Dating Rights

Just like driving a car, going to school or playing a sport, dating someone comes with both rights and responsibilities. Print these out and post them as a reminder for yourself and others. But first, look at them carefully and ask yourself if you are violating someone else's rights - or if someone is violating yours. Are you fulfilling your responsibilities? Are you respecting your rights and the rights of your date?

**Dating Rights**

I have the right:

1. To be treated with respect always
2. To my own body, thoughts, opinions, and property
3. To choose and keep my friends
4. To change my mind - at any time
5. To not be abused - physically, emotionally or sexually
6. To leave a relationship
7. To say no
8. To be treated as an equal
9. To disagree
10. To live without fear and confusion from my boyfriend's or girlfriend's anger

**Dating Responsibilities**

I have the responsibility:

1. To not threaten to harm myself or another
2. To encourage my girlfriend or boyfriend to pursue their dreams
3. To support my girlfriend or boyfriend emotionally
4. To communicate, not manipulate
5. To not humiliate or demean my girlfriend or boyfriend
6. To refuse to abuse - physically, emotionally or sexually
7. To take care of myself
8. To allow my boyfriend or girlfriend to maintain their individuality
9. To respect myself and my girlfriend or boyfriend
10. To be honest with each other

**FAQ:**

**Relationship Violence - Help for Teens**

**1. Question:** What kind of abuse occurs in relationships?

*Answer:* Relationship abuse comes in many forms. Most abuse falls within one of four categories: Physical, Emotional, Psychological, and Sexual. You need to be aware of what they look like so you will know if one or more of them is part of your relationship. Here is a brief description of each kind of abuse.

a. Physical: actions which cause physical pain or injury, such as kicking, pushing, punching, pinching.
b. Emotional: actions which cause loss of self-esteem, such as name-calling, swearing, criticizing
c. Psychological: actions which create fear, such as isolation or threats
d. Sexual: acts of a sexual nature that are unwelcome or uncomfortable

**2. Question:** What are some early warning signs that my partner might abuse me?

*Answer:* There are certain behaviors that are often seen in people who abuse their partners. Here is a list of behavior that should raise red flags.

- Blaming others for problems
- Blaming you or others for feelings
- Breaking or hitting things
- Constantly checking up on partner
- Controlling behavior
- Cruelty to animals or children
- Explosive anger
- Forcing sex on partner
- Forcing traditional gender roles
- History of abuse
- Hypersensitivity
- Isolation
- Inflexible and rigid patterns of behavior
- Jealousy and Possessiveness
- Low self esteem
- Substance abuse
- Threats of violence
- Unrealistic expectations
- Use of force during an argument
- Verbal abuse and name-calling

If your partner behaves in any of these ways, you should find someone to talk with about your concerns. Consider talking with a close friend or relative you can trust. If you don't know someone like this, you can go to our list of resources. There you will find telephone numbers and web sites where you can get help understanding your situation and protecting yourself from abuse or potential abuse.

3. Question: I get jealous sometimes. Does that mean I'm an abuser or potential abuser?
Answer: Everyone gets jealous sometimes. What you need to watch for is jealousy that is extreme or used to control the other partner. Here are some signs of extreme or controlling jealousy.

- You get mad when your partner talks to other people
- You get mad when your partner has good friends other than you
- You get mad when your partner spends time with other people
- You get mad when your partner expresses warm feelings for another person
- You withdraw, sulk, or become angry and abusive when expressing jealousy

All of these behaviors are damaging to the relationship, and harmful or potentially harmful to your partner. If you or your partner behave in any of these ways, you should seek advice or assistance. Consider talking with a close friend or relative you can trust. If you do not know someone like this, you can go to our resources listed here. There you will find telephone numbers and web sites where you can get help understanding your situation and protecting yourself from abuse or potential abuse.

4. Question: I thought my partner must really love me when my partner gave me a cell phone. Now my partner wants to know where I am all the time. Is this normal?
Answer: This is an early warning sign that your partner might become abusive in the future. Your partner is showing possessiveness and controlling behavior. Possessiveness is when someone treats you as if you are a belonging. The possessive person will not want you to share your time or give any attention to anyone else. It is similar to jealousy, but even more extreme. It is also a dangerous sign of trouble ahead. A controlling attitude is also a serious danger sign. This happens when one partner rules the relationship and makes all of the decisions. The other partner's point of view is not important. Often the controlling partner tries to tell the other how to dress, who to talk to, where to go. Providing the other partner with a cell phone is one way to maintain control by keeping tabs on the other partner. This could be what is happening in your relationship. You should talk with someone about this. You can also find help at some of the resources listed here.

5. Question: My partner doesn't get mad very often, but when s/he does get mad it scares me. How can I tell if this is a warning sign of abuse?
Answer: Even if your partner rarely gets angry, you should always watch out for people who seem to get too angry. These people may hit walls or lockers, yell loudly, get red in the face, call names, have fire in their eyes, or
actually threaten others with violence. This type behavior is a serious warning sign of future relationship abuse. If your partner does any of these things when angry, you need to seek assistance. Talk to someone. You can find help at some of the resources listed here.

