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Safety

[Home](#) » [Safety](#) » [In relationships](#)

In relationships

As a teen, you will have relationships with a lot of people. These relationships will probably include **friendships** and dating relationships. Most of the time, these relationships are fun and healthy, and they make us feel good about ourselves. Sometimes, though, these relationships can be unhealthy. Unhealthy relationships can cause someone to get hurt physically or emotionally. The questions and answers below will help you understand how to spot an unhealthy relationship and how to change a bad situation.

Click the following links to jump to a section on this page.

- [What is a healthy relationship?](#)
- [What are the signs that I am in an abusive or unhealthy relationship?](#)
- [My friend gets mad if I hang out with other people. What should I do?](#)
- [What are unhealthy relationships?](#)
- [What is abuse?](#)
- [Why are some people violent?](#)
- [Why do some people stay in unhealthy or violent relationships?](#)
- [Why should I leave?](#)
- [How do I get out of an unhealthy or abusive relationship?](#)
- [What do I do if I am being hurt by a parent/guardian or another family member?](#)
- [What do I do if a friend tells me that he or she is in an abusive relationship?](#)
- [Should I have my friend talk to his or her parents/guardians or another adult?](#)
- [What if my friend won't listen to me and wants to keep the abuse a secret?](#)
- [What else do I need to know?](#)

What is a healthy relationship?

In healthy relationships, you and your friend or the person you are dating feel good about each other and yourselves. You do activities together, like going to movies or out with other friends, and you talk to one another about how you feel. These relationships can last a few weeks, a few months, or even years.

In healthy relationships, there is respect and honesty between both people. This means that you listen to each other's thoughts and opinions and accept each other's right to say no or to change your mind without giving each other a hard time. You should be able to let the other person know how you are feeling. You might disagree or argue sometimes, but in healthy relationships you should be able to talk things out to solve problems.

What are the signs that I am in an abusive or unhealthy relationship?

There are many signs that you could be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship. Take a look at the list of warning signs below and see if any of these describe your relationship.

Your friend or the person you are going out with:

- gets angry when you talk or hang out with other friends or other dating partners
- bosses you around
- often gets in fights with other people or loses his or her temper

**National Sexual
Assault Hotline**
1-800-656-HOPE (1-
800-656-4673)

**National Domestic
Violence Hotline**
1-800-799-SAFE (1-
800-799-7233)

**ChildHelp USA
National Child Abuse
Hotline**
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-
800-422-4663)

These hotlines are
free, private, and
open 24 hours a day.

Take a Quiz!

[Test your
relationship](#)

[What does it take to
stay safe in a
relationship?](#)

- pressures you to have sex or to do something sexual that you don't want to do
- uses drugs and alcohol, and tries to pressure you into doing the same thing
- swears at you or uses mean language
- blames you for his or her problems or tells you that it is your fault that he or she hurt you
- insults or tries to embarrass you in front of other people
- has physically hurt you
- makes you feel scared of their reactions to things
- always wants to know where you are going and who you are with



These are just a few of the signs that you may be in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Sometimes there are only one or two "warning signs" and sometimes there are many. If any of these signs are a part of your relationship, you should speak to a trusted adult such as a parent/guardian, teacher, doctor, nurse, or counselor right away!

My friend gets mad if I hang out with other people. What should I do?

Be honest and stick to your decision. Tell your friend you like spending time with him or her but that you also want to spend time with other friends and family. Whether you are in a close friendship or a dating relationship, it is important for both of you to stay involved with the activities and interests you enjoyed before you became close. In a healthy relationship, you both need time to hang out with other friends and spend time alone.

What are unhealthy relationships?



In an unhealthy relationship, you usually feel the exact opposite of how you feel when you're in a "healthy relationship." You and your friend do not usually feel good about each other and yourselves. Not all unhealthy relationships are abusive but sometimes they can include verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. This can involve both people being violent or abusive toward each other or can involve only one person doing this to the other. Many times, a relationship is not unhealthy in the very beginning, but becomes so over time.

