



Dating Abuse



Have fun and stay safe *while you are dating*

Dating can help you figure out what kind of people and activities you like and don't like, and what's important to you.

But sometimes dating can turn into something that doesn't feel good. Sometimes people abuse their dating partner, or are even violent. The signs of an unhealthy relationship may not be obvious. Talk with someone you trust.



What is in this booklet

What is abuse

- How you can tell the difference between a healthy dating relationship and an unhealthy or abusive one
- How you can stay safe in the dating scene and still have fun

What you can do

- What you can do if you find yourself in an unhealthy or abusive situation
- How you can tell if a friend might be in an abusive dating situation

Where to get help

- How you can help a friend you are concerned about

*Definition of family violence**

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. It can include many forms of abuse including spouse abuse, senior abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and witnessing abuse of others in the family. Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse and spiritual abuse.

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* This is Alberta Government's definition of family violence as identified in the *Finding Solutions Together* report.

What happens in a healthy dating relationship?

- You enjoy the time you spend together
- You can disagree and know it's okay to talk about your differences
- You feel good doing things apart from each other as well as together
- There is no fear in your relationship
- You do not try to restrict or control each other
- It's easy to be true to yourself when you are with the other person
- You encourage each other to be great

Being in a healthy dating relationship does not mean you always agree or that you are going to stay together for a long time. It just means you are respectful to each other while you are dating.

But not all dating relationships are healthy. Is it a big problem? Well, one study found that 29 per cent of girls and 13 per cent of guys between 11 and 20 years old had experienced some form of dating abuse that was upsetting to them.¹



“I went out with this guy a few times. It didn’t work out so I told him I didn’t want to see him anymore. All of a sudden he was everywhere I went — outside my apartment, in the bookstore, even in the coffee shop where I work. He sent me text messages like every hour. I spent months watching over my shoulder. I called the police and asked them what to do, so they would have his name on file. I never left work by myself and I changed my phone number. Eventually he got the message.”

What is abuse?

Abuse is about power. Abuse is about control. Abuse is about one person trying to control or dominate another. Here are some control tactics that might be used.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE TACTICS are often present with other forms of abuse.

Emotional abuse may include:

Treating you with disrespect

- Name-calling, insulting, blaming, humiliating
- Swearing at you or yelling at you
- Doing or saying things that are disrespectful or rude, or that embarrass you
- Interfering with or ridiculing your spiritual beliefs and practices

Emotional roller coaster

- Being explosive or having wild mood swings
- Cheerful one minute and angry the next
- Alternating between being cruel and kind
- Manipulating you emotionally, such as, “If you love me then you will do as I want”

Isolation

- Being possessive
- Not wanting you to be with other people
- Placing limits on who you can spend time with or the amount of time you spend with other people
- Trying to keep you away from your friends and family

SEXUAL ABUSE TACTICS may include:

- Unwanted sexual touching
- Sexual acts without consent
- Making fun if you do not want to do certain sexual things
- Unsafe sexual practices, for example, not using a condom
- Making rude comments or gestures that embarrass you
- Forcing a person into degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts

INTIMIDATION TACTICS are actions meant to scare you. They may include:

Behaviours that could harm you or people or possessions you care about, such as:

- Driving dangerously when you are a passenger
- Throwing things or breaking things
- Destroying your possessions

Threats

- Threatening to harm you
- Threatening to harm people or pets you care about
- Threatening to spread rumours about you or get you in trouble
- Threatening to commit suicide if you do not do something they want
- Threatening gestures or facial expressions

Stalking or harassment tactics, such as:

- Following you
- Parking close by and watching where you live or work
- Contacting you by phone, Internet or text message more than you feel comfortable with
- Contacting your friends or family to ask about you or spread false rumours about you
- Continuing to contact you after you have made it clear you do not want any further contact

PHYSICAL ABUSE TACTICS include any action that could cause you pain or injure you.

