



# Dating Abuse: **The Facts**

Common questions about dating abuse



# 1. It only happened once, my boyfriend/girlfriend said it'll never happen again. Can I believe that?

Abusive partners know how to make you feel like each time they hurt you will be the last time. **Some abusive relationships have a pattern like this:**



And some abusive relationships never feel like a “honeymoon”. Either way, if you’ve been hurt or made to feel bad by your partner, it’s not right. **You deserve to feel safe, happy, and loved by your partner.**

## 2. Does dating abuse happen in MOST teen relationships?

**No.**

Between 10 – 20% of high school students in Massachusetts report experiencing physical or sexual violence from their partner<sup>1</sup>, and 1 in 5 high school students in Boston report using physical violence with a dating partner in the past month.<sup>1</sup>

1 in 4 teens in a relationship has experienced harassment, name calling, or put downs through a cell phone. 1 in 5 have experienced harassment through social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace.<sup>2</sup>

That's a lot—more than it should be. These numbers also mean that most teens are **not** experiencing dating abuse. In other words, dating abuse is not normal and it's not part of most relationships.



### 3. Isn't it only called "dating abuse" when someone hits you?

The term "dating abuse" is used to describe a wide range of behaviors such as:

- **Verbal abuse:** Insults, put-downs, threats.
- **Emotional abuse:** Spreading rumors, playing "head games" or making someone feel crazy, invading a person's cell phone or internet privacy, destroying another person's belongings, telling a person what to do, who to be friends with, or what to wear.
- **Sexual abuse:** Forcing or coercing any unwanted sexual activity, including "using game" or "smooth talk" to get what you want sexually when the other person doesn't want it, getting someone drunk or high to get what you want sexually. This kind of abuse may also include knowingly giving someone a sexually transmitted infection, or hiding or ruining their birth control.
- **Physical abuse:** Hits, slaps, pinches, biting, punches, kicking, choking, pulling hair, or shoving all count as physical abuse. Physical abuse also includes hurting your child, a pet, or some other physical act meant to scare you. If anyone physically hurts you against your will, that counts as physical abuse.





## 4. My boyfriend/girlfriend texts me a lot because they care about me and want to know what I'm doing. Is that a problem?

Texting is a great way to keep in touch with people. **Using text messages to check up on you constantly, control you and your actions, put you down, or scare you, are signs of an unhealthy relationship.**

17% of teens in a recent survey report that a boyfriend or girlfriend has made them afraid to not respond to a cell phone call, email, IM, or text message.<sup>2</sup>

You should also be able to take a break from texting when you feel like it. Non-stop texting at all hours of the day and night are signs of an unhealthy relationship.

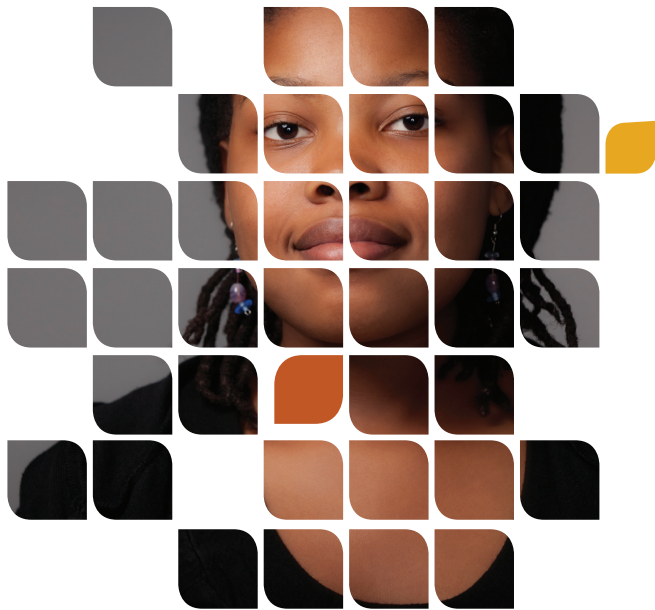
## 5. My boyfriend/girlfriend only hits me when he/she is drinking. Does that excuse it?

**People who hit or abuse their partners, in any way at any time, are doing the wrong thing. Being drunk or high is not an excuse.**

Alcohol and drugs can make fights or bad situations worse. Usually, when teens report that their partner gets violent after drinking, it is a sign of other problems throughout their relationship.

