

## RED FLAGS FOR ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The following is a list of warning signs for potentially abusive relationships. They are presented as guidelines and cues to pay attention to, not as judgments on the worth of the other person.

### Question relationships with partners who:

- Abuse alcohol or other drugs.
- Have a history of trouble with the law, get into fights, or break and destroy property.
- Don't work or go to school.
- Blame you for how they treat you, or for anything bad that happens.
- Abuse siblings, other family members, children or pets.
- Put down people, including your family and friends, or call them names.
- Are always angry at someone or something.
- Try to isolate you and control whom you see or where you go.
- Nag you or force you to be sexual when you don't want to be.
- Cheat on you or have lots of partners.
- Are physically rough with you (push, shove, pull, yank, squeeze, restrain).
- Take your money or take advantage of you in other ways.
- Accuse you of flirting or "coming on" to others or accuse you of cheating on them.
- Don't listen to you or show interest in your opinions or feelings.  
. .things always have to be done their way.
- Ignore you, give you the silent treatment, or hang up on you.
- Lie to you, don't show up for dates, maybe even disappear for days.
- Make vulgar comments about others in your presence
- Blame all arguments and problems on you.
- Tell you how to dress or act.
- Threaten to kill themselves if you break up with them, or tell you that they cannot live without you.
- Experience extreme mood swings. . .tell you you're the greatest one minute and rip you apart the next minute.
- Tell you to shut up or tell you you're dumb, stupid, fat, or call you some other name (directly or indirectly).
- Compare you to former partners.

### Some other cues that might indicate an abusive relationship might include:

- You feel afraid to break up with them.
- You feel tied down, feel like you have to check-in.
- You feel afraid to make decisions or bring up certain subjects so that the other person won't get mad.
- You tell yourself that if you just try harder and love your partner enough that everything will be just fine.
- You find yourself crying a lot, being depressed or unhappy.
- You find yourself worrying and obsessing about how to please your partner and keep them happy.
- You find the physical or emotional abuse getting worse over time.

## EXAMINING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

### What are your rights in a relationship?

- To express your opinions and have them be respected
- To have your needs be as important as your partner's needs
- To grow as an individual in your own way
- To change your mind
- To not take responsibility for your partner's behavior
- To not be physically, emotionally, verbally or sexually abused
- To break up with or fall out of love with someone and not be threatened

### Are you being abused?

- Are you frightened by your partner's temper?
- Are you afraid to disagree?
- Are you constantly apologizing for your partner's behavior, especially when he or she has treated you badly?
- Do you have to justify everything you do, everywhere you go, and everyone you see just to avoid your partner's anger?
- Does your partner put you down, but then tell you that he or she loves you?
- Have you ever been hit, kicked, shoved or had things thrown at you?
- Do you not see friends or family because of your partner's jealousy?
- Have you ever been forced to have sex?
- Are you afraid to break up because your partner has threatened to hurt you or himself or herself?
- Has your partner ever threatened your life or the life of someone close to you?

### Are you being abusive?

- Do you constantly check up on your partner and accuse her or him of cheating or lying?
- Are you extremely jealous or possessive?
- Do you have an explosive temper?
- Have you hit, kicked, shoved, or thrown things at your partner?
- Do you constantly criticize or insult your partner?
- Do you become violent when you use drugs or alcohol?
- Do you use threats or intimidation to get your way?
- Have you ever forced your partner to have sex with you through threats?
- Have you ever threatened your partner with physical harm?
- Have you threatened to hurt yourself or someone else if your partner breaks up with you?

*If you feel that you are in an abusive relationship, you are not alone.*

*There is help available for you or someone you know who suffers in an abusive relationship.*

The Red Flag Campaign is a project of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance and was created thanks to the generous support of the Verizon Foundation.

## HELPING A FRIEND WHO IS BEING ABUSED

Many students are emotionally, physically, or sexually abused by their intimate partners each year. If you are concerned about a friend, perhaps you feel the problem will work itself out. This is very unlikely. Violence and abuse in relationships usually continues and often gets worse over time if no action is taken to stop it. You can help your friend by being honest about your concerns. Say something.

### Things that might be keeping you from saying something:

- **The violence can't really be that serious.** Dating violence includes threats, pushing, punching, slapping, choking, sexual assault, and assault with weapons. It is rarely a one-time occurrence and usually escalates in frequency and severity. Even if the violence is "only" verbal, it can seriously affect the victim's health and well-being, so any act of dating violence is something to take seriously.
- **My friend must be doing something to provoke the violence.** A victim of dating violence is never to blame for another person's choice to use violence against her/him. Problems exist in any relationship, but the use of violence is never acceptable.
- **If it's so bad, why doesn't s/he just leave?** For most of us, a decision to end a relationship is not easy. Your friend's emotional ties to her/his partner may be strong, supporting the hope that the violence will end. Perhaps your friend doesn't know about available resources, or maybe social and justice systems may have been unhelpful in the past. Perhaps when your friend has tried to end the relationship in the past, her/his partner may have used violence to stop her/him. These are just some of the many compelling reasons that may keep someone in an abusive relationship.
- **I shouldn't get involved in a private matter.** Dating violence is not a "personal problem". It is a crime with serious repercussions for your friend, your friend's partner, your campus, and your entire community.
- **I know the abusive person— I really don't think he/she could hurt anyone.** Many abusers are not violent in other relationships and can be charming in social situations, yet be extremely violent in private.
- **The abusive person must be sick.** Using violence and abuse is a learned behavior, not a mental illness. People who use violence and abuse to control their partners choose such behavior; viewing them as "sick" wrongly excuses them from taking responsibility for it.
- **I think the abusive person has a drinking problem. Could that be the cause of violence?** Alcohol or drug use may intensify violent behavior, but it does not cause violence or abuse. People who engage in abusive behavior typically make excuses for their violence, claiming a loss of control due to alcohol/drug use or extreme stress. Acting abusively, however, does not represent a loss of control, but a way of achieving it.
- **How can my friend still care for someone who abuses her/him?** Chances are, the abuser is not always abusive. S/he may show remorse for the violence after it happens and promise to change. Your friend may understandably hope for

such changes. Their relationship probably involves good times, bad times, and in-between times.

