**The Relationship Spectrum**

Frequently Asked Questions

Adapted from Love is Respect (www.loveisrespect.org)

**What is Teen Dating Abuse?**

Abusive behaviors can be physical, emotional/verbal, sexual, financial, digital and/or include stalking.

**Physical abuse** is any intentional and unwanted contact with you or something close to your body. Sometimes abusive behavior does not cause pain or even leave a bruise, but it’s still unhealthy.

**Emotional** **abuse** includes non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring or “checking in,” excessive texting, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking.

**Sexual** **abuse** refers to any action that pressures or coerces someone to do something sexually they don’t want to do. It can also refer to behavior that impacts a person’s ability to control their sexual activity or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs.

**Digital dating abuse** is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner.

You are being **stalked** when a person repeatedly watches, follows or harasses you, making you feel afraid or unsafe.

**How common is Teen Dating Abuse?**

One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.[[1]](#footnote-1) Anyone can be abusive and anyone can be the victim of abuse. It happens regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, race or economic background.

**Why does my friend abuse their partner?**

People abuse their partners because they believe they have the right to control the person they’re dating. Abuse is a learned behavior. Sometimes people see it growing up. Other times they learn it from friends or popular culture. No matter where it’s learned, it’s not ok and it’s never justified. Many people experience or witness abuse growing up and decide not to use those negative and hurtful ways of behaving. It’s most important to know that abuse is a **choice**, and it’s not one that anyone has to make.

**A little jealousy or possessiveness means my partner cares about me, right?**

Sometimes, jealous or possessive behavior can seem like a good thing but it’s actually a warning sign of teen dating abuse. Your partner may think that they have a right to control your thoughts, feelings or actions or they may view you as a possession.

**Why doesn’t my friend leave their abusive relationship?**

There are many reasons why both men and women stay in abusive relationships. If you have a friend in an unhealthy relationship, support them by understanding why they may choose to not leave immediately. Reasons why someone might stay in abusive relationships include fear, believing the abuse is normal, embarrassment, low self-esteem, love or fear of being outed if they identify as LGBTQI. Your friend may stay because of pressure, including social/peer pressure, cultural/religious reasons or pregnancy/parenting. Your friend may also distrust adults or authority figures because they worry that adults won’t take them seriously or they may have negative experiences with the police or court systems.

**Will the abuse go away if I ignore it?**

A lot of teens believe that if you ignore abusive behaviors, they will go away. In reality, abusive behaviors may get worse or escalate if you ignore them. Let your friend know that support is available if they want to address the abuse.

**Will my friend be safe if they break-up with their partner?**

It can be dangerous to tell your friend to “just break up, just leave” their partner. The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when someone decides to leave the relationship. This doesn’t mean that your friend has to stay in an abusive relationship but it does mean that it is important to make a **safety plan**. A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that can help your friend avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when their in danger. An interactive safety plan can be found at Love is Respect (http://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/safety-planning/interactive-safety-plan/).

**Is it illegal to send or receive “nudes” from my partner?**

It may seem like sending or receiving “nudes” is a normal behavior but it is a **felony offense** in the State of Ohio. Currently, a minor who is caught creating, distributing, or possessing a sexually explicit image of a minor could be prosecuted under the State of Ohio’s child pornography laws and if convicted, required to register as a sex offender.

**How can I help my friend?**

Only 33% of teens who were in a violent relationship ever told anyone about the abuse. Your friend might be scared to tell you about the abuse because they may think that no one will believe them. The most important thing you can do is to start by listening to your friend and believing what they tell you. Use the *It’s Abuse* card to refer your friend to important local and national resources.

1. Davis, Antoinette, MPH. 2008. Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency Focus. Available at http://www.nccdcrc.org/nccd/pubs/2008\_focus\_teen\_dating\_violence.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)