



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & TEEN DATING ABUSE

Teen Resource Guide

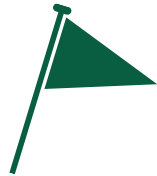
Domestic Violence Crisis Center
www.dvccct.org

THE RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in between. Abusive relationships don't happen overnight and often have a gradual escalation of unhealthy behaviors.

GREEN FLAGS & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

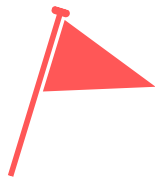
Healthy relationships consist of many different elements that make them strong and healthy. We like to call these characteristics green flags.



- Communication
- Trust
- Honesty
- Support
- Respect
- Equality
- Independence
- Boundaries
- Fun

RED FLAGS & UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Unhealthy relationships are based in attempts to control the other person. Often, the healthy characteristics start to go away and red flag behaviors develop. Red flags are warning signs that a relationship could turn abusive.



- Jealousy
- Dishonesty
- Breaks in communication
- Controlling what you wear
- Possessiveness
- Isolation
- Constantly checking in
- Playing head games

ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH POWER & CONTROL

In abusive relationships one person is making all of the decisions and there is an imbalance of power and control. Power and control are maintained through different forms of abuse, including:

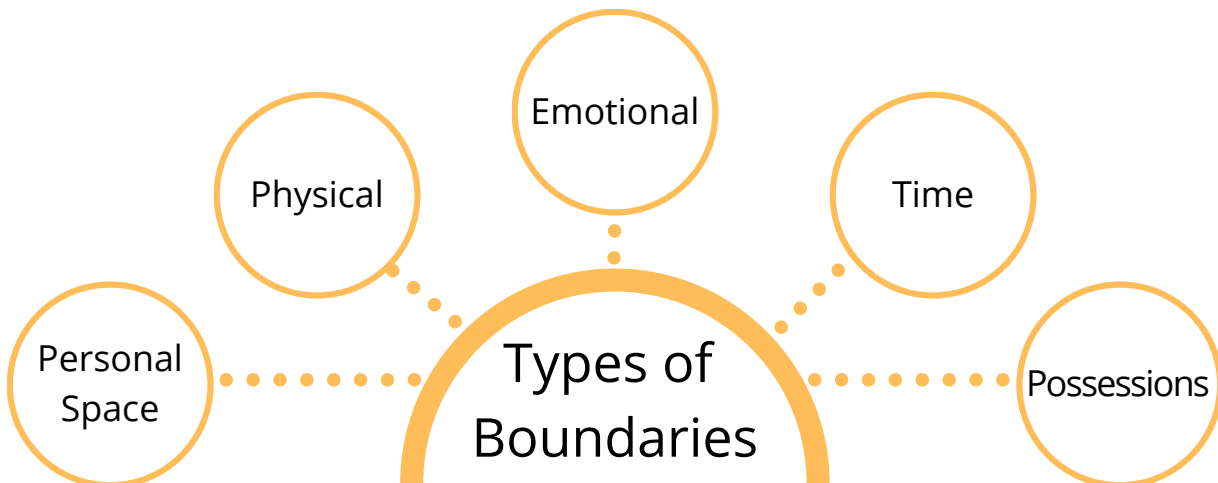
- Physical
- Verbal
- Emotional
- Sexual
- Digital
- Economic

ASSERTING YOUR BOUNDARIES

WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?



Boundaries are like lines that we cannot cross. Everyone has different levels of boundaries that can change based on a number of factors. In a healthy relationship both people clearly communicate their boundaries and respect the other's boundaries. Healthy boundaries in a relationship don't come naturally, nor do they come easily.



Check out the examples below to see how the characters assert their boundaries and then practice writing them, yourself.

Manuel and Christina have been dating for a few weeks. They start joking around and Manuel pushes Christina pretty hard. Respectfully, but without smiling or laughing, Christina makes eye contact with Manuel and says *"I know we are just playing around, but I don't like people putting their hands on me like that. Don't push me again."*

Naomi and Thomas are dating. Thomas has plans with his friends to go to the movies. While he is out, Naomi texts him asking where he is and who he is with. He steps away from his friends to call her and tell her his plan. On the phone he says *"I trust you and don't constantly message you when you are out with your friends. I want to be able to enjoy my time with my friends and not be glued to my phone. You should trust me and not feel the need to keep checking in on me."*

Kyle and Sam have been dating for 2 months. Kyle says I love you to Sam, but Sam doesn't feel comfortable saying it back yet. What can Sam say to set boundaries in terms of Sam's comfort level and how Kyle's comment made them feel?

DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

WHAT ARE DIGITAL BOUNDARIES?

In today's highly connected world, our digital devices can give us access to anyone, anywhere, at any time. And while that may be beneficial in some circumstances, it is important that we set digital boundaries to help us determine how often we want to engage with others through technology.

