

**Love**  
**DOESN'T HAVE**  
**TO HURT** teens

The American Psychological Association developed this document with consultation from the Partners in Program Planning in Adolescent Health (PIPPAH), whose members include: American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, and Commission on Domestic Violence, American Dietetic Association, American Medical Association, and National Association of Social Workers.

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# Sound familiar?

Kevin is walking in the school hallway with his friends and sees his girlfriend at her locker with her friends. When he goes up to her, she gives him a cold look and says loudly, “I don’t know why I even bother with you, loser! I guess I just keep you around because I feel sorry for you.” Kevin feels frustrated because he doesn’t know what he did and embarrassed because his friends saw his girlfriend putting him down.

THAT KIND OF HUMILIATION HURTS, **AND IT IS A BIG DEAL.**



Jennie and Tyrone lunch in the cafeteria with her friends. They start teasing each other, but then the playing turns to insults. Tyrone sees that Jennie is upset but doesn’t stop. When Jennie gets up and says, “Get away from me, I hate you,” Tyrone says, “Shut up” and slaps her across the face.

THAT SLAP IS VIOLENCE, **AND IT IS A BIG DEAL.**

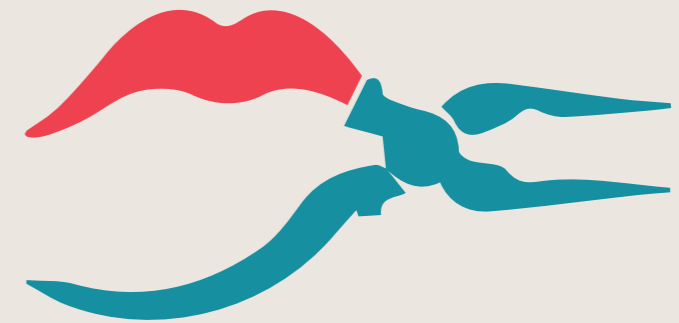


Tony and Emily have been dating for a few weeks, and he is beginning to act like he owns her. He complains when she spends time with her best friend—or anyone except him. He expects her to meet him in the halls between classes, eat lunch with him, let him go home with her after school, and be with him every weekend. Afraid she’ll lose him, Emily begins to cut herself off from her friends.

THAT KIND OF POSSESSIVENESS ISN’T LOVE—IT IS ABUSE, **AND IT IS A BIG DEAL.**

Christine and Allison are in an intense argument. Christine gets madder and madder, until she finally grabs Allison, shakes her, and shoves her against the wall. Later, Christine apologizes, saying, “I’m not proud I lost my temper, but you really pushed my buttons. You should know better than to get up in my face like that, because you know I get too angry to control myself.”

THAT KIND OF BEHAVIOR—THE SHOVING AND THEN BLAMING SOMEONE ELSE FOR THE BEHAVIOR—IS VIOLENCE, **AND IT IS A BIG DEAL.**



Alfredo and Maria, who have been going out for a few weeks, are making out. Maria has been clear that she doesn’t want to go any further than kissing, but Alfredo becomes aggressive, disregarding her request to slow down and back off. He forces her to have sex, later telling her she was a tease and asking for it.

THAT KIND OF SEX IS RAPE, **AND IT IS A BIG DEAL.**

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# Love shouldn't hurt like this!



It's wonderful to be in love. It's exciting, romantic, and fun, and you feel like nothing can go wrong. Sure, like the love songs say, love hurts sometimes. You worry, you wonder if the person you love really loves you, or if he or she is cheating on you. But knowing that love hurts doesn't mean you should expect to get hurt—to be put down, slapped, embarrassed in front of your friends, pushed, yelled at, forced to have sex if you don't want it, controlled by, or afraid of the person you're going out with.

Getting hurt like that isn't love. It's dangerous. It's violence. It can happen to anybody, even if you're smart or popular or strong or sophisticated. And it doesn't matter who you're seeing. It happens to girls and to boys. It happens in same-sex relationships.

