

# RELATIONSHIPS EXIST ON A SPECTRUM

All relationships exist on a spectrum, from healthy to abusive to somewhere in between. Below, we outline behaviors that occur in healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.

## HEALTHY

A **healthy relationship** means that both you and your partner are:

**Communicating:** You talk openly about problems, listen to each other and respect each other's opinions.

**Respectful:** You value each other as you are. You respect each other's emotional, digital and sexual boundaries.

**Trusting:** You believe what your partner has to say. You do not feel the need to "prove" each other's trustworthiness.

**Honest:** You are honest with each other, but can still keep some things private.

**Equal:** You make decisions together and hold each other to the same standards.

**Enjoying personal time:** You both can enjoy spending time apart, alone or with others. You respect each other's need for time apart.

## UNHEALTHY

You may be in an **unhealthy relationship** if one or both partners is:

**Not communicating:** When problems arise, you fight or you don't discuss them at all.

**Disrespectful:** One or both partners is not considerate of the other's feelings and/or personal boundaries.

**Not trusting:** One partner doesn't believe what the other says, or feels entitled to invade their privacy.

**Dishonest:** One or both partners tells lies.

**Trying to take control:** One partner feels their desires and choices are more important.

**Only spending time with your partner:** Your partner's community is the only one you socialize in.

## ABUSIVE

**Abuse** is occurring in a relationship when one partner:

**Communicates** in a way that is hurtful, threatening, insulting or demeaning.

**Disrespects** the feelings, thoughts, decisions, opinions or physical safety of the other.

**Physically hurts** or injures the other partner by hitting, slapping, choking, pushing or shoving.

**Blames** the other partner for their harmful actions, makes excuses for abusive actions and/or minimizes the abusive behavior.

**Controls and isolates** the other partner by telling them what to wear, who they can hang out with, where they can go and/or what they can do.

**Pressures or forces** the other partner to do things they don't want to do; threatens, hurts or blackmails their partner if they resist or say no.

# DEFINING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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Relationships can all look different, but healthy relationships have a few things in common: open communication, mutual respect and healthy boundaries.

**Communication** is a key part of building a healthy relationship. The first step is making sure both partners in a relationship want and expect the same things—being on the same page is very important. The following tips can help your students create and maintain a healthy relationship:

**Speak Up.** In a healthy relationship, if something is bothering them, it's best to talk about it instead of holding it in.

**Respect Each Other.** Each partner's wishes and feelings have value. Let each other know they are making an effort to keep their ideas in mind. Mutual respect is essential in maintaining healthy relationships.

**Compromise.** Disagreements are a natural part of healthy relationships, but it's important that they find a way to compromise if they disagree on something. They should try to solve conflicts in a fair and rational way.

**Be Supportive.** Offer reassurance and encouragement to each other in a relationship. Also, partners should let each other know when they need their support. Healthy relationships are about building each other up, not putting each other down.

**Respect Each Other's Privacy.** Just because someone is in a relationship doesn't mean they have to share everything and constantly be together.

## Setting Healthy Boundaries

Healthy relationships require space. Creating healthy boundaries is a good way to keep relationships healthy and secure.

By setting boundaries together, partners can have a deeper understanding of the type of relationship they each want. Boundaries are not meant to make anyone feel trapped or like they are “walking on eggshells.”

Creating boundaries is not a sign of secrecy or distrust—it's an expression of what makes someone feel comfortable and what they would like or not like to happen within the relationship.

### Healthy boundaries shouldn't restrict someone's ability to:

- Go out with their friends without their partner.
- Participate in activities and hobbies they like.
- Not have to share passwords to their email, social media accounts or phone.
- Respect each other's individual likes and needs.

# DEFINING UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & DATING ABUSE



Relationships that are not healthy are based on power and control, not equality and respect. In the early stages of an abusive relationship, your students may not think the unhealthy behaviors are a big deal. However, possessiveness, insults, jealous accusations, yelling, humiliation, pulling hair, pushing or other negative, abusive behaviors, are—at their root—exertions of power and control. Remember that abuse is always a choice and you deserve to be respected. There is no excuse for abuse of any kind.

