

## Summary Report on WELLNESS SUMMIT 2018 *Teen Relationships in the Era of #MeToo*

On Dec. 6, the Prevention/Intervention Team's Wellness Summit addressed *Teen Relationships in the Era of #MeToo*. It brought together members from all sectors of the community, including BHS staff, faculty, students, and parents, to brainstorm *concrete strategies and actions we can take individually and as a community to shift the culture toward one of greater respect*.

Prevention/Intervention Team's Mary Minott set the tone of the summit to promote **awareness, education, and change** for a subject that is very charged yet murky, given that it involves everyday human interactions and people have a vast range of perspectives and experiences. But the issues are very much on the mind of BHS students, who are asking for help in changing what they call "a culture of toxic masculinity" in a era of rampant incivility and disrespectful sexual attitudes and behavior. This behavior thrives on silence. But now that #MeToo has opened up the discussion, how can we "create the culture that we want" and help students navigate the challenges of healthy real-world relationships in the face of troubling media content and 24/7 connectivity?

Violence Prevention Specialist Doreen Gallagher and Sergeant Chuck Thornton spoke about what is really happening in Brookline around this issue and the legal ramifications, and Brian Poon, who is the new Title IX coordinator spoke about conversations with staff regarding what the school is already doing (such as Mentors in Violence Prevention, "Escalation" documentary and discussion, advisory discussions, and a planned "Healthy Relationships Day") as well as what else students need from the school around this issue.

### PEER LEADER REPORT

A panel of six Peer Leaders shared what they are experiencing at BHS, where 18% of freshman girls experience sexual harassment, and 1 in 5 girls report having had "sexual contact against their will" by senior year -- 1 in 12 for boys. (Data from latest 2017 Brookline Student Health Survey.) Their top points:

- Students experience sexual harassment -- pressure to send inappropriate pictures (sexting), unwanted touching, remarks, cat calls -- in the hallways at school, at parties, in relationships, and out in the community (at work, on teams, etc.). It is common behavior ("bro code") that has become normalized, which makes it easier for it to escalate. Many boys don't even perceive this as a problem, and it can come down to "he said, she said."
- In the moment, teens often feel it's safer to brush it off, walk away, and not call out behavior, which can risk escalating it or starting a cycle of shame/blame or retaliation. Students are afraid to report or even speak up -- perhaps feeling unsure of possible consequences -- so they feel silenced and powerless.

- Unhealthy social media use can stunt the social skills for face to face communication and relationship intimacy and create unrealistic expectations (porn, portrayal of men and women around sex, violent games, etc.)

## **SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FROM TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

### **General -**

- Reinforce clear, open, positive communication, especially in sexual/relationship encounters.
- Talk about the importance and the hallmarks of “consent” -- talk about respect and empowerment in general, and the impact on consent of being under the influence.
- Watch out for gender biases -- don’t assume men are always oppressors and women are submissive.
- Emphasize positive use of social media.
- Teach/model positive relationship skills (include role play -- “What would you do if...?”
- If you see something, say something -- don’t be a bystander.
- Empower students to say “No,” and “If you do that again, I’ll report you.”

### **School Administration/Staff/Students -**

- Start social/emotional education at a younger age and continue through the grades, to foster respect and empathy, breaking the cycle of normalizing uncivil behavior. (Use Peer Leaders as much as possible for younger grade education. Share personal stories, when appropriate.)
- Solicit student involvement in developing curriculum.
- Consider making the “Wellness” curriculum higher profile, perhaps mandatory.
- Foster more peer to peer discussion, role playing, maybe through a more effective Advisory.
- Educate teens and adults on the gray areas between harassment and assault, as well as what it means to say “No,” that if it makes someone uncomfortable, it is “not okay.”
- Clarify the process of reporting/resolving an issue -- role of mandated reporters and what happens when an incident is reported.
- Create a system for kids to talk about incidents without officially “reporting,” perhaps Restorative Justice circle, etc.
- Find opportunities (sports teams, clubs, arts groups, etc.) to encouraging breaking the bystander mentality, especially from the male perspective (locker room banter, etc.). Enlist coaches to incorporate conversations about respectful behavior expectations.
- Make sure statistics and trainings include LGBTQ community and normalize all kinds of relationships, not just hetero-normative, to reduce the fear and stigma of reporting by LGBTQ. Integrate this discussion into Day of Dialogue, involve GSA. Address prevalence of homophobic language.
- Encourage trusting relationships between educators and students - raise awareness of help being available.
- Prevent joking about sexual harassment and assault and create a safer culture to share experiences.
- Create healthy relationships campaign - posters on consent, rape culture, etc.
- Create school tip sheet on harassment and assault.

## Parents -

- Create a respectful culture at home and talk to kids early about respect, consent, empathy, being inclusive, understanding differences, etc.
- Model healthy communication.
- Model healthy social media activity and promote digital citizenships.
- Foster parent connections and meetings/workshops (perhaps a talk by Peer Leaders to parents about sex harassment during orientation).
- Create parent tip sheet on harassment -- send via email from Head of School.

## CLOSING REMARKS

BHS Head of School Anthony Meyer addressed the importance of working together as a community to support all students, who have made it clear they are looking for our help. He stressed the need to educate students earlier and better, encourage empathy, provide safe havens for discussion of sensitive experiences, and be mindful of privacy concerns. It is a very murky and challenging issue, but this summit is a good start toward making some real inroads toward helping to, as the students say, "create the culture that we want."

## ACTION COMPLETED OR ALREADY UNDERWAY

- *Healthy Relationships Day* – discussions with students are underway
- Student poster campaign created by Peer Leaders
- Parent Tip Sheet in preparation (open for parent suggestions, email [Karen\\_campbell@psbma.org](mailto:Karen_campbell@psbma.org))
- MVP (Mentors in Violence Prevention) integrated into *Crash Course* for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, run by Peer Leaders
- MVP training for boys' basketball teams by Peer Leaders and facilitator Kendell Jones
- TAB Editorial on summit reached out to community

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**If you are interested in participating in some aspect of strategies addressing this issue, please let us know -- contact [June\\_Harris@psbma.org](mailto:June_Harris@psbma.org)**

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