

excellence & ethics

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The Smart & Good Schools Education Letter

Daughters in Danger

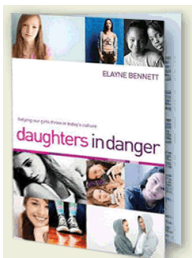
Elayne Bennett, President, Best Friends Foundation

Girls and young women today face a growing range of threats to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Historically high numbers suffer from anxiety, dating violence, STDs, eating disorders, bullying, harassment, drug abuse, alcoholism, and other stressors. And the same culture that is victimizing girls has transformed some young men into our daughters' predators.

Dating Violence: A National Problem

On May 3, 2010, as part of our Best Friends work in Washington, DC's public schools, I taught a class on preventing dating violence to high school teens. It was a lively session. When the students began to name names, it became clear that they were talking about couples in their school who were locked in abusive relationships.

But dating violence is not just an inner-city problem; it's a national problem. One out of 10 high school students has been a victim of dating violence. And nearly 80% of girls who have been physically abused in their intimate relationships continue to date their abuser.



The day after my class on dating violence, the news broke that University of Virginia lacrosse star George Huguely had just been charged with killing his girlfriend, Yeardeley Love, a leading player on

the UVA women's lacrosse team. She had graduated from Notre Dame Preparatory School, a Catholic high school whose mission is to "prepare women of moral integrity to become more loving, just, and wise." That did not prepare her, however, to exercise wisdom in choosing romantic partners.

Like too many young men his age, George Huguely grew up in an increasingly violent culture. Several months before he killed Yeardeley Love, he punched a sleeping teammate to the point of concussion after seeing him with Love. Then he learned that Love was dating another lacrosse player and sent her a threatening e-mail. A few days later, in a drunken rage, he killed her.

4 of 5 girls in abusive relationships continue to date their abuser.

A Culture of Rape

Yeardeley Love could have died the way she did on a hundred other campuses because of the culture that prevails there. Many of today's college males are fans of the nihilistic mega-bestseller, *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*, by Duke Law School grad Tucker Max. Max writes about his youthful, drunken sexual orgies in mind-numbing detail. Female students have protested his campus appearances, arguing that his writing "promotes a culture of rape."

Twenty-five years before Yeardeley Love's murder, Liz Securo learned about the campus sexual culture the hard way, as she recounts in her memoir, *Crash into Me: A*



Survivor's Search for Justice. During her first semester at UVA, she went with a friend to a Phi Psi fraternity party. Some friendly brothers offered her a punch which caused her to become disoriented as soon as she drank it. A frat member, William Beebe, then pulled her into his room, ripped her clothes off, and brutally raped her. She awoke the next morning wrapped in a bloody sheet. She later learned that two other frat brothers also raped her that night. Although Beebe would years later plead guilty and serve time for the rape, the fraternal brotherhood protected the other guilty parties.

Phi Psi's ethos didn't change much. After Beebe's rape conviction, Phi Psi hosted Tucker Max, on tour for his book. Max's book signing became a drunken orgy, during which he had two hookups with sorority girls. Shouted a frat member at a Tucker Max seminar, "You are my god, man."

Toxic U

In October 2003, a Duke University coed was attacked and sexually assaulted in her own bathroom. This incident led the student and her friends to speak out about sexual assault on campus in an

online publication called *Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Duke*. In 2007, a national Campus Sexual Assault Study reported that one in five U.S. college females had experienced a sexual assault.

In *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*, Mary Eberstadt uses the shorthand “Toxic U” to describe the intersection of two campus trends—casual hookups and binge drinking. Koren Zailckas, in *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood*, reports that over the past four decades, while male alcohol abuse has remained constant, there has been a threefold increase in the number of females who get drunk at least ten times a month—resulting in higher risks of suicide, depression, and sexual assault.

Predators Who Look Like Students

As a graduate student at UNC Chapel Hill, I was approached one evening by a friendly young man I thought was also a graduate student. When he asked if I would give him a ride to his house, I naively agreed. I had left Reilly, my Sealyham Terrier, in the back seat of my little Dodge Dart. The guy directed me out of town to a remote area where some students lived, then down a dark road. There was nothing there. As I turned to look at my passenger, he was lunging at me. At that moment, Reilly let out a ferocious growl and sprang between the seats to protect me. My would-be predator jumped out of my car and ran off into the darkness. I gunned the accelerator and sped home.

This “graduate student” disappeared from campus. Universities have long attracted predators like this. Young women then and now walk into these situations unprepared.

The New Sexual Regime

Today, most women, including myself, consider themselves feminists in that they believe girls should have roughly the same opportunities as boys, and women

should be paid equally for equal work. What many people don’t realize, however, is that women have been dragged, willingly or not, into the dark side of the sexual revolution, which reduced female sexuality to what it is for many men—a recreational activity.

