

OUTING RELATIONSHIP ABUSE: A PRIMER FOR LBGT YOUNG ADULTS.

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Chapter 1

RELATIONSHIP ABUSE DEFINED

“I’ve never met anyone like Sean,” Cliff said dreamily. “He’s almost too good to be true.”

“Too good to be true,” Ryan parroted. “What does that mean?”

“He’s perfect. He’s good looking, polite, and romantic. Just the other day he told me he didn’t want to live without me. He said he’d kill himself if I ever left him.”

Sean’s comment is not romantic. It’s abusive, he is manipulating Cliff into not breaking up by threatening suicide. Some people have the need to control others by using different manipulative methods. The abuser uses psychological, physical, or sexual methods to control their victims.

Am I in an Abusive Relationship?

If you believe your partner is trying to control your behavior, life, or friendships that feeling could be an important clue to danger ahead. This list of warning signs may help you to decide if you are in an abusive relationship:

- Has he/she ever held you down, pushed, hit, kicked, or thrown something at you?
- Does he/she make excuses for their violent behavior?
- Does he/she demean you, then laugh and say they are only kidding or that you are too sensitive?
- Does he/she get extremely jealous or angry when you look at or talk to another girl/boy?
- Does he/she go through your personal belongings? Like your notes to and from other people, your cell phone, personal computer, backpacks, etc.

- Does he/she ask you to choose between being with him or her and your family or friends?
- Do you feel you can't express your thoughts or feelings around him/her without having to be afraid of the way they will react?
- Do you have to ask him/her for permission to spend time with your friends or take part in activities that does not include him/her?
- Does he/she have unpredictable mood swings?
- Has he/she forced you to have sex or touched you sexually against your will?
- Has he/she acted mean towards, or bragged about hurting animals?
- Does your relationship feel out of control?
- Do you feel like you are *walking on eggshells* and have to watch what you say or do when he/she is around you?
- Do you feel something is not quite right with your relationship?

Relationship Abuse Is A Serious Matter

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), one in 11 students report at least one incident of physical violence in a dating relationship each year. The statistic includes both boys and girls between the ninth and 12th grades. Eight percent of boys and 9 percent of girls have been to an emergency room because of dating violence.ⁱ

If you have determined you are in an abusive relationship you need to talk with a counselor before pursuing your relationship further. The counselors at the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline are supportive of people in LBGT relationships. The telephone number to the Helpline is 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 TTY for the Deaf. It is open 365 days a year 24 hours a day. You can also talk with an Advocate on the

computer at: www.loveisrespect.org. This service is available 7 days a week from 4 p.m. to Midnight Central Time.

In the chapters that follow you will learn about different forms of abuse; the difference between relationship myths and facts; what to expect when you see a counselor or call a hotline; how to help yourself if you are in an abusive relationship; facts about rape and sexual assault; and how to have healthy relationships.

Chapter 2

TYPES OF ABUSE

"I got it Mom." Zach yelled running to the phone. "Hello."

"The Gay/Straight Alliance is having a spring dance this Saturday. We should go," Dylan announced.

"I'm...I'm going with Todd," Zach said under his breath.

"What did you say," Dylan demanded.

"I'm going with Todd.

"You're going with someone else?" Dylan screamed.

"Yea, I didn't think you'd care."

"Of course I do. Since we were dating exclusively I didn't think I'd have to tell you not to go out with anyone but me," Dylan's voice turned harsh.

"I...I didn't think going with my best friend mattered that much," Zach said in a defensive tone.

"It sure as hell does. I want to be the only one you go out with. Call Todd and tell him you're going with me, or else I'll tell your parents you're gay."

"But..."

"I mean it," Dylan slammed the receiver down.

Dylan is intentionally trying to manipulate Zach into doing what he wants. He knows that Zach isn't ready to reveal his sexual orientation, and by threatening to *out* him Zach will give in since he is frightened of the negative consequences it could have.

Another method abusers in LBGT abusive relationships draw on is using a person's internalized homophobia or transphobia against them. "People who have

internalized homophobia or transphobia believe they are bad or aren't as good as other people because of the way LGBT individuals are stereotyped.. The abuser twists their feelings to his/her advantage. He/she may tell their partner that no one else would love them or treat them any better than they do since they are LGBT. A person who has internalized homophobic or transphobic beliefs may think what they say is true," said Carrol A. M. Smith, PhD, RN Dept. of Nursing University of Illinois at Chicago.

