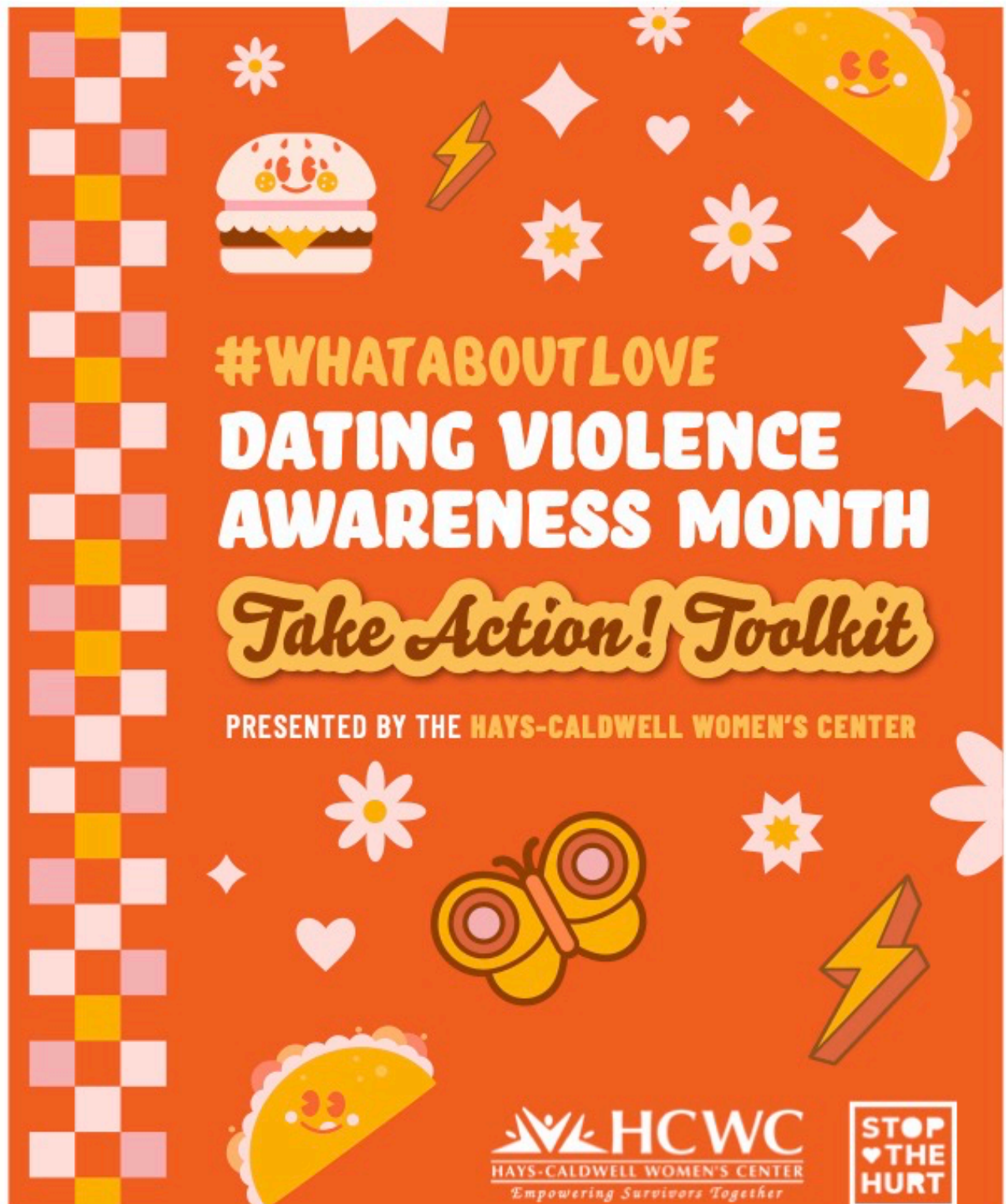


**Relationship health and support  
thrives this Valentine's Day**



By Felicity Guajardo



*The poster and cover for the toolkit offered by HCWC | Permission to use by HCWC*

SAN MARCOS— As we approach Valentine's Day with warm hearts and love for our partners, families and friends, we should also be reminded to care for each other in our inner circles and beyond this February during Dating Violence Awareness Month.

