Is A Teen You Love In An Abusive Relationship?

By Stephanie Nilva, Executive Director, Day One

Abusive or unhealthy relationships never begin with intimidation or violence; they begin with affection. Then they show signs of jealousy disguised as love. One person says, “I want to spend every minute with you!” Soon the partner doesn’t really see his or her friends or family any more.

No one asks someone out on a date by saying, “We’re going to have a great time tonight, and in six months, I’ll be calling or texting you all day so that I always know where you are, who you’re with and what you’re doing.” In six months, I’m going to hit you. No one hears that on the first date.

Knowing the warning signs of abuse can help a teen identify an unhealthy relationship and make informed decisions. Remember, young people aren’t likely to make decisions just because an adult tells them to; when teens make decisions for themselves, they are more likely to follow through and feel empowered rather than burdened by instructions from an authority.

Preventive Actions

- Highlight healthy relationships in which partners respect, support and trust one another. Point out the healthy behaviors in these relationships.
- Teach teens to protect themselves! Make them aware of dating violence and brainstorm with them ways of handling different situations to ensure their safety.
- Teach teens to respect each other! Help your teenager feel good about who she or he sees, what s/he does, or what s/he wears. Tell him or her no one has the right to control or hit anyone else.

Some Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

- **Isolation.** Is s/he disconnected from friends or family? Has s/he lost interest or abandoned interests that were once important?
- **Emotional and Physical Changes.** Have you seen sudden changes in mood or personality? Does s/he seem afraid of the partner? Constantly nervous or anxious, depressed, acting out, or secretive? Does s/he have unexplained bruises, scratches or injuries?
- **Constant Monitoring.** Does your teen seem upset or anxious when s/he misses the partner’s phone calls or texts? Does it seem like the partner is always checking up on your teen?
- **The Partner’s Behavior.** Does the partner act extremely jealous or possessive and demand to know where your teen is and who s/he is with?
• Making Excuses for Partner’s Behavior. Does your teen apologize for the partner’s behavior towards you or others? Has s/he casually mentioned the partner’s temper or violent behavior and then laughed it off as a joke?

**If Your Teen Comes To You for Help**

• Be calm and take positive steps. Deal with your anger in a constructive way.
• Actively listen. Ask questions, but don’t judge. Make sure to keep lines of communication open. If your teen believes s/he will be listened to and not get in trouble, s/he will be more likely to be honest with you and let you help.
• Don’t blame or punish your teen. Avoid questions like “Why did you let this happen?” Instead, try: “It’s that person who has a problem, not you. It’s not your responsibility to help him/her change.”
• Don’t put down your teen. Don’t give the message that you think s/he is stupid or senseless for being in the relationship. Try: “This isn’t your fault. You’re not to blame. Your partner shouldn’t be doing this to you.”
• Reassure your teen of your love and concern. Reinforce your wish to help do what’s best for him/her. Try: “I care about what happens to you. I love you and I want to help.”
• Take your teen’s feelings seriously. Acknowledge that your teen’s feelings about the partner–both the good and the bad–are real. Don’t tell your teen that s/he can’t understand love yet or expect him/her to “get over” the person. It is possible to love someone who hurts you.
• Don’t threaten violence against the abuser! Threats reinforce the idea that problems are solved with violence, because if it’s okay for you, then it’s okay for the abuser. Instead, let your teen and his/her partner know that you will call the police if you ever witness violence.
• Respect your teen’s choices. Forbidding your teen from seeing the abusive partner may cause him/her to go behind your back. If you offer patient support, your teen will be more likely to come to the decision to end the relationship, and learn how to have healthier relationships in the future.
• Allow your teen as much control as possible. Even though safety is your first concern, it is important to allow your teen to make decisions whenever it is safe. If you take away your teen’s decision-making, you might make matters worse.
• The break-up period is the most dangerous part of a relationship. If your teen breaks up with the abusive partner, ask an expert about how to get an order of protection and other ways to protect your teen.
• Get your teen counseling. Contact an agency that specializes in domestic violence and teen relationship abuse. Counseling will help your teen work through the emotional damage caused by the abuse and learn to avoid abusive relationships in the future.

*Always look to experts for help. Call Day One at 800-214-4150 or go to [dayonenyny.org](http://dayonenyny.org) for more information.*