



National Campus  
Safety Awareness Month



# NCSAM 2020 PODCAST SERIES

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## TRANSCRIPT: WHEN DATING HURTS

### Introduction

The subject matter of this podcast series will address challenging topics related to personal and campus safety. We acknowledge this content may be difficult and have included specific content warnings in each episode to help create an inclusive, positive, and safe experience for all listeners.

### Music

[Playing]

### Introduction

In the wake of COVID-19 and an advancing civil rights movement institutions around the nation are reaffirming their commitments to campus safety as they navigate the great reopening. And even as communities wrestle with a new normal, the Clery Act remains the same. A call to action, our paths may be different, but the purpose of the journey is still the same.

### Introduction

Today we'll be hearing from Bill Mitchell, whose story is featured in the film. "Then Everything Changed" and who is the author of "When Dating Hurts." Jessica Mertz, Clery Center Executive Director will sit down with Bill who now serves as a Clery Center board member, to discuss one of the other health crises the global pandemic brought to light—intimate partner violence. Bill and his family know this issue far too well. In 2005, his daughter, Kristin Mitchell was killed by her ex-boyfriend just 20 days after she graduated from college.

The content of this episode focuses on campus safety issues, including dating violence, which may be upsetting or disturbing to some listeners. Please take care while listening.

### Jessica Mertz

Hello, Bill. Welcome. Thank you for joining me today. Um, I wanted to start by letting listeners know that I have known you and your family for almost 15 years now. I was a classmate of Kristin's at St. Joseph's University and was one of many, many people who felt deeply impacted by her loss. Um, and I know that you have spent much of the last 15 years educating yourself and educating others about dating violence. So I want to ask what made you decide to write this book. Can you share a little bit with us about why and what you are hoping readers will get from it?

### Bill Mitchell

Yes. Thank you, Jess. Thanks for, uh, thanks for, for putting this together so we can speak like this in this forum. Um, you know, I, uh, way back in the, the beginning, when we found out what happened with Kristin, and once we were able to get at least a little bit of our balance and start to understand why this happened to her, uh, you know, this dating violence murder. Soon after I, when I found out that of, of, uh, of dating abuse, I felt like what I wanted to do was to help other parents and family's children not go through what we were experiencing. So over the course of time that might've meant being asked to speak in front of groups or asking if I could speak, um, which later on, or at least by now has added up to somewhere just over 100 speeches over the years.



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I wish I had done a lot more, but also seeing the impact that that brought. And so of late the last four or five years, I started to think that I could give a speech and talk with 50 people or several hundred people. And I knew that they would go and talk with other people, which was great, but I knew that a book could do so much more, you know, book could get the thousands of people, uh, and it could be, it could be gotten at any hour of the day. It could be read in any hour of the day, it could be passed to other people. So a book seemed like the wisest thing that I could do next. So that was, that's what I did.

### Jessica Mertz

And can you share some of the responses and reactions you've had to the book so far from readers?

### Bill Mitchell

Yes. Well, you know, um, the response has come in different ways. Um, you know, some people will call me and talk with me and some people will email me. Well, what I got mostly was, uh, people saying I have two daughters at home and um once I finished reading your book, I'm going to be sure that they read it. Um, some people would say things like, I just read the book and I just ordered two more, uh, for my sisters who have teenagers. So those, those are the times when I feel like it's making the most of a horrible situation, having your daughter murdered, um, is, is devastating. And so it's just taking it and trying to, to take all that emotional energy and to put it into some sort of a form so that maybe it prevents a lot of this from happening. And then I've also heard from some people it's a comfort to those. Who've had it happened to read it from someone else, putting it into words. It's almost like it's not their story, but in some ways it is their story. And it seems to bring a lot of healing for those who, um, who are going through something similar to this. So it's, it's been, it's been all positive.

### Jessica Mertz

In reading the book for me, I think what, um, was so powerful about it was just how relatable and genuine and authentic your voice was throughout it. Um, and one of the things that really stood out to me was when you shared that last email exchange that you had had with Kristen, um, which was happened to be that evening that she was killed. And in that email exchange, she had opened up a little bit about her, uh, her boyfriend's behavior and was advice from you. Can you share a little bit about, um, with listeners how you think you would have understood or read those emails differently, knowing what you know now about dating violence?

