THE YOUNG HOLLYWOOD ISSUE

DRESS LIKE A STAR celeb stylists reveal their tricks

my space
nine tips to revamp your room

the big bang

fix your hair fast with a fringe

with NICK CANNON, KRISTEN BELL, DAKOTA FANNING, the cast of HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL & more!

FANCY FEET shoes to party in
HOT TOPIC: ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

When it comes to describing her ex, Rachel, a sixteen-year-old from Maryland, does not mince words. “My boyfriend was a jerk,” she says. “He’d try to get me to smoke and drink and he’d tell me I wasn’t worth his time.” Audrey, a nineteen-year-old New Yorker, dated a guy for almost three years, who—despite the fact that they were “totally in love”—would “always call me dumb.” And when Melanie, thirteen, from Florida, started hearing rumors about herself and her boyfriend, she never thought he would be the culprit. “I heard we had done this intimate stuff together, which wasn’t true. I later found out he started all the rumors. Now I’m scared to have romantic relationships.”

boy trouble

What should you do when his words hurt? Holly Siegel reports.
HOT TOPIC:
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Sound familiar? It may to many teens, according to the latest research. A recent study found that 44 percent of teen girls know someone their age in a relationship with repeated verbal abuse. While some girls chalk up bad language, manipulation, or name-calling as nothing more than guy behavior, experts warn that verbal abuse can actually be classified as a legitimate form of domestic violence. Nineteen-year-old Brooklyn-bred Nora* stayed with a verbally abusive boyfriend for two years. When he was mad at her, he’d call her names and say he hated her. But she still stuck with him: “He could be sweet when he wanted to, and I ignored the rest.”

One problem girls face is that unless they’re dealing with physical violence, abuse can be hard to identify. Ruthie, a seventeen-year-old New Yorker, notes that her friends often brush off a guy’s hurtful words as simply being part of his nature: “Girls think, ‘That’s just how he is.’ Even when 24-year-old Andrea’s ex called her vulgar names like ‘slut’ so often that he began to use it instead of her name, she stayed with him: ‘I would rather have had him than be alone.’

“We were totally in love—but he’d always call me ‘dumb’”
—Audrey, 19

“If you’re in a verbally abusive relationship, enlist the help of your parents, friends, or professionals trained to address domestic violence (like social workers). When you break it off, bring someone along and stay in public. Ask for support,” says Murray. “Telling people what you’ve been put through doesn’t make you look stupid, it makes him look crazy.”

Girls can come out of bad relationships with better perspectives than before. Daria,* 23, who ended a verbally and physically abusive relationship, now volunteers with Day One (an organization that helps teens dealing with domestic violence), and Nora works with abused women at a shelter. Audrey, for one, wants to share her new dating philosophy with as many girls as possible: “Don’t stay with a guy just because you’re comfortable. Someone who really loves you shouldn’t treat you badly.”

*Name has been changed.

SAFE PASSAGE

Worried things could get dangerous? Stephanie Nilva, executive director of Day One (dayonenyc.org), an organization that strives to prevent dating abuse and domestic violence, says that teens are more empowered than they think: “Statistically, orders of protection [a court order that can prevent an abuser from contacting you, coming near you, assaulting, or harassing you] are effective, and in many states you can get one without people like your parents or friends knowing.” New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum is working to change a law in New York so that a victim can get a civil court order of protection against someone even if they aren’t married or don’t have kids together. Idaho Senator Mike Crapo is also working on a resolution to make the first week of February 2007 Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week. If you need help, call the National Domestic Violence hotline at (800) 799-SAFE, or check womenslaw.org.