At first, if it happens to you or to a friend, you might not get what's going on. You're thinking, "I can handle this. I can make it stop"; or "There's no black eye. I'm not getting pushed down a stairway." "I shouldn't take put-downs so seriously." Maybe you're thinking, "He only gets jealous because he loves me." "She only slapped me to show attitude." "She won't love me if I don't do everything she wants when she wants it." "To show my love, I should want to spend every spare moment with him."

Or maybe you do get it. You know things aren't right, but you feel alone. You're ashamed to tell your friends. You're afraid the explosions and jealousy will get worse if you tell anyone. You're afraid to tell your parents because they might make you break up. Maybe you're also afraid of losing your boyfriend or girlfriend. Maybe you think it's worth it to put up with anything just to have someone special in your life.

Every relationship has problems and upsets. That's just part of life. But if you see patterns of uncontrolled anger, jealousy, or possessiveness, or if there is shoving, slapping, forced sex, or other physical violence—even once—it's time to find help.

Think about this: Imagine that your best friend is dating someone who thinks and acts that way. Would it seem okay? Would you want them to stop hurting each other? Would you treat your best friend this way?

You have the right to be treated with respect and to not be harmed physically or emotionally by another person. Violence and abuse are not acceptable in any relationship. Love shouldn't hurt like this.

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*What's the first step in turning the situation around?*

Take it seriously.  
Listen to yourself.  
If you feel that someone is abusing you, trust those feelings.  
Take it seriously.

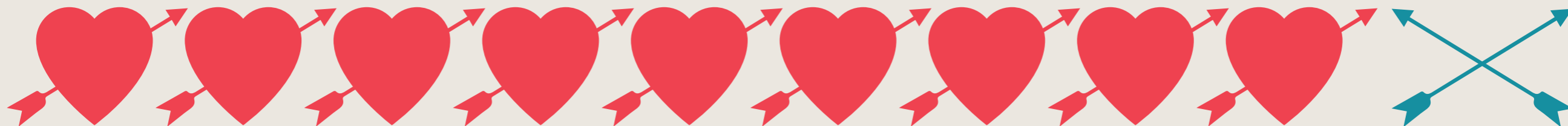


*What's the second step?*

Take care of yourself.  
You're too valuable to settle for love that hurts.  
Don't stay silent—find support and help.

# Believe it—it's happening

**Nearly one in 10** high school students will experience physical violence from someone they're dating. Even more teens will experience verbal or emotional abuse during the relationship.



**Between 10 and 25%** of girls between the ages of 15 and 24 will be the victims of rape or attempted rape. In more than half of those cases, the attacker is someone the girl goes out with.

**Girls are not the only ones** who are abused physically or emotionally in relationships. Boys also experience abuse, especially psychological abuse. Boys rarely are hurt physically in relationships, but when it happens, it's often severe. Boys also can be pressured or forced into unwanted sex, by girls or by other boys.

**Violence happens** in same-sex relationships, too. When it does, gay and lesbian teenagers often don't know where to turn for help. If they are not comfortable telling people they're gay, that makes their situation even harder. In some cases their partner may threaten to out them even though he/she knows it could be dangerous!

**Often a relationship doesn't start out violent**, but the violence starts after the two people have known each other for a while. The one big exception is forced sex (sometimes called date rape or acquaintance rape). Forced sex can sometimes happen the first or second time two people go out, especially when one person has very little dating experience and is afraid to say "no."

If you think something is wrong, it probably is. You may feel anxious, have trouble sleeping or experience a change in appetite or weight. Your body may be telling you that something is not right—pay attention to these signs.