### Bill Mitchell

Yeah. You know, it's, um, from what I read when I read it, cause the, her emails to me were, were, uh, all within the last say 10 to 12 hours before she was attacked and murdered. Uh, but I, I knew she was dating some guy. I know from my wife that she had said at one point in time that it was not a perfect relationship. She didn't say any more than that. Michele and I who's my wife, uh, we didn't follow up on that. That didn't seem to be a big trigger that didn't come with a lot of other questions behind it. And there were still these emails and it looks like she was having a great time with a couple of guys she had just graduated with because, uh, she wanted to see them before they went off to jobs and neither New York or Texas.

And, but she started in the last email or two, there was three that day, but in the last two, she started to talk about having a difficult time that day. And then the very last one said that she had a fight with the guy who she had been dating. And I took that as sort of a verbal fight back and forth. And I know later on that, that's what she meant. So I had that. Right. But, uh, you know, I just looked at it is they're having a difficult time and I didn't,



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I didn't see that there was any more to do, you know, I, okay. So knowing what I know now, obviously, you know, I would have, I'd pick up the phone and I'd say, Hey, you know, so you got this guy you're dating this guy and you're having some sort of argument or something like that.

I mean, give me some sense of what that's all about. I just would have asked a lot of open questions. Um, you know, knowing what I know now, I would have been asking those questions while I was in my car from Baltimore up to Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, you know, probably exceeding the speed limit. Uh, but you know, that's that, and my last email from her, she had sent somewhere around 2:30 in the morning on June 30, 2005. And I read it the next morning and I wrote this nice little response, which was a, he needs to know you care about him, but he, he needs to know you also have other friends and things like that. And then here I was writing an email to somebody who had passed away five hours earlier. So, uh, yeah, I definitely learned the hard way. And, and there's a huge benefit to those who see those passages because they could probably relate to them and say, wow, I gotta listen more carefully and I have to ask more questions.

### Jessica Mertz

Yeah. I was so glad that you showed those emails in that email exchange because I think one of the challenges in educating people about dating violence is helping them, you know, see the warning signs and know what they are, especially with family and friends, um, and helping them recognize it. It's not always so obvious, right? It's not always somebody who's going to be saying I'm being abused or I'm being controlled. And that you often do have to read between the lines more and just know when to ask questions, which I think is really good advice is, you know, it's not about jumping to conclusions, but it's about maybe just inquiring some are and asking, asking questions and seeing if that person is willing to open up to you a little bit more about what it is they're experiencing. So I think just that simple act as a parent or a friend, um, could actually help you learn a lot more about what, what somebody is experiencing in a relationship.

### Bill Mitchell

Yeah, that's exactly it. Yeah. I mean, if anything, the book is, is a cautionary tale because dating violence is very real. It takes a bit of a leap of faith. I believe for parents to consider the open their minds up and consider the fact that this could be going on with their daughter who is living down the hallway, if she's in high school or maybe she's in college, but this could be going on. And, uh, so it is a cautionary tale that it's real. And, uh, and that, that I hope people will buy the fact that it can happen to your child, or it can happen to a relative of yours. So if you hear your niece talking about her boyfriend and you start hearing some things, you don't just think, wow, he sounds difficult. Or boy, I wouldn't like that guy dating my daughter, you know, and then it just ends there, but it can happen to your relatives, your coworkers, and, and then honestly, for a lot of people reading it, uh, even though this is more geared to parents reading this on behalf or for the benefit of their children, but it could happen really at any age. We, you know, we tend to keep talking about young adults and all of that, but honestly, this can happen to anybody in a dating or even a marital relationship. I mean, domestic, domestic violence doesn't know age. So, uh, yes.

### Jessica Mertz

Yeah. So I think we've seen some really important strides in education related to abuse and unhealthy relationships in the past 10 years. Yet it amazes me that there continues to be such reluctance to seeing it as the massive problem that it is. Um, for example, the fact that the majority of assaults and homicides are committed by someone, a person knows. I mean, that's been proven time and time again. Um, why do you think dating and domestic violence is such a difficult topic for people to talk about and to really understand?



