

boyfriends

Relationship Rights and Responsibilities

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO	YOU HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO
Understand your needs.	Think carefully about what you need in order to have a healthy, happy, safe life (with or without a relationship).
Protect your future.	Define and defend your priorities in all aspects of your life, not just your relationships, and to take steps to protect those decisions.
Have relationships that make you feel good about who you are as a person.	Make sure that no one puts you down, tries to change you, or makes you feel badly about yourself.
Enjoy your relationships.	Reasonably decide and demand how you want to be treated by someone in a relationship.
Not feel pressured.	Never allow someone to pressure you into decisions that make you uncomfortable or to threaten you if you change your mind.
Protect your safety.	Keep yourself out of situations that could reel out of control or that may be hard to escape.
Feel good about your body.	Take care of your body: feed it well, exercise, get enough sleep, and stop others from causing you physical or emotional pain.
Say "NO."	Think about your limits ahead of time and make sure your partner knows what they are and respects them.
Say "yes" on your own terms.	Be clear about what "yes" means (including what, when, how, where, and why).
Change your mind.	Be true to yourself and what you know is good for you, even if it is hard to explain to someone else.
Have a mutually respectful relationship.	Treat your partner the way you wish to be treated.

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Characteristics of Healthy Relationships

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In a healthy relationship, both partners have open and honest communication. They share power and control over decisions.

How do I get there? It starts with self awareness and the building blocks of healthy relationships.

Self-Awareness

Understanding Yourself People can't relate well to others until they can relate well with themselves. This means valuing your own body and understanding how you think and what you want and need. People who are ready for positive relationships usually

- **Appreciate their bodies.** They understand the changes that happen with puberty and view them as normal. They practice healthful behavior such as showering, brushing their teeth, eating well, and getting enough sleep. They avoid doing things that put them in physical or emotional danger.
- **Understand and prioritize their needs.** They understand what is important to them, now and in the future. They decide what is "right" for them based on those values and act to protect those choices. They understand the future consequences of the decisions they make now.
- **Accept responsibility for their behavior.** They understand that what popular culture "sells" them in media messages can be unrealistic, especially as it relates to sexuality and intimate relationships. They are able to stand up for themselves and do what is right instead of what seems "expected," even if it feels uncomfortable or causes bad feelings from friends or peers.
- **Understand and acknowledge sexuality but set limits.** They understand that sexual feelings are normal. They can enjoy sexual feelings without acting on them. They understand the consequences of sexual behavior and are prepared to deal with them (disease, pregnancy, or the changing and damaging effects of sex on a relationship and/or reputation). They can make decisions about how far to go in a relationship on their own but can also discuss this openly with a partner.

The Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships

Secure, supportive family relationships A strong connection to family can provide you with examples of good relationships and teach you how to handle conflict and build on positive experiences. Young people with healthy family relationships usually

- **Communicate effectively about issues, including sexuality.** They make sure their parents/caregivers know what's going on in their lives, even if they don't disclose every little detail. They are willing to let their parents know how they are dealing with problems. They understand that demonstrating safe and appropriate behaviors leads their parents to allow them more privileges and responsibilities.
- **Consider their family's values when making decisions.** They negotiate with family on boundaries while demonstrating respect for their needs and opinions. They ask questions of parents and other adults they trust about relationships and sexuality. They work to understand their parents' points of view, even if they don't entirely agree with them.

Secure, supportive friendships The ability to form good friendships underlies the ability to have healthy intimate relationships. People with good friendship skills tend to

- **Appropriately and respectfully interact with both genders.** They communicate effectively with male and female friends. They listen respectfully and without judgment. Their relationships provide equal give and take; they identify and avoid relationships where one friend takes advantage of another. They respect each others' rights to privacy: they don't tell each others' secrets.
- **Act on their own values and beliefs, even if they are not the same as their peers'.** They understand the pressure to be popular and accepted, but they don't allow the need to fit in to work against their own values and priorities.

What does a healthy relationship look like? People in healthy, intimate (physical and/or sexual) relationships express love and intimacy appropriately and talk about physical intimacy and sexual behavior. They also take action to protect themselves.

Expressing love and intimacy in developmentally appropriate ways In a healthy relationship people usually

- Understand the difference between love and sexual attraction.
- Try to understand how their partner is thinking and feeling.
- Resolve conflict with calm, mature discussion, respecting each other's needs and differences of opinion.
- Know that both partners have equal rights and responsibilities in love and sex.

Talking about physical intimacy and sexual behaviors In a healthy relationship, people are usually able to

- Talk with their partners about sexual behaviors before they occur.
- Communicate and negotiate sexual limits:
 - Explain their limits clearly (how far they are willing to go) before sexual behavior occurs (sober, with the lights and their clothes on).
 - Accept their partner's limits without question or ridicule.
 - Make sexual decisions and plan their behavior together.
 - Understand that “no” means “NO,” that even “Yes” means “NO” until they both agree upon their actions before they happen (sober, with the lights and their clothes on).