Dating abuse is a **pattern of destructive behaviors used to exert power and control** over a dating partner. While we define dating violence as a pattern, that doesn't mean the first instance of abuse is not dating violence. It just recognizes that dating violence usually involves a series of abusive behaviors over a course of time.

**Dating violence can happen to anyone**, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation or background.

Drugs and alcohol can affect a person's judgment and behavior, but they **do not excuse abuse or violence**. Alternatively, if a person uses drugs/alcohol it does not mean they deserve abuse or assault.

## Dating violence can be:

**Physical:** hitting, slapping, choking, kicking, grabbing, pulling hair, pushing, shoving

**Emotional/Verbal:** putting you down; embarrassing you in public (online or off); threatening you in any way; telling you what to do or what to wear; threatening suicide; accusing you of cheating

**Sexual:** pressuring or forcing you to do anything sexual you're not comfortable with and/or do not consent to, including sexting; restricting access to birth control; unwanted kissing or touching

**Financial:** demanding access to your money; preventing you from working; insisting that if they pay for you, you owe them something in return

**Digital:** sending threats via text, social media or email; stalking or embarrassing you on social media; hacking your social media or email accounts without permission; forcing you to share passwords; constantly texting or calling to check up on you; frequently looking through your phone or monitoring your texts/call log

# WARNING SIGNS OF ABUSE

## Warning Signs of Abuse

Because relationships exist on a spectrum, it can be hard to tell when a behavior crosses the line from healthy to unhealthy or even abusive. The following are warning signs of a relationship going in the wrong direction:

- Constantly putting someone down
- Extreme jealousy or insecurity
- Explosive temper
- Isolating someone from their family or friends, dictating who they can see or hang out with
- Mood swings (nice one minute and angry the next)
- Checking someone's cell phone, social media or email without permission
- Physically hurting someone in any way
- Possessiveness
- Telling someone what to do or what to wear



## Not sure if one of your students is in trouble?

You might not see dramatic warning signs like black eyes and broken bones, so it can be difficult to know for sure if they are experiencing abuse in their relationship. But if you know the signs to look for, you might be able to recognize an abusive relationship before it escalates. To start, listen to your instincts—you probably wouldn't be worried without good reason. Also, look for these red flags:

- Problems with school attendance, particularly if it is a new problem
- Lack of interest in former extracurricular activities
- Sudden request for a change in schedule
- Unexplained changes in behavior, grades or quality of schoolwork
- Noticeable change in weight, demeanor or physical appearance
- Isolation from former friends
- Little social contact with anyone but their dating partner
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Making excuses or apologizing for their dating partner's inappropriate behavior
- New disciplinary problems at school, such as bullying other students or acting out
- Name-calling or belittling from a dating partner

# HOW TO HELP YOUR STUDENT

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You can play an important role in helping students recognize abuse and get the help they need. Consider these tips as you try to make a positive change in your students' lives:

**Be clear:** Tell your students that abuse is unacceptable and that this is an issue you take very seriously.

**Encourage discussion:** Ask students what they think about abuse. Encourage them to think critically about the impact of violence—in their own relationships and society at large.

**Listen:** Listen to what students tell you and what you see and hear. Let them know you care, that you are there for them and that you are paying attention.

**Be prepared:** Be aware of mandatory reporting requirements that apply to you as a teacher and notify your school counselor when you suspect abuse.

**Spread the word:** Enlist your colleagues and administrators in raising awareness of teen dating violence.



If you are certain that your student is involved in an abusive relationship, here's what you can do:

**Tell your student that you're concerned for their safety.** Point out that what's happening isn't "normal." Everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship. After consulting with the student's parents, offer to connect them with a professional, like a counselor or attorney, who they can talk to confidentially.

**Be supportive and understanding.** Stress that you're on their side. Provide information and non-judgmental support. Let your student know that it's not their fault and no one "deserves" to be abused. Make it clear that you don't blame them and you respect their choices.

**Believe them and take them seriously.** Your student may be reluctant to share their experiences in fear of no one believing what they say. As you validate their feelings and show your support, they can become more comfortable and trust you with more information. Be careful not to minimize their situation due to age, inexperience or the length of their relationship.

