

## What's an Unhealthy Relationship?



A relationship is unhealthy when it involves mean, disrespectful, controlling, or abusive behavior. Some people live in homes with parents who fight a lot or abuse each other — emotionally, verbally, or physically. For some people who have grown up around this kind of behavior it can almost seem normal or OK. **It's not!** Many of us learn from watching and imitating the people close to us. So someone who has lived around violent or disrespectful behavior may not have learned how to treat others with kindness and respect or how to expect the same treatment.

Qualities like kindness and respect are absolute requirements for a healthy relationship. Someone who doesn't yet have this part down may need to work on it before he or she is ready for a relationship. Meanwhile, even though you might feel bad or feel for someone who's been mistreated, you need to take care of yourself — it's not healthy to stay in a relationship that involves abusive behavior of any kind.

## Warning Signs

When a boyfriend or girlfriend uses verbal insults, mean language, nasty putdowns, gets physical by hitting or slapping, or forces sexual activity, it's a sign of verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

*Ask yourself, does my boyfriend or girlfriend:*

- get angry when I don't drop everything for him or her?
- criticize the way I look or dress, and say I'll never be able to find anyone else who would date me?
- keep me from seeing friends or from talking to any other guys or girls?
- want me to quit an activity, even though I love it?
- ever raise a hand when angry, like he or she is about to hit me?
- try to force me to go further sexually than I want to?

These aren't the only questions you can ask yourself. If you can think of any way in which your boyfriend or girlfriend is trying to control you, make you feel bad about yourself, isolate you from the rest of your world, or — this is a big one — harm you physically or sexually, then it's time to get out, *fast*. Let a trusted friend or family member know what's going on and make sure you're safe.

It can be tempting to make excuses or misinterpret violence, possessiveness, or anger as an expression of love. But even if you know that the person hurting you loves you, it is not healthy. No one deserves to be hit, shoved, or forced into anything he or she doesn't want to do.

## ***Why Are Some Relationships So Difficult?***

Ever heard about how it's hard for someone to love you when you don't love yourself? It's a big relationship roadblock when one or both people struggle with self-esteem problems. Your girlfriend or boyfriend isn't there to make you feel good about yourself if you can't do that on your own. Focus on being happy with yourself, and don't take on the responsibility of worrying about someone else's happiness.

What if you feel that your girlfriend or boyfriend needs too much from you? If the relationship feels like a burden or a drag instead of a joy, it might be time to think about whether it's a healthy match for you. Someone who's not happy or secure may have trouble being a healthy relationship partner.

Also, intense relationships can be hard for some teenagers. Some are so focused on their own developing feelings and responsibilities that they don't have the emotional energy it takes to respond to someone else's feelings and needs in a close relationship. Don't worry if you're just not ready yet. You will be, and you can take all the time you need.

Ever notice that some teen relationships don't last very long? It's no wonder — you're still growing and changing every day, and it can be tough to put two people together whose identities are both still in the process of forming. You two might seem perfect for each other at first, but that can change. If you try to hold on to the relationship anyway, there's a good chance it will turn sour. Better to part as friends than to stay in something that you've outgrown or that no longer feels right for one or both of you. And before you go looking for a new relationship, respect your current one by breaking things off before you make your move.

Relationships can be one of the best — and most challenging — parts of your world. They can be full of fun, romance, excitement, intense feelings, and occasional heartache, too. Whether you're single or in a relationship, remember that it's good to be choosy about who you get close to. If you're still waiting, take your time and get to know plenty of people.

Think about the qualities you value in a friendship and work on developing those good qualities in yourself — they make you a lot more attractive to others. And if you're already part of a pair, make sure the relationship you're in brings out the best in both of you.

## ***The Breakup***

If you've just had a break-up and are feeling down, you're not alone. Just about everyone experiences a break-up at some point, and many then have to deal with heartbreak — a wave of grief, anger, confusion, low self-esteem, and maybe even jealousy all at once.

