



## NEWS RELEASE

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### ***Willow Tree Missions Commemorates Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month***

**Monticello, IL** – Each year, February is recognized as Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month across the country. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, one in 3 teens will experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from someone they're in a relationship with before they become an adult and more than half of college students say it is difficult to identify dating abuse or help someone who is a victim. Teen dating abuse affects 1.5 million high school students nationwide in a year.

Dating violence is often pictured as physical abuse but it can take form in other ways. Abusive relationships can also include emotional manipulation, verbal put-downs, excessive jealousy, digital stalking, and other negative behaviors. Warning signs of an abusive relationship can include attempts to isolate a partner from friends and family, feeling anxious or afraid around your partner, and patterns of control. It is important to note that this is not love but rather signs of power and control. Healthy relationships, on the other hand, exhibit communication, mutual respect, trust, a sense of safety, supportive behaviors, and other positive qualities that make both individuals feel valued. Students who have questions or concerns about relationships should utilize school resources such as counselors, trusted adults, and social workers.

“Based on industry data, we feel there is a need in Piatt County to educate students and parents about the risks associated with teen dating. During the month of February, we will be working with the schools in the area to provide messaging and resources that they can utilize in this educational effort. Great resources are also available at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) for those who want to learn more. Resources are also available through our office, and we can be reached in several ways. We can be reached by phone at 217-762-2350, extension 3, by text to the same phone number without the extension or by email at [info@willowtreemissions.org](mailto:info@willowtreemissions.org)”, said Andrea Kocher, Director of Services for Willow Tree Missions.

**ABOUT WILLOW TREE MISSIONS:** Established in 2007 first in Cisco and now in located in Monticello, Willow Tree Missions is a Christ centered non-profit corporation that operates resale shops that fund services for victims of domestic abuse. Family Service Center staff assist clients determined to escape abusive situations and create healthier, safer environments for themselves and their children. For victims in imminent situations, Willow Tree Missions provides emergency shelter and assistance with clothing, transportation, and household needs. The organization partners with law enforcement officials and community advocates to obtain orders of protection, safety planning, and legal referrals. To help clients move forward, Willow Tree Missions also provides ongoing crisis and spiritual counseling. Recognizing the interaction between education, substance abuse, and emotional/physical trauma, Willow Tree Missions has instituted Christ centered support programs and proactive educational outreach initiatives.

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