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# If There's No Respect, It Isn't Love

TYPE OF VIOLENCE	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW IT WORKS	EARLY WARNING SIGNS
<b>Verbal Abuse</b>	Behavior that causes harm with words	Name calling, Insults, Public humiliation, Yelling	Teasing that includes insults
<b>Psychological and Emotional Abuse</b>	Behavior intending to cause psychological or emotional distress	Threats; Intimidation; Put downs; Telling a person's secrets; Jealousy; Possessiveness; Isolating a person from friends, family; Destroying gifts, clothing, letters; Damaging a car, home, or other prized possessions	Pouting when you spend time with your friends, Threatening to leave you in an unsafe location, Trying to control what you do
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	Behaviors that inflict harm on a person	Slapping, Hitting, Shoving, Grabbing, Hair pulling, Biting, Throwing objects at a person	Going into a rage when disappointed or frustrated; Teasing, tripping, or pushing; Threatening to injure
<b>Sexual Violence: From Coercion to Date Rape</b>	Sexual advances that make a person feel uncomfortable; sexual behavior that is unwanted	Insisting, physically or verbally, that a person who said "no" have sex anyway; Forced sex	Using emotional blackmail to talk you into having sex ("If you loved me, you would")
<b>Abuse of Male Privilege: "It's a Guy Thing"</b>	Behavior that assumes that boys have more power than girls and that boys have special privileges in relationships with girls	The guy makes all decisions for the couple, The guy expects his girlfriend to wait on and pamper him, The guy treats his girlfriend as if she is property he owns	Expecting you to be available to him at all times or he is available to you when he feels like it; Acting macho with friends: "This is my woman!"

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## Why does it happen?

Violence is so common that sometimes it seems like the normal thing. But it's not. It's something we learn—and something we can change.

To understand why relationship violence happens, start by thinking about some of the situations you deal with every day.



## Learning the rules of love

When you first begin to date someone seriously, you have new and unfamiliar experiences. You start to discover society's rules for dating and relationship behavior. In addition, you are trying to figure out how to impress someone who is really special to you and how to be yourself in a relationship. You see all kinds of images of what relationships are supposed to be like—but how do you know which ones are the right ones to follow? It's hard to ignore other people's examples of relationships—for example, if your parents don't show respect for each other it would be hard for you to know how to respect your boyfriend/girlfriend. But you can decide for yourself what sort of relationships you want to have with your friends and your boyfriends or girlfriends. You can learn to have a healthy relationship and be loved and treated well by someone you care about. Violence is not the way to do it. Respect is.

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# Stereotypes that hurt

In every culture, people have certain ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman. These ideas are called stereotypes. When you first start dating someone seriously, stereotypes can get you really confused about how you or the person you're going with ought to behave.

**Boys** often have the idea that it's a "guy thing" to act tough and treat girls like property, like they own them. Guys often try to get their friends' approval by acting like they don't care about anything or anyone. Even a guy who likes a particular girl might show off for his friends by treating her badly or acting like she's been put on earth just to have sex with him.

**Girls** often accept the idea that it's a "guy thing" to push girls around, and so they should learn to go along with it. Girls also may believe it's a "girl thing" to try to figure out and do whatever will keep their boyfriends happy. So, they may feel that they have to do only what the guy wants, or they may put up with the guy ignoring them, treating them badly around others, being really possessive, or being violent or abusive.

Both girls and boys often have the idea that boys can't control themselves when it comes to sex. They may believe that if a man forces a woman to have sex against her will, she was probably leading him on in some way.

Remember: There's no "guy thing" or "girl thing" when it comes to violence and abuse in relationships. There's just the "right thing" and the "wrong thing."

Violence and abuse are always the wrong thing.

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# The violence around us

Violence is all around us—on television, in movies, in music videos, in video games, and even in our schools, neighborhoods, and homes. People get into fights on the street, on buses, and in malls and use every kind of threat just to get their way. Drivers shout at and even shoot at each other. Television and movies show buildings and people being blown to bits. Bench-emptying brawls break out regularly on hockey, baseball, and football fields. Schools around the country use metal detectors and security guards to protect students from outsiders and from each other. And even at home, parents resort to violence to express their feelings to each other—and sometimes to their children.

