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RELATIONSHIPS

Is Your Relationship Good for You?

Relationship Responsibilities

Are You Safe in Your Relationship?

Are You Safe in Your Relationship?

Relationship Abuse at a Glance

Abuse is never OK in a relationship.

People can hurt their partners verbally, emotionally, sexually, or physically.

If you feel you are being treated badly, you probably are.

Help is available.

Healthy and happy relationships help us feel better about ourselves and our place in the world. Unhealthy relationships can make us feel unhappy, unsafe, and fearful of the future.

Unfortunately many people are in hurtful, unsafe, or violent relationships. It can happen to anyone — students, doctors, teachers, celebrities, and construction workers — whether they are women or men; teens or adults; straight, gay, or bisexual.

How Do I Know if My Relationship Is Unsafe?

Everyone has a right to feel safe in a relationship. But abusive relationships are too common. Controlling or violent behavior in a relationship never fixes problems. And it tends to get worse and happen more often over time.

There are several ways that a partner can hurt you and make you feel unsafe. People can hurt their partners:

- verbally
- emotionally
- sexually
- physically

They can also hurt their partners by withholding money or by using it to control them.

If your partner hurts you, remember: You do not deserve to be hurt. Nothing you say or do causes your partner to hurt you. We all get angry sometimes, but when we do, we all have choices. We can choose to express ourselves in healthy ways. Or we can be irresponsible and choose to hurt someone else — which is not healthy.

WORDS

In healthy relationships, partners help each other feel good about themselves. Insults, unkind words, and humiliation are very hurtful — they are disrespectful and make us feel bad about ourselves.

Does your partner ...

constantly criticize you, call you names, or put you down in front of other people?

threaten to harm you, your children, your family, pets, friends, or

himself?

blame you for everything that goes wrong?

lie or break promises to you a lot?

ever say, "You make me get this angry," or "I can't help being so

mad with you around"?

expect you to do everything she or he says?

threaten your immigrant status?

threaten to "out" you or reveal other personal information about

you to your family, friends, or coworkers?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you are likely being treated badly. Signs of abuse like these may mean that you're not safe in your relationship — and it may get worse.

FEELINGS AND INDEPENDENCE

In healthy relationships, partners respect each other's needs. Being jealous or trying to control someone else does not show love.

Does your partner ...

ignore or dismiss your ideas or the things you want to do?

keep you from going out or get jealous when you spend time with

family or friends?

seem very overprotective or ask other people to watch over you?

want to be a part of everything you do?

call, e-mail, or text you all the time or drop in on you

unexpectedly?

accuse you of flirting or getting romantically involved with

someone else?

keep you from having money of your own or using the car?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you are likely being treated badly. Signs of abuse like these may mean that you're not safe in your relationship — and it may get worse.

SEX

In healthy relationships, partners care about and respect each other's sexual needs and limits. Forcing or hurting someone in a sexual way is physically and emotionally damaging. It's wrong and it's against the law.

Does your partner ...

force you to have sex when you're asleep, drunk, or high?

get angry and threaten you when you don't want to have sex?

force you to have sex without protection against pregnancy and/or

STDs?

hurt your genitals or any part of your body during sex?

criticize your sexual performance or use sex as a way to punish you?

only care about her or his own sexual pleasure?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you are likely being treated badly. Signs of abuse like these may mean that you're not safe in your relationship — and it may get worse.

Saying "No"

Many of us think that once we are in love, we can never say "no" to sex. We might even believe that we can never say "no" once we marry. No matter what kind of relationship you have, if you are forced to have sex, it is rape. If you are humiliated or forced to be sexual in any way, that is sexual abuse.

PHYSICAL SAFETY

In healthy relationships, partners help each other feel loved and safe. Hurting someone physically is never okay, it doesn't solve anything, and it's against the law. Violent behavior and fear make a person feel unsafe.

Does your partner

push, shove, punch, kick, choke, or bite you?

restrain you, hold you down, or use other kinds of force during an argument?

have violent mood swings?

break or throw objects, or destroy your things?

leave you stranded in dangerous places?

refuse to help you or keep you from going to the doctor or getting medicine?

have a history of physically abusing a partner in the past?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you are likely being treated badly. Signs of abuse like these may mean that you're not safe in your relationship — and it may get worse.

How Do I Know If My Children Are Not Safe?

In order for children to know they are loved, they need to feel safe. In healthy families, partners share the responsibilities of having children — the fun ones as well as the difficult ones. They create a safe and secure home life for their families. Hurting children is never okay, and it's against the law. Children can be removed from a home where they are being abused.

Does your partner ...

make your kids feel frightened?

tease your kids until they cry?

easily get frustrated with your kids?

punish your kids harshly?

get jealous of the attention you give to your kids?

completely ignore your kids?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, your children are being treated badly. Signs of abuse like these may mean that you and your children are not safe in your family — and it may get worse.

Should I End the Relationship?

In abusive relationships, abusive behavior may become increasingly dangerous. Even if your partner apologizes and promises that it won't happen again, it is likely to get worse.

Trust your instincts. If you feel you are treated badly, you probably are. If you feel unsafe, you are probably in danger. If something inside you tells you to get away from your partner, do it.

Does your partner ...

refuse to take full responsibility for the abuse?
refuse to get professional help?

become more and more abusive?

push, hit, kick, or choke you more often as time goes on?

hit you harder now and leave more bruises or broken bones?

make threats to kill you or her/himself if you leave the relationship?

have a weapon?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you are in danger. You need to make plans to get out of your relationship.

How Do I Leave an Unsafe Relationship?

It's not always easy to leave a relationship — even when you're getting hurt. It's okay if you feel you cannot leave right now. Remember that your safety is important, so get information and help as soon as possible — **HAVE A PLAN**. Abuse can get worse if your partner finds you after you leave, so be careful.

If you are thinking about leaving, be prepared.

Do you have access to money — cash and ATM and credit cards?

Do you have a bag packed in case you need to leave quickly?

Does the bag contain personal items, a change of clothes for you and your children, an extra set of keys, and important medicine, including emergency contraception?

Do you have a trusted friend in whose home you can store the bag?

Do you know where your personal identification papers are — driver's license, passport, or immigration?

Do you know where other important legal, medical, banking, and ownership papers are?

Do you have a safe place to go?

Who Can Help Me if I Am in an Unsafe Relationship?

If you are being abused, you may be feeling alone — like you're the only person going through this. But you're not. There are many support services available. You may need a safe place to stay, legal

Whatever it is that you need, talk to someone — a friend or someone else you trust. Or contact

1-800-799-SAFE — a confidential hotline, to speak with a counselor in private, toll-free

1-800-230-PLAN — to reach your local Planned Parenthood health center for support and local referrals, toll-free

911 — call the police, if you feel you are in immediate danger or need help right away

National Domestic Violence Hotline — for information and resource listings

What if Someone I Know Is in an Unsafe Relationship?

Don't try to "take control" because it could make things worse.

Remember that it is very hard to end a relationship. You can't force a person to leave a relationship before they are ready.

Help the person get professional advice.

Seek out more information using the resources listed above.

Want to know more?

Find Dr. Cullins' answers to common sexual health questions.

Q&A WITH DR. CULLINS