- **If my friend wanted my help, s/he would ask for it.** Your friend may not feel comfortable confiding in you, feeling you may not understand her/his situation. Talk to her/him about the abusive behaviors you have noticed, tell your friend no one deserves to be treated in that way, and ask her/him how you can help.

### What You Can Do to Help:

- **Say something. Lend a listening ear.** Tell your friend that you care and are willing to listen. Don't force the issue, but allow your friend to confide in you at her/his own pace. Never blame your friend for what is happening or underestimate her/his fear of potential danger. Focus on supporting your friend's right to make her/his own decisions.
- **Become informed.** Find out all the facts you can about dating violence. Contact offices on campus that address sexual and dating violence, or contact the local program(s) in your area that assist victims of domestic violence. Look for books about dating violence in your local library. Visit the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance website at <http://www.vsdvalliance.org> and/or call the Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.838.8238 (v/tty). [Click here for more information.](#)
- **Guide your friend to community services.** Gather information about dating/domestic violence programs in your area. These programs offer safety, advocacy, support, legal information, and other needed services. If your friend asks for advice on what s/he should do, share the information you've gathered. Let your friend know your s/he is not alone and people are available to help. Encourage her/him to seek the assistance of dating/domestic violence victim advocates. Assure her/him that they will keep information confidential.
- **If your friend decides to end the relationship...** Help her/him make a plan to be safe. S/he may want to call a local domestic violence hotline to help create a "safety plan". Domestic violence programs can help her/him look at her/his options and make a plan to be as safe as possible. Victims of dating violence may face the greater risk when they try to end the abusive relationship. If the abusive person feels s/he has lost control, s/he may become very dangerous.
- **Focus on her/his strengths.** Your friend has probably continually been told by the abusive person that s/he is a bad person, a bad student, or a bad friend. Your friend may believe s/he can't do anything right and that there really is something wrong with her/him. Give her/him emotional support. Help her/him examine her/his strengths and skills. Emphasize that s/he deserves a life that is free from violence.

This document has been adapted several times by several organizations and originated with "Helping The Battered Woman, A Guide For Family And Friends," a 1989 publication of the National Woman Abuse Prevention Project.

## SAFETY PLANNING FOR STUDENTS

Here are several things you can do to help yourself and/or your friend.

- This is not your fault! No one deserves to be treated in an abusive way!
- Seek outside help in a support group or in counseling. Talk to your [student counseling center](#) or call the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-838-8238 (v/tty) ([LINK](#)) to find help near you.
- Share what's happening with a trusted friend. It is important to have a good support system to get through this.
- Abusers will often isolate their victims; reach out to friends and family you may have not connected with in a while.
- If you live together, try to save small amounts of money. Keep it in a safe place like a safety deposit box or with a friend.
- Open your own savings account; if you live together, do not have the statements sent to your home; get a P.O. Box or pick them up at the bank.
- Leave some extra money at a friend's home.
- If you want to try to stay in school, ask the student counseling center if they can refer you to offices that can help you get through tough semesters, You may also inquire about withdrawing from classes so you can take a break away from campus.
- If possible get a part time or full time job—check out student employment opportunities.
- Identify family members or friends who could lend temporary financial support.
- Consider taking out extra student loans to help pay for a new apartment.
- Investigate student housing options—emergency loans and housing are sometimes available.
- Call campus police or 911
- Be aware of weapons your partner may have
- Avoid going on long trips alone with your partner
- Tell your RA/roommates about the situation
- Arrange for double dates—if possible try not to be alone with your partner
- If the abuser also lives in your residence hall, try to get transferred into another building, switch rooms etc—ask the student counseling center if they can assist in facilitating the transfer
- Try to let friends, roommates and RAs know where you are going and when you should be back—check-in with them while you're out
- If your abuser has a copy of your key, request that s/he return it to you, or change your locks
- If you live with her/him: Include keys, emergency phone numbers, money for calls or a prepaid calling card, a change of clothes for you and your kids (if you have children), and medications
- Don't forget important documents such as birth certificates, resident cards/student IDs, social security cards, student loan info and schedules
- Arrange for a safe place to leave your school books, such as a trusted friends' place, the locked trunk of your car, etc.
- Call the [Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline](#) at 1-800-838-8238 (v/tty) to find a domestic violence court advocate near you, so you can discuss your options.

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National Domestic Violence Hotline

1 800 799 SAFE

1 800 787 3224 TTY

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1 800 656 HOPE

National Stalking Resource Center and

National Center for Victims of Crime

1 800 FYI CALL

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline

1 866 331 9474

1 866 331 8453 TTY

Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline

1 800 838 8238

YWCA Women in Crisis Domestic Violence Shelters & Programs, Norfolk

757 625 5570

YWCA Response Sexual Support Services, Norfolk

757 622 4300

Samaritan House, Virginia Beach

757 430 PALS

Help and Emergency Response (HER Shelter), Portsmouth

757 485 3384

Transitions Family Violence Services, Hampton

757 723 7774

Genieve Shelter, Suffolk

1 800 969 4673

Avalon: A Center for Women and Children, Williamsburg

757 258 5051

Laurel Shelter, Gloucester

804 694 5890

Navy Family Advocacy

757 444 NAVY