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COMMUNITY

Red Cross program teaches kids how to recognize signs of abuse

It's Not Your Fault program now being offered in Halton

By Stephanie Thiessen
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

(6 Is it abuse if my father is always asking about my friend and paying her a lot of attention?"

The above question is an example of something a student might ask as part of a Red Cross program new to Halton — entitled It's Not Your Fault — that's being presented to help students understand what consitutes abuse, and what can be done to prevent it.

What constitutes abuse isn't always clear cut, and a general confusion about what it includes can prevent children from coming forward, said Shelley Grist, project administrator for Halton.

According to the Canadian Red Cross, every day in Canada thousands of kids are emotionally, physically or sexually mistreated by people they trust.

The organization reports that children account for 22 per cent of the population, but represent 60 per cent of reported sexual assaults. One in 12 kids have witnessed violence in their homes before they're seven years old.

Program launch timely

This month is recognized nationally as Child Abuse Prevention Month, a fitting time to explore the new program — some students have already seen it, while others may see it in the coming months.

In 1976, the Canadian Red Cross helped create RespectED, an abuse prevention education program that now encompasses various workshops and presentations offered about violence and abuse prevention.

"Last year we reached 2,800 students in the Halton schools with the message about violence and abuse prevention and that abuse is never the fault of the victim," Grist said.

The new It's Not Your Fault presentation is being offered through RespectED and is for students in grades 7 to 10. It explores all aspects of violence, child abuse and prevention through interactive discussion and



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GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT: Shelley Grist, program co-ordinator for the RespectED program, stands beside a violence and abuse prevention poster.

group activity.

The program is presented by eight local adult volunteers who've completed extensive training.

The two-hour presentation examines neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, Grist said, and delves into the impact of abuse on its victims and why abuse happens.

Students who suspect a friend is being abused learn how to help.

Perhaps most importantly, the presentations give answers on where victims can go for help and what resources are available in their communities.

The reaction so far to the presentation has been positive, Grist said.

The program currently has presentation

openings for Milton schools for November 13, 28 and 30, plus December 5 and 11 and various dates next year. The cost is \$50 per person.

All that's needed is a teacher's request, and the Red Cross volunteers will give the presentation, Grist said, adding she's trying to spread the word across Milton.

The program fits in with the school curriculum.

One of the reasons the program is successful is it allows students to ask questions they might not feel comfortable discussing with their teachers, Grist said.

"The students don't feel embarrassed to ask the questions of someone they won't be seeing every day," she explained.

Also available through RespectED in

Halton are adult workshops that provide information about the barriers and benefits to preventing abuse.

Participants learn ways to proactively build safer relationships within organizations and communities, Grist said.

These workshops are particularly helpful for adults — such as sports coaches and teachers — who work with youths, she said.

"It's a difficult topic, but it's a topic we all need to be informed about."

To book the It's Not You Fault presentation or attend an adult workshop, e-mail Grist at Shelly.Grist@redcross.ca.

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Tuesday, October 17 Wednesday, October 18 Thursday, October 19 Friday, October 20 Saturday, October 21 Monday, October 23 Sunday, October 22 8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 1:00pm - 3:00pm Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Simply Halton -Energy from Waste 7:30pm - 10:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA TVC Sports: Canadian Raquetball Finals Swap Talk (Live) 10:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA 10:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA