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Relationship Safety

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Why is relationship safety an important issue?

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What are the characteristics of a healthy relationship?

- Non-threatening behaviour
- Respect
- Trust
- Support
- Honesty
- Accountability
- Responsibility
- Fairness
- Compromise and Negotiation

Unhealthy relationships show signs of:

- Verbal or emotional abuse
- Harassment
- Physical abuse or assault
- Sexual abuse or assault

What is dating violence?



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The dating experience in high school



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Examples of verbal or emotional abuse include...

- Insulting, yelling, swearing, humiliating, teasing, belittling and ignoring.
- Making all the decisions in the relationship: where you go, whom you should see, what you should do, etc.
- Isolating the other person.
- Forbidding him or her to see friends or being jealous of the those friends.

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Stalking is also considered a form of emotional abuse.

What is stalking?

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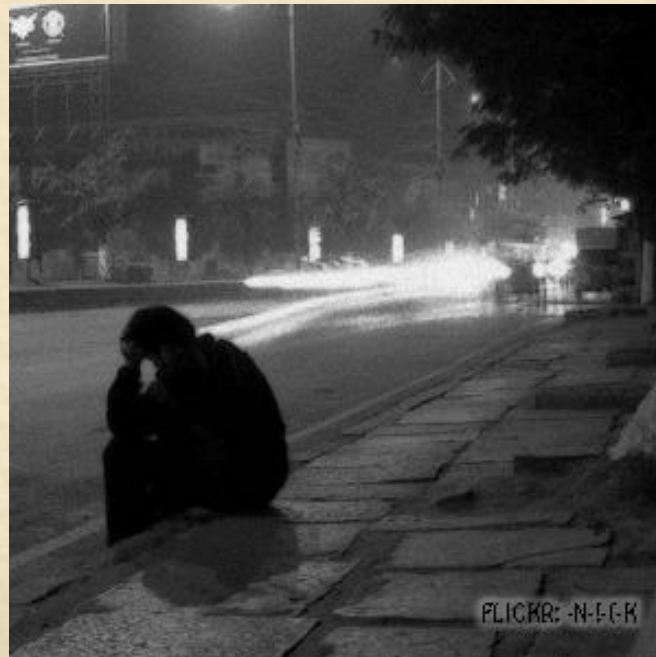
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What tactics do stalkers employ?



Jenna's story

- Since they broke up two weeks ago, Mike has emailed Jenna telling her that she has made a big mistake and that he wants her back. Jenna thought that was sweet of him, but her friends keep telling her she shouldn't give in.
- As a result, since the breakup, Jenna has been spending more times with her friends, and last night she went to the movies with Josh, one of her longtime friends.
- The next day, when she checked her email, she saw that Mike had emailed her. In his email, he tells Jenna that she shouldn't be seeing other guys because they are still exclusive. He also warns that Josh better steer clear or else.

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What are examples of physical violence?



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Abuse and the law

- In Canada, certain categories of abuse, such as assault, sexual assault and criminal harassment are crimes under the *Criminal Code of Canada*.
- Some types of abuse are also addressed under provincial legislation. The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* is relevant to young persons between the ages of 12 and 17.

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Psychological abuse can also fall under certain laws of the *Criminal Code*, such as:

- criminal harassment
- uttering threats
- harassing telephone calls
- intimidation

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Meghan and Jason's story

- **Megan is 15. She began dating 17-year-old Jason last year. She was very happy when she first met him because he was good-looking and popular. When they started going out together, she was quite flattered by his attention. He told her what clothes she looked best in and how to wear her hair.**
- **However, after a while, he began telling her what she should and shouldn't wear and that she had better not cut her hair short. Whenever she went against his wishes, he lost his temper and yelled at her.**
- **Recently, he has been getting more physically violent with her and has held her arm and even slapped her once when she yelled back at him.**

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**What are examples of sexual
abuse/assault?**

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What is date rape?

- Date rape is sexual abuse/assault. It occurs when a person forces his or her dating partner to have sex.
- The aggressor may use emotional coercion or physical strength to demand sex. Sometimes, although less frequently, the aggressor threatens the other person with a weapon.

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The Effects of Sexual Assault

In many cases the victim of sexual assault is left feeling confused and conflicted.

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The Effects of Sexual Assault

A sexual assault victim may also be scared.
Some fears are:

- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of rejection by partner or peers
- Fear of retaliation or abandonment.

Why do people stay in abusive relationships?

Leaving isn't always as easy as it seems...



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Why Stay?

- The victim might confuse the jealousy and possessiveness of the abuser with real love and concern.
- The abusive partner might apologize and the victim might become hopeful that things will work out. The victim might want to help the dating partner change.
- The abusive partner might threaten the victim: “If you don’t go out with me, you’ll be sorry.”
- The victim may still love the abuser and not want to lose that.
- The victim might not want his or her parents to say, “I told you so.” This is especially true if the parents did not like the boyfriend/girlfriend right from the start. You might think your parents are too strict or controlling.