In addition to the threat of *outing and use of internalized homophobia or transphobia*, abusers use other tactics to manipulate their victims into doing what they want. The lists below include *some, but not all*, of the various methods abusers use to manipulate their victims.

Psychological Abuse

Usually, when people think of abuse they think of physical violence like hitting, biting, or shoving. Thus, people don't feel that psychological abuse is serious. It is just as serious as physical or sexual abuse. "Psychological wounds do not readily heal. The memories of name-calling and the insults are forever etched in someone's mind," said Katherine van Wormer, Ph.D., MSSW, Professor University Northern Iowa

These are some of the behaviors associated with psychological abuse:

- **Threats** The abuser makes or carries out threats to harm you, your family, or friends. He or she threatens to leave you or commit suicide.
- **Intimidation** The abuser makes you afraid by using looks, gestures and/or actions. He/she has access to guns or other weapons, and lets you know they know how to use them.

- **Emotional Abuse** The abuser puts you down in front of others. They make you feel bad about yourself and/or your sexuality. They send mixed signals, or play mind games.
- **Isolation** The abuser doesn't let you talk to or go out with friends or family. He/she makes you account for your whereabouts at all times. He/she expects you to spend all your time with him/her; they tell you no one will believe you if you tell authorities about the abuse because you are LBGT.
- **Minimizing, Denying, or Blaming** The abuser makes light of abuse by saying it did not happen. He or she does not take responsibility for the abuse by blaming it on other things: like past abuse by parent, stress, argument, alcohol or drugs. They minimize or justify the abuse by saying it's not violence because it's happening in a same-sex relationship.
- **Privilege** The abuser treats you like a servant. He or she makes all the decisions. They tell you what you should and should not wear or how to act.
- **Economic Abuse** The abuser makes you ask for money or demands money from you. He or she prevents you from getting or keeping a job. They use your credit card without permission. They do not work and ask you for money.ⁱⁱ

Physical and Sexual Abuse

If ignored, psychological abuse may escalate into physical and/or sexual violence.

Physical abuse often starts with a playful punch or excessive tickling and moves to more severe forms of violence. Some common behaviors associated with physical and sexual violence are:

- Restrains you while hitting or punching

- Strangles you
- Imprisons you
- Jerks, slaps, or bites you
- Throws things at you
- Keeps you from food, water, or sleep
- Touches you or forces sex when you don't want it

Please Note: *These lists only give some of the ways people are abusive. If you believe you are being abused, but don't see the behavior listed you should still talk with a counselor.*

What Should I Do If I'm In An Abusive Relationship?

If you think you might be in an abusive relationship, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline and talk with a counselor. People on the hotline are supportive of callers in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships, and can provide suitable resources. The number is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY For The Deaf 1-800-787-3224. They are open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. The number is available to people in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Chapter 3

FACTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

“What happened?” Megan stared at Alexis’ bruised arm.

“Kat hit me.” Tears ran down Alexis’ cheeks. “I never dreamed she’d do that.”

“It was probably just a lover’s quarrel. You should call and make up.” Megan smiled. “Don’t let this little fight stand in the way of your happiness. You two were made for each other.”

“You’re right. When she hit me we were arguing about how I thought she was flirting. Kat hates it when I get jealous. I bet, if I would have kept my mouth shut this wouldn’t have happened. I’ll give her a call right now and tell her I’m sorry,” Alexis took the cell phone out of her pocket.

Megan, like many people both inside and outside of the LBGT community believed the myth that members of a same-sex couple are not violent towards one another. She was not being helpful to Alexis when she told her that Kat hitting her was the result of a lover’s quarrel. As long as people deny LBGT relationship abuse exists, victims in abusive relationships are prevented from recognizing they are abused, and will not get the help they need.

In the rest of the chapter, some common myths about relationship abuse are listed and replaced with facts.

- **Myth: If You Are Not Physically Injured It Is Not Abuse.**

Fact: Psychological Abuse Is Just As Harmful As Physical Abuse.

