



Helping a Friend in an Unhealthy Relationship

People who have never been abused often wonder why a person wouldn't just leave. They don't understand that breaking up can be more complicated than it seems. There are many reasons why both men and women stay in abusive relationships. If you have a friend in an unhealthy relationship, support them by understanding why they may choose to not leave immediately.

Conflicting Emotions

- **Fear:** Your friend may be afraid of what will happen if they decide to leave the relationship. If your friend has been threatened by their partner, family or friends, they may not feel safe leaving.
- **Believing Abuse is Normal:** If your friend doesn't know what a healthy relationship looks like, perhaps from growing up in an environment where abuse was common, they may not recognize that their relationship is unhealthy.
- **Fear of Being Outed:** If your friend is in same-sex relationship and has not yet come out to everyone, their partner may threaten to reveal this secret. Being outed may feel especially scary for young people who are just beginning to explore their sexuality.
- **Embarrassment:** It's probably hard for your friend to admit that they've been abused. They may feel they've done something wrong by becoming involved with an abusive partner. They may also worry that their friends and family will judge them.
- **Low Self-esteem:** If your friend's partner constantly puts them down and blames them for the abuse, it can be easy for your friend to believe those statements and think that the abuse is their fault.
- **Love:** Your friend may stay in an abusive relationship hoping that their abuser will change. Think about it — if a person you love tells you they'll change, you want to believe them. Your friend may only want the violence to stop, not for the relationship to end entirely.

Pressure

- **Social/Peer Pressure:** If the abuser is popular, it can be hard for a person to tell their friends for fear that no one will believe them or that everyone will take the abuser's side.
- **Cultural/Religious Reasons:** Traditional gender roles can make it difficult for young women to admit to being sexually active and for young men to admit to being abused. Also, your friend's culture or religion may influence them to stay rather than end the relationship for fear of bringing shame upon their family.
- **Pregnancy/Parenting:** Your friend may feel pressure to raise their children with both parents together, even if that means staying in an abusive relationship. Also, the abusive partner may threaten to take or harm the children if your friend leaves.

Distrust of Adults or Authority

- **Puppy-love Phenomena:** Adults often don't believe that teens really experience love. So if something goes wrong in the relationship, your friend may feel like they have no adults to turn to or that no one will take them seriously.
- **Distrust of Police:** Many teens and young adults do not feel that the police can or will help them, so they don't report the abuse.



Language Barriers/Immigration Status: If your friend is undocumented, they may fear that reporting the abuse will affect their immigration status. Also, if their first language isn't English, it can be difficult to express the depth of their situation to others.

Reliance on the Abusive Partner

- **Lack of Money:** Your friend may have become financially dependent on their abusive partner. Without money, it can seem impossible for them to leave the relationship.
- **Nowhere to Go:** Even if they could leave, your friend may think that they have nowhere to go or no one to turn to once they've ended the relationship. This feeling of helplessness can be especially strong if the person lives with their abusive partner.
- **Disability:** If your friend is physically dependent on their abusive partner, they can feel that their well-being is connected to the relationship. This dependency could heavily influence his or her decision to stay in an abusive relationship.

Warning Signs that you are in an unhealthy relationship

- **Does your partner:**
 - Exhibit constant jealousy.
 - Lose his/her temper easily.
 - Blame others for his/her actions.
 - Restrict you/tell you what to do.
 - Tell you that you are worthless.
 - Not support your relationships with family and friends.
- **Do you feel:**
 - That if you could do everything she/he asks the violence would stop.
 - That you are the only person that loves and understands him/her enough to help him/her.
 - That her/his possessiveness is proof of her/his love for you.
 - Afraid that if you end the relationship he/sh will hurt himself or someone else.
 - That things will work out and get better.

What Can You Do?

If you have friends or family members who are in unhealthy or abusive relationships, the most important thing you can do is be supportive and listen to them. Please don't judge! Understand that leaving an unhealthy or abusive relationship is never easy. Try to let your friend know that they have options. Invite them to contact DoVE for advice.

If you are caught in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, the best thing you can do is contact DoVE, and find out what your options are.

DoVE offers FREE & CONFIDENTIAL help, advice, and resources.
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