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Good afternoon, I'm David, and today I am an only child.

My sister, Kristin, died young at 21, when she was brutally attacked and murdered by her boyfriend on June 3, 2005.

Only weeks earlier, she graduated from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. She was about to begin a new chapter of her life, when the book was suddenly slammed shut.

How could this happen?

Kristin was an innocent and peaceful person. In some ways, maybe she trusted a little too much.

But she didn't know the difference between a guy caring a lot about her – and a guy keeping tabs on her incessantly, checking on her every move. A guy who tried to separate her from friends and family and monopolize her attention.

Kristin didn't know that excessively controlling behavior is a classic warning sign for potential violence in a relationship.

The day of her fatal attack, Kristin wanted to spend time with a couple of classmates who would be moving on to new jobs in other states.

In text messages with her boyfriend, she sent this... "You are being ridiculous. Why can't I do something with my friends?"

Two hours before she was attacked, another one read, "You were so controlling today."

A half hour before the attack, the last email she ever wrote in her life, was sent to my father... in part, it reads..."He was acting really jealous that I hung out with my friends all day. They are people who care about me that I want to keep far into the future...He didn't understand that, and kept calling me all day. It was really annoying."

(later it read...)

"When I want to spend time with my friends,he can't seem to handle it...It is really hard to deal with someone who seemed to be getting more and more controllingand not giving me space to be me."

My father read that early the next morning.

He wrote back...

"He needs to know what friends mean to you. And he needs to know where he stands with you."

That's what he wrote, but she never read it.

Her life had ended hours earlier when she was viciously stabbed and slashed 55 times by this man she was dating, with defensive wounds to her arms and hands. Eleven stab wounds to her back alone.

Kristin failed to recognize the warning signs of the unhealthy relationship she was trapped in. Education about this was not very available then.

In fact, education about teen dating violence is still not included in an appalling number of states today. Isn't it obvious how critical this is?

I feel that I have a unique vantage point, as my generation was the first within which so many teenagers began carrying their own cell phones. I got my first cell phone my sophomore year in high school.

The fact is, people in dating relationships these days have **immediate** access to one another, a fundamental change from the dynamics of dating in my parents' and grandparents' generations. This is often manifested through text messaging.

By way of this immediate access to one another, controlling behavior is now infinitely more easily channeled in a way that was never as possible before. Two people who do not live together can be in constant communication. **This is a key point.**

The outlet for obsessive, controlling behavior is there. It is behavior that can be an indicator for potential violence, as in my sister's tragic story. We need our young people to recognize these warning signs.

Today's youths need to learn about dating violence, so they can interpret when it is happening around them.

States need to open their doors to the truth about teen dating violence, so it can be taught in every middle school and high school in the country. The curriculum already exists -- and is ready to be distributed. So why are we, in America, waiting ???

I know teen dating violence education is a subject that's often difficult to discuss.

It's disturbing to learn that someone who you think loves you, could try to manipulate and control you. Or hurt you.

But that's the kind of clarity we need to give young people.

Allow me to consult my own experience once more. Young people simply do not know much at all about dating violence. When I was in middle or high school and heard in passing about abuse in a relationship, I frankly didn't know what to do or think. I didn't like it, but it was somewhat taboo and unfamiliar.

We need to weave **common knowledge** about dating violence into American culture through education at a young age. Dating violence shouldn't be an unmentionable issue, and its warning signs need to be known.

In schools, this needs to carry the same level of importance as math, English, reading and history. Its information a person will use for a lifetime. And it saves lives.

If Kristin were here, she would ask us to take action so that no other young woman would ever suffer the horrific fate she needlessly endured.

Once the curtain of ignorance is pulled back, the truth will save, or at least improve, girls' and young women's, as well as young men's, lives. It's what they don't know that can hurt them.

One more item...

Besides teens, we must awaken today's parents to the realities of teen dating violence. The fact is, most mothers know little about this subject, and fathers are completely out of touch with it.

What makes it worse is their "discomfort in talking about it."

"Discomfort?"

I define "discomfort" these days as visiting my sister's grave on Christmas.

The information's ready to go into schools right now. And the need's never been greater. What, at times, today has become permissible behavior towards women, is nothing more than dating abuse, or dating violence.

Let's call it what it is.

Young people, specifically young women, need to know that warning signs are the kind of alarms that can save your life or a friend's life.

Liz Claiborne's "MADE" Program has rich information anyone can easily download and read or dispense. Their *Love is Not Abuse* curriculum provides life-saving lessons free of charge.

So what are we waiting for ???

This problem is not going away if parents and school systems don't address it. Education is a sure way out of our profound lack of awareness. We need for our children to have the kinds of tools it will take to avoid deadly behavior.

It's time for action.

My parents, who are also MADE members, testified in Annapolis, Maryland this year on behalf of House Bill 845, supporting Delegate Carter, which would allow dating violence education into Maryland schools for the first time. It passed and was signed into law. But Maryland is only one of a few states with such a law. I passionately urge the rest of the states in the union to do likewise.

Our best hope today is that the powerful and motivated people assembled here will come together and adopt teen dating abuse policies within each of your states.

Imagine how great a difference you will make by passing laws that get education about dating violence where it will do the most good. And that's in our schools.

Rhode Island, Maryland, and Texas are perfect examples that legislators such as you can and do make life-saving differences.

Dating violence today is beginning to be understood for what it is: a widespread epidemic of pain and suffering that leads to a lifetime of broken dreams.

Today, my sister, Kristin, if she were able to speak to you here today, would urge you to teach our young women and men about this.

She would ask you to give them what she never had. She paid the ultimate price for not knowing about it.

Education about teen dating violence is a powerful way to break the cycle -- at an early age.

I hope you will work together and get this done. You are the right people, and now is the right time.

The Mitchell family, including Kristin -- thanks you.

THE KRISTIN MITCHELL FOUNDATION

The mission of The Kristin Mitchell Foundation is to support educational efforts that raise awareness, among college students, about the potential dangers of unhealthy dating relationships.

kristinskrusade.org