Physical abuse tactics may include:

- Shoving, pushing or elbowing you
- Slapping, kicking, biting, punching, pinching, hair-pulling
- Throwing things at you
- Threatening to harm you with an object or weapon

EMOTIONAL ABUSE TACTICS	INTIMIDATION TACTICS	SEXUAL ABUSE TACTICS	PHYSICAL ABUSE TACTICS
Disrespect, insults, blaming	Actions intended to frighten you	Pushing you to have sex before you want to	Anything that could cause physical harm or pain
Embarrassing or degrading you	Behaviours that could harm you	Unsafe sex	
Emotional roller coaster	Stalking or harassment		
Isolating you	Threats		

Both guys and girls can be abusive to their partners. Abuse happens in heterosexual dating relationships and in LGBTQ* dating relationships. One study found that youth between 11 and 20 years old who have been abused in dating relationships most often report emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The same study found that compared to girls, boys were more accepting of abuse whether perpetrated by a girl or a boy.²

*A commonly used acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited and queer identities. Sexual minority is a synonymous term.

How can I tell if my relationship is healthy, unhealthy or abusive?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Look at the chart that follows. For each relationship factor, think about your relationship. Then ask yourself this question: Is my relationship most like the healthy, unhealthy or abusive relationship?

	HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP	UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP	ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP
Sharing Feelings	You feel safe and strong enough to tell your partner how you really feel.	You feel awkward telling your partner how you really feel.	You are afraid to tell your partner how you really feel because you fear getting put down or threatened.
Communicating	You respect and listen to each other even when you have differing opinions on a topic.	Your partner ignores you and does not respect your opinions when there is a difference of opinion.	Your partner treats you with disrespect and ignores or makes fun of your ideas and feelings or makes fun of them.
Disagreements	You can have disagreements and still talk respectfully to each other. You resolve your disagreements.	Your disagreements often turn into fights.	You are afraid to disagree because you do not want to unleash your partner's anger and violence. The disagreement is an excuse for abuse.
Intimacy and Sex	Both of you can be honest about your feelings about physical affection and sex. Neither of you feels pressured to do anything you do not want to do.	You are embarrassed to say how you feel because you think your partner may not listen or care. You "go along" with some things.	Your partner ignores your needs and wants. Your partner pushes you into situations that make you uncomfortable, frighten or degrade you.
Trust	You trust each other. You are comfortable with your partner spending time with another guy or girl.	Your partner feels jealous every time you talk to another guy or girl. You feel jealous every time your partner talks to another guy or girl.	Your partner accuses you of flirting and orders you not to talk to another guy or girl.
Time Alone	You can spend time alone and consider this a healthy part of your relationship.	You think there may be something wrong if you want to do things without your partner. Your partner tries to keep you to himself or herself.	Your partner does not allow you to spend time doing things on your own. Your partner sees this as a challenge or threat to your relationship.
Violence	You and your partner take care not to speak harsh words or make mean comments. There is no physical violence in your relationship.	There have been a few incidents of emotional abuse or controlling behaviour in your relationship. There is no pattern of abuse or violence.	There is a pattern of increasing, ongoing abuse in your relationship: emotional, physical, sexual and/or intimidation.

If you found that your relationship fell into the healthy category, congratulations. You treat each other in a respectful way.

If you found that your relationship fell into the unhealthy or abusive category, then you have some options for what you can do about that.

If you are in an abusive relationship

IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU, YOU MIGHT FEEL...

...that you're all alone.

You're not alone. Other teens and adults have experienced abuse and violence in dating relationships. They mostly report suffering emotional and sexual violence. Friends, other family members, neighbours, social workers, teachers or school counsellors, doctors and other service providers are all possible sources of help. There are also many community resources available to help you. At the back of this booklet, you will find some ideas about sources of help.

...that you're worthless, ugly, stupid or unlovable.

You're not. You're a normal person who had a bad experience. You have the power to move on from it. And you have the right to have a healthy, happy relationship.

...that you can't tell anyone.

You can tell someone. Pick a person you trust, such as a friend, neighbour, family member, teacher, counsellor, or community services staff person. If that person does not listen or understand, tell a different person. It's okay to ask for help. Silence and acceptance will only lead to further abuse.

