

WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP ABUSE?

Abuse in relationships can happen to anyone. It's not normal, it's never OK and definitely not part of a healthy relationship. It isn't always physical, it can be emotional and sexual abuse too. If your relationship leaves you feeling scared, intimidated or controlled, it's possible you're in an abusive relationship.

If you're experiencing abuse, or have done in the past, please remember that you're not to blame and there are people who can help you.

Is there ever an excuse for relationship abuse?

No. There's never an excuse for relationship abuse. Anger, jealousy, alcohol or wanting to protect the other person – none of these are excuses.

SIGNS TO SPOT

Some people think that relationship abuse is just about violence, or physically forcing somebody to do something they don't want to – but that isn't true. Abuse can be emotional and verbal, and could escalate to physical or sexual abuse. All types are serious and they're never OK.

What is emotional abuse?

Some people use emotional abuse to control people. These signs can be more difficult to spot, but could include:

- Getting angry when you want to spend time with your friends
- Isolating you from friends and family
- Threatening to spread rumours about you
- Saying things like "If you loved me you would..."
- Putting you down all the time, using names like 'frigid' or 'slut' to control what you do, humiliate you and destroy your self-esteem
- Trying to control your life (telling you how to dress, who you hang out with and what you say)
- Threatening to harm you or to self-harm if you leave them
- Demanding to know where you are all the time
- Monitoring your calls and emails, threatening you if you don't respond instantly
- Getting really angry, really quickly
- Using force during an argument
- Blaming others for their problems or feelings
- Being verbally abusive
- Using threatening behaviour towards others
- Pressuring you to send them nude pictures

If someone is lesbian, gay, bi or transgender and not 'out', their partner might threaten to 'out' them if they don't do what they want.

What is physical abuse?

Some people use violence to force someone to do something or threaten to use it to control them. It could include:

- Hitting
- Punching
- Kicking
- Slapping
- Pushing someone against a wall and refusing to let them go
- Holding somebody down

What is sexual abuse?

Forcing someone to do any sexual acts they don't want to is rape or sexual assault. This kind of abuse can happen in relationships.

CONSEQUENCES

Relationship abuse and controlling behaviour can have serious consequences for both the people being abused and those that are doing something wrong to their partners.

How can relationship abuse affect the person being abused?

Relationship abuse can destroy someone's self-confidence, have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing and leave them feeling isolated, lonely or depressed.

What happens to the abusers?

Many abusive behaviours are illegal and can even carry a prison sentence. Criminal convictions can also stop people from doing certain jobs, and travelling abroad to certain countries. So it could seriously damage their future ambitions.

The social consequences of being labelled an abuser should not be underestimated and can be severe. It can have an effect on what people think about you and whether you can get a boyfriend or girlfriend. Would you want to be friends with somebody that was known as an abuser? Now imagine if that person were you.

ADVICE

An abusive relationship isn't normal, it's not OK, and if it's happening to you, you're not to blame for the abuse. It might feel like you're alone, but you're not – you deserve to be safe and help is available.

It is important to seek help, but if you're experiencing abuse, you shouldn't confront your abuser on your own. Instead speak to a trusted adult (family member, teacher, youth worker or the police) about what's happening to you.

If someone you know is in an abusive relationship, you shouldn't confront the abuser on your own either, but you can seek help on their behalf in a way that is safe for you and them.

You can speak to someone in confidence at any of these organisations about abuse in relationships and how to get help – whatever your sexuality or gender identity. You can also speak to the police. If you, or someone you know, is ever in immediate danger, call 999.

What if you're a boy being abused by a girl?

If you're a young man who's experiencing abuse from your female partner then it may be especially hard for you to tell someone. Some people have told us they would feel less manly if someone knew they were being abused by a girl, or if their female partner threatened them with false allegations in order to keep them silent.

Talk to an adult you trust, it's really important, or speak in confidence to the helplines specifically for men.

What if you're lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender (LGB or T)?

If you're lesbian, gay, bi or transgender, you can speak to organisations with people who understand what you are going through. You can also contact the Galop National LGBT Domestic Abuse helpline run by trained advisors.

I'm worried about a friend, what should I do?

It can be really worrying when someone you care about is being hurt or abused by their partner. The more supported your friend feels, the easier it could be for them to deal with what's happening. It's hard to understand when you're not in that situation, so listen, don't be critical and don't pressure them to do something they're not ready to do. As a friend, you can get advice on what to do by speaking to any of these organisations.

I think I might be abusive, what should I do?

If you recognise the signs of an abusive relationship, and you're hurting the one you love, it can be tough facing up to this, but you can stop and change your behaviour. Call the Respect phoneline who are experts in talking to people who are abusing their partners.

Are you in a gang and worried about abuse?

Sometimes young people in gangs feel they don't have choices and have to do what's expected of them from other gang members, be it sexual or illegal.

If you're in a gang and you're being pressured or expected to engage in any activity you don't want to do, seek help here or contact Childline to speak to a trained advisor who understands the pressures of being involved in a gang.

SARAH'S STORY

Sarah, 17, contacted Women's Aid about her abusive and controlling boyfriend

I was friends with my boyfriend for a year before we started going out. Three months into the relationship everything changed, he became possessive and controlling. I wasn't allowed to see my friends, or spend time with family. If my phone rang he'd answer my phone and read my messages. He made me overeat so I would put on weight because he said he didn't want other boys looking at me. He would bombard me with texts and phone calls. I once had over two hundred missed calls in three hours because I wouldn't answer my phone.

I soon couldn't face going to college because he'd be there, waiting for me outside lessons. And it got physical; he'd grab me so I couldn't leave his side, he took my phone so I couldn't call anyone. Once he wouldn't let me on the bus and then he dragged me off down the road. He hurt my wrist and I had a sling for a few days.

But I would always go back to him because he told me he wouldn't do it again and he made me feel like I had nobody but him. I felt dependent on him.

People tell you to end it, but it's not easy. It can be the most dangerous time. When I did, he cut his wrists in front of me, held me against a wall and screamed abuse in my face. Now whenever I see him, I shake and feel sick. I have so much respect for people who leave abusive relationships.

Sarah contacted Women's Aid who talked through her options with her. They didn't tell her what to do, but listened to her concerns and priorities. They talked to Sarah about the importance of her safety and wellbeing and how domestic abuse can have a negative impact on self-esteem.

Women's Aid explained to Sarah it can often take many attempts to leave an abusive relationship. Women's Aid also talked about what the different types of physical abuse can look like, but also explained how domestic abuse can also include things like controlling behaviour and emotional abuse that Sarah experienced.

Women's Aid were honest with Sarah about her risk, as leaving an abusive relationship can be dangerous, this meant that she was able to make informed choices. They enabled Sarah to explore and plan for her safety and signposted who she could make contact with to get the support that she needs, and encouraged her to call the police in an emergency situation.

Women's Aid took Sarah's situation very seriously. They didn't make her feel that she didn't deserve support as she is young. They explained that any woman could experience domestic abuse regardless of her age, ethnicity, religious group or disability, and reassured her that she was not to blame for the abuse, her abuser is to blame for abusing her and that nothing justifies domestic abuse.

Is something like this happening to you?

Any type of abuse is wrong and never okay. It's not normal and it can seriously damage your confidence and your self-worth. You're not on your own and help is out there. You can contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid, on 0808 2000 247. And remember, if you ever feel in immediate danger, call the Police on 999.

Taken from: [HTTPS://WWW.DISRESPECTNOBODY.CO.UK/](https://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk/)

Disclaimer: All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person. Case studies are created from real Women's Aid contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes from the young person.