



TIPS FOR TEENS

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE AN UNHEALTHY ONLINE RELATIONSHIP

Did you know that almost half of junior high students say they have been bullied online? And almost a fifth say they've experienced online dating violence? It's important to know that online relationships, just like real-life relationships, can be unhealthy. If you think you or someone you know is in an unhealthy, abusive online relationship, this tip sheet is for you.

Relationship abuse is when the person you are dating hurts, insults or scares you, tries to control you, makes you feel bad about yourself, pressures you to do things you don't want to do, or tries to keep you away from your friends and family. *Whether it occurs online or offline, these are all signs of an abusive, unhealthy relationship.*

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For more tip sheets, visit canadianwomen.org/AVON

THE HARM OF ONLINE ABUSE IS DIFFERENT

- It's easier for abusers to keep regular tabs on your whereabouts and online activity.
- The abuse occurs on the same platforms (e.g. social media, text) you use to interact with friends and family, making you feel like you can't escape it.
- Once it has started it can escalate very quickly, and you can't control it by yourself.
- It's permanent and may happen in public spaces.

SIGNS YOU MAY BE IN AN UNHEALTHY ONLINE RELATIONSHIP HAS SOMEONE:

- Made you share your passwords and/or other confidential information?
- Shared private videos or photos of you without your permission?
- Kept tabs, spied on, or stalked you online?
- Made you unfriend people?
- Pressured you to send a sexual photo of yourself or sent you unwanted sexual photos?
- Spread rumours or embarrassed you publically online?
- Sent messages or texts that made you uncomfortable, threatened or afraid?
- Threatened to do any of these things, or other things that made you feel uncomfortable?

NOT ALL ABUSIVE ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS ARE WITH PEOPLE YOU KNOW IN REAL LIFE

Some people look online for teens they can lure into unhealthy situations. Most of the time, people who target teens online don't pretend to be anyone they're not, and don't hide what they're looking for. They target mostly girls in their early teens, as well as boys who are or think they may be gay or bisexual, and shower them with attention, sympathy, affection and kindness, to gain their trust and persuade them that they love and understand them. These are tactics to lure them into an abusive relationship and other dangerous situations.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP ONLINE OR OFFLINE

If you're in an abusive relationship, get help. Take screenshots of the messages and posts that the person has sent you in case they later delete them. Talk to friends, parents, teachers, or other adults you trust. If your partner has threatened violence, either online or offline, contact the police.

If there's nobody you can or want to talk to in person, you can call an anonymous helpline like www.kidshelpphone.ca (1-800-668-6868).

IT'S NEVER YOUR FAULT

Talking to people about what is going on and how it makes you feel is not being disloyal. Don't blame yourself for things that you may have done, like sharing your password or letting them have sexual photos of you. Nothing you do ever gives someone the right to abuse you.

WHAT FRIENDS CAN DO

Friends can play an important role in helping to prevent or leave an unhealthy relationship:

- If your friend tells you that they think they are in an abusive relationship, listen to them and believe them.
- There is so much fear and shame that happens in an abusive relationship that it can be even more hurtful if someone has built up the courage to talk about it and they are shut down or not believed.
- If you suspect a friend is getting involved in an unhealthy relationship – as a victim, or an abuser, talk to them about it. If that doesn't help, talk to their parents, a teacher or another adult you trust.
- Don't be part of the abuse by forwarding or sharing any embarrassing or sexual material that's being spread around.
- Call people out when they say or do things that make it seem like relationship abuse is okay or like someone may have "deserved" to be a victim.

For additional resources on online safety, visit www.mediasmarts.ca.