...that it's your fault.

Abuse is not your fault, even if your dating partner may want you to think it is. People make their own choices. Your abuser made the choice to abuse you. But you do not deserve to be abused. Nobody does. You deserve to be treated with respect.

...that you'll accept the abuse so you can keep the relationship.

Abuse is never acceptable. Once abuse starts, it almost never stops by itself. In fact, abuse and violence almost always get more frequent and more severe if you allow them to continue. Sometimes you might think it is more important to have a relationship than to be safe. But abuse and violence are never acceptable. They grind you down and eventually destroy you.

...that the abuse means your abuser loves you.

Abuse is not love. Abuse is about wanting power over another person. It is about control. If your partner is jealous or possessive and cuts off your contact with friends, that is about control. If your partner tells you what to do, hurts you or forces you to have sex, that is about control. It is not love. Love is not about anger, jealousy, or fear. Love is about friendship, respect, accepting and encouraging one another.

...that your abuser was stressed or intoxicated, so it doesn't count.

Abuse is abuse no matter what. Stress, alcohol, drugs or any other factors do not take away a person's responsibility for his or her choices and behaviour. Many people have stress or use alcohol and drugs but they do not abuse others.

FIVE THINGS TO DO IF YOUR PARTNER HAS BEEN VIOLENT OR THREATENS VIOLENCE

If you decide to leave the relationship, you need to know it is one of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship. Your abusive partner is losing control over you and will do everything possible to get it back. This does not mean you should stay in the situation. It does mean you need to take extra care to protect your safety.

1. Tell someone. Make sure other people you trust are aware of your situation. Talk with someone you trust — a friend, a teacher, a counsellor, a coach or a family member. If that person doesn't take you seriously, tell someone else. Continue until you get the help you need.

“A whole group of us went to a party. When we got there, we realized we didn't know anyone. They seemed older than we were, but we decided to make the best of it and settled in. This one great looking guy put the moves on my friend and she went down the hall with him. We were excited for her because she'd never had a boyfriend or anything. I guess we lost track of time. When we started to leave we realized she hadn't come back. We found her crying in one of the bedrooms. Her clothes were torn and she had a bruise on her cheek. Turns out the guy thought she would have sex with him, when she thought they'd just make out a little. He didn't rape her but he hurt her and scared her. Now when we go out we never leave each other alone.”



“I dated this girl for a few months. I liked her at first, but then it seemed like she wanted to own me. She wanted to be together every day. She wanted me to stop hanging out with my friends. If I talked to another girl, she would accuse me of cheating. I wasn’t — but the way she was acting made me think it might be a good idea. I finally told her I wanted to break it off. She cried and begged me to stay with her. I felt sorry for her so we went out a few more times, but it wasn’t working. I broke it off for good. She started phoning my parents and my friends, saying I had done terrible things to her. She sent me 20-page letters. Last night she phoned, crying, and telling me she can’t live without me. I need this to be over.”

2. Get help to protect your safety.

- **If you are in immediate danger, call 911** or call the police, RCMP or Tribal police. Look in the emergency pages of your local phone book to find the telephone number of police in your area
- Call the Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** to find resources in your community or visit **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca**
- Have your parent/guardian or a trusted adult help you obtain an emergency protection order, restraining order or peace bond to legally stop an abuser from contacting you

3. Make a safety plan to deal with your immediate situation.

- Make sure someone always knows where you are and when you expect to be at a certain place. Let them know whom to call for help if you do not arrive on time
- Think of safe places you can get to quickly if you need to escape from an abusive person
- Consider changing your school locker or lock
- Consider changing the route you use to get to school or work
- Change the number to cell phones, beepers or pagers or get rid of them. Change your e-mail address
- There are things you could use if you get into a dangerous situation. Try to keep them on you, not in a purse or a bag that could get separated from you. Keep these things with you at all times:
 - Coins for pay phones, or a cell phone that works
 - Calling cards, so you can phone long distance if necessary
 - The number for the local shelter
 - Phone numbers of people who could help
 - A copy of any restraining order
- Keep a journal or write notes that describe abusive incidents. These notes may be useful later in order to prove to police that there is a pattern of abuse

4. Understand what you are dealing with.

Here are five things you need to understand.