Loose Girl: A Memoir of Promiscuity, by psychotherapist Kerry Cohen, serves as a sobering guide to the real costs of sex without commitment. In Cohen’s case, “sexual liberation” included STDs, pregnancy scares, abortion, and “desperation and emptiness.”

Very few universities address the campus sexual culture in a significant way. An exception is Catholic University of America. In announcing its return to a policy of same-sex dorms, President John Garvey cited research showing that students in coed dorms are *more than twice as likely* both to indulge in weekly binge drinking and to have had three or more sexual partners in the past year. Garvey states that “binge drinking and hooking up are the two most serious ethical challenges college students face.”

**Binge drinking and hooking up:
“the two most serious ethical
problems of college students.”**

The Porn Generation

Another disturbing development in today’s campus sexual culture is that 70% of college-age men now view pornography on a regular basis. Harvard Law School student Ben Shapiro wrote *The Porn Generation* about pornography’s corrosive effect on his peers. Pornography leads males to view and treat women as sex objects. Some males have become so jaded by watching pornography that they no longer find it satisfying to make love to real women.

Some men who use pornography will seek out children as victims. The FBI’s Crimes Against Children Unit has documented the relationship between pornography and child molestation.

A High School Tragedy

The toxic combination of alcohol abuse and a hookup culture is not limited to the college years. In May 2005, Beth Twitty got a phone call that her 18-year-old daughter, Natalee Holloway, a high school senior on a school trip to Aruba, had not shown up at the hotel for the bus back to the airport. She had flown to Aruba with 130 of her classmates and seven chaperones.

Natalee was a straight-A student at an affluent Alabama high school. According to her mother (her parents were divorced), Natalee never drank, did not have a boyfriend, and had not had sex. According to Natalee’s friends, however, she began drinking the moment she got to Aruba and rarely stopped. This was apparently not her first use of alcohol, but the peer group code of silence kept Natalee’s mother in the dark.

The Aruban deputy police chief in charge of the investigation stated, “There was wild partying and a lot of drinking and room-switching every night.” After a night of partying, Natalee was seen riding away with three local males—and was never seen again.

Natalee’s mother now lectures students on the dangers of “overseas travel.” But Natalee could have suffered the same fate had her group gone somewhere in the U.S. All the major forces that put young people at risk came into play: a popular culture that glorifies reckless behavior; peer pressure to indulge in it; and parents who sanction it, lack the will to resist it, or are just unaware of what is going on in their young person’s life.

What Schools Can Do to Help Girls Thrive

Much of the trouble our daughters face begins in middle school. The movie “Thirteen” captures the chaos that envelops many young girls. Tracy, the film’s protagonist, starts out as a studious innocent, but yields quickly to the pressure the school’s “hot” girls apply to dress and act older. Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* describes middle school as “a crucible,” a time and place where many “confident, well-adjusted girls are transformed into sad and angry failures.” Pressure to be beautiful and popular often leads to sex, drugs, and bad grades.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Many schools are now structured on a more sensible, K-8 model. In Boston there were once only three K-8 schools; today there are more than 30. As girls in these K-8 schools hit puberty, they are not thrown into a suddenly sexualized environment. Rather, they become the school leaders and take on the role of mentor to their kindergarten or 1st-grade “buddies.” Later, when they go to high school, they’re more comfortable in their new bodies and more emotionally equipped to deal with the transition.

Best Friends, Best Men

The premature sexualizing of our young has made mothers out of some girls who

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are still children themselves. Nearly three decades ago, while on staff at Georgetown University's Child Development Center, I had a startling reality check when a 12-year-old girl brought her baby in for evaluation. This little girl had absolutely no sense of what motherhood entailed. Now, her new baby daughter seemed destined to be another victim in the sad cycle of young, unwed motherhood.

To help prevent tragedies like this, I developed Best Friends, a program to challenge inner-city girls (and later, boys) to safeguard their futures by setting high goals and abstaining from sex, drugs, and drinking (box at right). However, when I first presented this program to a group of U.S. Dept. of Education experts, it was met with skepticism. A female Ph.D. said, "Do not try to take this program to the inner city. Those girls are not going to listen to you."

In the back of the room, Pauline Hamlette, the statuesque principal of D.C.'s Amidon Elementary School, rose and said, "Mrs. Bennett has taught poetry in my classrooms. I have seen her with my students. Children don't care what color you are; they just want to know if you really care about them. I want this program next year for my 6th-graders." With those words, she opened the door for us to the D.C. Public

Schools.

By 2013, more than 30,000 girls in 15 cities had embraced our program's character message of *self-respect through self-control*. Georgetown University's Dr. Bruno Anthony reported early on that his findings validated our Best Friends name. Students in our program were significantly more likely to help their friends make a decision regarding sex—and that decision was to wait.

