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# Helping curb violence



## SIGN ON DOTTED LINE

Licensed clinical social worker Kenn I. Hicks has developed a "dating contract" he believes will help curb youth dating violence by opening up a dialogue about what constitutes violence. Below is a closer view of the contract.

EVELYN KRISTO  
Valley Press



# Man works to quash date violence

VALLEY LIFE ■ C8



## Dating contract fights verbal, physical battering

By RYAN CHADDICK  
Valley Press Correspondent

**K**enn I. Hicks believes youth dating violence is out of control, and he is determined to help curb the violence. "You can read the statistics," said Hicks, a licensed clinical social worker.

"Look here; it says that one in three teens experience violence in a romantic relationship. That's not acceptable."

In his social work, Hicks has seen his fair share of domestic violence.

To put an end to youth domestic violence, Hicks has created a teen and young adult dating contract.

"The contract forces the couple to talk to each other," he said. "It creates an opportunity for the involved families to engage in a dialogue with their children. Some parents do not discuss violence with their children."

"This way the parents can let their daughter know what acceptable behavior is and what is not," Hicks continued. "Maybe the father can tell his son what's acceptable for him. Hitting, belittling, making strong sexual passes — those are not appropriate and acceptable behaviors."

In addition, Hicks believes teenagers may engage in violent relationships because they see their parents behave in unhealthy manners.

"After looking at the contract, a teen might say, 'Hey, my dad shouldn't be hitting my mom like that,'" Hicks said. He added that "a boy might see his father take control of the family, and he wants to have the same kind of control. So, he'll try to control his girlfriend however he can."

In other words, teens often mimic their parents. A teenage girl is just as likely to accept the violence her boyfriend may bestow upon her if her mom also accepts domestic violence.

"I would say that a lot of kids are just performing the roles they see in their parents," Hicks said. "And so the cycle of violence just continues. This contract, though, hopefully can break the family code of silence. You know, whatever happens in the family stays in the family. A dialogue can break this code and the continuous cycle of violence."

The contract requires parents or guardians of the individual teens, as well as the teenagers themselves, to sign the contract.

Domestic violence does not nec-

essarily mean a man beating a woman, Hicks said.

"We are seeing an increase in women being arrested for domestic violence," he said, although he was quick to add these women may just be defending themselves against a battering man.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, arrest rates for violent incidents among teenage girls rose more than 40% from 1992 through 2002.

Several area high school administrators admitted they saw this trend in their schools.

In years past, fighting incidents involving girls occurred rarely, but last year one area high school saw more than 30 incidents of girls fighting.

In fact, more girls than boys fought this year at the high school.

"I think girls are just lashing out for the violence they've experienced," Hicks said.

Others disagree.

Brint Laubach, guidance counselor at Phoenix High School, a community day school run by the high school district for students expelled from its comprehensive sites, believes several factors are involved in the increase of female violence.

"A few things come to mind that may be contributing to this," Laubach said in an e-mail response to questions.

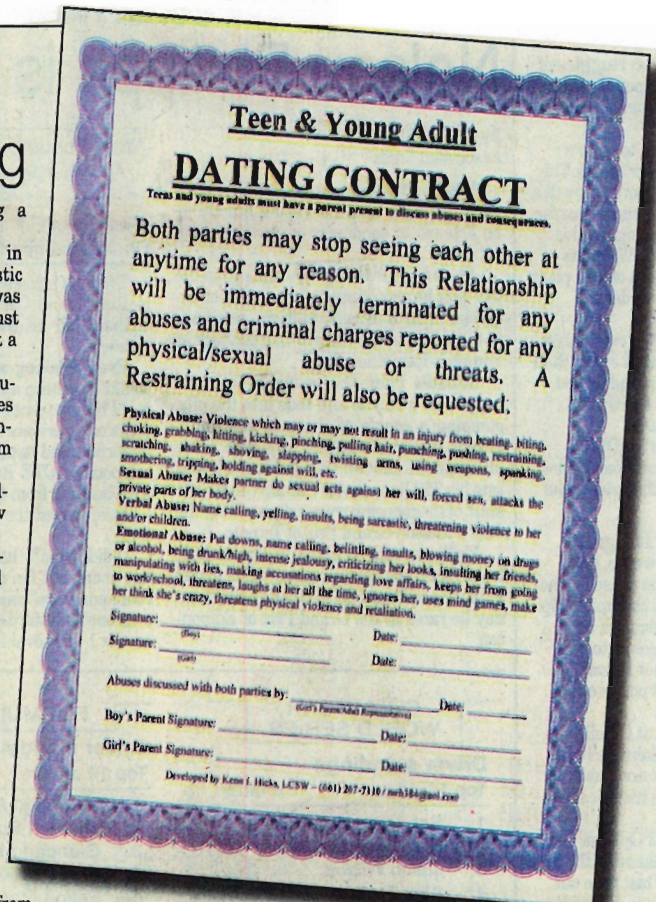
"No. 1, break-up of the family: Many men no longer lead, provide, and protect their families; women forced to take on masculine roles; lack of moral training from (age) 0-12 years old, 'survival of the fittest' mentality among children in day cares, etc.

"No. 2, National Organization of Women/women's liberation movements promote women taking on masculine roles: they have a significant influence over the media, colleges and curriculum development in public schools.

"No. 3, music, television and media: gangster rap and pop music, television (aggressive women heroines in cartoons and kids' programs), and

"No. 4, loss of religious and ethnic culture in America's humanistic, liberal melting pot."

Helen Grieco, the executive director of California NOW, said she seriously disagrees with Laubach's



assessment.

"The message is offending," Grieco said. "No, the women's movement hasn't made women more masculine. That is a poorly thought out answer to a social problem. It's sad. The economics of our society is creating more and more poverty. Mothers and fathers are just exhausted. I blame the government."

"In years past, a family could live off one parent working full time. Now, both parents have to work overtime just to make ends meet. Kids don't feel love. And, they're lashing out. Is that the women's movement? No. If anything, the women's movement is trying to address these issues."

Hicks is committed to facing the problems of violence in the home and in relationships.

"I want to get this message out to the kids: violence is not acceptable," he said. "You can't hit someone; you can't allow someone to hit you. It's unacceptable. Oftentimes the violence in the teenage relationship begins with name-calling, belittling, insults. Then it escalates to physical and sexual abuse. Kids — boys and girls — need to know that this is not acceptable. Families need to know

and take responsibility."

Grieco said she feels sympathy for families and believes society needs to take responsibility for teenage violence.

"If we were really a family-loving country we wouldn't have one out of five children living in poverty," she said. "Where's our responsibility? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure this out. There's a serious lack of community support. Other industrial nations have many safety nets. It's appalling what happens in this country."

Hicks said he is trying to help support the community. He is available to give lectures or speak to students at assemblies.

"I would love to come to the high schools here and speak with the students. It'd be best for me to share with entering freshmen," Hicks said. "I'm available to speak with Parent Teacher Associations, junior high schools, battering shelters, anywhere. You can never get this message out too early or to too many people."

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