- You are not responsible for the abuse. People who abuse are responsible for their own actions. You did not cause it to happen even if your partner would like you to think so
- Abuse or violence will not stop or go away by itself. The typical pattern is that violence gets more frequent and more severe until someone does something to stop it
- If you have children or live in a household with children, they are being harmed by the abuse. Being exposed to abuse or violence damages children’s brain development — even if they are not consciously aware that it is happening. Whether or not you are the children’s biological parent or brother or sister, take responsibility for the best interests of children in your household
- Many women in violent marriages say the abuse started when they were dating. Does your idea of “living happily ever after” include being hit, being called names or being sexually assaulted? Do not imagine that if you agree to live together or get married, the abuse will stop. It will only get worse
- You are a valuable person. You are not meant to be treated badly. You deserve to be treated with respect. Everybody does

5. Care for yourself. You are in a difficult situation. You need strength and courage to change it. Anything you do to uplift your body, emotions, mind or spirit will help you to get through this situation and create the life you want for yourself.

Other people have had negative dating experiences and have gone on to have happy relationships and a good life. You can too. In the meantime, be kind to yourself, care for yourself and do things that uplift you so you have the energy to get past this situation.

What you can do to avoid dating abuse or violence

ELEVEN DATING SAFETY TIPS

1. Consider double-dating the first few times you're out with someone new.
2. Plan to be safe.
 - Plan before you go out. Think of different ways to be safe if you find yourself in a dangerous or potentially dangerous situation
 - Make a list of the adults you could talk to if your partner abuses you. The list could include people at school, such as teachers, the principal, counsellor and security staff
 - Make a list of the friends you can ask to help you stay safe
 - Use the buddy system for going to school, classes and after school activities
 - Make a list of the people you could call for a ride home if you are stranded
 - Make a list of the places you could go quickly to escape an abusive person. The list could include a convenience store or gas station that is open 24 hours
3. Before you leave on a date, make sure you know the exact plans for the date. Make sure a friend or family member knows where you plan to be and what time they can expect you to be home.
4. Always make sure a reliable friend or family member knows where you are.
5. Let your date know that you are expected to call or tell that person when you get home.
6. Don't leave a party with someone you don't know well; if you do, make sure you tell a friend you trust about your plans and the name of the person you are with. Ask a friend to call and make sure you arrive home safely.
7. NEVER have a private face-to-face meeting with someone you've met online. If you want to meet an online friend that you don't know, make sure that you take an adult with you.
8. Be aware that if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you will not be able to react as well or as fast.
9. Trust your instincts. If a situation makes you uncomfortable, stay calm and think of a way to leave.
10. If a person frightens or intimidates you or shows a lack of respect for your wishes, ask for help. Then call the relationship off.
11. Expect to be treated with respect. Practice saying, "I need to be respected." Know that you are worth it.

KNOW THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS: SEVEN WARNING SIGNS THAT YOU ARE DATING A PERSON WHO IS ABUSIVE AND COULD BE VIOLENT

1. Soon after you begin dating, your boyfriend or girlfriend pressures you to make the relationship very serious or to have sex.
2. Your boyfriend or girlfriend becomes extremely jealous and possessive. He or she thinks these destructive displays of emotion are signs of love.
3. Your boyfriend or girlfriend tries to control you and to make all decisions about what you do together. Your boyfriend or girlfriend does not take your views or desires seriously.
4. Your boyfriend or girlfriend tries to keep you from spending time with close friends or family.
5. Your boyfriend or girlfriend verbally and emotionally abuses you. He or she does things like yell at you, swear at you, manipulate you, spread false and degrading rumours about you, and try to make you feel guilty.





6. Your boyfriend or girlfriend threatens physical violence.
7. Your boyfriend or girlfriend has abused a previous girlfriend or boyfriend. He or she accepts and defends the use of violence by others.