**Help develop a safety plan.** One of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship is when the victim decides to leave. Be especially supportive during this time and try to connect the student to support groups or professionals that can help keep them safe.

**Remember that ultimately your student must be the one who decides to leave the relationship.** There are many complex reasons why victims stay in unhealthy relationships. Your support can make a critical difference in helping your student find their own way to end their unhealthy relationship.

## Key Themes

For healthier communication, try to:

**Find the Right Time.** If something is bothering you and you would like to have a conversation about it, it can be helpful to find the right time to talk. Try to find a time when both you and your partner are calm and not distracted, stressed or in a rush. You might even consider scheduling a time to talk if one or both of you is really busy!

**Talk Face to Face.** Avoid talking about serious matters or issues in writing. Text messages, letters and emails can be misinterpreted. Talk in person or on the phone so there aren't any unnecessary miscommunications.

**Do Not Attack.** Even when we mean well, we can sometimes come across as harsh because of our word choice. Using "you" can sound like you're attacking, which will make your partner defensive and less receptive to your message. Instead, try using "I" or "we." For example, say "I feel like we haven't been as close lately" instead of "You have been distant with me."

**Be Honest.** Agree to be honest. Sometimes the truth hurts, but it's the key to a healthy relationship. Admit that you aren't always perfect and apologize when you make a mistake instead of making excuses. You will feel better and it will help strengthen your relationship.

**Check Your Body Language.** Make eye contact when speaking face-to-face. Sit up and face your partner. Let your partner know you're listening. Show them you really care. Don't take a phone call, text or play a video game when you're talking. Listen and respond.

**Use the 48 Hour Rule.** If your partner does something that makes you angry, you need to tell them about it. But you don't have to do so right away. If you're still hurt 48 hours later, say something. If not, consider forgetting about it. But remember your partner can't read your mind. If you don't speak up when you're upset, there is no way for them to apologize or change. Once you do mention your hurt feelings and your partner sincerely apologizes, let it go. Don't bring up past issues if they're not relevant.

## How to Communicate if You Are Angry

If you get angry with your partner, here are a few steps to take:

**Stop.** If you get really angry about something, stop, take a step back and breathe. Give yourself time to calm down by watching TV, talking to a friend, playing a video game, taking a walk, listening to some music or whatever helps you relax. Taking a break can keep the situation from getting worse.

**Think.** After you're no longer upset, think about the situation and why you got so angry. Was it how your partner spoke or something they did? Figure out the real problem then think about how to explain your feelings.

**Talk.** Finally, talk to your partner and when you do, follow the tips under Key Themes.

**Listen.** After you tell your partner how you feel, remember to stop talking and listen to what they have to say. You both deserve the opportunity to express how you feel in a safe and healthy environment.



## Relationship Spectrum - Key

### Healthy

Your partner tells you how special you are and how much they care about you

Your partner uses a name or pronoun that you don't like but stops using it once you correct them or ask them not to

Your partner appreciates your passions and encourages you to do the things you love

You miss your partner when you go on vacation with your family but you have a really good time anyway

You had a really good day and can't wait to tell your partner because you know they will be excited about to hear about it

You and your partner feel like you can share things with each other, but you also feel like you can keep some things private

### Unhealthy

If you have a disagreement your partner uses the silent treatment and won't talk to you for days

Your partner says you don't really love them because you want to go to a movie with a friend instead of spending time alone with them

You always feel like your partner's wishes and goals come first

You and your partner agree to take the night off from texting or calling each other, but while you're out with your friends your partner calls and texts you multiple times to say they miss you

Your partner refuses to spend time with your family, but still expects that you spend time with theirs.

Your partner texts you more than you want them to and gets angry if you don't respond

### Abusive

Your partner controls your FB and other social media accounts

After an argument, your partner blocks the doorway and takes your keys to prevent you from leaving

Your partner randomly stops by your job even though you told them it made you uncomfortable

Your partner threatens to tell other people about your sex life or share private photos or texts

Your partner gives you gifts but demands something in return, like money or sexual acts

Your partner demands access to your bank account

When you go to your favorite restaurant and order something different, your partner acts disgusted and calls you stupid for ordering it

Your partner tells you they wouldn't hit you if you just did things the right way