

You Asked. I Answered.

Real Talk About Dating, Friendships, Boundaries & Red Flags.

Honest answers to real student questions about dating, friendships, abuse, boundaries, and what to do when something feels off.



I WANT TO EXPERIENCE RELATIONSHIPS, BUT I'M SCARED OF ABUSE. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE?



The single best thing you can do to protect yourself in relationships is to learn to set and hold boundaries.

Decide what you want and reject everything that's not that.

Say you're someone who has a quirky fashion sense and you love that about yourself...

You're in a new-ish relationship and your bf/gf starts criticizing the way you dress. You set the boundary by requesting they stop, "Hey, it hurts my feelings when you say mean things about my clothes, even if you are just joking. I love my style and I'm going to keep wearing what I like. Please keep your negative opinions and mean jokes to yourself."

If they stop, great! You'll know this person values your feelings and is willing to work together to create a relationship that's fun, safe and healthy.

If they don't stop - if they continue to criticize you even after you voiced your feelings - they either don't respect you or they don't have the emotional maturity to understand why what they're doing is damaging. It's NOT your job to educate or convince them to treat you well.

This is the moment you ask yourself: "Is this what I want? A relationship with a person who intentionally hurts my feelings??"

Of course it's not! So reject it! This is where you hold the boundary: you end the relationship.

(To set a boundary and not hold it tells them they can do whatever they want and you'll still stay.)



WHO'S A GOOD PERSON TO GO TO WHEN YOU SEE ANY SORT OF ABUSE?

Your principal, SRO, or guidance counselor are a great place to start. But any teacher you trust can be someone you talk to about what's going on.

The administrator or teacher you speak to can help make sure the right people are informed.

WHAT DID IT TAKE / HOW WERE YOU MOTIVATED TO FINALLY LEAVE?

I was only able to leave the physically abusive relationship because I was motivated to protect my son from the cycle of violence.

I left four times before he was even born — and went back every time. That's not unusual. On average, it takes someone six attempts to leave abusive relationships before they stay gone for good.

After that relationship ended, I continued repeating similar patterns — not violent, but still unhealthy. It wasn't until my last relationship that I finally sought therapy and started looking at what was keeping me in those cycles.

When I could see clearly that the life I was living wasn't the life I wanted for my future self, I walked away (which was still incredibly difficult.)

DOES THE PATRIARCHY MAKE MEN ABUSIVE?

The short answer? No.

Being abusive isn't something a system magically turns on in someone. Abuse is rooted in control — and often in unresolved trauma, entitlement, insecurity, or a belief that you have the right to dominate someone else.

But here's where it gets complicated.

We live in systems that have historically given men more power — socially, financially, legally. And when someone already believes they're entitled to control another person, a system that protects or excuses that behavior can make it easier for them to get away with it.

That doesn't mean "that's just how men are." It means power without accountability creates space for harm.

So does patriarchy create abusive men? No.

Does it often make it easier for abusive behavior to be minimized, excused, or overlooked? Yes.

And that's why individual responsibility matters more than ever.

HOW DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF AWAY FROM TOXIC FRIENDS?

This is one of the toughest challenges a teen can face. It can be easier to identify toxic behaviors inside romantic relationships than friendships and friendships can be harder to step away from than romantic relationships. You may be dealing with multiple people, years of history, shared teams, or even intertwined families

When deciding whether to stay friends with someone - it's important to frame it about you, not them. Think about the saying 'you're a combination of the six people you spend the most time with'.

Instead of evaluating them as a person, ask yourself: Is this someone I want to be like?

How will this friendship affect your life over time? Positively or negatively? How do you feel after you spend time with them? Good, happy, energized? Or are you left feeling upset, sad or just 'off'?

If you decide to end a friendship, the best approach (when possible) is to be upfront, kind and brief. (Remember, this is about making a decision that's best for you — not attacking them or expecting them to change.)

You could say something like: "I think you're a fun person to be around, I don't feel we're aligned as close friends any longer. I wish you well, but I'm going to keep my distance."

Sometimes ending a friendship causes the other person to react badly.

In those cases, keep your distance and limit contact as much as possible. They may say mean things or try to get a reaction from you. Your best move is to refuse to engage.



When you deprive a fire of oxygen, it goes out... the same thing happens when you don't give any attention to drama.



IF REACTIONS BECOME ABUSIVE OR THERE ARE THREATS OF VIOLENCE, TELL A TRUSTED ADULT RIGHT AWAY: YOUR PARENTS OR A SCHOOL OFFICIAL (PRINCIPAL, SRO, ETC.)

Moving on from a friendship can be difficult — even for adults. I've had to do it many times, and it's never easy. But as humans, we're constantly growing and changing. It's normal for friendships and relationships to change (and end), too.

The important thing to remember is your experience is about you. You're not obligated to stay friends with anyone.

Whatever negative reactions come from taking that uncomfortable step will be small compared to the long-term emotional benefit of doing what's right for your future self.



SHOULD YOU DATE IF YOU DON'T FEEL READY, EVEN IF THE OTHER PERSON IS?

I think entering a relationship under false pretenses of any kind is damaging to both people and usually backfires. It causes more hurt than being honest from the start, even if that means admitting you're not ready.

More importantly, there is no hurry to date — let alone think about marriage — at this stage of your life. You have your whole life to explore romantic relationships. There's ZERO reason to push yourself.

