



unhealthy


un·health·y
/ˌənˈhelTHē/
adjective

Harmful to character or morality; corruptive,

A guide to recognizing abuse and toxicity in your relationship

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"I NEVER
THOUGHT
IT WOULD
HAPPEN
TO ME..."

Many individuals who experience intimate partner abuse begin their story with these words. They met someone who was charismatic, charming, and well-liked by others. The thought of this person ever hurting them never crossed their mind.

At this stage, it's easy for the victim to miss the warning signs and justify his/her partner's behavior.

What starts as passive-aggressive comments and jealousy gradually turns into manipulation, controlling behavior, aggression, and rage. Often, an abuse victim will experience more than one type of abuse.

Jenna's Story

"I thought we were in love..."

When I was growing up, violence was never a thought. I was close to my parents, siblings, grandparents, and cousins. I knew dating violence was bad and that it happened even in my teen relationships, but I always said with pride that I could never end up in a relationship "like that."

I met Michael during freshman year in choir class. He was a year older than me, and our relationship started off perfect. We spent all our free time together and my family loved him. He opened up to me quickly and told me about his family. He said his mom wasn't around and his dad was an addict who got mad easily and turned abusive towards him and his little brother. He told me he had never felt loved or wanted. I knew he struggled with that, so I wanted to do all I could to make him feel supported and loved from then on. I trusted him and thought we were in love.



It started with little comments that I thought were coming from a place of love and concern for my well-being like, "Babe, I think you've gained a little bit of weight lately. You should start eating better.", "I don't like when you wear those shorts. They're way too short. Other guys look at you, and I love you so much, I hate it when other guys look at you."

It made me feel good. I felt wanted, I felt like someone loved me so much that it hurt them for another man to pay attention to me. I rationalized it all as I ate my salad, changed my clothes, took off and reapplied my makeup, redid my hair, and thought of excuses to tell my family and friends.

Jenna's Story

"I rationalized it all and thought of excuses..."

Soon, he didn't talk to me about his family or his life anymore. He just got angry when I didn't do, say, wear, or think what he wanted. It no longer felt like he was concerned for me or loved me as he said, but like all I ever did was fail to make him happy. I wondered if he had ever loved me at all.

He told me I was fat, ugly, dumb, and selfish. When we were alone, he would hit, choke, slap, and throw things at me. I started to have panic attacks getting dressed because I felt like I no longer knew what would set him off and I was scared of even picking the wrong pair of shoes.

I started to become withdrawn and quiet, scared to say or do anything wrong.