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# Personal pressures

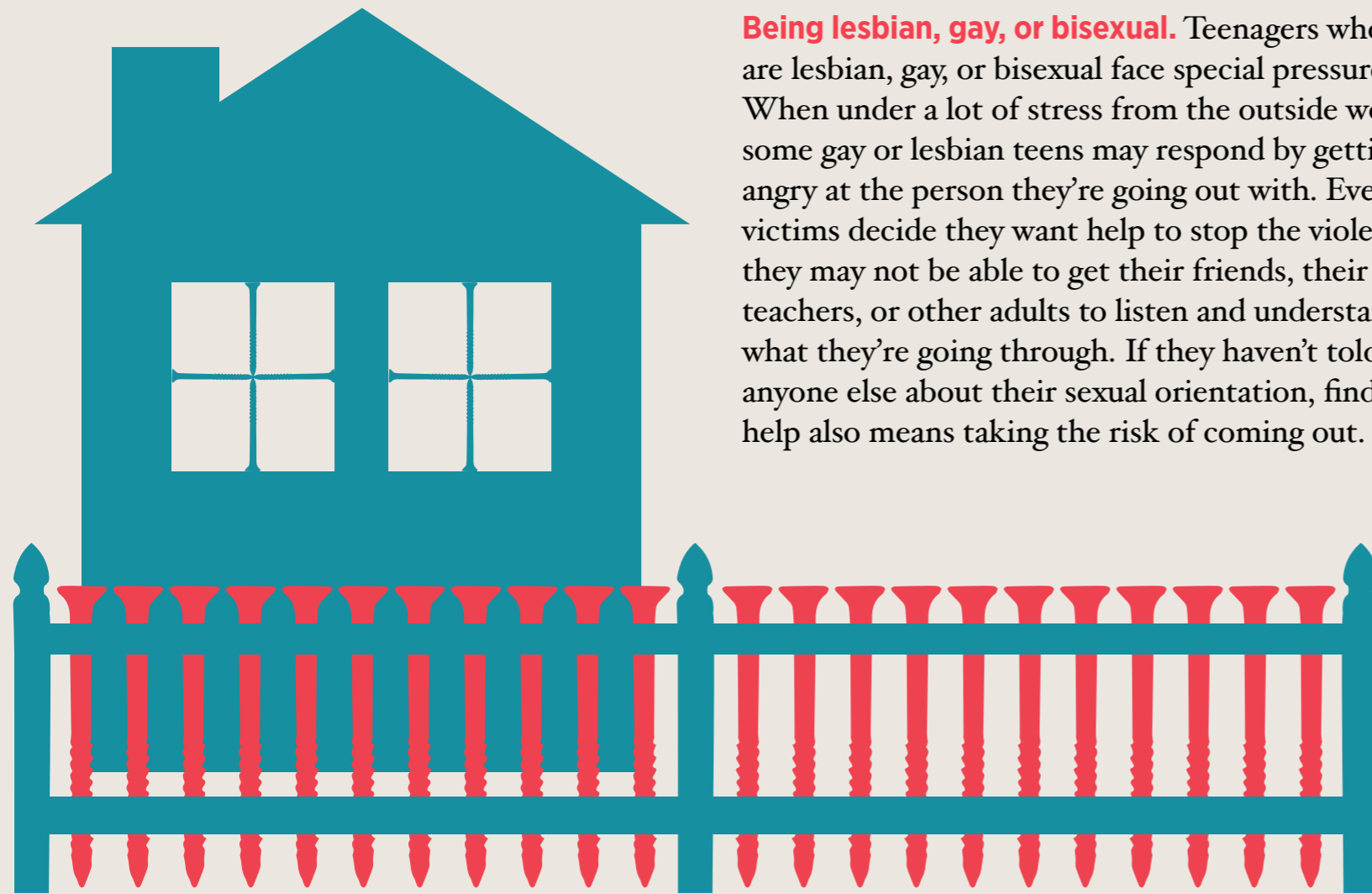
Some social and personal situations are hard for anyone to handle, but they are especially hard when they affect teenagers. These personal pressures can contribute to abusive or violent behavior in relationships and to accepting that kind of behavior from a boyfriend or girlfriend.

