

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY

Staying Safe in Relationships

A new relationship can be an adventure. But for both adults and teens, it's important to be aware of how relationships can take unexpected turns. Whether you're new to romantic relationships and dating for the first time, or making new friends online or in person, caution is needed. What seems like a promising relationship can sometimes become an abusive one.



In any relationship, you have the right to be treated with respect, and to not be abused physically, emotionally, or sexually.

Threats to one's safety can appear in a number of ways. Relationship violence can take the form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. While females are more at risk for violence, both genders can be subject to abuse. Threats can be online, such as when "cyberbullying" occurs via social media or messaging. Sex offenders can find and take advantage of young people on the Internet. Abuse usually involves one person trying to manipulate and harm another.

To highlight the need for personal safety, this issue of *Your Source* presents introductory information about:

- How parents can guide teens when it comes to dating and relationships.
- How all computer and smartphone users should protect their identities and be cautious in online interaction.
- How to develop a personal safety plan when there is a risk of abusive behavior by a partner.

Go online today! Log on to access *Relationship Safety* under the Library/*In the Spotlight* section. There you'll find resources that can help you and your family stay safe in a variety of situations. It's best to be prepared!



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Safe Dating for Teens

Dating relationships can be a fun and exciting part of life. They can also be confusing, especially if dating is new to a teen. Here are some tips for parents.

- Before your teen starts dating, help him or her set guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behavior by dating partners.
- If it's your teen's first date with someone, suggest they go out with another couple or in a group.
- Remind teens to stay true to themselves and not be pressured by a date to do something they don't want to do.
- Discuss with your teen some of the warning signs of potential abusers. An example would be when someone starts taking control or acting obsessively or aggressively—including on the phone or by text.
- Get your teen's agreement to a curfew time for specific activities. Should they need to miss a curfew, require that they call home immediately.
- Talk with your teen about how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Finally, encourage your child to share their experiences and concerns with you. Without judging, educate your teen on how healthy relationships should work. The advice can last a lifetime!

Developing a Personal Safety Plan

When a relationship becomes abusive, it's often hard to escape. Concerns about family safety, living arrangements, finances and related issues often make the decision to leave difficult. And yet, tolerating abuse is the worst possible thing to do. Abuse always gets worse if it is not stopped.

The Advantages of Planning

It can be hard to admit the seriousness of a relationship problem. But it's always better to be prepared should abuse worsen. With a plan in place, you'll be better able to follow established steps toward safety. The following are some suggested safety plan elements.

Every 2.5 seconds, someone in the U.S. becomes a victim of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.¹

- Plan in advance how you and your loved ones will get to a safe place quickly if violence occurs.
- Practice getting out of your home safely. Identify which doors, windows, elevator, or stairwell to use.
- Identify trusted neighbors you can tell about potential violence. Ask them to call the police if they hear a disturbance at your home.
- Devise a code word to use with your children, family and friends when you need the police.
- Prepare an "emergency kit." Leave money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents, important phone numbers, and extra clothes and medicines in a safe place or with someone you trust.
- Ask that person to let you and your children stay with him or her—on a moment's notice—in an emergency.
- Keep local crisis hotline numbers in your wallet or purse so you can get help and advice at any time.
- Develop a safety plan with your children for when you are not with them.
- Inform your child's school or day care about who has permission to pick up your child.
- If you have pets, make arrangements for them to be cared for in a safe place.

Help is Available

Seeking help is one of the first steps toward ending the cycle of fear, anger and violence. Your program offers confidential counseling and resources.

Now That's An Idea!

Stay Safe Online!

Keep your information to yourself— Don't post or give out your Social Security number, address, phone number, or bank and credit card account numbers. Don't respond to requests for money.

Be wary of meeting a new online friend— Before you decide to meet someone, research them via Google, etc. If you agree to meet, do so in a public place.

Think before you post— Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back. Many people can see your page. This includes family, teachers, or the job you might want to apply for in five years.

Monitor your child online— Limit children's nighttime use of social media and texting. Periodically review the Internet "history" on family computers. Use available parental controls and blocking software.

Communicate— Talk to your children about sexual abuse and potential online dangers. Encourage them to report any online bullying or threats.

1. National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISUS), CDC 2010

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