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## Bill Mitchell

Wow, that's, that'll take two podcasts to get through that question. But I think that, I think that one of the first things is this is that a lot of people think that this happens in certain neighborhoods, certain parts of town, certain neighborhoods, it doesn't happen in their neighborhood, their zip code. They come, they discount it. They don't really think about it that much. It doesn't happen around here. I think that's part of it at least. I mean, this is just, this is going to be a research project of one person, which is me, but I think that some people sort of look at it talking about it or, or, or reading the book, or getting too close to the subject. It's almost as if it might like a pariah situation, it might bring it on or something like that, you know, getting close to it might make it happen, which is of course ridiculous.

But, uh, I just think a lot of people think it's what you might call an icky subject. And, uh, so, and I think also with, with, uh, we've found at least with some school systems, they feel like they've got it handled because they have, uh, an hour or two on this subject every year. And they feel like that's just about enough. And plus they have a lot of other things they have to teach, which are of course very important, but I can't think of anything more important than this, honestly, because this happens at such a, an amazing rate and, and can happen to absolutely anybody.

In my experience, especially talking to young people about dating and domestic violence, I feel like accepting the reality of how prevalent it is and how many people experienced abuse makes the world seem like a pretty scary place. Right? And I, I feel like, um, there is sort of an avoidance often because it is, it's hard to wrap your head around how somebody in your life, somebody you care about or somebody love could also be a person that could to hurt you. Um, you want people to understand that and to be able to recognize it and respond to it. Um, but you also don't want to terrify them, uh, to be in relationships and to trust people. So it's always a difficult balance in educating.

## Jessica Mertz

I completely agree with you. It, it is, uh, it's tough. I mean, it's very often, it's when I know when I go to, to speak about it, I can see it in the audience. There are a lot of people who just don't want to be there and just don't want to hear it. Um, you know, they don't relate to it. And I understand that if, if they it's kind of like if they only knew.

So, our theme for National Campus Safety Awareness Month, NCSAM is the same yet different, which I think speaks to this weird moment we're in right now where we feel like we are, or many of us are sort of in a holding pattern where it's hard to look to the future. It's hard to do a lot of planning. There's so much uncertainty yet at the same time, there's so much happening. And according to national and global reports, there's been a lot of conversation about there being a pretty significant increase right now in intimate partner violence during COVID-19. Do you have any thoughts about why you think we're seeing this increase in why dating and domestic violence, uh, might be more prevalent during this time in particular?

## Bill Mitchell

Well, I think things like stay at home orders if people do follow them, the, the idea of, of being, um, let's say for a moment that we're talking of a relationship or a man is the abuser and the woman's being abused just even though it can be, it can run in, it could be male, male, female, female, and in any other combination. So, but it's just, um, I'm talking about something I know more about because of what happened in our family, but, um, but the idea that, that, that somebody who's being abused maybe more so than ever is confined to quarters



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with somebody who, who is a power and control type person. And because if the prevailing winds outside of the house or that there was this pandemic, um, you know, mixing with the public is not a good thing. You know, we're all kind of now sequestered together, which for some people is it's, it's bad enough when, uh, when the health situation outside feels like it did a year ago, and now we're kind of, um, cellmates, so to speak.

It can only get worse. And for a lot of people who maybe went to a job and now they can't go to a job, they lost their job. They're home, they're frustrated, they're angry. They're going to take it out on people who were home with them. So I've talked with a number of people who were directors of domestic violence agencies, and yes, there's spikes in all those categories and anything, anything they would get calls on. They're getting many more calls. Um, the violence is up. All of these things are up, you know, they, they are, they're having to actually go from some of the, some of the safe houses they've had to actually renting rooms in motels and various areas just to, just to put people, to get them away from abusive, violent partners. So yes, it's put it, it's taken everything that was there and put it into a pressure cooker. And you just about have to expect this, this to get worse. It has gotten worse.