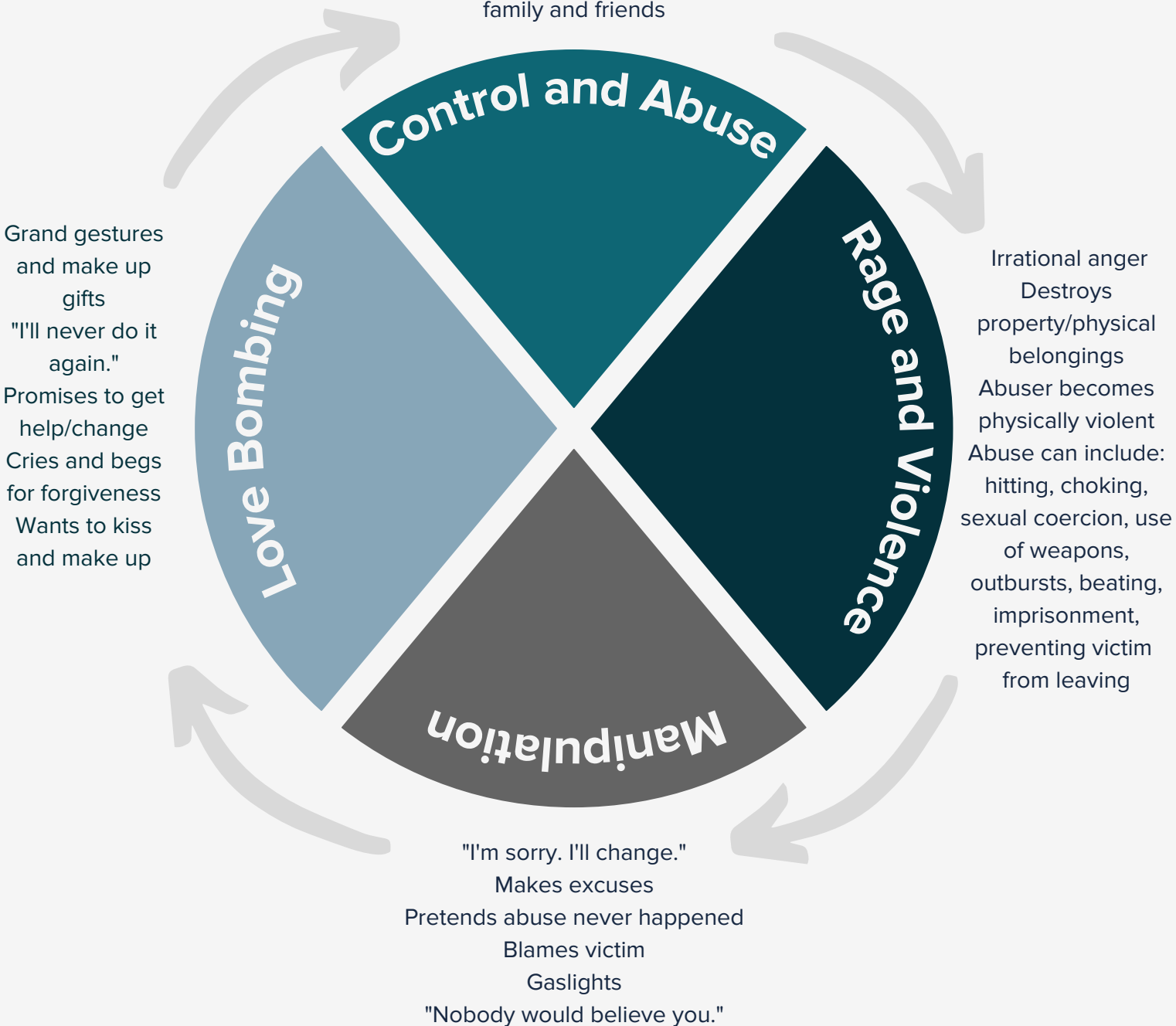
My friends and family noticed the shift in me and started to bring up stuff that Michael had said or done, but I was defensive because I told myself I loved him even if he hurt me. Finally, they sat me down and made me listen. They told me I was in an abusive relationship and that it wasn't okay and that I needed to end it. They supported me and helped me find the resources to make a safety plan and leave the relationship.

It wasn't easy. When I would try to break up with him, he would call me and threaten suicide or self-harm and threaten my family. But, with the help of my support system and a safety plan, I was able to take the steps I needed to protect myself and, in turn, my family from my abuser.

The Cycle of Abuse

One reason it is so hard to leave an abusive relationship is the manipulative cycle of abuse that the victim can find themselves stuck in with their abuser.

Unpredictable and moody
Overly critical
Withdraws affection
Makes victim feel guilty
Victim is isolated from
family and friends





Connecting the dots

All too often, our society normalizes abusive and unhealthy behavior. It's easy to miss the signs of an abusive relationship because we see unhealthy relationships represented throughout all forms of media.

**IF YOUR
RELATIONSHIP
MAKES YOU
FEEL:**

- **AFRAID**
- **ALONE**
- **TRAPPED**
- **UNVALUED**
- **UNLOVED**

**IT ISN'T
HEALTHY AND
IT ISN'T OKAY.**

DATING PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS

ABUSIVE: RED LIGHTS



Communicates in a way that is hurtful, threatening, or demeaning.

Physically hurts or injures the other partner by hitting, slapping, choking, pushing, or shoving.