Taking action to protect your health and safety In a healthy relationship, people are usually able to

- Understand that sexual feelings and desires are normal human experiences but that there are many ways to acknowledge and honor sexual feelings that don't put them at risk for disease or pregnancy.
- Talk about the differences between low- and high-risk sexual behaviors.
- Protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and diseases by using safe sexual practices, including consistent use of condoms (100% of the time) in addition to other effective forms of contraception.
- Willingly seek advice, information, and services from parents or other trusted adults, and turn to the health care system, community agencies, religious institutions, and schools for additional advice and information.

Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

An **unhealthy relationship** has an imbalance in which one partner tries to exercise control and power over the other through threats and emotional and/or physical abuse.

How do I recognize it? An unhealthy relationship can include name-calling and insults, withholding of money or other resources, threats of isolation from friends and family, coercion, violence, stalking, and significant physical injury. An unhealthy relationship evolves from what can seem wonderful to abusive over time.

Evolution of Abuse

Starts out great! An unhealthy relationship doesn't always feel unhealthy at first. Look for these warning signs that your relationship might not be healthy:

- You receive excessive attention and flattery.
- You feel included, comforted, and supported beyond what you've felt before.
- You feel excessively wanted, desirable.

A little jealousy never hurt anyone? These excessive feelings can quickly turn to obsessive behavior. Your partner may begin to

- Show a lack of trust.
- Resent/restrict your time with friends and family.
- Call frequently and drop by unexpectedly.
- Monitor your behavior.

Falling hard and fast Be aware of controlling and obsessive behavior in your partner. He or she may

- Come on strong:
 - "You're the only person I could ever talk to."
 - "I've never felt loved like this by anyone."
- Pressure you to commit quickly.

- Try to control you. Your partner might
 - Claim it comes from concern.
 - Want explanations for all time or actions.
 - Begin to make personal decisions for you (what you can or can't wear, whom you can or can't see, what kinds of activities you can participate in, or what you can spend).
 - Want you to ask permission to do things.
- Pressure you, and make you feel guilty for wanting to slow things down.

Expectations and isolation Obsessive behavior in your partner may escalate. He or she may

- Expect you to meet all of his or her needs:
 - Be the perfect friend, boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife.
 - "If you love me, I'm all you need—you're all I need."
 - Eventually expects you to take care of everything, from emotional to physical needs.
- Cut you off from all resources (family, friends, religion, counseling, school, work), saying they are causing trouble.

It's not my fault! Your partner may

- Blame other people for his or her problems.
- Feel people are out to get him or her.
- Blame you for everything that goes wrong.
 - "You hurt my feelings."
 - "You're hurting me by not doing it my way."
 - "You make me happy when you do it my way."

Gets a little ugly Your partner may exhibit signs of cruelty:

- Not so nice
 - Sometimes cruel to animals or children
 - Insensitive to the pain and suffering of others
 - Teases younger brothers or sisters until they cry
- Sticks and Stones
 - Says things that are mean, hurtful, or degrading
 - Makes you feel worthless
 - "You could never survive without me."

Gets out of hand

- "Playful" use of force
 - Holds you down
 - Makes you do things you don't want to do
 - Makes you do things when you aren't ready to do them
- Dr. Jekyll and Mr./Mrs. Hyde
 - Sudden changes in mood and behavior
 - Nice one minute and uncontrollably angry the next
 - "I was just kidding"

- “I didn’t mean it”
- ***“I promise it will never happen again.”***

Absolute WARNING Signs

- Past history of battering/abuse: “He/she made me do it!”
- Threats of violence: “I’ll kill you!”
- Breaking things (Sometimes done as a punishment). Feels the right to punish you
- ***ANY FORCE***

What to Do If You Are in an Unhealthy Relationship

Be proud of yourself for recognizing your situation is dangerous. It can be hard to recognize problems from the inside of a relationship. It is too easy to justify someone's behavior and accept the blame yourself ("If only I hadn't done that, this wouldn't have happened." "Maybe it was my fault."). You deserve to be treated equally and respectfully. You deserve to have your needs met, too. You deserve to be in a relationship that makes you feel better about who you are, not worse. You deserve to feel safe in your relationships.

What do I do now?

Read others' stories: educate yourself on what typically happens in abusive situations when you don't do something about it.

- It can take months or years for a controlling relationship to evolve into one of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
- The **dangers are real**, ranging from lifelong effects of emotional or physical trauma to physical violence or death.
 - Of the women between ages 15-19 murdered each year, 30% are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
 - 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year.
 - 1 in 3 female homicide victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
 - 3% of male homicide victims were killed by their wives or girlfriends.
 - On average, more than 3 women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country *every day*.

