

Stepping In

Introduction

Watching a friend go through an abusive relationship can be very scary, and it can seem difficult to figure out how to help them. The decision to leave can only be made by the person experiencing the abuse, but there are a lot of things that someone can do to help a friend stay safe.

If a friend is undergoing the serious and painful effects of dating abuse, they may have a very different point of view than you. They may have heard the abuse was their fault and feel responsible. If they do choose to leave, they may feel sad and lonely when it's over, even though the relationship was abusive. They may get back together with their ex many times, even though you want them to stay apart. It may be difficult for them to even bring up a conversation about the abuse they're experiencing.

As you are discussing this lesson, you should highlight that if someone listening is in an unhealthy or an abusive relationship, they must be careful. Remind them that they know their relationship best and if any of these tips would put them in danger, don't try them.

Overview

Students will learn how to cultivate healthy relationships and how to recognize and intervene in unhealthy relationships.

Educators will have an opportunity to raise awareness about dating violence and help prevent it by guiding students to understand the facts and how to intervene.

Scenario

You are having a sleepover with your friend and she confides in you that she is stressed out about her relationship. She tells you how her boyfriend likes it when she sends him sexually explicit pictures of herself; so she has done it a couple of times. She didn't see any harm in it but now he demands that she does it, even if she doesn't want to. She says that she tries to tell him she isn't comfortable doing it anymore, and he said since she did it before she has to do it again. She also says that he tells her since she is his girlfriend this is something that she is expected to do. Recently he has told her that he will even leak the ones that she has already sent if she doesn't continue to send them.

Questions

1. Is it okay that the person your friend is dating makes her send nudes/ sexually explicit pictures? Why or why not?
2. What do you think about this person threatening to leak her pictures?
3. Is it okay for a partner to demand that the other partner do something because they have done it before?
4. Is this behaviour healthy, unhealthy or abusive?
5. How would you support a friend in this situation

FOR STUDENTS:

How You Can Help a Friend

Don't be afraid to reach out to a friend who you think needs help. Tell them you're concerned for their safety and want to help.

Be supportive and listen patiently. Acknowledge their feelings and be respectful of their decisions.

Help your friend recognize that the abuse is not "normal" and is NOT their fault. Everyone deserves a healthy, nonviolent relationship.

Focus on your friend, not the abusive partner. Even if your friend stays with their partner, it's important they still feel comfortable talking to you about it.

Connect your friend to resources in their community that can give them information and guidance. Remember, loveisrespect.org can help.

Help them develop a safety plan if you believe that they are in an abusive relationship.

If they break up with the abusive partner, continue to be supportive after the relationship is over.

Don't contact their abuser or publicly post negative things about them online. It'll only worsen the situation for your friend.

Even when you feel like there's nothing you can do, don't forget that by being supportive and caring, you're already doing a lot.