



RHY & DV TOOLKIT

RUNAWAY & HOMELESS YOUTH AND RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE TOOLKIT

GUIDANCE AND MATERIALS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Key Terms & Definitions Handout

Recognizing and understanding the intersection of runaway and homeless youth and intimate partner violence, including dating, domestic and sexual violence, is critical to creating meaningful services and effective intervention and prevention strategies for both homelessness and relationship abuse, and in creating partnerships between the programs working with youth at risk. Developed by and for experts and advocates in both the runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and the domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) fields, the RHY & Relationship Violence Toolkit provides information, resources, tips and tools to better address relationship violence with runaway and homeless youth.



Service providers from each field share a mutual goal: enhancing the safety and healing of young people in living situations and relationships marked by violence and abuse. This handout assists in creating effective partnerships by defining key terms used by and between each field to create a common ground and shared language. Visit the RHY & Relationship Violence Toolkit (www.nrcdv.org/rhydvtoolkit) for more information.

1 CHILD EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This term describes a child who lives in a home in which there is domestic violence. These children may also be called “children who have been exposed to a batterer or battering behavior.” These children may see or hear the physical and/or psychological violence, see the aftermath, be used as pawns or weapons against the adult victim, or become intentional or unintentional targets of an abuser. They live in an environment of fear, unpredictability, and confusion.

Note: Many professionals, including some RHY providers, may use the term “domestic violence victims” to include the children and young people who have lived in a home where one adult is using power and control tactics to abuse the other adult. Generally in the domestic violence field, domestic violence is understood to occur between adults in intimate, familial, or spousal relationships (see definition below), and domestic violence in and of itself is not child abuse. If the child him/herself were being physically, emotionally, sexually abused or neglected by a parent, relative, or other primary caregiver, it is more accurate and appropriate to distinguish this as child abuse rather than domestic violence.

2 COUCH SURFING

Describes situations where RHY are living in unstable and/or temporary living arrangements such as the couches or spare bedrooms of friends, lovers or other family members.

3 DATING VIOLENCE

Dating violence involves the intentional use of tactics by one partner to gain, maintain, or regain power and control over the other while in a dating or intimate relationship, including physical violence or threats, verbal abuse, emotional/psychological coercion, sexual abuse, stalking, isolation or a combination of these strategies. Behavior in a relationship in which dating violence exists is controlling, abusive, threatening, and aggressive, which results in fear, confusion and feelings of helplessness or hopelessness for the victim. Dating violence can occur in homosexual and heterosexual relationships. This might also include the use of texting and other forms of electronic communication to exert a sense of “control” for the abuser.

4 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A pattern of coercive control that could include one or more of the following: the use of physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, verbal and economic abuse, including manipulation and maltreatment of children by one partner to gain, regain, and maintain power and control over an intimate partner. The abusive partner, typically referred to as a batterer, may be a current spouse, live-in partner, significant other, boyfriend/girlfriend or an ex-spouse, past partner or ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, including someone with whom the victim has a child. The term “intimate partner violence” can also be used to describe domestic violence or dating violence. Most domestic violence programs focus on adult domestic violence or intimate partner violence, which may include services for victims of teen dating violence.

5 GROOMING

Grooming is the process by which an offender draws a victim into a sexual relationship and maintains that relationship in secrecy. The shrouding of the relationship is an essential feature of grooming.

6 HOMELESS YOUTH

A youth with unstable housing, i.e., they stay at least one night in a place that is not their home because they were not able to stay at home, ran away from home, did not have a home, and/or stayed at a shelter, outdoors, in a squat, a car or public transportation, under a bridge, or with a stranger. It is not uncommon for youth in this situation not to self-identify as “homeless.”

7 POLYVICTIMIZATION

Polyvictimization refers to the incidence of being victim to more than one traumatic event or situation. This victimization may take the form of physical assault, child maltreatment, sexual abuse, or bullying. They may also witness such events in their homes, schools, and communities. There is a high incidence of polyvictimization among runaway and homeless youth.