If someone you care about is ready and you're not, don't force a relationship to appease them. That almost always leads to resentment and eventually damages the connection.

Of course it's fine to stay friends while the other person who is ready "waits" — as long as they accept that you may never feel romantically about them, and that pressuring you is unacceptable.

HOW DO YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE HELPED GET OUT OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

The answer to this varies depending on the age of the person being abused.

If they are under 18, you absolutely should bring it to the attention of a teacher, principal, counselor, or police officer as soon as possible. You'll be able to do so confidentially and they'll investigate and take appropriate action from there.

I want to recognize, this could be a situation in which anonymity wouldn't matter because it's a very close friend and you're the only one who could have told...

Of course you would be worried your friend is going to be mad. I want to tell you, it takes incredible bravery to speak up anyway. I'd much rather lose a friendship to their anger, than lose a friend at the hands of someone abusing them.

And I'd want my friends to do the same for me.

Unfortunately, if the person is over 18 and refusing help, your options are pretty limited. You can't force someone to end a relationship — it has to be something they're prepared to do or they'll likely go back.

There's a lot more that goes into this answer, as the relationship becomes more complex (in terms of shared housing, children, etc.) A victim who leaves an abusive relationship without the preparation and planning will almost always return to it, possibly exacerbating violence and ultimately making it even harder to get out.

While you can't make them leave, you can help them by making sure they know you support their right to leave when they're ready, and you'll be there to offer what help you can when the time comes.

HOW TO GET PAST OLD TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS?

- Accept that the relationship is over. O-VER. For good. Go no contact if you're not already. Closure is something you give yourself, by letting go - including letting go of trying to figure out why someone did or didn't do something. It doesn't matter, it's over. There's NO answer that will help you.
- Accept that there's nothing you did to deserve being treated badly. Their actions are about them, period.
- Focus on the bad times. It's easy to get caught up in good memories or the things you liked about them - instead, think about all the times they hurt you and made you feel bad.
- Look for the lessons or the experiences you gained from that relationship - not as a way of holding the memories, but finding the value of the time you spent, to relieve angst over what can feel like wasted time.

Here's what I mean: even in relationships that had toxic dynamics, there were still real experiences inside them. I learned how to ride motorcycles. I learned about boating and how to build a deck. I tried kayaking and rock climbing. I was exposed to music and fashion I probably wouldn't have found on my own. And I traveled to places like San Antonio, New Orleans, Nashville, and Miami. It was never about what I was given, but what I experienced.

And here's the bonus: no matter how badly someone treated you, they can never take back the knowledge or experiences you gained. Even if that knowledge is simply realizing what you will never tolerate again — that's still a huge win.

I want to be clear — this isn't about finding value in them, or convincing yourself they gave you something intentionally. Identifying what you gained is about you. Think of it like a treasure hunt: you keep the parts that build your future self, and you leave the rest behind. Every experience is shaping who you're becoming, day by day. The goal is to take what's valuable and let go of everything else — including that person.

Don't get hung up on someone who was only meant to deliver that experience to you. That's like calling the Amazon driver about the product inside the box they left on your porch.



And If ALL else fails, purposely give yourself the ick.

Think about those annoying / gross / rude / ignorant little habits you loathed but forced yourself to ignore when you were together - make a list if you have to. Then, every time you think of them, come back to that list. Before you know it, you'll stop thinking about them altogether (and when you do, you'll be either grossed out or indifferent.)

I personally did this one. It works.

HOW WOULD YOU HELP SOMEONE WHOSE PARENT HAS GONE THROUGH DV AND SOMETIMES TAKES IT OUT ON THEIR CHILD NOW?

I would first need to ask what that looks like. Is the parent being overly harsh, overly protective, limiting freedoms around dating or is this a situation where they are becoming explosive or abusive themselves?

My guidance would vary depending on the specifics, but my advice would ultimately end with the suggestion they seek the help of a therapist.

Both the parent (if willing) and child individually, as well as together, could be beneficial.

Whatever the situation, it's crucial the parent be able to separate their experiences from their child, and from their child's experiences. When dealing with cycles of abuse, that separation can be difficult — and for some parents, it becomes even more challenging as their child gets older and reaches adulthood. Perhaps the parent could be feeling resentful if they've had to parent the child alone, or they might be acting out due to fear of abandonment as the time gets closer for the child to leave the nest. It's a complicated web of emotions when abuse is involved. However, those are emotions for the parent to deal with on their own. NONE of the parent's emotions are the child's responsibility or fault. (please read that again)

LET'S NORMALIZE THERAPY!!

Despite the stigma therapy gets, it can be an incredibly beneficial tool, especially for those of us who've experienced or witnessed abuse. Our minds are not meant to process prolonged stress like that, especially as children, and the effects can stay with a person long after the abuse has ended (which is exactly how it gets carried into the next generation).

Therapy provides a safe environment to explore your feelings with a professional who acts as a guide along the way. It's a chance to be seen and heard, without anyone centering their feelings over yours.

Therapy has become much more accessible over the past few years. It can be done online or in person, individually or as a family. There are even apps dedicated specifically to providing access to mental healthcare, discreetly and affordably.

If you think therapy might be right for you, your school's counseling office can help you explore your options.

