

Teen and Young Adult Dating Violence

Many young women in college, high school, or younger, report abuse in their relationships.* Young men who are abusive use various tactics of control against their girlfriends. These tactics may include:

- ❖ Making all the decisions in the relationship—where to go, with whom to spend time, what to do, etc.
- ❖ Insisting she respond immediately to pages or cell phone calls.
- ❖ Monitoring where she says she is going and getting angry if she goes somewhere else; following her around the community.
- ❖ Pressuring her to stop seeing her friends, or using jealousy as an excuse to control who she sees or with whom she spends her time.
- ❖ Name calling, put-downs, making a girl feel bad about herself, telling a girl that no one else would date her or that she is ugly, fat, or stupid.
- ❖ Taking her money, pressuring her to give up money or trying to keep her from getting a job.
- ❖ Making her do sexual acts or have sex when she doesn't want to.
- ❖ Threatening to hurt her physically or emotionally, threatening to tell people that they've been sexual, threatening to break up with her if she doesn't do what he wants, or threatening to commit suicide if she ends the relationship.
- ❖ Slamming doors, punching walls, grabbing, shoving, slapping, hitting, kicking, punching, or assault with weapons.

Warning signs:

Physical abuse in a relationship rarely starts out as severe violence. Some behaviors that show the possibility that a dating partner may eventually become physically violent may include extreme jealousy, blaming others for all problems, never being able to admit to wrongdoing, cruelty to animals, and holding rigid beliefs about sex roles for men and women. The following stories show some warning signs that a boyfriend may get more controlling or violent.

Jealousy:

“My boyfriend is really crazy about me. He just hates it when I talk to other guys. I tell him they're just friends, but he says they're all after me. One time we got into a fight because he saw me sitting with another guy in the cafeteria. I tried to tell him we were just studying for a math test, but he said I was lying and slapped me. I guess he gets jealous because he loves me so much.”

If someone is jealous we often think it's a compliment—like it's his way of showing he cares. It's normal to feel jealous now and then, but we can't keep someone from having other friends. No one has the right to control whom we see or whom we choose as friends. A slap (or any kind of violence) is not a sign of love and affection. It's a sign of control and no one deserves it. We have no right to control what someone does by threatening or hurting them. When we get so mad we want to hit somebody, we should walk away from the situation. When we cool off we can try talking about what happened.

Using Anger and Control:

“Last night I went out for pizza with my girlfriend. She wanted to go to a party at a guy's house, but I wasn't really up for it. She said she was going no matter what I did, so I grabbed her arm and told her she couldn't leave me with nothing to do. She started walking away, so I pulled her hair and yanked her around. She ran away, yelling she never wanted to see me again.”

Anyone can get frustrated when things don't go their way, but abusing people we care about to get what we want is never okay. Being hurt by a friend's words or actions doesn't justify using physical force. If you can't handle the situation, walk away and talk it out at another time. No one has the right to make decisions for another person. It's okay to end a relationship with someone who tries to control you with force.

Abuse at Home:

"My dad expects my mom to be there when he gets home from work. The other night she had to work overtime, so when she came home she went straight to bed. Dad followed her, screaming that he's sick of her not doing what she's supposed to. Then he beat her up and stormed out. Later he apologized and promised it wouldn't happen again, but it always does. That's just the way he is."

It's normal for parents to get angry sometimes and argue. But hurting or hitting another adult, teenager, or child is wrong. In fact, it's against the law. Hitting people never makes problems go away, and someone can get seriously hurt or even die. If your father or your mother's partner uses violence, they are choosing this behavior to try to control things because they think they have a right to do so. This is wrong. You can choose other ways to solve problems and negotiate in your relationships.

Healthy Relationships:

Arguments in relationships are normal, but using physical violence is never okay. A healthy relationship is one in which partners treat each other with respect, support each other's goals in life, and expect each other to have their own opinions, feelings, friends, and activities. In an equal relationship decisions are made together, both partners make compromises and admit mistakes, and communication is open and truthful.

Girls:

Does your boyfriend strike out at you or make you feel afraid or uncomfortable? Do you change your behavior to try to keep him happy? Are you afraid you will get hurt if you try to end the relationship? It's important to know that no one has the right to hurt you as a way to control you. It's against the law for someone to use violence against you. If you get assaulted you can call the police. If you are being abused, talk to a trusted friend or family member, counselor, teacher, or call a battered women's program in your area. It's also not okay to treat your boyfriend in abusive ways.

Boys:

Do you have a problem controlling your anger? Have you hit or hurt someone you care about? Have you lost friends because of the abusive way you acted? It's important for you to reject the idea that physical abuse is okay—before it gets worse. If you are abusive to a girlfriend, stop it now. Talk to a school counselor and ask for help to change your behavior. It's also not okay for your girlfriend to treat you in abusive ways.

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Tell them that it is not their fault.

Tell them that they don't deserve it.

Believe them and let them know that you do.

Be supportive, but don't tell them what to do. Whatever they decide it is their decision.

Don't blame them for the abuse or their decisions. It is difficult to leave a relationship and they may not be ready yet.

Offer to go with them to talk to someone such as a teacher, a counselor, or an advocate the Battered Women's Project.

Continue to be there for them even if they do not leave the relationship.

Let them know that they can always come to you.

Don't spread gossip. It could be dangerous for them.

Help them to make a safety plan.

**Give them good information about abuse.
(You can call the Battered Women's Project for information and support, 24 hours a day.)**

Remember you can't fix it, but you can be helpful by being a good friend.

More information available on Teen Dating Violence

[Facts on Teen Dating Violence](#)

[TDV Power & Control Wheel](#)

[Equality Wheel](#)

[Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship](#)

[Why Teen's Don't Tell Friends or Parents About Dating Violence](#)

[Safety Planning](#)

[Support & Education Available for Teens at the Battered Women's Project](#)

Get Help and Find Safety:

For assistance in finding help for all types of abuse, call the Battered Women's Project 1-800-439-2323 in state or 207 769-8251 out of state 24 hours.

Adapted from "Helping the Battered Woman, A Guide for Family and Friends," National Woman Abuse Prevention Project, 1989.

***This material addresses violence in heterosexual relationships, but violence occurs in lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and gay relationships, too.**