**Violence at home.** When children see a parent being abused, they often grow up thinking that name-calling, screaming, or hitting is normal between people in love. Children in violent homes often get the idea that it is acceptable to threaten, intimidate, bully, or hit another person to get their own way.

**Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual.** Teenagers who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual face special pressures. When under a lot of stress from the outside world, some gay or lesbian teens may respond by getting angry at the person they're going out with. Even if victims decide they want help to stop the violence, they may not be able to get their friends, their teachers, or other adults to listen and understand what they're going through. If they haven't told anyone else about their sexual orientation, finding help also means taking the risk of coming out.

**Cultural beliefs.** Teenagers' cultural and ethnic backgrounds affect their relationships. Some teenagers come from cultures in which people don't date someone unless they're going to marry that person, so they may not let their families know they are in a relationship. In some cultures, loyalty is such an important value that a teen in an abusive relationship may decide not to ask for help. Also, teenage girls who believe they can't do much with their lives because of their family's or culture's rules, or because of discrimination or poverty, may place their hopes for the future on finding someone to love and take care of them. Abuse may seem like a small price to pay to escape a life without hope.

**Having a disability.** People who have disabilities often face a higher risk of violence of all kinds, especially if they are less able to defend themselves or to report abuse. Any behavior that intentionally harasses, teases, or takes advantage of a person with a disability is abusive. That includes such acts as keeping something out of reach of a person who uses a wheelchair, making it hard for someone who uses hearing aids to hear you, or deliberately trying to confuse someone with a learning disability.



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**Getting pregnant.** Pregnancy is a vulnerable time that often leaves a teenage mother-to-be feeling alone, dependent, helpless, and condemned by parents, teachers, and friends. If her boyfriend is abusing her, she may not tell anyone because she fears losing him, doesn't want to face more disapproval from her family, or fears her baby will be taken away from her.

**Getting sexually involved with an adult.** Young teenagers sometimes find themselves involved in sexual relationships with persons much older than they are. Although you may have romantic feelings for someone 5 or 10 years older, even if both of you consent to having sex, you should know that the older partner is committing a crime called statutory rape. Also, some adults beat or otherwise seek control over teens that they're involved with. A sexual relationship where an adult dominates and controls a young teen should never be confused with love.

**Drinking alcohol or taking drugs.** Drinking alcohol or taking drugs does not cause violence, but it can have unpredictable effects: It can lower inhibitions or change perceptions of what is really going on. Even one drink is enough for some teens to say or do things they regret. Alcohol and drugs also cause people to misread situations—to see a come-on when there isn't one or to see only friendliness in a situation that could lead to rape or other violence. Drugs and alcohol often are used as excuses for abuse: "I didn't mean to hurt you. I was out of control." Being drunk or high is never an excuse for hurting someone.

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# Ready for a change

## When you're ready to change the situation

Hurting someone is never a sign of love. When a relationship is violent, the people involved need to either make the relationship work without violence or get out of it. You don't have to settle for an abusive relationship, and you don't have to continue to behave in abusive ways. Both of you deserve better.

People often need help to get out of abusive relationships. There are lots of reasons why breaking free can be hard. From a very early age, we get the idea that having a romantic relationship is the most important thing in the world and is worth any sacrifice.

Dating someone can be a status symbol, a way to feel more secure, or a way to break into a new circle of friends.

Some people just don't like to be alone. They may feel that any relationship is better than no relationship.

Many teenagers don't want to ask their parents for help. A girl whose boyfriend has slapped her might be afraid her parents won't let her go out with him or with anyone if they find out. A boy's parents might not approve of his girlfriend's influence and take away his car keys. The parents of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual teen might see one violent relationship as proof that all same-sex relationships are unhealthy.