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Mike and Susan's story

- Mike (16) is dating Susan (18). Susan has more dating experience than Mike does. They have been going out together for three months and Mike likes Susan very much -- she is his first serious girlfriend. Susan has asked Mike several times to skip doing his homework so that they can see each other. Mike wants to keep his grades up, but does not want to disappoint Susan.
- Sometimes, when he doesn't meet her, she becomes very angry and yells at him, calling him a "mama's boy" and "immature." Lately, she's been pressuring him to go all the way and have sex. Mike is reluctant to do so. He is still a virgin and thinks it is too soon for him. However, he is scared she will dump him if he says no. She often tells him, "If you really loved me, you would show it by sleeping with me." She is now starting to demand that they get together, or she will find a "man" to do what she wants.
- Is this considered dating violence? If so, what forms of dating violence are illustrated in the scenario?

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Common myths concerning dating

Myth #1:

Spending money equals favours: e.g., “I spent a lot of money on you, so you owe me something in return (like sexual favours).”

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Myth #2

Revealing clothes equal a sexually willing person: e.g., “She’s dressed in tight, revealing clothes, so she must be willing to have sex.”

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Myth #3

Being nice means he or she wants to continue seeing me: e.g., “He was nice to me during our date, so he must want a relationship with me or something more.”

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Myth #4

Constantly calling your girlfriend/boyfriend on the telephone is okay: e.g., “It’s okay to call her all the time, bring flowers and gifts, or go to her home, even if she tells me to stop. After all, I’m being persistent because I love her – it’s true love.”

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Myth #5

If a person is drunk or high, then he or she is fair game: e.g., “She got drunk/high during our date, so I can have sex with her.”

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Myth #6

Jealous and possessive behavior equals love: e.g., “Being jealous and possessive shows that I love him.”

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Samantha and Ryan's story

- Samantha is 14. She met 18-year-old Ryan while hanging out with her friends. They would skateboard, play tennis and do other activities with this group of friends. Her parents are very strict and do not allow her to date. One evening, Samantha told her parents she was going to her friend's house. In reality, she met up with Ryan at the youth centre as he had asked her to do. Outside the centre, Ryan invited her to go for a ride with him. She noticed he had been drinking, but thought he was okay enough to drive.
- Ryan drove her to a secluded place in the park and offered her a beer, which she drank. Then he began touching her. She did not really want him to do so but was afraid. Her protests did not work on him, and he continued pulling her clothes off. He forced himself on her, despite her protests and tears. He then drove her home and kissed her goodnight. Smiling, he said they would get together again tomorrow. She ran out of the car, went up to her room and took a bath. She did not tell her parents what had happened. The next day Ryan called and said he wanted to see her that evening. She agreed.

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What are the consequences of dating violence?



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Effects of dating violence vary according to gender

- **Women who are physically abused by their dating partners tend to suffer more physical and emotional harm compared to abused men.**
- **Adolescent women are more likely to be punched or forced into sexual activity.**
- **Adolescent men, however, are more likely to be pinched, slapped, scratched or kicked by their partner.**

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Violence in relationships during the teenage years often leads to further violence during adult life

- **FACT:** The severity of violence among intimate partners has been shown to increase if the pattern has been established in adolescence.
- Children in approximately half a million households had either heard or witnessed a parent being assaulted



How widespread is domestic violence?

A survey of 26,000 Canadians found that 7% of people in married or common-law relationships experienced some form of domestic abuse in the past five years.

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Consequences of Domestic Abuse

- Domestic abuse doesn't only affect the person who is directly victimized: children who are exposed to violence in their homes may experience serious emotional, developmental, behavioural and academic difficulties.

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**How can you protect
yourself from an
abusive partner?**

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How can I protect myself?

- Avoid confusion. Be clear with your boyfriend/girlfriend about where you stand on issues such as drinking, drugs and sexual activity.
- When dating a new person, go out in a group or to public places only.
- Keep enough money to get home safely. Carry a cell phone on dates.
- Find out as much as you can about your date: Does he drink? Did he hit his previous girlfriend?
- Pay attention if your parents and friends do not like your boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Do not assume that things will get better or improve. Even if they apologize, they rarely improve and often become more abusive. Unless they get treatment for the issues that contribute to their abusive behaviour, it is rare for an abusive person to change.
- Insist on being treated with respect. No one deserves abuse.
- Remember that you have choices – you can choose the people you go out with, how you will behave when you are with them and whether you will continue seeing them.

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**How can you protect
yourself from an
abusive family
member?**

**What can you do if
your parents are
abusive to each other?**

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**How can I tell if a
friend is being
abused?**

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What can I do to help?



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Want more information?

- Visit the DEAL.org website for fact sheets and blog posts on these issues.

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