Even though you can't see scars like you can with physical abuse it doesn't mean abuse does not exist. If neglected psychological abuse usually worsens, and often escalates to physical violence.

- **Myth: The Victim Provokes The Abuse.**

Fact: Studies Show That What A Victim Does Or Does Not Do Has No Effect On Reducing Abuse In A Relationship.

The abuser wants the victim to believe they provoked the abuse since they don't want to assume responsibility. The abuser tells the victim 'you made me do it' or 'I did it for your own good.' They want their victim to become confused and believe they caused it to happen. The abuser is the only person responsible for the abuse. No one is responsible for another person's actions.

- **Myth: A Victim In An Abusive Relationship Must Want To Be Abused Otherwise They Would Leave.**

Fact: People Don't Leave An Abusive Relationship For Many Reasons Some Of These Are:

1. The victim fears for his or her life. The most dangerous time for a victim of a violent relationship comes when they break up.

Batterers believe they "own" their partners, and have a right to do with them as they wish. If the victim does get away successfully, the abuser goes to great lengths to find their ex-partner so they can continue the abuse.

2. The abuser gives his/her victim false hope that they will reform. After an abusive incident, the abuser is often extremely sorry.

“He/she is overcome with feelings of regret and fear of losing their partner. He/she may give their victim flowers or other gifts by way of apology and promise never to do such a thing again. This is called the honeymoon phase. It lasts only as long as the abuser’s mood is good. Once he/she starts feeling down, insecure or, angry at his/her partner again, the cycle of violence continues,” said Dr. van Wormer. “People who are abusive will almost always continue that pattern.”

3. People who are LBGT and were in abusive relationships have much more difficulty finding sources of supportive service than heterosexual men and women. Local resources for relationship abuse in the LBGT community are often scarce. Many traditional domestic violence services lack the training, sensitivity, and expertise to adequately recognize and address abusive LBGT relationships.ⁱⁱⁱ
4. Sometimes a victim becomes confused, and feels they provoked the abuse. They believe things might change if they did something different.

- **Myth: Relationship Abuse Doesn’t Cause Serious Injuries.**

Fact: Relationship Abuse Often Results in Death, Physical or Serious Physical or Psychological Injuries.

Seventy percent of girls and fifty-two percent of boys in violent relationships report injuries. Eight percent of boys and nine percent of girls have been to an emergency room

for an injury received from a partner. Victims of violent relationships are not only at increased risk for injury, they are also more likely to engage in binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fights, and sexual activity. Relationship violence associated with unhealthy sexual behaviors can lead to sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV infections. Violent relationships during adolescence may disrupt normal development of self-esteem and body image. Adolescents in violent relationships often carry these unhealthy patterns of abuse into future relationships.^{iv}

- **Myth: Drugs and Alcohol Cause Violence.**

Fact: Drugs and Alcohol Don't Cause Violence.

The abusers lack of control causes the violence not the drugs or alcohol, they blame for their violent behavior. This is just another effort on the abusers part to avoid responsibility for their actions.

Myths about relationship violence create confusion, thus preventing people from getting the help they need. It is important to expose myths so abuse can be prevented.

Chapter 4

COUNSELING

“I feel like I have to walk on eggshells whenever I’m around Josh.” Beckum said to Caleb as they walked to the bus stop.

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“I have to be careful and watch what I say or do around Josh or he’ll go ballistic. Like, the other night, I was late for our date because I had gone shopping with my sister and the store was crowded. When I got to the restaurant I told him why I was late, he threw his drink in my face and called me a liar. I was so embarrassed.” Beckum sat on the bench. “When we first met, I thought it was romantic when he said he wanted me all to himself. Now, I know what he meant; he doesn’t want me around anyone else.”

“What are you going to do?” Caleb sat next to him.

“I don’t know. His anger scares me.”

“Maybe you should talk with Mr. Drake.”

“No way! I talked to him when I first thought I might be gay. He said it was just a phase. He suggested I do something manly, like go out for football.”

“Talk with a counselor on the phone.”

“What if they trace my call then tell my parents I’m gay?”

