

How to Recognize Unhealthy Relationships

You can play an important role in helping a teen or young adult recognize abuse and get the help they need. Not sure if someone you know is in trouble? If you know the signs to look for, you might be able to recognize an abusive relationship before it becomes dangerous. To start, listen to your instincts- you probably wouldn't be worried without good reason.

Warning Signs and Red Flags

-  Problems with attendance—classes, practice, games, events, work etc., particularly if this is a new problem
-  Lack of interest in former extracurricular activities
-  Stops seeing friends and becomes more isolated
-  Sudden request to change schedule
-  Change in appearance
-  They are depressed or anxious, or you notice changes in their personality
-  Unexplained changes in behavior, grades or quality of work/performance
-  Little social contact with anyone but their partner
-  They have unexplained marks or injuries, or the explanations they offer don't make sense
-  Apologizes for their partner's behavior and makes excuses for their partner's inappropriate behavior
-  Acts extremely possessive, jealous of their partner or others
-  New disciplinary problems at school or work, such as bullying others or acting out
-  When you see them together, their boyfriend/girlfriend calls them names, belittles or puts them down in front of others
-  Partner checking up on them constantly, calling and texting them
-  Partner checks cell phones, emails or social networks without permission
-  They are constantly worried about making their partner angry
-  They casually mention his or her violent behavior or explosive temper, but laugh it off as a joke
-  Partner exhibits extreme insecurity
-  You see their partner lose their temper, striking or breaking objects
-  You see signs of unhealthy behavior when the abuser thinks no one is paying attention

If you suspect someone you know is being abused, it can be difficult to know what to do. You may fear for their safety. Don't let your discomfort with the topic blind you to possible warning signs of relationship abuse or stop you from reaching out and offering support.

Have the Conversation

How to prepare:

Look through the resources on reachoutwny.org and learn as much as you can about relationship abuse, red flags and warning signs. Consider reaching out for additional resources or guidance from trained advocates.

Have the conversation in a quiet and private space, and allow enough time to listen. Don't just pull them aside in the hall or after practice. Close the door. Keep it low key. Don't push it if they are not ready to talk. Try again another time.

What to do/say:

- Privacy and confidentiality are key. Let them know that whatever you talk about will stay between the two of you.
- Be supportive and listen without judgment. Try not to speak negatively about the abusive partner. This may put the victim on the defense, because they have already been manipulated to believe that the abuse is their fault.
- Start the conversation with questions like "How are things going?," "Have you seen any kind of abusive behavior with your friends or peers?," "What does that look like?," "Why do you think one person would abuse the other?" and "What makes a relationship healthy?"
- Talk about behaviors or red flags you've seen. "I'm concerned that he seems to control where you are allowed to go and who you talk to." Ask them if they've noticed the same and how that behavior makes them feel. Point out that what's happening isn't "normal."
- Listen and believe them. Say things like, "I'm sorry this is happening to you," "I know it's complicated," and "You don't deserve this." Make it clear that you don't blame them and that you respect their choices. Be careful not to minimize their situation due to age, inexperience or the length of their relationship.
- Reflect their own power and control back to them while showing your support. Say something like, "Here are resources when you're ready. I encourage you to make that call, but I want you to know that this is your situation and you know what is best for you. Is there anything I can do to help?"
- What you see or hear may make you frustrated and upset. If this happens try to stay calm. Remind them that he or she deserves a healthy, violence-free relationship and that they didn't cause this, abuse is NEVER appropriate and NEVER their fault.
- Listen, but acknowledge that you are not an expert. Empower them with the tools to act when they're ready.
- Be patient. On average, it takes someone seven times to leave the relationship for good. Continue offering support in any way you can. Believing and supporting them can be a major factor in helping them stay safe, or helping them find their own way to end the unhealthy relationship when they're ready.

What NOT to do/say:

- Don't try to control the situation. Threatening to report the abusive behavior might shut them down. If you're connected with a school, church or business that might be official policy, so be honest and up front with them about any mandatory reporting. Help them understand administrators and officials are just as concerned for their safety as you are. Point them to resources that can be confidential.
- Do not try to fix this by going to their partner or friends. That can inflame the situation. You want to build their trust.
- Don't blame or judge—with your words OR your body language. Don't make them feel like they brought this on. They already get "blame" in their current unhealthy relationship. They did not cause this. It's not their fault.
- Don't make demands or offer advice. Offer suggestions or options and then respect their decision. Never start a sentence with "You should" or "You shouldn't." Keep in mind that relationship abuse is all about power and control. Any attempt to swoop in and make demands could backfire and make them shut down.
- Don't wait for them to come to you.
- Don't try to fix this by yourself. There are people who are trained and see this every day. Find resources and people who can help not just the victim, but you too.

Need More Support? | Reach Out

If they aren't ready to openly communicate with you about their relationship, let them know there are free, confidential services and trained individuals available to answer their questions. Pass on the information below, but let them know you are always available to talk.

If at any time you feel that you or someone you care about are in immediate danger, call 911.

These websites and hotlines are available 24/7 to help victims and survivors of domestic violence. Call for free, confidential information from trained advocates:

Family Justice Center of Erie County
716-558-SAFE (7233)
www.fjcSAFE.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-SAFE (7233)
800-787-3224 TTY
www.ndvh.org



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