Disrespects the feelings, thoughts, or opinions of the other partner.

Blames the other partner for their harmful actions.

Controls and isolates the other partner by telling them what to wear, who they can/can't spend time with, where they can/can't go.

Pressures/forces the other partner to do things they do not want to; threatens, hurts, and blackmails their partner if they say no.

HARMFUL: YELLOW LIGHTS



Not communicating when problems arise, you fight or don't discuss them at all.

Disrespectful: One or both partners is not considerate of the other's feelings and/or personal boundaries.

Not trusting: One or both partners doesn't believe what the other says, or feels entitled to invade their privacy.

Dishonest: One or both partners tells lies.

Trying to take control: One partner feels their desires, choices, and opinions are more important.

Only spending time with your partner: Your partner's community is the only one you spend time in.

HEALTHY: GREEN LIGHTS



Communicating: You talk openly about your feelings and problems, listen to each other, and respect each other's opinions.

Respectful: You value each other as you are. You respect each other's emotional, sexual, and digital boundaries.

Trusting: You believe what your partner has to say. You do not feel the need to prove each other's trustworthiness.

Honest: You are honest with each other, but can still keep some things private.

Equal: You make decisions together and hold each other to the same standards.

Enjoying personal time: You can both enjoy time apart, alone, or with others. You respect each other's need for time apart.



TRUE OR FALSE?
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
NEVER HAPPENS IN
TEEN RELATIONSHIPS

FALSE.

Teen Dating Violence Affects 1.5 million
teens in the U.S. every year.

here
are the

FACTS

1

1 in 3 teens will be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship. Violent behavior often begins between 6th and 12th grade; 72% of 13 and 14-year-olds are "dating."

2

There are 4 types of Teen Dating Violence:

Psychological Violence: name-calling or playing manipulative mental games

Physical Violence: hitting or kicking

Stalking: following or giving unwanted attention

Sexual Violence: forcing or pressuring a dating partner to perform sexual acts against their will

3

Teens who suffer dating abuse are subject to long-term consequences like alcoholism, eating disorders, promiscuity, and violent behavior. 50% of young people who experience rape or physical or sexual abuse will attempt to commit suicide

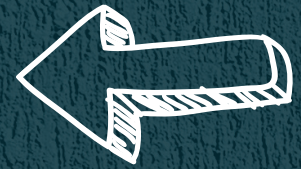
78% of teens report experiencing online harrasment and abuse via text message and other messaging and/or on social media

Digital Abuse

A New Type of Domestic Violence?

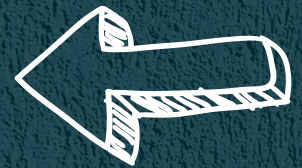
What is it?

Digital abuse is the use of technology such as texting and social media to bully, harass, stalk, or intimate a dating partner. This is often seen as verbal or emotional abuse.



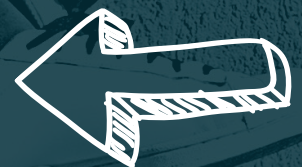
You may be experiencing digital abuse if your partner:

- Tells you who you can or can't be friends with on Facebook and other sites.
- Sends you negative, insulting or even threatening emails, Facebook messages, tweets, DMs or other messages online.
- Tracks your location and/or stalks you.
- Puts you down on social media via DMS, posts, comments, etc.
- Sends you unwanted, explicit pictures and demands you send some in return.
- Pressures you to send explicit video.
- Steals or insists to be given your passwords.
- Constantly texts you and makes you feel like you can't be separated from your phone for fear that you will be punished.
- Looks through your phone frequently, checks up on your pictures, texts and outgoing calls.



The Statistics

In a 2022 study conducted by Love Is Respect, 1 in 4 teens reported experiencing online harrasment and abuse via text message and other messaging and/or on social media. 33% did not seek help or support.





” Why don't you just leave? ”

This is the question asked most of those in abusive relationships. While the person asking may be wellmeaning and have pure intentions, the question can feel insensitive and intrusive.