### Jessica Mertz

Yeah. I think for many, um, dating and domestic violence survivors, especially folks who are experiencing it now, their safety net or their, their places where they were safe of have now been taken away from them during this time. And when we look at college students, um, that's of course the, the case for many of them too, especially if they have been told to leave their campus, um, and to return home where maybe their households with their, with their parents or families or partners are not safe, and yet they have no place else to go. And that's one of the things that we're trying to do is figure out how can we support schools and provide, you know, be, be creative in our thinking right now. And how, how do you help keep your students safe even when they're not physically on your campus?

### Bill Mitchell

Yeah, it's a, it's a huge question. I, I honestly can't sit here and say, I have the answer to that, except trying to find new and improved ways at least to dispense information and great, great suggestions. Um, I mean, from my own standpoint, I mean, I'm a guy that just worked on a book for years and it came out in May of this year, but I've been told by a lot of people that even though it tells the story of what happened with my daughter and how my family handled that journey over this last 15 years, that's not everything the book's about it does also talk to, or has stories in there from survivors. And I think there's a lot of learning in there, but it also then goes into a whole section that talks about, as you talked about earlier, warning signs and something that I call the template that all abusers follow, which I think is very valuable because if somebody is on the fence about what's wrong with their relationship, and just seems like a bunch of emotions running wild, I think if they read that template, they'll begin to see their own life being played out step by step is that, wow, this happens to me.

And then he does these things and then he does that and then he apologizes and then he's better for a while. And then it starts getting bad and I feel isolated and this goes through this template and it just, it goes through it in a cyclical way. So I do think getting the information out, and then one of the main things I feel is, is once people see this happening in their own lives or in the lives of someone they care about to then direct them to people that they can call when they get a chance and, uh, you know, national domestic violence hotlines, or, you know, they're, they have, they have these hotlines in every city in this, in this country, but get great advice about those things they can do so that they, they may be, uh, deal with the relationship better or in some cases break away from the relationship. But it has to be done. Definitely has to be done with a lot of planning. And,



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um, you know, it's, it's, it's dangerous to break away. You would think just breaking away is a really good idea, but it can be the most dangerous time. So yeah, it's, it's, it's tough. It really is tough. And my heart goes out to anybody who's in a relationship like that right now, or anybody that knows of somebody who is.

### **Jessica Mertz**

So, Bill, you've done a lot of speaking engagements, both big and small. And I know that many of our listeners will be folks who are tasked with educating their own communities about dating violence. So can you share a strategy or approach that you think has been effective in getting people and perhaps young people in particular to really listen and pay attention to this message?

### **Bill Mitchell**

Yeah, that's a very good question. I think that, uh, this is what I found at least, a lot of young people do want to hear about this. And it's interesting that, that it seems like nothing captures people more than a powerful story. Something that is just so compelling that if the person next to you were saying, Hey, I want to talk about this as a thing you go, no, no, no. I want to hear this person. So whether it's a personal story or a story that, that you have found, you have to keep the story driving ahead. You have to know how to shift gears, meaning I can get to a place that is a very emotional to the audience. And, um, but then a moment later, few moments later, let them breath, but then take them to a happier place. You know, talk about some anecdotal thing that happened with my daughter when she was in high school. Um.

### **Jessica Mertz**

Yeah, I really appreciate you speaking to the power of storytelling. I think that you're right. It has, forever been one of the most effective ways to get people, to listen and to relate and to have an emotional response, to an important message. And often, especially in education communities, we tend to really focus in on the, you know, what are all the facts that we need to share? What's the bulleted list of warning signs, but I think you're right, that we also need to remember how powerful it is to share a story and to let people understand the actual real life impact of these issues. So Bill, many of our listeners are administrators and folks who are actively working on campuses with student communities. If you could summarize what would be your call to action for them around dating violence?