People who “only” get violent after drinking or using drugs have a problem, and might need help to stop.







## 6. What can happen if I stay in an abusive relationship?

When abuse happens in relationships, **the abuse usually gets worse and more intense over time.** There may be times when things seem better, but in the long run it is hard for abusers to change without professional help.

Research shows only 4 – 7% of abusive relationships get better on their own. In one survey, 64% of girls who had experienced severe violence in a dating relationship reported that their relationship worsened or ended.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, if you are experiencing dating abuse, it is most likely going to stay the same or get worse, not better.

## 7. Who can I talk to about what is going on in my relationship?

**It depends on who you trust and who you feel will help to keep you safe. Here are some suggestions:**

- **A trusted friend:** Talk to your friend face-to-face. When you talk about confidential and personal problems on Facebook, in text messages, and in emails, the information can easily get back to your partner. Some teens report that talking to their friends is not helpful enough, because their friends don't know what advice to give. Some teens also say that their friends are too close to the situation to have good advice.
- **A trusted adult:** Your doctor, parents, teachers, coaches, and youth leaders are just a few of the adults who want to make sure you are safe and happy. However, not all adults know what to do about dating abuse. **If you talk to an adult and they tell you abuse is normal, your fault, or not a problem—don't listen!** Find a different adult to trust with this problem.

If you aren't sure that you want your friends or family to know what is going on, there are people in your community who can help. Any local domestic violence resource center or rape crisis center will be able to listen and provide any answers and support that you need.



No matter where you live, you can always  
call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:

1-866-331-9474 | 1-866-331-8453 (TTY)

[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)



## 8. Am I justified in breaking up with him/her?

### Yes!

If you don't want to be together anymore, you have every right to breakup. You don't owe your partner a second chance, even if he or she says something that makes you feel guilty.

If you want to end things, it's over. You have a right to expect your partner to accept your decision, even if he or she is not happy about it.

## 9. Any tips if I am thinking about leaving?

**Breakups are not easy, especially if you're worried about if your partner will react violently.** Always remember that your safety is important and that you must look out for your own safety first.

If it is safe, break up in person. Breakups over text message and Facebook may make your partner want to contact you over and over because they don't understand. They may also confront you the next time they see you, which could be dangerous. To have a face to face conversation:

- **Prepare yourself:** Prepare for how you will feel emotionally and prepare to protect your safety. Talk to friends about fun things you can do together to keep you safe and keep your mind off of your ex-partner.
- **Practice:** Practice ways to be clear about why you are breaking up, and ways to express that ending your relationship is what you want to do. Practice ways to respond to your partner if they tried to change your mind or if they started to get upset.
- **Plan:** Plan to keep yourself safe. Try to break up in a public place with a friend or a trusted adult watching from nearby just in case your partner starts to get angry or abusive. Plan to meet up with that friend right after the breakup. You could tell them something like, "I'm meeting him at 4 p.m., I'll meet you at 5 p.m. If I'm later, make sure that I'm okay, I will be on the benches at the Park Street T stop".

- **Reach out to a friend:** Friends can help you stay safe in each one of these steps, as well as in the weeks after a breakup. If you are used to seeing a partner on the way to and from school, work, or the bus, a friend can stay with you to make sure that your partner doesn't try to get you alone and potentially hurt you.
- **Reach out to adults:** If you feel in danger during school or at work, you may want to talk to a school counselor or employer so that they can help you create a safety plan or keep your ex-partner away from you.

Talk to your family, and others you live with: make sure they know never to let your ex into the house, or tell him/her where you are if he/she comes to the door.



**If you ever feel like you are in immediate danger, call 911.**



Should Make You Feel Respected! [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)

1: Rothman, E.F., Johnson, R.M., Azrael, D., Hall, D.M., & Weinburg, J. (2010) Perpetration on Physical Assault Against Dating Partners, Peers, and Siblings Among a Locally Representative Sample of High School Students in Boston, Massachusetts. Arch Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 164(12), 1118-1124. 2: Picard, P (2007). Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study. Liz Claiborne, Inc. Available at: [www.loveis-notabuse.com/surveyresults\\_2007mstr.htm](http://www.loveis-notabuse.com/surveyresults_2007mstr.htm) 3: Molidor, C. & Tolman, R. (1998). Gender and contextual factors in adolescent dating violence. Violence Against Women, 4 (2), 180-194.

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