



Frequently Asked Questions - Lake Washington High School March 2022

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.


How can I tell if a relationship is unhealthy?

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's important to remember that we all do unhealthy things in our lives, but when these unhealthy behaviors become a pattern, that's a sign the relationship is unhealthy. If you feel nervous or unsettled about starting a conversation with your partner once you identify unhealthy signs that are present, that's a sign the relationship may be unhealthy or even abusive. You should be able to talk honestly and openly, no matter how long you've been dating! There is a difference between unhealthy and healthy passion. Healthy passion feels mutual, respectful, and uplifting. Unhealthy passion feels confusing, overwhelming, and potentially scary. People express healthy passion by balancing their strong emotions with strong respect for what the other person is feeling, too.

In LGBTQ+ relationships, emotional abuse may look a bit different from heterosexual relationships. This can include homo-, bi-, or transphobic insults and making someone feel as though they deserve abuse because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. This may also include blackmailing someone over their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important to remember that no matter someone's gender or sexual orientation, abuse is never okay.

Sometimes, it's hard to know what really "counts" as a problem, particularly when it comes to relationships, and when to speak up. Because the media regularly portrays unhealthy behaviors as normal (or even desirable!), it can be confusing to recognize when a behavior we are experiencing or doing is unhealthy. Unhealthy behaviors are also often brushed aside with phrases like, "I was only joking" or "you know what my sense of humor is like". Unhealthy behaviors are still unhealthy, even if that wasn't the intention.





How can I tell if a relationship is healthy?

Healthy relationships bring out the best in you and make you feel good about yourself. A healthy relationship doesn't mean a "perfect" relationship, and no one is healthy 100% of the time, but the 10 Signs of a healthy relationship are behaviors you should strive for in all your relationships.

Everyone deserves a healthy relationship. A healthy relationship is made up of qualities that build someone up and make them feel good about themselves. In a healthy relationship, your partner will empower you to be your best self and you won't question if you're being treated with respect. Some signs of a healthy relationship include: independence, kindness, trust, fun, respect, taking responsibility, among others.

Is jealousy normal? What can I do if I'm feeling jealous?

Yes! We all experience emotions like anger and jealousy because we are all human. It's okay! Emotions give us information about ourselves and signal us to pay attention to something – but it is what we do in response to those emotions that is up to us. It is important to remember that we are in control of our own behavior, our emotions shouldn't control us.


Behaviors like healthy conflict and taking responsibility are hard to get right every time. The goal isn't to be perfect, it's to recognize when we're not perfect and apologize, then do better next time.


If you're feeling jealous, calmly talk it out. If there's a lack of trust in the relationship, it's usually for a reason. Express your feelings and the worrisome behaviors you've noticed to open up the conversation with your partner without blaming them for your feelings. If they shut you down or lash out, that's a sign that the relationship may be unhealthy. If you are feeling distrustful of your partner, it's okay to end the relationship. Take some time to think through what you want and why trust was lacking.

A healthy apology means taking responsibility and making changes. While all of us will do unhealthy things, we can take steps to prevent those same behaviors from happening again. In a healthy relationship, people apologize for their actions, take responsibility for their behavior, AND change their behavior.

How can I support a friend who doesn't want me to talk about their relationship with anyone else?

This is a hard situation—your friend may have confided in you about an unhealthy relationship of any kind (romantic, friendship, relationships at home), and asked you to promise not to tell anyone. It's important to remember that you are not an expert, and you can't help someone all on your own. There are a few things you can try:

- You can ask your friend to help you brainstorm some adults who they trust, and you can offer to go with them to talk to this person
 - You can go to an adult that you trust and share an anonymous version of the story to get advice
 - You or your friend can reach out to an anonymous chat line—Love is Respect (text LOVEIS to 22522) is a great one for romantic relationships, and the Teen Talk App is a peer-to-peer platform to get support on a wide variety of topics
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Ultimately, your friend's safety is of the utmost importance. If you are worried that they are in an unsafe situation, it is not betrayal to ask for help. They may be mad at you in the short term, but they will be thankful for you in the long term.

If I know my friend is doing unhealthy things, when does it become my responsibility to step in?

