

Parenting for prevention books and young people



As Upper Valley students head back to school, we are thinking about many of their summer reading assignments. Students from Thetford Academy and Hanover High School read House on Mango Street, Woodstock Union students read Passing and East of Eden, and Rivendell Academy students wrote papers about the stereotypes and prejudices found in their books. In many of the novels students are required to read, both as summer reading and as part of their regular school curricula, themes of gender-based violence often play a role in the story in some way or another.



Even if there are not scenes that explicitly depict sexual and dating violence, nearly all stories portray our society's relationship with gender stereotypes. Characters are often limited by the expectations of their gender or are forced to deal with the consequences of fighting against these assumptions. This is likely true in whatever book your teen is reading and television show or movie they are watching! We have endless opportunities to have conversations with young people about gender, power, and its impact on all of us.

As adults with young people in our lives, we can all take advantage of these moments and encourage teens to reflect on and share their own experiences and perspectives. These conversations help build confidence and their trust in the adults closest to them. So ask your teenager about the book in their backpack and see where the discussion takes you!

Some Conversation Starters:

- How were characters influenced by the expectations of their gender?
- How are women treated in the novel?
- How are men encouraged to act?
- What kind of violence happened in the novel?
- Who did the hurting? Who was hurt?
- How did people on the outside react to the violence? Indifference? Disgust? Support? How could people have reacted differently?
- Were there parts of the novel that related to your own life? If it were rewritten, how might things be the same? How would they be different?

Recommended reading with themes of gender-based violence:

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty
Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
Passing by Nella Larsen
East of Eden by John Steinbeck