### **Bill Mitchell**

Uh, boy, that's a good question. My call to action to them would be that, that if they embrace the fact that this is something that dating violence is something that is real, that is happening right at this moment, that that person walking by you in the hallway could have something going on. And that, that if you were to believe this is happening, if you were to educate yourself with current information of what to look for, and then what to do, if you feel like you spot it, that you could be doing heroic things without a whole lot of effort, and you could be guiding people to better live safer lives, more complete lives. And in some cases you could be saving their lives. You just don't know. You just, you just don't know, but these opportunities, I believe come by for all of us. You don't just have to be an administrator in college, but these opportunities come by us and it's just dialing up our awareness and knowing what to look for. We can see these red flags and we can then step in a little bit and just, just find nice ways to engage with people and direct them to more information for themselves and ways to do in most cases, better their lives. You know, you just, you just never know what that other person is going through.





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## Jessica Mertz

Thank you, Bill for all of the activism and education and, and time you have spent in your family has spent over the past 15 years, really trying to, um, not only educate people but save lives. Uh, I think it's made a difference even beyond what you'll ever be able to, to know and hear. I want to close today with, um, some quick questions that we're asking everybody, uh, somewhat unrelated to our conversation so far. Um, can you share for people a "life hack" for coping with quarantine?

## Bill Mitchell

Okay. I got one for you here. One of the things that I have found over the years, and I find it works even better in the year 2020 is doing, doing things for other people will always make you feel better about your own situation in life. So when you don't feel, when you don't feel great and I'm not talking about sick, I'm just talking about you don't feel great because of COVID. You don't feel great because you have to put a mask on to do the simplest things outside at a store or anything like that. But honestly, if you just shifted over to be nicer to people, help people look for ways to better someone else's life it'll always come back. That you'll feel better about your own situation. So I just say to people, look outwards, um, try to find something out there that, that, uh, that you can do to better someone else's life, because you really will kind of walk away. It's a little like the feeling of holding the door for somebody who's not actually that close to the door, but they're coming your way. You just kind of walk away saying that was a good thing to do. And somewhere down, you know, I helped that person and I, and I feel better about me. That's the, I want to be,

## Jessica Mertz

I think we can all agree that 2020 will be a year that we always remember for a number of reasons. What do you hope will be different after 2020? And what do you hope will stay the same?

## Bill Mitchell

I feel like when times get really tough like this, that you can see, you can see the best in people. I've seen it happen many times taking a walk, how people on the other side of the street will look over and wave. And you know, that maybe they wouldn't have done that a year ago or six months ago whenever. Um, I think, I think that, uh, I think people can rise to the occasion when it's really tough like that. And I hope that that stays around a very long time.

## Jessica Mertz

And is there anything you hope will be different?

## Bill Mitchell

You know, um, there was one thing I would love to see everybody get used to, again, is everybody telling the truth about things that I feel like a huge part of COVID and, and really a lot of other things are people coming up with, people making up answers that that benefit them in the moment. And I would just love for more people to take a grander view and say really seriously. How would you want people to speak with you?

## Jessica Mertz

So, Bill, thank you so much for joining us today. Um, we are excited to let people know about the book, "When Dating Hurts" and also to encourage people to check out the film that we have on our website, "Then



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Everything Changed," which they can download for free along with the curriculum to use on their campuses, to educate students about dating violence. And we're so glad that you continue to be an advocate and a champion for Clery Center. And for this work, we really appreciate you.

### **Bill Mitchell**

Yes. Thank you very much for, for putting all of this together. And I appreciate all the work that Clery Center's doing. I'm, I'm happy to be with the Clery Center this past couple of years. I hope it goes on forever. And, and, uh, you know, I think that, uh, I think together we have accomplished quite a lot, but, but there is certainly a lot more to do and, uh, and, uh, anybody can come along and help, you know, it's, it's all for the good, it's all about safety.

### **Jessica Mertz**

Thank you.

### **Bill Mitchell:**

Thank you too. Appreciate it.

### **Support Clery Center**

Hi, I'm Andy Cagnetta a proud Clery Center board member. National Campus Safety Awareness month is an opportunity for Clery Center to provide free resources to colleges and universities across the country. But we can't do that without the support of our generous donors. If you like me, believe in the importance of creating safer campuses for our students and want to support a mission driven nonprofit organization like Clery Center, please donate online at [clerycenter.org](http://clerycenter.org). That's— C L E R Y — center.org.