“When I called a hotline I asked the counselor if they traced calls. The counselor told me they don’t. She said tracing my call would be a breach of confidentiality. Think about calling them. I bet you’d feel better. I sure did after talking to them,” Caleb handed Beckum a card with the hotline’s number.

Talking With A Counselor

If you believe you are in an abusive relationship you should talk with a counselor who will be non-judgmental and accepts you for who you are. Most counselors at domestic violence agencies or hotlines are not judgmental toward people in same-sex relationships; however there are some who are disapproving and lack the sensitivity to counsel you in a unbiased manner. Some believe people who are LGBT are going through a phase and should change. The best thing for you to do when you go to a counselor is ask directly what their view of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender is. If they say they are; “sinful, abnormal, or just a phase,” ask for a referral to another counselor.

Calling a Hotline

Phone counselors, like most other counselors, are supportive and non-judgmental, and listen to what you have to say. They will try very hard to understand how you are feeling, and help you figure out what you want to do.

The counselor will not know who you are or where you are calling from unless you choose to tell them. You can be open and discuss anything on your mind without fear of the counselor tracing your call or telling your parents. They will listen, not judge, and ask questions so they can determine how to help you. They will not give advice, but will offer suggestions for you to consider when you are feeling stuck. The role of a counselor is to be a sounding board, and help you find your own answers.

Counselors on the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline are supportive people who are LGBT. Their number is 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 TTY For the Deaf. The hotline is open 365 days a year 24 hours a day. You can also talk with a counselor on

the computer at; www.loveisrespect.org. This chat is available 7 days a week from 4 p.m. to Midnight Central Time.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

“Where did you get those bruises?” Andrew asked as he looked at Tristan’s arm.

“Alonzo hit me when I told him I wanted to break up. I walked towards the door and, he grabbed my shoulder, jerked me around, and hit me. Then, he waved a knife in my face and told me if he couldn’t have me nobody could. After awhile he stopped screaming, and broke into tears. He told me how sorry he was for hurting me. He said he was stressed because of tests at school. He promised never to get violent again if I wouldn’t break up.”

“Do you think he means it?”

“I’m not sure. My gut tells me I should leave, but my heart tells me I need to give him a second chance. Maybe it was just the stress that made him act crazy,” Tristan mused.

“Besides, for the last few days he’s paid more attention to me than he ever did before.”

Tristan needs to trust his instincts, they are telling him something important. Alonzo is giving him false hope. His promise to change is a common part of abusive relationships, it follows violent incidents and is called the *honeymoon phase*. “During the *honeymoon phase* the abuser is overcome with feelings of regret and fear of losing his or her partner. He or she may give their partner flowers or other gifts by way of apology and promise never to be violent again. The *honeymoon phase* lasts only as long as the abuser’s mood is good. Once he/she starts feeling down, insecure or, angry they are violent toward their partner again,” said Dr. van Wormer.

Relationship violence is cyclic. During the beginning of a relationship faults and certain behaviors are overlooked, as time goes on, however, conflicts occurs. If the conflicts aren’t handled through positive communication tension builds. The tension

results in violence. This is called the cycle of violence, and repeats itself throughout the relationship. *The cycle of violence* has three parts; *Tension Building Phase, Explosive Phase, and Honeymoon Phase.*

During *The Tension Building Phase*, the abuser becomes more and more stressed. It is usually marked by minor incidents like verbal abuse, shoving, pushing, or throwing things.

The Explosive Phase occurs when the abuser's stress level builds to the point where he/she explodes in an angry fit of rage displayed by emotional, physical or sexual violence. *The Honeymoon Phase follows The Explosive Phase*, where the abuser expresses regret and promises never to be violent again.

Why Should I Care About The Cycle of Violence?

The cycle of violence illustrates the various phases in *most, but not all*, abusive relationships. It's helpful to familiarize yourself with the feelings and behaviors associated with the *cycle of violence* so you can end the cycle if it should be happening in your relationship.

