and often about these issues so we can help them to avoid the terrible sorrow felt by families and others who are victims of abuse. Each of us has the right to a safe and healthy relationship free from violence, coercion and fear.

-- JESSICA ARONOFF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **BREAK THE CYCLE**

DEAR JESSICA: Thank you for an important letter. I hope it grabs the attention it deserves from teens and their parents. Your statement that as many as one-third of teenagers experience abuse in a dating relationship, and more than half of them have friends who have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused, will shock many people, I am sure.

Readers, **Break the Cycle** provides domestic violence education, information and help to students ages 12 to 24 throughout the country. It teaches what healthy relationships are and helps them to recognize the warning signs of abuse. Break the Cycle lets them know that help is available if they are suffering or in danger, and shows them that they deserve safe, supportive, non-violent relationships.

There are opportunities for interested people to help in this endeavor. To find out more about this worthwhile program, log onto www.breakthecycle.org, or call toll-free at 1-888-988-8336 (TEEN). I have supported **Break the Cycle** in the past, and continue to do so, because the earlier young people learn to differentiate between healthy relationships and obsessive, destructive ones, the healthier our society will be.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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February 27, 2006