DATING BILL OF RIGHTS³

The Dating Bill of Rights outlines the respectful treatment every person should receive in a healthy dating or intimate relationship.

I HAVE A RIGHT TO...

- Ask for a date
- Refuse a date
- Suggest activities
- Refuse an activity if I don't feel comfortable with it
- Have my own feelings and be able to express them
- Say, "I think my date is wrong and/or my date's actions are not appropriate"
- Ask someone not to interrupt me
- Have my limits and values respected
- Tell my partner when I want affection
- Refuse affection
- Be heard
- Refuse to lend money
- Refuse sex any time. I don't need a reason
- Have friends and space away from my partner

I HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO...

- Set my limits and values
- Respect the limits and values of others
- Communicate clearly and honestly
- Not violate the limits of others
- Ask for help when I need it
- Be considerate
- Check my actions and decisions to determine if they are good or bad for me
- Make sure children in my household are not exposed to violence or abuse
- Set high goals for myself

If you are concerned about someone you know

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: HOW YOU CAN TELL IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN AN ABUSIVE SITUATION

1. **First, look at the chart of "healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships"** on page 4. Think about the person you care about and his or her dating partner. What do you see, hear or feel when you are with the two of them? In which category does their relationship fit?
2. **Next, look again at the list of behaviours describing abuse tactics:** emotional, spiritual, isolation, sexual, intimidation, stalking and physical abuse tactics on page 3. Have you observed any of these behaviours in their dating relationship?
3. **Here are some other clues** that abuse may be taking place:
 - Mood or personality changes
 - Changes in their style of clothing or make-up
 - Skipping school, dropping out of school, dropping classes, or failing grades
 - Emotional outbursts or over-reacting to things that seem small or unimportant
 - Not being able to make decisions and seeming to lose confidence in themselves
 - Withdrawing from friends or family; not being at events or activities they used to attend
 - Drug or alcohol abuse, especially increased use of alcohol or drugs

- Signs of injury like bruises, sores, scratches or broken bones — especially if the injuries do not match the story they tell you about how they got the injuries

IF ABUSE HAPPENS TO SOMEONE YOU KNOW, YOU MAY FEEL...

...that it's none of your business.

It is your business. Preventing abuse is everyone's business.

...that it's hopeless to get involved.

It's not hopeless. Most people who are abused develop very low self-esteem and lose their self-confidence. They usually do find their way out of the relationship, but it can take some time to overcome their fears and take the necessary steps. Your positive support and encouragement can help.

...that there is nothing you can do.

There is a lot you can do. One act of support and positive encouragement can make a big difference to someone who is being abused. You can contact one of several community or government resources for advice or ideas on how best to help. The list at the back of this booklet might help you get started.

How you can help

TWO THINGS YOU CAN DO IF YOU SUSPECT SOMEONE IS IN AN ABUSIVE SITUATION

1. Understand the person may not realize this is abuse or may not want to talk about it.

Sometimes people in abusive dating relationships do not realize that the behaviour they are experiencing is abuse. If they are new to the dating scene, they may not know that, "This is not normal," and, "This is not acceptable."

People who have been abused can be embarrassed, ashamed or afraid to talk about the abuse.

2. Find the right words to open the door for the person to talk.

Here are some examples of things you could say. Find your own words that are appropriate for the person you're talking to.

- "Are you okay?"
- "I've noticed you don't seem as happy as usual. I'm wondering if that's true"
- "I've noticed you're not around as much as you used to be, and when we do see you, you are more quiet than usual. I don't mean to be nosey, but sometimes that's how people act when they have a big problem or when they are dating someone that's not treating them well"
- "For a while I was dating someone that didn't treat me well, and I can see the signs." (Say this only if it's true.) "Here is what I see that makes me think you could be in a bad situation." (Describe the signs you see.) "Here are three things I can tell from experience, and lots of other people's experience. First, you're not the only one. Second, you don't deserve to be abused. And third, abuse never gets better by itself — in fact, it gets worse"

Because this is someone you know and care about, you will know the right words to use to open the door to begin talking about the abuse.