6. Question: My partner is acting abusive or at least showing some of the warning signs, but I feel sorry for my partner and don't want to end the relationship because I think I can make things better. Isn't this a good reason to stay with my partner?

Answer: This is not a good reason to stay with your partner. Many people in abusive and potentially abusive relationships feel this way. That is why it is important for you to know the following facts.

- The abuse is not your fault
- You do not deserve to be abused
- You cannot change someone who is abusive
- Staying in the relationship will not stop the abuse
- Over time, the abuse will get worse
- Make a safe plan to follow when the abuse happens again

Some of these facts are merely common sense, but may not be obvious when you are trying to maintain an abusive or potentially abusive relationship. Some of these facts are taken from studies of abusive relationships. All of these facts are important for you to know and understand. If you are in an abusive or potentially abusive relationship, you need to get help before you get hurt. Consider talking with a close friend or relative you can trust. If you do not know someone like this, you can go to our list of resources. There you will find telephone numbers and web sites where you can get help understanding your situation and protecting yourself from abuse or potential abuse.

7. Question: I've tried several times to end my relationship, but my partner says life would not be worth living without me. I love my partner and don't want to hurt my partner. What should I do?

Answer: Your partner has low self esteem. This is one of the early warning signs of abuse. People with low self-esteem do not like themselves very much. In a dating relationship a person with low self-esteem may say, "I'm nothing without you," or "You are my world." This is not real life. Your partner is the one responsible for learning to like himself/herself. As long as you stay in a relationship like this you allow your partner to use you as a crutch and your partner may never seek the help s/he needs. For more information check out our resources listed here. You can help your partner by sending your partner links to this page and any other worthwhile pages you find.

8. Question: My partner is abusive and I want out. What should I do?

Answer: Here is a checklist of things to remember and things you can do.

Things to remember:

- You deserve better. Do not put up with abuse.
- You are not alone. Teens from all different backgrounds and all across the country are in, have been in or know someone in an abusive relationship.
- You have done nothing wrong. It is not your fault that your partner abuses you.
- The longer you stay in the abusive relationship, the more intense the violence will become. It does not get better over time.
- Being drunk or high is not an excuse for abusive.
- No one is justified in attacking you just because he or she is angry.

Things you can do:

- Talk with your parents, another family member, a friend, a counselor, a faith or spiritual leader, or someone else you trust. If you remain isolated from friends and family, your abuser has more opportunity to control and abuse you.
- Get help from professionals. Your community will have places you can go for help. Look for help at rape crisis centers, health services, counseling centers, youth organizations, churches or spiritual centers, your family health care provider, and other similar places.
- Educate yourself. There is more information on the Internet. See our resource list.
If the abuse happens at school, report it to a school counselor or security officer.
Keep a log of the abuse. You may need it for evidence if you have to take legal action.
Do not meet the abuser alone. Do not let the abuser in your home or car when you are alone.
Avoid being alone at school, your job, or on the way to and from places.
Always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.
Establish a regular time or place to contact someone so they will know to check on you if they do not hear from you as scheduled.
Develop a safety plan and rehearse what you will do if the abuser becomes abusive.
Give yourself some space, take a break from dating.

9. Question: I have a friend who I think is in an abusive relationship. I want to help my friend. Is there anything I can do?
Answer: Most teens talk to other teens about their problems. If a friend tells you things that sound like his or her relationship is abusive, here are some suggestions on ways to help.

- Do not ignore signs of abuse. Talk to your friend.
- Express your concerns. Tell your friend if you are worried and why.
- Offer support to your friend.
- Do not judge your friend.
- Point out your friend’s strengths. It is possible that your friend has lost the ability to recognize their own abilities and gifts. This happens to many people in abusive relationships.
- Encourage your friend to confide in a trusted adult.
- Offer to go with the friend for professional help.
- Find out what laws in your state may protect your friend from the abuser.
- Never put yourself in a dangerous situation with the victim's partner.
- Do not try to mediate or otherwise get directly involved.
- Call the police if you witness an assault.
- Tell an adult such as your school principal, a parent, your guidance counselor, or school resource officer, if you suspect the abuse but do not witness it.

10. Question: I'm not in a relationship now, but I want a healthy relationship when I find the right partner. Are there things I can do right now to increase my chances of success?
Answer: You have already taken the first step by asking this question. There are things you can do, not only to increase your chances of success, but also to help others do the same thing. Consider doing these things.

- Ask your school library to purchase books about the cycle of violence and how to avoid it or get out of it.
- Read up on healthy relationships and how to recognize and stop relationship violence.
- Talk to other teens and adults in your school and community about what you have learned.
- Start a peer education group to discuss issues related to teen dating violence.
- Encourage your school and community organizations to start a program to help abusers break their pattern of abusive behavior. Teaching people how to be in a relationship without violence can help break the cycle.
- Ask your school if some of your classes like health, social studies, contemporary living, or other classes can incorporate discussions of teen dating violence into the class curriculum.