These are the emotions and behaviors that are commonly reported during *The Tension Building Phase*; ^v

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSED

Angry

Afraid

Unfairly Treated

Embarrassed

Hopeless

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSED

Nurturing

Walking on Eggshells

Compliant

Accepting

Works to Diffuse Partner's Anger

Depressed

May Use Drugs/Alcohol

Tense

Confused

Humiliated

Disgusted

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSER

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSER

Tense

Verbally Abusive

Frustrated

Drug/Alcohol Use

Disgusted

Fits of Anger

Angry

Possessive

Jealous

Silent

Demanding

Irrational

Controlling

May Not Let Partner go to School/Work

These are the emotions and behaviors reported during *The Explosive Phase*;^{vi}

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSED

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSED

Frightened

Attempt to Protect Self

Trapped

Tries to Get Away or Seek Help

Scared

Feigns Unconsciousness

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSER

Out of Control

Angry

Jealous

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSER

Deliberate Desire to Harm or Kill Partner

Violent

Irrational

These emotions and behaviors reported in *The Honeymoon Phase*;^{vii}

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSED

Relieved

Anger over Incident

Hopeful

Happy

Guilty

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSED

Offers Excuses for Abuser

Tries to Settle/Prevent Further Incidents

Hopes and Believes Change Will Last

FEELINGS OF THE ABUSER

Guilty

Apologetic

Remorseful

Unable to Understand Why Person

Who Was Abused Is Still Angry

BEHAVIOR OF THE ABUSER

Makes Promises to Change

Blames Others/Abused for Abuse

Acts Overly Sweet or Caring

If you believe you are in an abusive relationship, but don't identify with any of the emotions listed it does not mean you aren't being abused. Your instincts are the best indicator that something may be wrong. Talk about your relationship with a counselor at the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline before pursuing it further. The Counselor's are supportive of callers in LBGT relationships, and can provide supportive resources if they are necessary. The Helpline number is 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 TTY For the Deaf. The Helpline is open 365 days a year 24 hours a day. You can also chat with an Advocate on the computer at; www.loveisrespect.org. This service is available 7 days a week from 4 p.m. to Midnight Central Time.

Chapter 6

SAFETY PLANS

“I get scared when I’m with my girlfriend, Samantha. One minute she is happy, and the next she’ll fly into a rage. She’s hit me more than once,” Adrianna said in the receiver. “I don’t know what to do.”

“It sounds like you’re torn.” The counselor said.

“I am,” Adrianna, sighed. “I know I should break up, but I want Samantha in my life. She says she hits me because I drive her to it. Maybe if I get counseling I’ll learn what to do to stop her from hitting me and everything will be OK.”

Adrianna will probably stay in her relationship. She has bought into Samantha’s accusations that the abuse is all her fault. People in abusive relationships stay because of many reasons: fear of being alone; love and concern for their partner’s well being; shame; belief that their partner might change; not having information about available resources; fear of homophobic or transphobic responses by service providers; belief that abuse is their fault; depression.

How to Protect Yourself If You Are Not Ready To Leave An Abusive Relationship

- Try not to be alone with him/her, go only to public places.
- Let others know where you will be and what your plans are.
- Try not to be dependent on your boyfriend or girlfriend for a ride. Always carry a few dollars with you in case you need to call a taxi or take a bus.
- Always keep a cell phone with you. Charge your phone daily.

- Since they can get into your call history or get text messages erase everything routinely.
- If you feel you are in danger, do not be afraid to call the police. Listen to your fears; they are telling you something important.^{viii}

Steps You Need To Take When Leaving An Abusive Relationship

- If you believe the situation might become dangerous, don't break up in person. Call, email, or text message your partner.
- If you do break up in person, do it in a public place and don't leave with your partner.
- Have a friend with you, or tell a friend or parent what you are going to do and where you will be.
- Call a friend or counselor afterward to talk about what happened.
- If your partner gave you a cell phone, get rid of it, they may be able to track your movements with the built-in GPS.
- Vary your routine before and after school.^{ix}

Steps To Take If Your Ex-Partner Threatens You

- Consider telling your parents or other family members what is happening. They can help you screen calls and visitors.
- Try not to be alone at home. Have a friend or school official walk you to your car.
- Make sure you always lock doors and windows when you are at home.
- Always be aware of your surroundings. Look around before leaving your house or getting into or out of your car. Have your keys ready as you approach your door. Park in a well-lit area near building entrances.