Boundaries are not meant to make you feel trapped or like you are “walking on eggshells.” Boundaries help us feel comfortable, and they may even change over time. Just because you felt comfortable with something at the beginning of a relationship doesn't mean you're bound by it forever. The opposite can also be true: there may be something that you weren't okay with at the beginning of your relationship that you eventually become comfortable with. In a healthy relationship, everyone's needs and limits are respected.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN SETTING DIGITAL BOUNDARIES



Before you talk to your partner, check in with yourself by using the following questions to help you decide what you are comfortable with.

- What are your preferred methods of communication (phone calls, texting, FaceTime, etc...)?
- Do you have limits on how many hours a day you spend on your phone? Are there times during the day when you prefer not to receive any calls, online messages, or texts? (i.e. not during school hours or after you go to bed at 10 pm)
- Are you okay with tagging each other in photos or posting about the relationship publicly?
- Is it okay for your partner to follow your friends and family on social media?
- Is it okay to use each other's devices?
- Are there certain conversations you would prefer to have in person rather than through messages?

DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

WARNING SIGNS



If someone is making you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, it is time to think about setting a boundary with them, especially if you experience any of the following signs:

- You get knots in your stomach whenever they “cross the line” and check your phone without permission.
- You start to feel resentful of them when they comment on a post you shared.
- You feel disrespected by something they said or have done.
- You feel their expectations of you are unreasonable or inappropriate.
- You feel uncomfortable, or as though you are being pushed to do things you wouldn’t normally do, like share your location, passwords, etc.

HOW TO SET A DIGITAL BOUNDARY



Setting a boundary with a partner or a friend can be really challenging. That is exactly why we should practice them! Let’s say your partner wants you to unfollow certain people on social media. This makes you feel uncomfortable, so you want to set a boundary.

- 1 Identify The Problem:** “My partner is acting jealous and trying to control who I can be friends with online. It’s my social media account and I should be able to follow who I want.”
- 2 Define The Boundary:** “I’m okay with my partner following me on social media, but I’m not okay with them controlling who I follow because I have a right to make those decisions myself.”
- 3 Express Your Boundary With an I-Statement:** “I feel frustrated when you tell me who to unfollow on social media. I would like you to respect my privacy, and trust that I would not do anything to compromise the relationship.”
- 4 Determine the consequences:** “If you continue to tell me who to unfollow, I will limit your access to my social media page so you can no longer view it.”

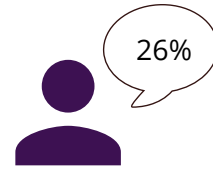
And if they continue to disrespect your boundary, it may be time to consider if you still want to be in a relationship with someone who does not respect how you feel.

DATING ABUSE

The intentional use of a pattern of destructive behaviors by one person to exert power and control over a dating partner.



1 in 3 teens will experience an abusive dating relationship.



In Connecticut, 26% of students surveyed, reported that someone they were dating or going out with, purposely tried to control them or emotionally hurt them.



A 2021 survey found 20% of female students in CT had been forced by someone they were dating or going out with to do sexual things they did not want to do.

FORMS/TYPES OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL

Any use of physical force with the intent to control a partner through fear or injury.

- Restraining
- Object aggression
- Reckless driving

VERBAL

Using words to hurt someone.

- Mocking
- Belittling
- Name calling
- Cursing
- Put downs

EMOTIONAL

Breaking down someone's self-esteem and/or sense of self.

- Isolation
- Gaslighting/playing head games
- Blaming
- Manipulation & lying
- Jealousy

SEXUAL

Taking away a person's control over their sexual choices. Trying to pressure or force someone to do something sexually that they do not want to do.

DIGITAL

The use of technology or social media to intimidate, harass, bully, stalk, or threaten a partner.

ECONOMIC

Using someone for their money, trying to make someone feel obligated or guilty by buying them, things.

HOW CAN I HELP MY FRIEND?

- Recognize the "red flags" and don't ignore them.
- Ask your friend about their relationships & keep the lines of communication open.
- Offer options/ask them what they want to do.
- Do not blame them for what is happening.
- Express concern for their safety.
- Offer to go with them to seek help and provide resources ([See Resources Page](#)).
- Understand that everyone reacts to trauma differently. Do not judge your friend for how they may respond to the situation.



WHAT CAN I DO?

If you are being abused or in an unhealthy relationship:

- Remember your rights (to be respected, independent, safe, and happy).
- Remember that conflict and abuse are not the same things.
- Talk to someone about your relationship (friend, family member, counselor).
- Recognize that it might be too dangerous to be with your partner, even though you care about them and/or love them.
- If you decide to break up, plan the safest way to do it.

Remember that you are not alone and it is not your fault.

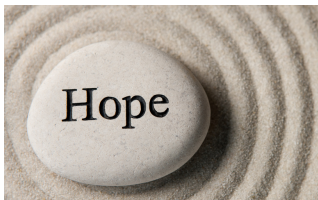
NAVIGATING SAFE ENDINGS

It can be tough sometimes to figure out when and how to end a relationship. You have probably spent a lot of time with this person and developed deep feelings for them. However, **it's important to make a decision based on your happiness, safety, and future** and not just the history you have with them. Whatever choice you make, DVCC is here to offer non-judgmental support. Check out our Navigating Safe Endings guide below. You can also schedule an appointment with one of our Youth & Family Counselors by calling DVCC's main business line at 203-588-9100.

