
















How to Recognize Unhealthy Relationships

Not sure if someone you know is in trouble? You might not see dramatic warning signs like a black eye or broken bone, so it can be difficult to know for sure if your friend is experiencing abuse. In fact, abuse doesn't start overnight. At the beginning they may have seemed like the perfect couple. Gradually, the warning signs and red flags appear. Often, so gradually the victim doesn't even realize it is happening.

Although there are many signs to pay attention to when it comes to relationships, look for these common red flags and warning signs of relationship abuse:

Warning Signs and Red Flags

-  When you see them together, their boyfriend/girlfriend calls them names, belittles or puts them down in front of others
-  They are constantly worried about making their partner angry
-  Lack of interest in former extracurricular activities
-  They stop spending time with friends and family and become more isolated
-  They are depressed or anxious, or you notice changes in their personality
-  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
-  Partner acts extremely possessive, jealous of others
-  Partner checking up on them constantly, calling and texting them
-  Partner checks cell phones, emails or social networks without permission
-  They casually mention his or her violent behavior or explosive temper, but laugh it off as a joke
-  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
-  They change appearance at the request of their girlfriend/boyfriend

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.

While they might not come to you directly, you are in a unique position to see the warning signs and red flags.

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 professionals at places like the Family Justice Center.

Find a private space where you can talk, away from friends, teachers or anyone else who might overhear you. Allow enough time to listen. 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 something like: "It seems like you're stressed out or unhappy. I'm here if you want to talk about it now or some other time, I'll keep it between us."
- Keep it simple. Talk about behaviors you've seen or red flags. Tell them about specific times you have been worried about them. "I was scared for you when I saw him grab your arm. Have you thought about talking to someone about what you are going through?" 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," "It's not your fault" and "You don't deserve this." Make it clear that you don't blame them and that you respect their choices.
- 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 or upset. If this happens stay calm. Remind them that she or he 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 prepared. The initial conversation might not go as smoothly as planned. They may put up barriers or deny there is even a problem.
- Be patient. On average, it takes someone seven times to leave the relationship for good. Continue offering support in any way you can.

What NOT to do/say:

- Don't try to control the situation. Threatening to report the abusive behavior might shut them don't down.
- Do not try to fix this by going to their partner, family or other 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 you need support, additional advice or have questions, there are resources available like the Family Justice Center. Advocates are available to support you and your friend at any point along the way.

If your friend isn't ready to openly communicate with you about his or her relationship, let them know there are free, confidential services and trained individuals available to answer questions and help avoid unhealthy relationships. Pass on the information below, but let them know you are always available to talk.

If at any time you feel that you or your friend 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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