Millions of poems and songs have been written about having a broken heart and wars have even been fought because of heartbreak.

## ***What Exactly Is Heartbreak?***

Lots of things can cause heartbreak. Some people might have had a romantic relationship that ended before they were ready. Others might have strong feelings for someone who doesn't feel the same way. Or maybe a person feels sad or angry when a close friend ends or abandons the friendship.

Although the causes may be different, the feeling of loss is the same — whether it's the loss of something real or the loss of something you only hoped for. People describe heartbreak as a feeling of heaviness, emptiness, and sadness.

## ***How Can I Deal with How I Feel?***

Most people will tell you you'll get over it or you'll meet someone else, but when it's happening to you, it can feel like no one else in the world has ever felt the same way. If you're experiencing these feelings, there are things you can do to lessen the pain.

**Here are some tips that might help.**

### ***Let It Out***

- **Share your feelings.** Some people find that sharing their feelings with someone they trust — someone who recognizes what they're going through — helps them feel better. That could mean talking over all the things you feel, even having a good cry on the shoulder of a comforting friend or family member. If you feel like someone can't relate to what you're going through or is dismissive of your feelings, find someone more sympathetic to talk to. (OK, we know that sharing feelings can be tough for guys, but you don't necessarily have to tell the football team or your wrestling coach what you're going through. Talk with a friend or family member, a teacher, or counselor. It might make you more comfortable if you find a female family member or friend, like an older sister or a neighbor, to talk to.)

- **Don't be afraid to cry.** Going through a break-up can be really tough, and getting some of those raw emotions out can be a big help. We know this is another tough one for guys, but there's no shame in crying now and then. No one has to see you do it — you don't have to start blubbering in class or at soccer practice or anything. Just find a place where you can be alone, like crying into your pillow at night or in the shower when you're getting ready for the day.

## *Be Kind to Yourself*

- **Remember what's good about you.** This one is really important. Sometimes people with broken hearts start to blame themselves for what's happened. They may be really down on themselves, exaggerating their faults as though they did something to deserve the unhappiness they're experiencing. If you find this happening to you, nip it in the bud! Remind yourself of your good qualities, and if you can't think of them because your broken heart is clouding your view, get your friends to remind you.
- **Take good care of yourself.** A broken heart can be very stressful so don't let the rest of your body get broken too. Get lots of sleep, eat healthy foods, and exercise regularly to minimize stress and depression and give your self-esteem a boost.
- **Do the things you normally enjoy.** Whether it's seeing a movie or going to a concert, do something fun to take your mind off the negative feelings for a while.
- **Keep yourself busy.** Sometimes this is difficult when you're coping with sadness and grief, but it really helps. This is a great time to redecorate your room or try a new hobby. That doesn't mean you shouldn't think about what happened — working things through in our minds is all part of the healing process — it just means you should focus on other things too.
- **Give yourself time.** It takes time for sadness to go away. Almost everyone thinks they won't feel normal again, but the human spirit is amazing — and the heartbreak almost always heals after a while. But how long will that take? That depends on what caused your heartbreak, how you deal with loss, and how quickly you tend to bounce back from things. Getting over a break-up can take a couple of days to many weeks — and sometimes even months.

Some people feel that nothing will make them happy again and resort to alcohol or drugs. Others feel angry and want to hurt themselves or someone else. People who drink, do drugs, or cut themselves to escape from the reality of a loss may think they are numbing their pain, but the feeling is only temporary. They're not really dealing with the pain, only masking it, which makes all their feelings build up inside and prolongs the sadness.

Sometimes the sadness is so deep — or lasts so long — that a person may need some extra support. For someone who isn't starting to feel better after a few weeks or who continues to feel depressed, talking to a counselor or therapist can be very helpful.

So be patient with yourself, and let the healing begin.

Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-7233
Crisis Hotline	832-416-1177
Teen Talk	832-416-1199 (call) or 281-201-4430 (text)