

# TeenSafe's Guide to Supporting A Friend Who is in a Controlling or Abusive Dating\* Relationship

When someone you care about tells you that they are being disrespected, mistreated, frightened, or hurt by their dating partner, it can feel unsettling, confusing, frustrating, or even scary. Many people don't know what to say or do when someone confides in them or when they see behavior that is abusive or controlling.

Below you will find some suggestions to consider if you are supporting someone who is being mistreated or if you want to raise the issue with a friend. Please note that this is a guide, not a script. Do what is natural for you, in your own words.

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**One in three** adolescents is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner.

## You could start with something like ...

- I believe/support you.
- I'm glad you told me.
- What your partner is saying or doing to you isn't your fault.
- What your partner is saying or doing to you is much more common than people think. You are not the only one.
- There are resources if you want – people you can talk to or confidential hotlines you can call.

## As you listen and support your friend ...

- Believe them.
- Listen non-judgmentally and without blaming or shaming them, even if you are confused about or disagree with some of their choices.
- Don't try to figure out how they might change their behavior to keep their partner happy.
- Offer support, but don't try to rescue your friend or tell them what they should do. If they are being told what to do by their partner, this can feel like more of the same rather than like support.
- Remind your friend that their partner is choosing to act this way – it's not your friend's fault.
- Encourage them to think about their options without pushing them toward a particular decision.

## Raising the issue with a friend when you are concerned ...

- Ask how things are going with the relationship.
- If you notice your friend's partner teasing them in a mean way or otherwise embarrassing them, you can tell your friend that you didn't think it was funny or okay.
- If your friend tells you about things that don't sound okay to you, you can gently but clearly tell them that they deserve to be treated with respect.
- Focus on what you didn't think was okay rather than putting down your friend's partner (even if they have broken up).
- If your friend doesn't want to discuss it, let them know you're open to talking another time.

## Some things to say or do if you are supporting a friend...

- Be clear that you are there for them.
- Tell them that you understand that their situation is very difficult.
- Let them know that they don't deserve to be treated badly. No one "asks for it."
- Remind your friend of what you like about them and why you think they are pretty amazing.
- Continue to invite them to hang out with you or do things together even if they keep declining. Controlling or abusive people often make it difficult for their partner to maintain friendships.
- Encourage your friend to tell you more about the situation, but avoid questions that start with "why." "Why" can make people feel defensive, judged, or blamed.
- Let them know that you are concerned about their safety, if that feels relevant.
- Help them identify people or organizations that could help, if they want to reach out. See the "Programs that Can Help" section (over) for more information. Let them know they can call anonymously if they want.

JF&CS

\*Dating abuse doesn't just happen to people in relationships; it can also impact friends with benefits, hook-ups, etc.

## Take care of yourself...

- Supporting a friend who is in a difficult situation can be very stressful. It's okay for you to find a trusted adult to speak with (even if you need to protect your friend's identity) and get support.
- Remember that the help listed below can be for you, too. Feel free to reach out anonymously to one of the helplines to talk about what's going on and figure out what you want to say and do.
- If you feel like you and your friend are going in circles and you are starting to feel overwhelmed or frustrated, it's okay to take a step back. Let them know that if they want help with something specific or are in danger, they can still talk to you about it and that you still care a lot about them.

## Programs That Can Help

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### National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline (24/7)

- Call 866-331-9474
- Chat at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)
- Text "loveis" to 22522
- [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) also has helpful information about dating abuse. Consider looking at the website with your friend so that you can both learn more together. Avoid using your friend's phone, though, or be sure to clear the browser history in case their partner looks at the phone at a later time.

### Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) (24/7 for phone, see below for chat hours)

- Call 800-841-8371
- Chat online at [barcc.org](http://barcc.org) from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.
- People with hearing disabilities can use the free and confidential MassRelay service
- [barcc.org](http://barcc.org) has a great deal of background information about sexual violence. If your friend has been sexually assaulted, you could consider looking at the website together to learn more.

### The Network/La Red (24/7)

- The Network/La Red is a survivor-led, social justice organization that works to end partner abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, SM, polyamorous, and queer communities.
- Call 617-742-4911 or 800-832-1901; TTY: 617-227-4911

### SafeLink (24/7)

- SafeLink is the Massachusetts statewide domestic abuse and sexual assault hotline.
- SafeLink can help you find the domestic abuse program nearest to your community.
- Call 877-785-2020

### TeenSafe (business hours)

- If you have questions about any of this information or about local resources, please be in touch! Email the TeenSafe Coordinator at [TeenSafe@jfcscoston.org](mailto:TeenSafe@jfcscoston.org) or call 781-647-5327 and ask for the Journey to Safety intake line.

TeenSafe is JF&CS Journey to Safety's response to dating abuse in our community. Through leadership, skill-building, and education, TeenSafe works with teens to build the language and tools they need to recognize abuse in a dating relationship and know how to respond if they see, hear about, or experience it. Looking through a Jewish lens, the program aims to generate community-wide awareness about intimate partner abuse and promote healthy and respectful behavior in intimate relationships. To learn more about the program, schedule a TeenSafe workshop in your community, or find out how teens can become TeenSafe Peer Educators, contact the TeenSafe Coordinator at [TeenSafe@jfcscoston.org](mailto:TeenSafe@jfcscoston.org).