Understand you are not alone

General Texas Statistics

- 74% of all Texans have themselves or known a family member or friend who has experienced some form of domestic violence.
- 47% of all Texans report having personally experienced at least one form of domestic violence: severe (physical or sexual), verbal, and/or emotional (for example, forced isolation from friends and family) at some point in their lives.

Teens and Relationship Violence

- Abuse can be emotional, physical, or sexual.
 - 1 in 3 teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked, or otherwise physically hurt by his or her partner.

- 13% of teenage girls who have been in relationships report having been hit or physically injured.
 - Nearly 1 in 5 teenage girls who have been in a relationship say a boyfriend has threatened violence or self-harm when presented with a break-up.
 - More than 1 in 4 teenage girls in relationships (26%) report enduring repeated verbal abuse.
 - 1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse.
- These events can happen in person, on the phone, by text message, video chat, and other means. It can be hard to get away from an abuser.

Don't blame yourself or judge yourself too harshly.

- You may have believed there was good in this relationship happened. Some things may affected you in very positive ways:
 - The problems might have been off-and-on.
 - The relationship may have been really good between problem episodes.
 - You may not have wanted to end the relationship, just the abuse.
 - You may have learned to recognize that **the dangers outweigh the possible benefits of continuing the relationship.**
- You may have thought you could change the person or fix your relationship:
 - He or she may apologize and promise to change.
 - You may think you can change him or her.
 - It is rare for controlling or abusive partners change their behaviors over time without significant professional help or other intervention.

Be prepared for a difficult journey Ending your relationship can be a major loss, even if it is good for you. Give yourself credit for how hard it is going to be. **Why is it so hard?**

- Genuine love and connection to the abuser
 - Your partner may have some very special, good, and endearing qualities. You may really love him or her.
 - This relationship may have helped you gain some self-esteem and confidence.
- Peer pressure
 - What our friends think of us really does matter.
 - Being in a relationship can offer some social status and feelings of acceptance.
 - Couples often share the same friends. If they break up and let people know what's going on, what are their friends going to do? Choose one over the other? What if they don't believe you?

- Shame
 - There's still a lot of shame in this society around admitting you have been abused.
 - It takes a lot of courage to end any relationship.
 - If there's violence involved, it can take a whole lot more.
- Difficulty leaving
 - If trapped in an abusive relationship, 73% of teens say they would turn to a friend for help, but only 33% who have been in or have known about an abusive relationship say they have told anyone about it.
 - Nearly 80% of girls who have been physically abused in their intimate relationships continue to date their abuser.

Recognize your parents may not see what is going on.

- Fewer than 25% of teens say they have discussed dating violence with their parents.
- 81% of parents either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it is an issue.
- 75% of parents are unaware that their teens have been physically hurt or bruised by their partners.

Getting Help

Remember that **asking for help is a sign of strength**; it is never a sign of weakness. While opening up to a friend may be your first step to finding support, it is always best to identify a trusted adult who can help you make an effective plan.

Who do I ask for help? Turn to a trusted adult or professional support system.

What you need from adults: Chart out all the adults you know and figure out who is your best ally:

- When you are ready to ask for help, choose an adult who has your best interests at heart. It might be a parent, a teacher, a school counselor, a coach, or a friend's parent.
- Write down what you need from the adult, including how you want them to behave.
 - Let them know it is important that they listen to everything you have to say before they start talking.
 - Ask them to understand how much you are hurting already.
 - Explain that you need their love, support, and help with problem-solving, not judgment about your mistakes.
 - Help them to understand that you may love your partner, but that you recognize you need help getting out of the relationship.

How do I end an abusive relationship?

- **Don't try to do it alone**
 - Ending abusive or dangerous relationships can escalate tensions and cause situations that lead to true physical harm or even sometimes death.
 - Have someone with you who can help keep you safe and make sure things don't get out of hand.
 - When possible, choose a public area to minimize the possibility of physical harm.
- **Have a plan**
 - Think through the possible ways to end the relationship.
 - Map out what might happen in each situation and how you would deal with it.
 - Have your support there to back you up.
 - Have a plan for what to do if it doesn't work out the way you thought it would.

What to Do If Your Friend Is in an Unhealthy Relationship

What are the signs of a Dangerous Relationship? Both males and females can be in dangerous relationships. You can interchange “he” and “she” in the following advice.

You know she is in trouble when...

- He puts her down or makes fun of her in front of other people.
- He acts extremely jealous when she talks to other boys (or girls), even when it is completely innocent.
- She apologizes for his behavior and makes excuses for him.
- She frequently cancels plans at the last minute for reasons that sound untrue.
- He’s always calling in to check in on her, texting her, demanding to know where she’s been and whom she’s been with.