## Don't think the violence and abuse will just stop

Violent behavior won't disappear on its own. One or both of you may have wrong ideas about relationships, expressing anger, what to expect from each other, what you deserve from someone you love. Usually, both of you need support and help to make a change. Being hurt by someone that you care about can make you feel weak, worthless, helpless, and alone. Turning to drugs or alcohol is not a good way to handle the situation—it will not make the abuse disappear or feel more bearable.

Start by talking to someone. A counselor, a coach, a teacher, a parent, a doctor, a minister or rabbi, or a close friend can help you get an objective opinion of the situation. They may also have some good ideas to help you stop the hurting and start talking to each other about what you really want and need in a relationship.

Then take some action!



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# If you are the one getting hurt

If a person who claims to love you also threatens, intimidates, or injures you, that person has some wrong ideas about love and isn't worth your time. If you can't love someone without also feeling afraid of him or her, you're better off getting out of that relationship.

## **Assault is a crime.**

If you are afraid that someone you're going out with may hurt you badly or if he or she already has, don't hesitate to call the police. In many states, teens who have been threatened or harmed can get the same restraining orders and other protections as adults.

## **The most important thing you can do is take care of yourself.**

As serious as the situation may seem, there are always alternatives to having a relationship with someone who hurts you. Demand to be treated with respect. You're worth it!

## **Make sure you're safe.**

Even if you haven't decided yet whether to leave the relationship, you can decide to be safe. Take some time to think about ways you can take yourself out of a dangerous situation the next time it occurs. For example, you can screen your phone calls, see your boyfriend or girlfriend only in a public place with other people around, or find a friend to stay with if you need to. Thinking through a plan of action can help you feel more in control of a situation so you can take the next step.

## **Get support.**

One of the most common forms of relationship violence is isolation—keeping you from spending time with your friends. If someone you're going out with controls your free time, you start to feel like you have nowhere else to turn. You aren't as likely to hear the support of friends who want you to leave the relationship. This is the time you need that support most. Talk to a friend, a teacher, a counselor, anyone who will support you as you stand up for yourself. Knowing that you don't have to rely on yourself can give you the courage you need to break free. If the first person you talk to doesn't give you the support you need, try someone else. Don't give up!

## **Demand respect.**

Point out the ways you've been hurt physically, sexually, and emotionally to the person you're going out with. Say that it's a big deal to you and that you want it to stop. Now. This can be a hard step for many reasons. The person may deny the abuse, get furious and threaten to hurt you, your family, or himself if you try to leave the relationship or tell anyone else about the problem. Or the person may get really sweet and remorseful, crying and promising never to hurt you again, only to return to the same old patterns later. Encourage the person you're dating to find help dealing with anger. Face fact though: Most people won't make that change, even if they really love you.

You can't change them. And as much as you might want to help the person you care about get over their abusive behavior, you have to think of yourself first.

## **Find help.**

Just because this is your relationship doesn't mean you should try to solve the problem on your own. A boyfriend or girlfriend who is hurting you already doesn't respect you in the way you deserve. Talk to an adult—a teacher, counselor, coach, or friend—who will stick with you. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness. It's about getting the support you deserve and making sure your boyfriend or girlfriend gets the message: Abuse is serious, and you deserve better.

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# If you are the one doing the hurting

For your own sake and for the sake of the person you love, get help! The problem of hurting people when you're angry or frustrated or jealous is not going away on its own. Even if you honestly think you're sometimes justified in your actions, you need to talk over this behavior with someone who can give you some new ideas about how to handle your feelings.



**Drinking alcohol or using drugs does not make you hurt someone.** It can have unpredictable effects, though, and can change the way you view situations. You can never use drugs and alcohol as an excuse for abusive behavior. You should make it a reason to get help for substance abuse.