[Hays-Caldwell Women's Center \(HCWC\)](#), a local non-profit that assists anyone who works, lives, or goes to school in San Marcos affected by violence/abuse is promoting February as Dating Violence Awareness month. Dating Violence Awareness Month is a nationally recognized initiative to help and educate communities about abuse and violence in young teens as well as young adult relationships.

The age range for occurrences of dating violence is 16-24 years old.

The Student Health Center also recognizes February as Dating Violence Awareness Month and offers resources for students affected by emotional, physical, mental, or financial abuse. These can be

meetings with the counseling center or putting students in contact with HCWC.

Kelsey Banton, health promotion specialist with the Student Health Center, puts the effects of dating violence in perspective.

"When we're having conversations around dating violence, we're really talking about the ways in which power and control are happening. Those dynamics are happening within a relationship over time and just to be really vigilant of what that can look like in our own relationships, but also in like the relationships that our friends have," Banton said.

In contrast to sexual violence, which can still fall within the bounds of dating violence, dating violence is happening year-round. Sexual violence on college campuses is most frequent to happen in the timeframe called ["the red zone."](#) The beginning of Fall semester to approximately Thanksgiving Break.

Kiara Nicholson, aid and prevention specialist at HCWC, says more about why dating violence can be dangerous for young adults.

"It's important that we raise awareness, because I think a lot of people don't even know that it's happening to them," Nicholson said.

"Especially young adults or teenagers, either it's happening to them, or they are the ones being abusive in their relationships. I think sometimes behaviors that would be considered abusive are so normalized because maybe they see it in media or maybe with their friends or their family, they don't recognize that the relationship is abusive."

Banton also offers some insight of what an unhealthy relationship might look like to an outside party.

"So, some of the things that we kind of talk about [in terms of examples] is really looking at the way in which someone is really controlling of their behavior or their actions, and this can start off really small. This can be the ways in which someone just talks about always wanting to spend time with another person and then the way that can grow over time," Banton said. "Or sometimes really quickly into constantly wanting to monitor them, know where they're at, and then becoming really jealous or possessive or angry and punishes them if they don't give them all of their time or they don't check in."

As to why dating violence happens—there is no clear or short answer.

"I think that we as a society don't fully talk about these issues very well and very openly. And so, the secrecy creates hostility and victim blaming to people who experience violence. And I still think we have a lot of work to do to really open up the doors around why people harm other people," Banton says.

So, the question raises...What can we do?

We can start by sharing on social media, normalizing conversations about dating violence/abuse, or lend our resources and knowledge to those who need it. Even as a bystander we can all lend our ears to listen to victims and help prevent violence in the future. [Bystander intervention training can be found as an outside resource on Right to Be.](#)

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In light of more discussions about domestic violence/abuse becoming more accepted, The Student Health Center is now introducing a part-time sexual assault advocate from HCWC on campus available to

victims of sexual assault. The advocate will be on campus every Monday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the education building in room 1015. Call (512) 396-3404 to make an appointment.

Students Against Violence (SAV) is also participating in raising awareness about dating violence by promoting [#WhyIStayed](#), a hashtag that surged the internet in 2014 after Beverly Gooden, a survivor and advocate for domestic violence combated against victim blaming.

SAV will be tabling with a QR code linking to a response forum to the hashtag for people to share their stories and find comfort in knowing they are not alone. The responses will be written on a 3D hashtag to be displayed in the student hub.

As we all prepare for our Valentine's Day festivities, let this cause act as a form of love to our community. Encourage your community members to look out for each other and care for one another.

"Overall, HCWC's mission is to create a community without violence and abuse, and we think that it takes everybody in the Community to come together to be able to do that. We also believe that everybody deserves healthy relationships," Nicholson said. "I know it's February. We're focusing on dating violence since it's dating awareness month, but people deserve healthy relationships across the board, whether that's with partners, and whether that's with family or friends."

Dating violence is not your fault. Whatever your story, you are not alone, and you have the right to speak up and speak out. If you want to share your experiences with us, we will display your responses on the San Marcos and Round Rock campuses to help challenge victim

blaming and stand in solidarity with each other. We will not collect or share any of your information.