There is no perfect formula for deciding when to step in and help someone who is doing unhealthy things. Ultimately, it is no one person's responsibility to step in and help another person, but it is the right thing to do as someone who cares about another person to do your best to help. This can look a lot of different ways depending on the situation.

Always think of your own safety first, as it might be dangerous to confront someone who has been physically abusive. If you see, hear, or find out about a friend being emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive toward someone else, and you feel comfortable intervening, say something or do something. Start with gentle questions like, "How have things been going between you and [partner] lately?"

If you don't feel comfortable intervening yourself, you can still talk to a teacher, counselor, parent, or other adult that you trust to ask for advice. It is not betrayal to ask for help if you have genuine concern for someone.


What can you do if your friend refuses help?


People stay in unhealthy relationships for lots of reasons. Sometimes it's a financial decision; sometimes it's a safety issue; sometimes it's about not wanting to upset someone. Even if it doesn't make sense to you, there are often real reasons that make sense to your friend in that moment.

We might be assuming that if the relationship was that bad, our friend would leave, but it's very common in unhealthy relationships for a person to not realize it's unhealthy until after they've left. Even if you're worried that talking to your friend might push them away, you could save their life by starting a conversation. It's better to play it safe than be sorry you didn't speak up.

Even if it seems awkward or you're not sure how your friend will react, talking to friends about their relationships with others shows that you care. Ask genuine, open-ended questions like, "How is the relationship going?" and do not assume that just because everything might look great on social media that everything is perfect. As a friend, your job is to help guide your friend toward the resources who can help them more than you can, not to take that role of a counselor or try to give beyond what you're capable of.

Allow the person in the challenging relationship situation to guide the direction of the conversation. It's important to find someone to talk to who isn't the person you're in a tricky relationship situation with, to help organize our thoughts and feelings. However, if your friend indicates that they are not open to talking about their feelings yet, reiterate that you are there for them when they are ready to talk.





Model healthy behaviors in your friendships, even when discussing unhealthy ones. It can be tempting to isolate your friend because you don't like your partner, or to belittle the person they're with to make them realize how unhealthy they are. However, these behaviors often make it harder for your friend to open up. Continuing to be friendly and supportive is easier said than done, but it's likely what your friend needs.

What are some examples of boundaries?

Boundaries help us understand what we are comfortable with. Boundaries are essential to all types of healthy relationships. In order to learn what your boundaries are, you must reflect on them to understand not just what your feelings are, but where they come from. When it comes to establishing boundaries with another person, it is a process that requires respectful, ongoing conversation where you talk through each of your ideas, comfort levels, and limitations.

Remember, there is no need to justify, argue for, defend, or explain a boundary you feel strongly about. Your boundary is being set because it makes you comfortable. If anyone doesn't respect your boundary, or feels strongly that they need something different, this is likely not the best relationship for each of you.

Below are a few examples of types of boundaries...

- **Social Media Boundaries:** Would it make you uncomfortable to share your social media or phone password with someone? Is there a limit to how many photos you're comfortable sharing - or a partner sharing of you - on social media?
- **Communication Boundaries:** How often are you comfortable talking to your partner? What type of communication do you prefer - texting? direct messaging? Facetime? Are you okay with double or triple texting? What about your partner?
- **Sexual Boundaries:** How comfortable are you being physically intimate? How do we become more comfortable talking about intimacy with others?

What can I do if my boundaries aren't respected?

Many times, when we cross a boundary with someone, we don't intend to make someone uncomfortable or hurt them. We may not have been as thoughtful as we should have been, but when it comes to people we care about, we rarely intend to cause harm. However, that does NOT mean that harm isn't caused when we unintentionally mess up and cross a boundary.

It is important to look for a compromise with someone and make sure you are comfortable with the decision made. It's ok to have a boundary you're not willing to compromise on, because boundaries are what keep us safe. If your boundaries don't line up with someone else's, it might be time to consider if the relationship is a good fit for you. It is important to be explicit and verbal about the boundaries you have. Have conversations that provide the WHY behind boundaries not just the WHAT of the boundary itself.

It can take time and work to rebuild trust after a boundary has been broken. When boundaries are consistently broken, we can begin to counter with unhealthy behaviors of our own, and wind up caught in an unhealthy cycle. Although uncomfortable, it is important to express how we are feeling early in a conflict so that we don't fall into a cycle that becomes harder to end.

