



Dating violence and abuse

Dating violence is when someone you are seeing romantically harms you in some way, whether it is physically, sexually, emotionally, or all three. It can happen on a first date, or once you've fallen deeply in love. Dating violence is never your fault. Learn the signs of dating violence or abuse and how to get help.

What is dating violence?

Dating violence is physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a romantic or sexual partner. It happens to women of all races and ethnicities, incomes, and education levels. It also happens across all age groups and in heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Some people call dating violence domestic abuse, especially when you live with your partner.

Dating violence includes:

- **Emotional and verbal abuse** — yelling, name-calling, bullying, isolating you from your family and friends, saying you deserve the abuse or are to blame for it, and then giving gifts to “make up” for the abuse or making promises to change
- **Sexual assault and rape** — forcing you to do any sexual act you do not want to do or doing something sexual when you’re not able to consent, such as when you’ve been drinking heavily
- **Physical abuse** — hitting, shoving, kicking, biting, throwing objects, choking, or any other aggressive contact

It can also include forcing you to get pregnant against your will, trying to influence what happens during your pregnancy, or interfering with your birth control.

What are signs of dating abuse?

Some signs of dating abuse include:¹

- Forcing you to have sex when you don’t want to
- Telling you that you owe them sex in exchange for taking you out on a date
- Acting overly jealous, including constantly accusing you of cheating
- Being extremely controlling, such as telling you what to wear, forbidding you from seeing friends and family, or demanding to check your phone, email, and social media
- Constantly checking in with you and getting angry if you don’t check in with him or her
- Putting you down, including your appearance (clothes, makeup, hair, weight), intelligence, and activities
- Trying to isolate you from other people, including by insulting them
- Blaming you for the abusive behavior and listing the ways you “made him or her do it”
- Refusing to take responsibility for their own actions
- Apologizing for abuse and promising to change again and again

<https://womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/other-types/dating-violence-and-abuse>

- Having a quick temper, so you never know what you will do or say that may cause a problem
- Not allowing you to end the relationship or making you feel guilty for leaving
- Threatening to call the authorities (police, deportation officials, child protective services, etc.) as a way to control your behavior
- Stopping you from using birth control or going to the doctor or nurse
- Committing any physical violence, such as hitting, pushing, or slapping you

None of the behavior described above is OK. Even if your partner does only a few of these things, it's still abuse. It is never OK for someone to hit you or be cruel to you in any way.

What is digital abuse?

Digital abuse is a type of abuse that uses technology, especially texting or social media. Digital abuse is more common among younger adults, but it can happen to anyone who uses technology, such as smartphones or computers.

Digital abuse can include:

- Repeated unwanted calls or texts
- Harassment on social media
- Pressure to send nude or private pictures (called “sexting”)
- Using texts or social media to check up on you, insult you, or control whom you can see or be friends with
- Demanding your passwords to social media sites and email
- Demanding that you reply right away to texts, emails, and calls

In a healthy relationship, both partners respect relationship boundaries. You do not have to send any photos that make you uncomfortable. Once you send a revealing photo, you have no control over who sees it. The other person can forward it or show it to others.

How does dating violence or abuse start?

Dating violence or abuse often starts with emotional and verbal abuse. The person may start calling you names, constantly checking on you, or demanding your time. This is your partner's attempt to gain power and control over you.

These behaviors can lead to more serious kinds of abuse, such as hitting or stalking, or preventing you from using [birth control](#) or protection against [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

Dating violence can happen even on the first date. If a date pays for the date, that does not mean you owe them sex. Any sexual activity that is without your consent is rape or sexual assault.

How common is dating violence?

Dating violence is very common in the United States. It can happen at any age, but young women are most likely to experience dating violence.² More than four in 10 college women have experienced violence or abuse in a dating relationship.³

What can happen if I don't end an abusive dating or romantic relationship?

Staying in an abusive relationship can have long-lasting effects on your mental and physical health, including chronic pain and [depression](#) or [anxiety](#). [Read more about the effects on your health](#).



Abusive partners may also pressure you into having unprotected sex or prevent you from using birth control. Or you may think that getting pregnant will stop the abuse. Abuse can actually get worse during pregnancy. It's a good idea to talk with your doctor about types of birth control you can use. If you are concerned about your partner knowing or becoming aware of your birth control use, talk to your doctor. If a male partner refuses to wear a condom, get tested for [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

Did we answer your question about dating violence or abuse?

For more information about dating violence or abuse, call the OWH Helpline at 1-800-994-9662 or check out the following resources from other organizations:

- [Learn About Dating Abuse](#) — Information from Break the Cycle.
- [Using Technology to Hurt Others](#) — Information from the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.

Sources

1. National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. (2012). [What Are the Early Warning Signs of Teen Dating Violence?](#) 
2. Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Basile, K.C., Walters, M.L., Chen, J., Merrick, M.T. (2014). [Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011](#). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Surveillance Summaries; September 5, 2014 / 63(SS08); 1-18.
3. Break The Cycle. (2011). [College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll](#). 

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