

New programme launched to help tackle teen abuse

With studies showing that almost 75% of girls and 50% of boys have experienced some sort of emotional abuse from their intimate partner, a new educational programme to highlight the signs of healthy and unhealthy teen relationships is being launched in Kilkenny. The StartSafe programme, in partnership with Amber's One Million Stars project, aims to support teens to develop and maintain safe, healthy relationships. Designed for Transition year students, StartSafe covers topics including consent, spotting the signs of abusive behaviour, dating abuse, coercive control and digital abuse.

StartSafe was piloted in the Loreto Secondary School in late 2021. In feedback, 100% of the Transition Year students who participated said they would recommend the programme to other students. All participants also said the programme made them more aware of topics including the cycle of relationship abuse, consent and digital abuse, while helping them to have a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The programme is now available to all local girls, boys and mixed post primary schools in Kilkenny city and county.

During the StartSafe programme, two experienced facilitators create a safe, gender neutral space for teens to explore the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, demonstrating how unhealthy relationships can have an impact on their emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

Through the craft of weaving eight pointed stars, Amber's One Million Stars project promotes the project's eight points of healthy love within relationships. The eight points are used as a framework throughout the StartSafe programme to invite students to weave a star, creating an open and safe environment where opinions and personal experiences can be shared. Students can in turn choose to create an exhibition of their stars to promote healthy, safe relationships in their school and/or community.

"We piloted the StartSafe programme with our Transition Year students last year. Confidential feedback supplied by the 120 students who participated showed that the programme was extremely well received. All who participated said they would recommend the programme to other students and schools. "Bring this programme to every school, as I feel every young person should know about this" was one of the points of feedback supplied by a participant, which speaks to the effectiveness of the programme" said Marguerite Kehoe, Loreto Secondary School, Kilkenny.

Lisa Morris, Manager, Amber Women's Refuge "According to UN Women, almost one in four adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their intimate partner, while young men are also increasingly victims of intimate partner abuse. As the frontline local Domestic Abuse service in Kilkenny, we see how toxic gender stereotypes can lead to abusive behaviours and relationships. We firmly believe that early education and intervention is key. We proactively developed the StartSafe programme, in association with Amber's One Million Stars Ireland project, to support local teens to identify, develop and maintain healthy dating relationships".

To learn more about the StartSafe programme or to book your school a place, contact childcare@amberwomensrefuge.ie

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