[Learn more about rape and date rape.](#)

What is abuse?

Some people think that their relationship isn't abusive unless there is physical fighting. There are other types of abuse, though. Below is a list of different types of abuse.

- **Physical abuse** is when a person touches your body in an unwanted or violent way. This may include: hitting, kicking, pulling hair, pushing, biting, choking, or using a weapon or other item to hurt you.
- **Verbal/emotional abuse** is when a person says something or does something that makes you afraid or feel bad about yourself. This may include: yelling, name-calling, saying mean things about your family and friends, embarrassing you on purpose, telling you what to do, or threatening to hurt you or hurt themselves. Pressuring you to use drugs or alcohol is also abuse, as is keeping you from spending time with your friends and family.
- **Sexual abuse** is any sexual contact that you do not want. You may have said "no" or may be unable to say no because the abuser has threatened you, stopped you from getting out of the situation, or has physically stopped you from leaving. This may include unwanted touching or kissing or forcing you to have sex. Sexual abuse includes date rape.



Why are some people violent?

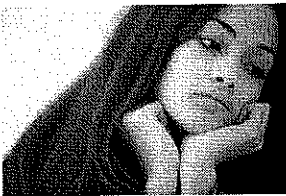
There are many reasons why a person could be violent or abusive to someone in any relationship. For example, a person who has grown up in a violent family may have learned that violence, like hitting or verbal control, was the way to solve a problem. They may be violent because they feel bad about themselves and think they will feel better if they make someone else feel worse. Others may get pressured by their friends to prove how strong they are. Sometimes people have trouble controlling their anger. Yet, violence NEVER solves problems.

Drugs and alcohol can also play a part in abusive behavior. There are some people who lose control and hurt someone after they have been drinking or taking drugs. But this is no excuse! Just because someone is under the influence of drugs and alcohol or has a bad temper does not mean that their abusive behavior is okay.

No matter why a person is violent physically, verbally/emotionally, or sexually, it is important for you to know that it *is not your fault!* You are *NOT* the reason for the violence. Violence is NEVER okay!

Why do some people stay in unhealthy or violent relationships?

Sometimes it may be hard to get out of an abusive relationship, because violent relationships often go in cycles. After a person is violent, he or she may say sorry and promise never to hurt you again. They may even say that they will work on the relationship, and it may be awhile before that person acts violently again. These ups and downs can make it hard to leave a relationship.



It's also hard to leave someone you care about. You may be scared or ashamed to admit that you are in an abusive relationship, or you may be simply scared to be alone without that person. You may be afraid that no one will believe you, or that your friend or partner will hurt you more if you tell someone. Whatever the reasons, leaving an unhealthy relationship is hard but it is something you *should* do. Read on to learn how to leave.

Why should I leave?

Abusive relationships are very unhealthy for you. You can have trouble sleeping or have headaches or stomach aches. You might feel depressed, sad, anxious or nervous, and you may even lose or gain weight. You may also blame yourself, feel guilty, and have trouble trusting other people in your life. Staying in an abusive relationship can hurt your self-esteem and make it hard for you to believe in yourself. If you are being physically abused, you can be in pain and may suffer permanent damage. *You should definitely leave the relationship if you are getting hurt, or if you are being threatened with physical harm in any way.*

The most important reason to leave an unhealthy relationship is because you deserve to be in a relationship that is healthy and fun.

How do I get out of an unhealthy or abusive relationship?

First, if you think that you are in an unhealthy relationship, you should talk to a parent/guardian, friend, counselor, doctor, teacher, coach or other trusted person about your relationship. Tell them why you think the relationship is unhealthy and exactly what the other person has done (hit, pressured you to have sex, tried to control you). See the question "What are the signs that I am in an unhealthy or abusive relationship?" for information that can help you explain your situation to an adult. If need be, this trusted adult can help you contact your parent/guardian, counselors, school security, or even the police about the violence. With help, you can get out of an unhealthy relationship.