- Talk with your local domestic violence agency about how you or your parents can get an order of protection.
- Write down all the things that he or she is doing to threaten or harass you. Be sure to record the date, time, and communication in all phone calls, emails, and text messages.^x

Steps To take If Your Ex-Partner Is Harassing You At School

- Try not be alone. Let your friends know what's happening. Have them walk to classes and eat lunch with you.
- Tell teachers, counselors, coaches, or campus police.
- Change your routine. Don't always come to school the same way or arrive at the same time.
- Talk to school staff about rearranging your class schedule and changing your locker location. Also, remember to change your lock if necessary.
- Plan things you can do after school other than going home to an empty house.^{xi}

Steps To Take If Your Ex-Partner Is Using The Internet To Keep Track Of You

- Change your email address and screen name. Only give it to people you trust to keep your safety a priority.
- Be careful with the information that you give out on internet sites, such as MySpace and Friendster. Your abuser can easily get information about you from these sites and use it to harass you. Putting only non-identifying information on web pages is always the best safety precaution.
- Be mindful of who can get access to your cell phone. Anyone can go into your call history and see who you talk to or read your text messages.^{xii}

It's very important to have a safety plan in place when dealing with an abusive partner. If you have any questions about how to make a safety plan call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline. The counselor's are supportive of callers in LBGT relationships, and are able to provide supportive resources if they are necessary. The Helpline number is 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 TTY For the Deaf. The Helpline is open 365 days a year 24 hours a day. You can also chat with an Advocate on the computer at; www.loveisrespect.org. This service is available 7 days a week from 4 p.m. to Midnight Central Time.

Chapter 7

RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

“What’s the matter?” Anita said when she saw the pained look on Angel’s face.

“I can’t believe what Jessica did,” Angel, sobbed sitting next to Anita.

“What?” Anita pressed.

“When I went over to her house this afternoon we started kissing and, she told me she wanted to make love. When I told Jessica, I wasn’t in the mood she got mad. She said if I didn’t let her she’d tell my parents I was transgender. I told her I was not going to listen to her threats and got up. As I was walking towards the door, she came after me; ripped my clothes off.; and started touching me all over. I told her to stop, but she just went right ahead.” Angel sobbed.

Definitions of Rape and Sexual Assault

When Jessica forced Angel to make love against her will she was committing rape. Anytime a person forces someone to do something sexually *against his or her will* it’s considered sexual assault or rape. It is also considered rape if a person is intoxicated or unconscious and unable to give consent. Examples of Rape and Sexual Assault are;

- Being forced to have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with another person.
- Being forced to put objects (including penis and fingers) in the anus, mouth or, vagina.
- Being forced by physical violence or coercion, to act or model for pornographic purposes.
- Having parts of your body touched in a sexual way.
- Being forced to touch parts of your own or another person’s body.

- Being forced to watch someone masturbate.

Myths About Rape and Sexual Assault

- **Rape or sexual assault does not happen between members of the same-sex.**

Not true.

Rape or sexual assault happens between members of the same-sex.

- **Sexual assault and rape are crimes of passion.**

Not true.

Rape and sexual assault does not have anything to do with sexual desire. Sexual assault or rape are acts of hostility to control the victim.

- **Only strangers commit rape.**

Not true.

Someone the victim knows commits the vast majority of rape and sexual assaults.

This can be a dating partner or someone you are in a long-term relationship with.

- **The victim “asked for it” through his or her behavior, the way they dressed or their sexual orientation.**

Not True

Rape or sexual assault is *never* the victim’s fault. No one “asks for it” or deserves to be assaulted, no matter the circumstances.

How Do I know If I Was Raped or Sexually Assaulted?

Usually, when a person is sexually assaulted or raped, they have difficulty thinking clearly. The following questions may help you decide if you were raped or sexually assaulted.

- Was I forced or pressured into having sex against my will?

- Was I threatened unless I performed sexual acts?
- Was I forced to have sex after drinking or taking drugs?
- Did he or she continue to have sex after I said ‘no?’