"My friend and I hooked up with some guys at a Friday night pub on campus. We drank and danced a lot and then decided to go with the guys to a different party. A bunch of our classmates saw us go. As we were walking there, this one guy kept grabbing at me. I asked him to stop, but he kept on doing it. After I asked him a couple more times and he kept groping me, my friend and I just took off running in the other direction. When I got to class on Monday, I heard that he was telling people he had sex with me. Everybody believes him."

“My boyfriend is adventurous. We have fun dreaming up new things to do. But last night I was tired and just wanted to curl up in front of the TV. He wanted to try out a kind of raunchy new position he’d seen in a video. I said I wasn’t up for it, but he just kept at me until I gave in. Maybe it was because I wasn’t really into it, but the position was uncomfortable and what he was doing was hurting me. I asked him to stop, but he said it was too late. I didn’t enjoy it at all and I’m sore today but my boyfriend hasn’t noticed. He thought it was great.”



SEVEN THINGS YOU CAN DO IF A FRIEND TELLS YOU ABOUT ABUSE

1. **Let them know you believe them.** Listen to what they are saying.
2. **Tell them they don’t deserve to be hurt** and that it’s not their fault. Nobody deserves to be treated badly.
3. **Honour your friend’s feelings.** Your friend may need to talk about the good stuff as well as the bad stuff.
4. **Find out what your friend wants to do** about the relationship, and support that. Your friend may be confused. Understand that abuse will do that to a person. Your friend may decide something and then change her or his mind.
5. **Accept that your friend may want to stay** in the relationship or try to make it work again. Don’t criticize. Just remind your friend that you are there.
6. **Watch your body language** and respect your friend’s right to personal space. For example, not everyone wants hugs.
7. **Be prepared for many different feelings or reactions.** Your friend may feel guilty or embarrassed for telling you — or even angry that you know. Don’t take any reactions personally. Keep reminding them that you are there for them. Tell them that you accept them exactly as they are and that you will support their choices.

FIVE THINGS NOT TO DO

1. **Don’t make judgments or give advice.** You don’t know what your friend’s experience is. You don’t know what is right for your friend, even if you have been in a similar situation. You can be helpful without telling your friend what to do. Listen and accept your friend no matter what.
2. **Don’t criticize your friend’s boyfriend or girlfriend.** Even in unhealthy relationships, it’s not bad all the time. If you criticize the boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend may feel forced to defend the abusive person.
3. **Don’t ask questions about the abuse.** The person may be finding it difficult to talk about the abuse, and a question will interrupt the flow. Your friend may stop talking.
4. **Don’t over-react.** If you act shocked or horrified, you may make your friend feel worse. Instead, stay calm.
5. **Do not confront your friend’s partner.** It could make a bad situation even worse. Instead, talk to your friend about what choices there are, ask how you can help, and keep reminding your friend that you’re there.

Get help

- **If you are in immediate danger, call 911** or call the police, RCMP or Tribal police. Look in the emergency pages of your local phone book to find the telephone number of police in your area
- **Emergency protection orders, restraining orders and peace bonds** are some of the legal ways to stop an abuser from contacting someone. Have your parent/guardian or a trusted adult help you obtain one
- Call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca**
- **Call the Bullying Help Line at 1-888-456-2323**
- Schools, colleges and universities often have counsellors or student programs that can help people who are in abusive dating relationships

¹ Price, E. L., Byers, E. S., Sears, H. A., Whelan, J., & Saint-Pierre, M. (2000, January). *Dating violence amongst New Brunswick adolescents: A summary of two studies*. In *Research Paper Series (2)*. Fredericton: The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, University of New Brunswick. Retrieved from <http://www.unbf.ca/arts/CFVR/documents/Dating-Violence.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Adapted from McShane, C. (1988). *Warning! Dating may be hazardous to your health!* Racine, WI: Mother Courage Press.



**Alberta Children and Youth Services
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