And when...

- You’ve seen him lose his temper or break things when he’s mad.
- She seems worried about upsetting him or making him angry.
- She is giving things up that used to be important to her, such as spending time with friends, and is becoming more isolated.
- Her weight, grades, and appearance are changing, or she is showing possible signs of depression.
- She has injuries she can’t explain or the explanations don’t make sense.

When your friend is being abused

DON’T...

- Be judgmental.
- Make her feel ashamed. She probably feels badly enough already.
- Give ultimatums—“It’s him or me!”; “Leave him or I’m telling!”—She’ll end up apologizing for his behavior or lying to cover up for him, and she’ll end up going back to him.

DO . . .

- Let her know **why** you are concerned.
- Be specific about incidents that you have witnessed, not the relationship in general.
- Let her know what you saw and how it made you feel.
- Tell her how you see his behavior having an impact on her:
 - "I felt badly when I saw him insult you in front of all of us. He doesn't have the right to treat you that way. What did you think about it?"
 - "He put you down and he manipulated you, and you made excuses for what he did."
 - The way he treated you made me worry about your safety."
- Remember that she is probably feeling very isolated and alone.
- Let her know you care about her, and that you are worried about her.
- Listen to what she has to say.

Offer to Help

- Tell her that you are there for her whenever she wants to talk.
- Talk to her in private, and keep what she says confidential.
- Let her know you won't stand by and let the behavior continue.
- Find someone knowledgeable about abuse that she can talk to, and volunteer to go with her.

When your friend is being abusive

Try to understand where your friend is coming from—most guys who hurt their girlfriends don't consider themselves "batterers."

- Many boys and men are in denial about the severity of their actions.
- It's hard for us, as their friends or family, to believe it.
- Reaching out and talking to someone we think is being violent in his relationship is truly an act of friendship and caring.
- It may seem like the hardest thing you can do, but it may be the best thing you can do.

When you think your friend is being abusive . . .

DON'T...

- Make him feel ashamed of himself.
 - Let him know that you care about him, and you want his behavior to change.
 - Let him know that if you didn't think he had it in him to be a decent person, you probably wouldn't be spending time with him.

DO...

- Be specific about what you saw and how it made you feel.
 - “I didn’t like it when you told your girlfriend she was stupid in front of all of us, and I can only imagine how it made her feel.”
- Take a stand.
 - “I’m not going to sit here as your friend/parent/coach/therapist and watch this happen and not say anything about it.”
- Give him a reality check.
 - His violent actions will have consequences. “This is a crime, and you could be arrested.”
“You could get kicked out of school.”
- Urge him to seek help.
 - He can talk to a counselor, coach, a member of the clergy, any trusted adult—even an older brother or mentor.
- Offer to get information for him about where to get help.

RESOURCE GUIDE

Suggestions for encouraging victims or abusers to get help

- Write down what you need from an adult, including how you want them to behave.
- Choose an adult who has your best interests at heart. It might be a parent, a teacher, a school counselor, a coach, or a friend's parent.
- Chart out all the adults you know and figure out who is your best ally.

Suggestions for encouraging concerned friends or family to get help

- If you think your friend is in physical danger, but she doesn't want to seek any help, go ahead and *tell an adult you trust yourself*.
- If you are concerned that a friend is being abusive, it can also be helpful to talk to an adult, either with your friend or by yourself if he doesn't admit the problem or refuses to go with you.
- Go to an adult you trust, one who you think will get your friend the help he needs and stick by you and support you for talking to them.

Resources

- Emergency Help 911
- National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-866-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline
1-866-331-9474
1-866-331-8453 (TTY)
- Love Is Not Abuse (www.loveisnotabuse.com)
Education, statistics, research, resources, and curriculum for educating teens and families about relationship abuse.
- Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.endabuse.org)
Facts and statistics, local and regional hotline numbers, domestic violence education and prevention, and public policy information.
- The Empower Program (www.empowered.org)
The Empower Program's mission is to work with youth to end the culture of violence.

- Girls Incorporated National Resource Center (www.girlsinc.org)
Statistics, research, information and resources on issues affecting girls.
- www.loveisrespect.org 800-331-9474
National Teen Dating Violence Hotline
Staffed 24 hours per day, 365 days per year
- www.loveisnotabuse.com
Sponsored by Liz Claiborne, Inc.
Information, handouts, data for support and general use
- www.ndvh.org 800-799-SAFE (7233)
National Domestic Violence Hotline
- **National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health**, Characteristics of Sexually Healthy Adolescents, 1995
- **www.iwannaknow.org**
- **Liz Claiborne, Inc.**
- LovesRespect.org
- LovesNotAbuse.com