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Teens Learn to Spot Signs of Abusive Relationships

About 50 teen-agers from Perris and surrounding communities took part in a recent symposium to spot the warning signs of an abusive relationship and ways to avoid or leave such relationships.

"What's Love Got to Do With It?" was the title of the Feb. 20 forum held at the Bob Glass Gymnasium. Organized by the City's Youth Advisory Committee and the high-school support group Love 4 Life, the event featured presentations by a Perris law officer and an educator from the Riverside Area Rape Crisis Center.

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough and his wife, Shelly, president of the Val Verde Unified School District Board of Trustees, also attended.

Mark Yarbrough said the symposium provided valuable life-lessons. He was particularly impressed that the forum was created by teens for teens.

"It's one thing to hear about abuse from an adult, it's another to hear about it from your peers," he said. "Abuse escalates. This is a good investment in our community."

Shelly Yarbrough told the teen-agers they should never stop believing in themselves. Growing up as a Native American, Shelly Yarbrough said her family and friends told her to keep her goals modest. She didn't. Instead she followed her own dream and has achieved success as a business owner, public-policy maker, educator and advocate for youth.

"Every school board member wants it better for our kids," she said. "Work hard. You will succeed."



Val Verde Unified School District president Shelly Yarbrough addresses the audience during the Feb. 20 "What's Love Got to Do With It?" symposium about abusive teen-age relationships held Feb. 20 at the Bob Glass Gym.

Vivian Amezcua, an education specialist at the rape crisis center, described the characteristics of a potentially abusive relationship. Those signs include more than physical punishment. They include jealousy, possessiveness, constant texting or calling, pressuring to have sex or use drugs or alcohol and antagonizing family members. Abusiveness also includes taunts, insulting remarks on social media and sexting. Women as well as men can be abusers.

Amezquita told the teen-agers everyone deserves to be respected by their partners. She urged symposium participants to not ignore the signs of abusive behavior and find a trusted friend or adult to confide in should their relationship sour.

An anonymous, toll-free number 800-FYI-CALL is in place to address dating concerns.

Perris Police Officer Brett Rooker provided a primer about the laws pertaining to sexual assault and domestic violence. Like the other speakers, he urged the teens to educate themselves about the warning signs of abuse and seek assistance as soon as possible. Rooker works with high-school students as part of the Department's Youth Accountability Team.

Rancho Verde High School student Alexa Olivas, 16, said she found the forum interesting and useful. The topics discussed and the tips disseminated will prove useful to many teens. A member of the City's Youth Advisory Committee, Olivas said she appreciated the City's support for the forum.

"We are grateful for the City allowing us to spread the word about dating violence and domestic abuse," she said.



Rancho Verde High School student Gabby Bulacan, 16, a coordinator for the recent symposium about teen-dating violence, talks to Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough during a break in the Feb. 20 event.

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