Building on our success with girls, in 2000 we launched Best Men, which emphasizes restraint from violence as well as sexual self-control. Among boys who were sexually active before the program, a significant number ceased that behavior by the end of the year. The data showed equally strong results for drug and alcohol use (box at left).

What Parents Can Do to Help Their Daughters Thrive

The success of Best Friends, Best Men, and other holistic, character-based programs shows that schools can do a lot to help young people form habits of healthy living and lay the foundation for a positive future. But ancient wisdom tells us that parents are the first and most important character educators of their children. What can we do as families to set our children on the path to a flourishing life?

1. STAY TOGETHER. One of the most important things we can do is to try to keep our families intact. In *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25-Year Landmark Study*, Judith Wallerstein found that girls from divorced homes have sex sooner—and with more partners—than girls from intact homes. They also marry later and divorce more often.

2. PAY ATTENTION. We should get to know our children's friends, including their boyfriends or girlfriends, and always know where they are. Because the strongest pre-

Best Friends & Best Men Principles

- ◆ Friends respect each other and help each other make the right decisions. The best friend is one who makes you a better person.
- ◆ Sex and love are not the same. Sex is never a test of love; friendship precedes love; and abstinence until marriage is the best policy.
- ◆ In middle school and high school, it is better to have boyfriends/girlfriends who are your age.
- ◆ You gain self-respect through self-control, being honest, accomplishment, and taking responsibility for your behavior. Making decisions that show respect for self and others will help you succeed in school and life.
- ◆ Alcohol clouds decision-making about sex. Drugs have the same effect as alcohol and can also lead to addiction, imprisonment, and death.
- ◆ Fitness requires proper nutrition, regular exercise, and self-discipline. Being fit leads to good health and self-respect.
- ◆ The only 100% sure protection against HIV/AIDS and other STDS is to abstain from intravenous drug use and from sexual activity until marriage.

<http://www.bestfriendsfoundation.org/>

dictor of sexual involvement is a romantic relationship of more than 18 months, we should discourage one-on-one dating and emphasize going out in groups.

3. HAVE A CORE PHILOSOPHY. In *Girls Will Be Girls: Raising Confident and Courageous Daughters*, Dr. Joann Deak urges parents to develop a "core philosophy" to guide their parenting. The firmer and deeper that core, the less there will be to negotiate. A family whose daughter has a moral commitment to chastity will not have to negotiate birth control, having sex with a boyfriend, or whether oral sex is really sex.

4. EAT TOGETHER. As a society, we have devalued the family meal. We need to restore its importance—and unplug at meals. Shut off the television and put the smart phones and iPods away. (For family conversation starters, see *Winter/Spring 2013 excellence & ethics* at www.cortland.edu/character.)

5. TEACH EMPATHY. One good way to teach empathy is to ask how a given action would make someone feel. We must also make our daughters aware that they will encounter situations where empathy is totally absent. Liz Seccuro discovered that at the Phi Psi house where she was brutally raped and which years later hosted Tucker Max.

BEST FRIENDS/BEST MEN OUTCOMES

Middle Schools girls in Best Friends, compared to non-participating peers in D.C. public schools, were:

- more than 6 times less likely to have sex
- 2 times less likely to use alcohol
- 8 times less likely to use drugs
- more than 2 times less likely to smoke.

Eighth-grade boys in Best Men, compared to non-participating peers, were:

- 33% less likely to use drugs
- 22% less likely to use alcohol
- 20% less likely to have sex.

¹Lerner, Robert. "Can Abstinence Work? An Analysis of the Best Friends Program." *Adolescent & Family Health* (2004), 3 (4), 185-192.

²<http://www.bestfriendsfoundation.org/FoundResults.html>

Why Wait?

I'm 19, and saving sex for marriage. I saw my friends do things they ended up regretting.

By waiting, I've saved myself from emotional and physical damage. Along with all the STDs I've avoided, I haven't had to deal with the burden of breaking up with someone I've had sex with or becoming a father before I'm ready for that. Having sex before marriage would cheat me and cheat my future wife. She deserves not to have to share me with anyone in the past.

Right now it can be tough to wait, but the payoff will come when my wife and I can enjoy the gift of sex that we've saved for each other.

Brett V.

Just for Guys/Just for Girls
www.humanlife.org

Max would later confess, "It's not just that I didn't care about other people. I didn't even understand that other people existed or mattered." In 2012, he told a *Forbes* interviewer:

There's an emptiness to hooking up so much. When you're below a certain age, or a narcissist, you don't notice it or care. But once you develop empathy, once you develop a soul, the loneliness and the emptiness become too much.

