

Dear 8th grade parent or guardian,

Your 8th grader just participated in two days of prevention programming with WISE through their health class. For decades, WISE has worked with Upper Valley school districts to facilitate education with the shared goal of ending gender-based violence. WISE programs are research-based, aligned with state statutes for sexual violence prevention education in schools, and informed by over 50 years of advocacy for survivors in the Upper Valley.

During the first day, we brainstormed what we have learned about relationships (dating and friendships) from the media. We talked about friendships between girls, then friendships between boys, and ended with dating relationships. We realized that so much of what we are taught is based on limiting and harmful stereotypes that normalize boys being aggressive and powerful and girls being treated like objects.

WISE focuses on gender stereotypes as a central strategy for preventing gender-based violence. This approach is backed by research that shows how an adherence to traditional gender norms is a significant risk factor for dating and sexual violence (Zurbriggen, E.L, 2010 & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Ultimately, we decided that there are a number of qualities that we value in our friendships and dating relationships that have nothing to do with stereotypes about gender.

On the second day, we read a scenario about Dave and Julie, who are dating. Dave is older and has a lot of power over Julie that he uses to control her in an abusive relationship. We talked as a class about the harmful impact of Dave's behaviors (including a sexual assault), and ways that we could demonstrate support for Julie.

Parenting for Prevention

Talk about relationships with your pre-teen:

- You can ask them what they learned during their class time with WISE!
- Check in with your pre-teen about what pressures they may be facing to start dating.
- Ask about their friends and their dating lives. They might be more willing to talk about dating if is in reference to their friends rather than themselves. Use this as an opportunity to set healthy expectations.
- Try to have an open dialogue about expectations around dating and be open to compromise. Let your child feel heard, and explain why you've set certain expectations.
- Together, identify adults who your pre-teen can talk with and ask questions about relationships.

For more information:

- Read, *Does Your Relationship Need a Checkup?* scarleteen.com/article/relationships/does_your_relationship_need_a_checkup
- Watch, *The Mask You Live In* and *Miss Representation* on Netflix.
- Watch, *A Compassionate, Empathy-Based Approach to Consent*, youtube.com/watch?v=rOh_2me-OW58&feature=youtu.be