Before the Break-Up

How Are You Feeling?

You may be experiencing a wide range of emotions right now, which can be a little confusing, and that's okay! It's normal to be uncertain or sad to leave, even if your relationship is abusive or unhealthy.



Hope that the relationship can get better, especially if your partner has been promising to change.

While unhealthy relationships can become healthier with enough time and dedication, you can only change your own behavior, not your partner's.

Fear of feeling lonely after the break-up, especially if they have become a big part of your life.

It's completely normal to feel lonely after a break-up, so it's important that you be gentle with yourself and take as much time as you need. It may also be helpful to talk with friends or find new activities that bring you joy.



Fear of your partner's reaction, especially if you are concerned that they may harm you or themselves after the break-up.

Take your fears seriously. Contact DVCC's Youth & Family Counselors who can help you create a safety plan.



Doubt if you are making the right choice, especially if your partner is controlling and has been making most of the decisions in the relationship.

It's okay to feel unsure if you are making the right decision. Any major change comes with uncertainty. Just remember that you are worthy of a relationship based on respect and equality.

Relationship Check Up

Ask yourself what is prompting you to consider ending the relationship?

- Have you been noticing red flags or signs of abuse?
- Do you no longer feel safe emotionally and/ or physically?
- Are you unable to engage in healthy conflict?

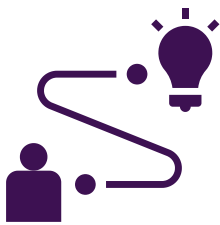
Try writing down the reasons you want to end your relationship before doing so and keep them as a reminder for yourself later on.

NAVIGATING SAFE ENDINGS

During the Break-Up

The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is during and after the break-up, so if you have any concerns that your partner may have a volatile response, it is important to connect with a professional like one of DVCC Youth & Family Counselors, who can help you create a safety plan. A safety plan is a personalized strategy for breaking up with a potentially or already abusive partner.

MAKE A PLAN & BE PREPARED



- Identify support systems like friends, family, a counselor, or a DVCC advocate, and let them know that you are ending the relationship.
- It's okay to break up over the phone if you don't feel safe doing it in person.
- If you do break up in person, try to do it in a public place. Have a trusted friend or family member wait nearby, or if that's not possible, at least let them know where you will be.
- You never have to justify a break-up; however, if you do choose to explain the reason for ending the relationship, don't feel like you have to explain it more than once. If your ex does not accept the decision or respect your boundaries, they might try to control you through pleas, guilt-tripping, threats, or insults.

IF YOUR PARTNER THREATENS SUICIDE



- If your partner threatens suicide during a breakup, it *could* be a sign that they are trying to maintain control through emotional manipulation by making you feel guilty or afraid. Of course, someone discussing suicide should always be taken seriously.
 - **Tell Someone:** Even if they forbid you or try to swear you to secrecy, don't keep the information to yourself. Let a trusted adult or professional know so you both can get the support that you need. You might be trying to figure out whether it's a true mental health crisis or an abusive act of control. The tricky thing is, sometimes it's both, or you might not ever know. Again, this is why we must always take threats seriously and always seek the help of an adult.
 - **Utilize Resources:**
 - Dial 988 for Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
 - Call 211 & press "1" for crisis
 - Text "HOME" to 741741

Everyone's boundaries are different, so what might be okay for some may be a deal-breaker for others.

You can break up anytime without having to justify your decision. As long as you're okay with the decision to break up, it's okay if your partner isn't.

NAVIGATING SAFE ENDINGS

After the Break-Up

IT'S OKAY TO FEEL HURT

It's natural to feel hurt after a break-up, even if the relationship was unhealthy or abusive. It can feel like the whole world has turned upside down, leaving nothing but feelings of sadness, loneliness, and depression. At some point, you may even feel like leaving the relationship was the wrong decision. Just remember to be kind to yourself and take as much time as you need to heal.

CONTINUE TO KEEP SAFETY IN MIND

The end of an unhealthy or abusive relationship doesn't necessarily mean the end of the risks you might be facing. Consider these steps after breaking up to ensure your ongoing safety:

- Talk to a trusted counselor or teacher to try and adjust your class schedule or find other ways to stay safer at school.
- Update your privacy settings on social media, and ask your friends to do the same.
- Turn off location sharing, and be mindful of tagging your location on social media.
- If your ex tries to maintain contact with your friends or family, ask them not to share any personal information about you.
- Save any threatening or harassing messages your ex sends.
- Keep trusted friends or family members nearby when attending parties or events that you think your ex might attend.
- If your ex does come to your home when you're alone, don't answer the door.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

It takes a lot of courage to end a relationship, so be proud of yourself for doing what's best for you. Take this time to explore your independence and pursue new opportunities and interests that bring you joy.

- Continue to lean on your support system which can help you feel safer and more confident.
- If you don't feel comfortable talking about the break-up with others, try journaling instead.
- Practicing self-care looks different for everyone. Check out this [link](#), to customize your own self-care plan today.