**Nobody is ever justified in hurting someone else to get their way.** You're not going to get what you're looking for—love, respect, kindness, affection, a happy time with someone who loves and trusts you unless you learn how to deal with your frustrations in a way that is not hurtful to others.

**You're not a bad person—just someone who needs help to stop a bad behavior.** You can learn new ways to deal with your anger, to fight fair, to communicate, and to give and get love in relationships. Don't let shame or fear stop you—talk to a parent, teacher, religious leader, doctor, nurse, psychologist, or guidance counselor today.

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# How can I help my friend?

Seeing a friend in a violent relationship is painful. You might want to help but not know what to say or do. You might be afraid of getting involved in someone else's problem. Or maybe you haven't seen the violence or abuse, and the person your friend is dating seems so nice that you wonder how much of the story to believe.

**If you're worried, say something.** If you're concerned about your friend's safety, mention it. People who are being hurt in a relationship often feel they can't talk to anyone. They may be ashamed. They may think the abuse is their fault. They may think they deserve it. Let your friend know that you're there, you're willing to listen, and you're not going to judge. If your friend isn't ready to admit there is a problem, don't give up. By being supportive and letting your friend know someone is willing to listen, you're making it easier to start dealing with the problem.

**Listen, support, believe.** If a friend asks for your help, take it seriously. Believe what your friend tells you, not the gossip you might hear in the hallway. Your friend is trusting you with very personal and painful information—be a true friend and don't spread gossip. Give support by making it clear your friend doesn't deserve to be abused in any way. Recognize that, as abusive as the person your friend is dating might be, your friend might find it difficult to leave the relationship, particularly if your friend believes it will make the violence worse.

**Call in reinforcements.** Your friend might tell you about a violent relationship only if you promise to keep it a secret. Violence and abuse are not problems to be kept secret. Whether your friend is ready to get help or not, find an adult you can talk to. Take your friend along if you can. You can tell the adult that you don't want to break a promise to keep a secret, but don't carry this burden all by yourself.



# Resources

Stopping violence in teen relationships is everyone's responsibility. Boyfriends, girlfriends, friends, parents, adults—all have a responsibility to speak out against behavior that is harmful and to prevent it from occurring.

Here are some people and organizations that can help. You can usually find phone numbers in your local phone book or ask a counselor at school to help you get connected.

## People and organizations

- State domestic violence coalitions
- Local rape crisis centers
- Gay and lesbian resources/centers for teens
- 4H programs in rural areas
- Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)
- Teachers, school counselors, school nurses
- Doctors and other health professionals
- Psychologists and other mental health professionals
- Shelters for battered women

## Telephone numbers

- National Domestic Violence Hotline, [1-800-799-SAFE \(7233\)](tel:1-800-799-SAFE) or [TTY 1-800-787-3224](tel:1-800-787-3224)
- National Organization for Victim Assistance, [1-800-TRY-NOVA](tel:1-800-TRY-NOVA)
- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, [1-800-799-7233](tel:1-800-799-7233) or [TTY 1-800-787-3224](tel:1-800-787-3224)
- RAINN: Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, [1-800-656-HOPE](tel:1-800-656-HOPE)
- The National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline, [1-866-331-9474](tel:1-866-331-9474) (available 24/7)
- Domestic Violence Hotline, [1-800-799-SAFE \(7233\)](tel:1-800-799-SAFE) or [TTY 1-800-787-3224](tel:1-800-787-3224)
- GLBT National Youth Talkline, [1-800-246-PRIDE](tel:1-800-246-PRIDE)

## Websites

- Project PAVE (Promoting Alternatives to Violence Through Education)  
<http://projectpave.org/just-teens>
- Boss of me: Making a transformation through empowered relationships  
<http://www.bom411.com/>
- Love is respect  
[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)
- Love is not abuse  
[www.loveisnotabuse.com](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com)
- Teenpcar: It stops with us!  
<http://www.teenpcar.com/>
- Know more: Stop abuse. Get help now. Learn how.  
<http://www.knowmoresaymore.org/>

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