



Frequently Asked Questions – Lake Washington High School

I received many questions covering similar topics, and have answered ones that represent common themes. If you asked a question that you feel is not answered here, please reach out to your counselor for more information.

What are some statistics around unhealthy relationships?

We know that 37.6% of women, 30.8% of men, and 54% of trans and non-binary people will experience intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime. Women of color experience IPV at higher rates—40% of black women and 56% of indigenous women report experiencing physical abuse from a partner. It's important to remember that IPV is under-reported due to social stigma and fear of retaliation, so it is likely happening at higher rates. The research we use comes from CDC, though there are other studies that have measured abusive relationships with slightly different parameters.


What can I do if I am interested in starting a romantic relationship?

Communication is key when starting a new relationship. This is why we talk about comfortable pace as a healthy behavior—if you aren't sure, talk to your potential new partner about what it means to you to be in a romantic relationship. There is no blueprint, no way that a relationship has to be. You get to decide that for yourself. If you're nervous about "defining the relationship" with a potential partner, try talking to a friend and practicing what you might say. Also, remember that they are probably just as nervous as you. Talking about a relationship can be uncomfortable and takes practice, but your relationship will be stronger for it!

How can I tell if a relationship is unhealthy?

We all do unhealthy things sometimes, and just because someone shows one of the unhealthy behaviors doesn't automatically mean you should end the relationship. It's important to talk about the unhealthy signs from the first time you see it—sometimes we don't realize that we're doing unhealthy things. If your friend or partner does something unhealthy, talk to them about how it made you feel. Every relationship is different, so the unhealthy behaviors may show up differently, but trust your gut! Remember, these are the 10 unhealthy signs to keep an eye out for: intensity, possessiveness, manipulation, isolation, sabotage, belittling, guilt, volatility, betrayal, and deflecting responsibility.

It is possible for people to change, but *it is not your responsibility to change them*. If there is an ongoing pattern of unhealthy behaviors, it may be time to end the relationship. If you need help ending a relationship safely, reach out to a trusted adult for advice and to help you make a [breakup plan](#).





What can I do if I am worried about a friend who is in an unhealthy relationship?

If you're worried about a friend, ask them how they're feeling about their relationship. It can be overwhelming to have someone come in and immediately label a partner as abusive or toxic, so instead start the conversation calmly and focus on the behaviors, not the person as a whole. Keep the conversation friendly, and let your friend guide the conversation. You can provide suggestions, but ultimately let them make their own decisions about how to move forward. Once you bring it up, your friend will likely want to talk about their relationship again—they may not be ready the first time, but let them know that you are there for them and keep checking in. For more tips, check out our [guide](#).

How can I know what my boundaries are? How can I explain a gut feeling to someone?

Sometimes we learn our boundaries through experience. For example, I know that I don't like rollercoasters because I went on one once and hated it. This is a little easier to explain to someone—I tried it, and I don't like it. However, many of our boundaries, especially in sexual relationships, exist because we don't want to experience something or we aren't ready. Boundaries are really about safety—whether that's physical, emotional, or financial. Think about what you feel comfortable with, and setting a boundary can be as simple as saying "I don't want to." If your relationship is healthy and you have a foundation of trust and respect, you shouldn't need to provide a further explanation if you don't want to. If you're pressed for a reason, you can say something like "I'm not ready" or "I'm not comfortable doing that"—both of those are complete answers, and if someone doesn't accept that answer, we're getting into manipulation or coercion.


If you find that you're often unsure about what your boundaries are, talk to a trusted adult about it. Being nervous about trying something new is totally normal, and you know best how much "nervousness" you are comfortable with. Have an honest conversation with your partner about how you are feeling, and


Do I still need to give/get consent if I've discussed my boundaries with my partner?

Yes! Remember the R in FRIES—we can always change our minds, so it's important to double check. It can be as simple as saying "do you still want to do X?" If they did change their mind, you'll be glad you asked, and if they still want to do it, now you know for sure.

Can declining consent be as simple as saying "no"?

Yes! "No" is a complete sentence. If you feel comfortable giving a reason, it can sometimes help the communication between you and the other person, but you are by no means obligated to do so. Even if you've said "yes" in the past, you don't need to give a reason for saying "no" this time.





How can you tell someone that you don't really want to hang out with them or work with them on a group project without sounding mean?

It can be hard to send boundaries with friends, especially when you have mutual friends that you *do* want to spend time with.

If you don't want to spend time with that person at all, think of it like a friend-breakup. A healthy ending is one where both people can understand and respect each other's' decision, whether or not they agree. It could be something as simple as reaching out to that person less and less over time, and that can be enough as long as both people feel respected. If someone keeps inviting you to hang out and you don't want to, you can politely decline the invitations, and they may take the hint. However, if the invitations persist and they aren't taking no for an answer, you may need to have a conversation—this will help to show that person respect and kindness. Being honest and open like this takes vulnerability, and it's definitely easier said than done! If you're worried about how they may respond, or you feel unsafe or uneasy as they continue to try to be part of your life, reach out to a trusted adult for support.

If you want to create space on something like a group project, you could simply say “thanks for asking, but I'm already working with someone else” if they ask you directly, or tell a friend “I'd rather not work with X, we don't really get along and I want to make sure I do my best work on this project.” If you have a foundation of trust and kindness, they will understand.