Sometimes, leaving an abusive relationship can be dangerous, so it is very important for you to make a **safety plan**. Leaving the relationship will be a lot easier and safer if you have a plan.

Here are some tips on making your safety plan:

- Go to your doctor or hospital for treatment if you have been injured.
- Tell a trusted adult like a parent/guardian, counselor, doctor, teacher, or spiritual or community leader.
- Tell the person who is abusing you over the phone that you do not want to see him or her so they cannot touch you. Do this when a parent or guardian is home so you know you will be safe in your house.
- Use a diary to keep track of the date the violence happened, where you were, exactly what the person you are dating did, and exactly what effects it caused (such as bruises). This will be important if you need the police to order the person to stay away from you.
- Avoid contact with the person.
- Spend time with your other friends, and avoid walking by yourself.
- Think of safe places to go in case of an emergency, like a police station or a public place like a restaurant or mall.
- Carry a cell phone, phone card, or money for a call in case you need to call for help. Use code words on the phone that you and your family decide on ahead of time. If you are in trouble, say the code word on the phone so that your family member knows you can't talk openly and need help right away.
- Call 911 right away if you are ever afraid that the person is following you or is going to hurt you.
- Keep domestic violence hotline numbers with you in a safe place or program them into your cell phone. The 24-hour National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TDD).

What do I do if I am being hurt by a parent/guardian or another family member?

Sadly, there are times when different kinds of abuse happen in the home. Child abuse is when any person caring for a child fails to take care of the child, physically hurts the child, or treats the child in a sexual way. No matter what, parents, guardians, and caregivers are supposed to protect and care for their children. The term 'child abuse' doesn't just refer to young children. Child abuse can happen to a child of any age, from infants to teenagers.

Learn more about what abuse is, the effects of abuse, and how to seek help.

If you or someone in your family is being abused at home, call the 24-hour Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).

What do I do if a friend tells me that he or she is in an abusive relationship?

If your friend talks to you about his or her abuse, you can help by:

- listening without judging or blaming
- telling your friend that you believe him or her
- telling your friend that it is NOT his or her fault
- telling your friend that you are always there to listen if he or she wants to talk about it
- reminding your friend of all the friends and family who care about him or her
- letting your friend know that you are worried about his or her safety
- telling your friend that you want to help him or her talk to a parent/guardian or other trusted adult right away
- offering to go with your friend to talk to an adult
- helping your friend make a safety plan (See the question "How do I get out of an unhealthy or abusive relationship?" above for tips on making a safety plan.)
- sharing the number of the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TDD)
- suggesting your friend take a self-defense class



Be sure not to take this on alone. Talk with a trusted adult, such as a school counselor, about how to help your friend.

Should I have my friend talk to his or her parents/guardians or another adult?

Yes! The most important thing that you can do for your friend is to try to get him or her to talk to an adult right away. This adult could be a parent/guardian, coach, teacher, school counselor, doctor, nurse, or spiritual or community leader. Offer to go with your friend to talk to an adult about the abusive relationship. If your friend is nervous about going to talk to an adult, remind him or her that an adult can:

- listen and give advice on how to handle the situation
- help get him or her to a safe place
- help contact the right people, such as the police, the school principal, or a counselor


What if my friend won't listen to me and wants to keep the abuse a secret?

After you urge your friend to talk to an adult about the abuse, you should also tell an adult. It is too much for you to handle alone. You may think you need to keep your friend's secret, but it is important for you to tell a trusted adult — especially if you are afraid that your friend could get hurt. Your friend will need help even if he or she doesn't think so.

Do not tell your friend to choose between his or her abusive partner and you. Be supportive, no matter what your friend decides to do. Don't tell your friend's secrets to others.

What else do I need to know?

At least 1 in 10 teens experience physical violence in their relationships. Even if you have not experienced physical, sexual, or verbal and emotional abuse, one of your friends may be in an unhealthy relationship with another friend or dating partner. If you are in an unhealthy relationship, or if your friend is, it is important to get help right away before someone gets hurt! Relationships are an important part of life and are supposed to be fun and special!

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