

Lessons Learned in Training School-Based Health Center Staff to Prevent and Address Adolescent Relationship Abuse



Adolescents need coordinated support from various community systems, including schools, health providers, and domestic violence advocates, to develop and maintain healthy relationships. School-based health center (SBHC) staff are a trusted resource for many youth and can play a crucial role in supporting their patients in having healthy, safe relationships. To learn more about how SBHCs can address adolescent relationship abuse (ARA) and human trafficking (HT), please see our [Healthy Starts, Healthy Hearts](#) resource.

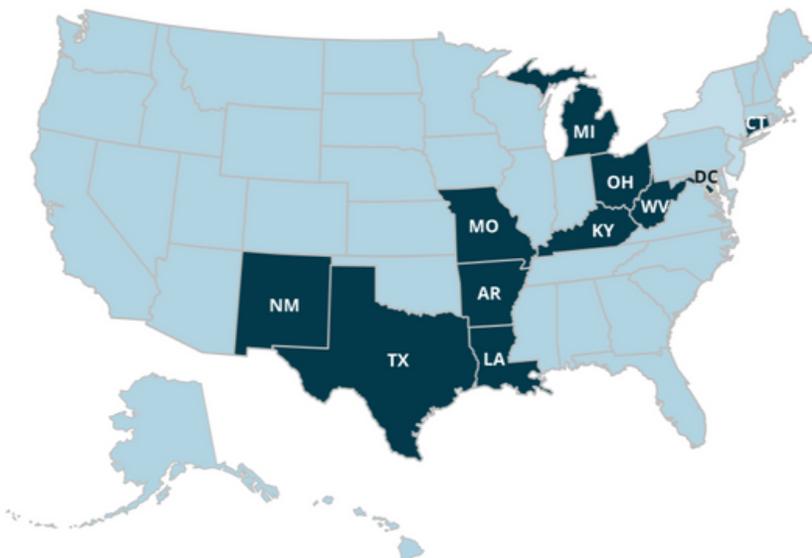
Background

Between 2021 and 2023, the School-Based Health Alliance's [Youth Safety Net Project](#) and Futures Without Violence's [Health Partners on IPV + Exploitation](#) partnered to offer two cohorts of the learning collaborative titled *Healing-Centered Approaches to Addressing Adolescent Relationship Abuse and Trafficking for School-Based Health Centers*.

The learning collaborative, comprising biweekly sessions, coaching calls, and action planning, focused on strengthening the capacity of SBHC staff to prevent and respond to adolescent relationship abuse and human trafficking. Primary care and behavioral health providers from 25 SBHCs in 11 states participated.

This resource is intended to support teams interested in offering structured learning opportunities designed to strengthen the capacity of SBHC staff to prevent and respond to adolescent relationship abuse and human trafficking.

It is based on learnings from two years of facilitating a national learning collaborative focused on adolescent relationship abuse prevention.



- Arkansas
- Connecticut
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Michigan
- Missouri
- New Mexico
- Ohio
- Texas
- Washington, D.C.
- West Virginia

At the conclusion of the learning collaborative, participants reported practice changes, including:



Implementing practices to support staff wellness and connectedness.



Incorporating the evidence-based, trauma-informed CUES intervention (Confidentiality, Universal Education/Empowerment, and Support) into their clinical practice. (See below.)



Amending health center policies to ensure that all patients are seen alone for a portion of the visit.



Building formal and informal partnerships with local domestic violence organizations.



Partnering with youth for healthy relationship promotion and peer-led initiatives. (See below.)



Conducting outreach to school staff to share information about the SBHC and its services.

CUES is an evidence-based and trauma-informed intervention for addressing adolescent relationship abuse in health settings. It involves:

- ✓ **Confidentiality:** Always see the patient alone for at least part of the visit and disclose the limits of confidentiality before discussing ARA. Know your state's reporting requirements.
- ✓ **Universal Education and Empowerment:** Use Futures Without Violence's safety cards to talk with all patients about healthy and unhealthy relationships and the health effects of violence. Always give at least two cards to each patient so that they can share with friends and family. Healthcare providers can order safety cards here.
- ✓ **Support:** Though disclosure of violence is not the goal, it will happen – know how to support a young person who discloses. Make referrals to additional supports when appropriate.

Ideas for partnering with youth:

- ✓ **Conduct focus groups** in health classes to learn more about what adolescents know and need related to healthy relationships.
- ✓ **Incorporate healthy relationship promotion** into activities led by an existing Youth Advisory Council.
- ✓ **Host informal office hours** when youth can come to the SBHC to participate in healthy relationship promotion activities.
- ✓ **Use an evidence-based violence prevention curriculum** to facilitate student learning
To hear directly from young people about their thoughts on about healthy relationship promotion, see our webinars featuring youth presenters here and here.

Tips for conducting effective learning opportunities on ARA prevention and response:

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Before the start, learn about each SBHC's partnerships and current practices related to ARA/HT. Consider the use of pre-surveys. Hold brief, informal meet-and-greets with each participating team before the first session to follow up on survey responses, discuss expectations and hopes, and build connections.

Decide on the goals of the learning opportunity. Consider goals related to clinical practice (such as implementing the CUES intervention) and collaboration (such as how to partner with a local domestic organization and how to engage youth in healthy relationship promotion).



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Consider partnering with local domestic violence prevention organizations to bring in expertise on the dynamics of ARA and HT. Furthermore, encourage participants to work with their local domestic violence organizations for services like safety planning, counseling, and case consultation to support young people and staff who need help.

Most SBHCs offer primary care and behavioral health services. Because youth may access SBHC services through either route, consider offering the learning opportunity to primary care and behavioral health providers, as well as other staff in the SBHC such as receptionists.



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During the learning opportunity, create instances for participants to “try on” the skills they are learning. For example, our learning collaborative participants completed a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle focused on CUES implementation. Teams received a PDSA form with specific instructions for implementing CUES. Between sessions, they were encouraged to “try on” CUES with three patients. At the following session, we offered reflection questions to facilitate sharing and learning.

Plan to stay in touch with participants after the learning opportunity. Offer follow-up coaching calls to facilitate continued connection, progress sharing, and additional technical assistance.



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Following the learning collaborative, the participating SBHC staff were generous in sharing their insight and learnings with us. To hear from two teams of SBHC providers who participated in our learning collaborative, check out our webinar on [Lessons Learned in School-Based Health Center Adolescent Relationship Abuse Prevention](#).

Many thanks to ...

The providers who participated in the learning collaborative. Thank you for your kindness, candor, and dedication to caring for adolescents. We are also grateful to the youth and adults who joined us as guest presenters to share their experience, expertise, and wisdom.

Finally, we deeply appreciate Health Partners on IPV + Exploitation for their partnership on the learning collaborative and for their contributions to this resource.



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