6. SHARE YOUR FAITH. Faith provides moral clarity. Many parents today feel overwhelmed by a powerful and ever more toxic popular culture. A strong, shared faith between parents and children can level the playing field.

7. EXPRESS DISAPPROVAL OF TEEN SEX. In *Your Child at Risk*, pediatrician and family counselor Dr. Meg Meeker says parents must clearly communicate disapproval of teen sex. She cites the National Study of Adolescent Health, which found that teens "who perceive that their mother disapproves of their engaging in sex are more likely to delay sexual activity." But the study also found that "if mothers recommend birth control, teens are less likely to perceive strong maternal disapproval of premarital sex."

8. KEEP THE HOME SECURE. Today our daughters are pressured by their boyfriends to send them indecent photos and by their girlfriends to do all manner of improper things. Boys are steered by their friends to visit an appalling variety of indecent web-

sites. Parents must therefore monitor their children's cell phone and Internet activity. TextGuard enables parents to log onto a website and monitor the content of their child's texting, e-mailing, and browsing. iWonder Surf allows parents to monitor and control the websites their child is visiting.

9. ENCOURAGE AMBITION. The great actress Helen Hayes once observed:

My mother drew a distinction between achievement and success. She said that achievement is the knowledge that you worked hard and did your best. Success is being praised by others. Always aim for achievement and forget about success.

10. ENCOURAGE MARRIAGE. We can teach our children the beauty and blessings of marriage by showing in our own lives the everyday rewards of marriage and family. In *Best Friends and Best Men*, we proudly promote the value of married life. We help young people see what a good marriage looks like through married role model speakers. We help them prepare themselves for a successful marriage. We catalog the benefits of saving sex until marriage. In our survey of *Best Friends and Best Men* participants, 92% of girls and 95% of boys said that they hoped to be married someday.

Despite the growing threats they face, we can help our daughters survive and thrive in today's high-risk culture. We must give them boundaries and enforce them. We must tell them to treasure their future and not waste it on behaviors that will fill them with shame the next morning and regret for many mornings to come. We must teach them not to get involved with men who don't treat them with the highest level of respect.

We must encourage them to find a passion and pursue it. We must urge them to focus on the things that will help them be happy over the long haul—such as honor, truth, decency, faith, and family. We must remind them how complex life is but how simple are its basic truths.

We can, we must, do better for our daughters. ■

Adapted from *Daughters in Danger: Helping Our Girls Thrive in Today's Culture* (2014) by Elayne Bennett, President and Founder, Best Friends Foundation. Email:

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SEX FACTS

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 out of 4 American women is the victim of rape (attempted or completed) during her lifetime. Most rapes are not reported.
- Dating violence is 5 times more likely in teen relationships that involve sex. Young women 16-24 experience the highest rates of violence at the hands of someone they know.
- Three out of 10 teenage girls get pregnant at least once. About a third get abortions. 20% of teen couples using condoms as birth control become pregnant after one year.
- About 50% of sexually active youth get an STD by age 25. About 80% of people who have an STD don't know it.
- You can get an STD such as herpes or HPV even if you use a condom because such infections are transmitted by skin-to-skin contact.
- Oral sex can spread herpes and other STDs to the face, mouth, and throat. Herpes can be transmitted to a baby during birth, causing brain damage or even death.
- *Pediatrics* (87) reported that the attempted suicide rate for sexually experienced girls (12 to 16) is 6 times higher than for virgins.
- 12- to 17-year-olds are among the largest consumers of online pornography.
- 58% of girls and 53% of boys ages 15 to 17 have never participated in any form of sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
- 67% of teen girls and 53% of boys who have had sex say they wished they had waited.
- The percent of black high school students who have "ever had sexual intercourse" fell from 82% percent in 1991 to 60% in 2011.
- Abstinent youth get better grades in school and are less likely to drop out. Teen sex raises the likelihood of other risk-taking such as drug and alcohol abuse and crime.
- More than 40% of children are now born to unwed mothers (vs. 6% in 1960). Children of unmarried mothers are more likely to grow up in poverty, have social-emotional problems, drop out of school, engage in teen sex, and have a child outside of marriage.
- Children living with their mother and her boyfriend are 11 times more likely to be sexually, physically, or emotionally abused than those living with married, biological parents.
- Couples who do not cohabit before marriage experience lower rates of marital conflict, infidelity, and divorce.
- Adults who delay sex until marriage report the highest levels of sexual satisfaction.

Sources: *Rape and Sexual Assault* (White House, 2014); Centers for Disease Control; *Pediatrics*, 87 and 114; NCI Ctr for Health Statistics; NCI Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy; *Lost in Transition*; Guttmacher Institute; Medical Institute for Sexual Health; *A Scientific Review of Abstinence and Abstinence Programs*; ChildTrends; *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*.