Although leaving may seem like an easy solution, leaving is complicated, complex, and messy.

There are many reasons why an individual may not feel they can "just leave." Here are just a few...

- **Fear, shame, misplaced guilt on self**
- **Physical or financial dependency on the abuser**
- **Belief that the abusive behavior is normal**
- **Lowered self esteem**
- **Love and hope of change for the abuser**



ENDING THINGS SAFELY

1. Break things off quickly and don't allow your abuser to manipulate you into staying by promising to change or threatening to harm themselves.
2. Get support from a friend or family to hold you accountable not to go back to the relationship.
3. Take precautionary measures when driving to school by avoiding driving the same route every day or traveling with a friend.
4. Ask a friend to walk to/from classes with you.
5. Spend lunch and free periods near faculty/staff and/or trusted adults and friends.
6. Talk openly to family and friends about the relationship and any attempt at communication or altercations by your abuser.
7. If you are home alone, know who you can call to come hang out with you until your family is back.
8. Have a plan to leave home safely and know where you can go in the case of an emergency.
9. Choose a code word you can use with family, friends, and neighbors when you might be in danger.
10. Know local resources to contact in an emergency. Examples in Decatur County are New Directions and local law enforcement.
11. Consider changing your phone number and social media accounts to help prevent the possibility of communication from the abuser.

THE MOST DANGEROUS PERIOD OF TIME IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP IS AFTER THE BREAKUP. IT IS IMPERATIVE TO HAVE A SAFETY PLAN IN PLACE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO ESCAPE SAFELY. THESE STEPS ARE RECOMMENDED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROFESSIONALS AND AUTHORITIES.

(LOVE IS RESPECT, 2022).

"How do I leave?"

MAKING A SAFETY PLAN

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS IN AN ABUSIVE OR UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP, YOUR RESPONSE COULD SAVE THEIR LIFE.



HERE ARE 5 PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP A FRIEND

1. Learn the physical, emotional, and behavioral warning signs- If you notice a sudden change in appearance, behavior, or language, it could be a sign of abuse.
2. Start a compassionate and safe conversation. Let them know what they say will be kept in confidence. Ask leading questions like, "How are things going?" or "It seems like you've been stressed lately. I'm here if you want to talk about it."
3. Listen without judgement, interrupting, offering unsolicited advice, or suggestions.
4. Believe the victim- Many times, a victim will feel alone and like nobody will believe them. Believe the victim and tell them so. Say things like, "I believe you," "It's not your fault," and "You don't deserve this"
5. Validate the victim's feelings- It is common for a domestic violence victim to feel guilt, shame, fear, anger, and even love and hope. If you want to help, it is important to validate their feelings while also reminding them that the violence and abuse is not okay.

Learn the Warning Signs

PHYSICAL SIGNS:

- BLACK EYES
- BUSTED LIPS
- RED OR PURPLE MARKS ON THE NECK
- SPRAINED WRISTS
- BRUISES ON THE ARMS

EMOTIONAL SIGNS:

- LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- OVERLY APOLOGETIC OR MEEK
- FEARFUL
- CHANGES IN SLEEPING OR EATING PATTERNS
- ANXIOUS OR ON EDGE
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION
- LOSS OF INTEREST IN ONCE ENJOYED ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES
- TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS:

- BECOMING WITHDRAWN OR DISTANT
- CANCELING APPOINTMENTS OR MEETINGS AT THE LAST MINUTE
- BEING LATE OFTEN
- EXCESSIVE PRIVACY CONCERNING THEIR PERSONAL LIFE
- ISOLATING THEMSELVES FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

LOVE SHOULDN'T HURT.

If you or someone you know is experiencing an abusive relationship, you are not alone.

Help and support is available to you.

RESOURCES:

New Directions

24 Hr Crisis Line: (812) 662-8822

Office Phone: (812) 662-8223

Current Office Hours:

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm

www.mynewdirections.org

In an emergency, call 911