8 RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE OR ABUSE

Often used interchangeably with “teen dating violence,” this term refers to the traditional concept of teenaged boyfriend and girlfriend, as well as same sex relationships, who may or may not be sexually active, where abusive tactics are used to control, manipulate, humiliate, and abuse the other partner. However, the “relationship” may also take the form of being with a partner for single, planned events. The context of teen dating violence is usually non-cohabitating relationships that vary widely in their level of intimacy, role expectations, and duration, such as a partner in a casual unplanned encounter, a sexual partner in a series of casual encounters, or members of a group who regularly socialize or hang out together.

9 RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

While there is no single definition of the term “runaway youth” or “homeless youth”, they include youth with unstable or inadequate housing, i.e., youth who stay at least one night in a place that is not their home because they could not stay at home, ran away from home, did not have a home, and/or stayed at a shelter, outdoors, in a squat, a car or public transportation, under a bridge, or in a temporary arrangement with another person (i.e. couch-surfing). These two groups also include “throw away” youth (defined below) and may include other vulnerable youth populations, such as current and former foster youth and youth with mental health or other issues.

10 SEXTING

Sexting refers to the act of sending sexually explicit messages and/or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. It can be used as a control strategy in unhealthy and abusive relationships by requiring photos of the victim be sent or by sending photos of the perpetrator or others to the victim.

11 SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault takes many forms including actual assaults such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats. Usually a sexual assault occurs when someone touches any part of another person’s body in a sexual way, even through clothes, without that person’s consent. Some types of sexual acts that fall under the category of sexual assault include forced sexual intercourse (rape), sodomy (oral or anal sexual acts), child molestation, incest, fondling and attempted rape. Assailants can be strangers, acquaintances, friends, or family members and can commit sexual assault by way of violence, threats, coercion, manipulation, pressure or tricks.

12 STALKING

Stalking can be defined as a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. To an outsider, stalking behavior can appear friendly and unthreatening, such as showering the victim with gifts or flattering messages. However, these acts are intrusive and frightening if they are unwelcome to the victim. Stalking is often a tactic used as part of relationship violence, but may also involve someone that the victim does not know.

13 SURVIVAL SEX

A term used by the RHY community to describe the exchange, whether consensual or coercive, of sex for basic survival needs such as food, clothing, shelter, protection, or money for food and other basic needs. These “relationships” may be with individuals the youth has on-going contact with or a one-time encounter to meet a particular need. Studies find that approximately 27.5% of street youth and 9.5% of shelter youth report having participated in survival sex.¹

14 TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Also called “relationship violence or abuse”, refers to the traditional concept of teenaged boyfriend and girlfriend, as well as same sex relationships, who may or may not be sexually active, where abusive tactics are used to control, manipulate, humiliate, and abuse the other partner. However “dates” may also take the form of a partner for single, planned events. The context of teen dating violence is usually non-cohabitating relationships that vary widely in their level of intimacy, role expectations, and duration, such as a partner in a casual unplanned encounter, a sexual partner in a series of casual encounters, or members of a group who regularly socialize or hang out together.

15 THROWAWAY YOUTH

A term used to describe two types of circumstance: 1) A child who is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and with the child out of the household overnight; or 2) A child who is away from home and is prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.

16 TRAUMA-BONDING

Traumatic bonding refers to the “strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other.” (Dutton & Painter, 1981). While trauma bonding can make it easier for a victim to survive within an abusive relationship, it severely undermines the victim’s ability to accurately evaluate danger and impairs their ability to perceive alternatives to the situation. Once a trauma bond is established it becomes extremely difficult for the victim to break free from the relationship.

17 TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES

Refers to integrating a basic understanding of how trauma affects the life of an individual seeking services. Trauma-informed organizations, programs, and services are based on an understanding of the vulnerabilities or triggers of trauma survivors that traditional service delivery approaches may exacerbate, so that these services and programs can be more supportive and avoid re-traumatization. Many of those seeking homeless and domestic violence services have histories of physical and sexual abuse and other types of trauma-inducing experiences.

¹ Green, J.M., Ennett, S.T. & Ringwalt, C.L. (1999). Prevalence and correlates of survival sex among runaway and homeless youth. Health and Social Policy Division, American Journal of Public Health, Vol 89, Issue 1406-1409.

18 UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

A youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (this means that the youth is not living with a parent or guardian, and includes youth who are residing with a caregiver who does not have legal guardianship, and youth who are living on their own), and lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Practitioners may use this term to differentiate between youth that are unaccompanied and homeless from those that are still connected to a family that is experiencing homelessness.