If you believe you were raped or sexually assaulted its important that you talk with a counselor as soon as possible. Counselors at the National Sexual Assault Hotline are supportive of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered, and can provide resources if needed. The phone is 1-800-656-HOPE (4673), it is answered 24/7. When you call the number a computer notes the area code and first three digits of your phone number. The call is transferred to the nearest RAINN member center. Your phone number is not retained, so the call is anonymous and confidential unless you choose to share personally identifying information. Or, you can reach a counselor by contacting RAINN’s 24/7 online hotline by going to; <http://apps.rainn.org/ohl-bridge/>

Chapter 8

DEVELOPING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

“Aisha asked me out Friday night,” Kimani said breathlessly. “I want to go, but there’s a part of me that’s scared to get into another relationship.”

“How come?” Jasmine asked. “You’ve been hoping she’d ask you out since last semester.”

“I had the same feelings about my ex-girlfriend Laqueta,” Kimani mused. “But, when I started going with her she changed. She was controlling, and would not let me out of her sight. It was like being in prison I worry that Aisha will be the same way.”

“I know how you feel. I was scared to get in another relationship after the rotten one I had with Latoya, but I’m glad I took a chance and started going out with Olivia. It’s so different, she respects me,” Jasmine said dreamily. “My counselor told me before I get in another relationship I should think about the danger signs of relationship abuse. Then if I thought my partner was being abusive, I could get out before it was too late. When I started dating Olivia I took it slow, that way I could compare the way she treated me with how Latoya did.”

Jasmine had good advice for Kimani about how to avoid an unhealthy or abusive relationship. In addition to becoming aware of the danger signs of relationship abuse, you need to make your boundaries.” Boundaries define what you will and won’t tolerate from others in their interactions with you. Plus, they define how you’ll interact with and treat others,” said Kimberly K. McClanahan, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Dept. of Pediatrics, University of Kentucky. “Without good emotional and physical boundaries, a person

allows others to get away with anything they want, including emotional and physical abuse.”

Do My Boundaries Need Work?

1. Do I become involved with people who end up taking advantage of me?
2. Is it hard to say *NO*?
3. Do I stay in relationships or situations long after I know I should get out?
4. Do I feel overwhelmed and drained by the relationships or situations I'm in?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you need to consider setting boundaries.

How Do I Set Boundaries?

The key to establishing boundaries is self-awareness. Nancy Diacon, MA, RN.

Director of the Menninger Adolescent Program has this advice:

1. Ask yourself these questions: “Who am I, and what are my values when it comes to—fill in the blank with your own examples of social or peer pressure?”
2. Identify a peer who you believe has healthy boundaries – share your admiration for their ability to hold true to what is important to them, and ask how they manage situations that tend to be most challenging for you.

Your boundaries may change as things change in your life. For example: You want to spend more time with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Therefore, you decide not to hang out with your friends as much. Redefining your boundaries may mean exchanging one belief for the other.

Whenever boundaries are created, your friends may not be supportive. Consider the person who decided to spend more time with their boyfriend/girlfriend and less with their

friends. Some of their friends may get upset. Setting boundaries has a price, which may mean losing friends along the way. However, relationships that are worth having will survive and grow stronger.

In addition to enforcing your boundaries, you need to recognize and respect the boundaries of others. In other words, everyone has the right to express their needs and preferences, but nobody has the right to hurt others in the process. For example, it's okay for you to tell your friend they need to respect your trust when they violate it, but it's not okay to be verbally abusive to them.

A Healthy Relationship Defined

Setting personal boundaries is very important when it comes to relationships. Unhealthy or violent relationships are built on inequality when one of the partners uses power and control to manipulate the other. Healthy or non-violent relationships are built on equality. A healthy relationship has these elements:

- **Respect:** Listen to your partner, without passing judgment about what they are saying. Be emotionally supportive and understanding toward him or her. Value their boundaries without putting them down or trying to change them.
- **Negotiation and Fairness:** Seek mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict, be willing to compromise.
- **Non-Threatening Behavior:** Talk or act in such a way that your partner feels safe and comfortable in expressing himself or herself.
- **Trust and Support:** Support your partner's goals in life. Respect his or her right to have their feelings, friends, activities, and opinions.

- **Honesty and Accountability:** Communicate openly and truthfully with your partner. Be responsible for your behavior; whenever you are wrong admit it.
- **Self-Confidence and Personal Growth:** Respect your partner's individuality, encourage their individual growth and freedom. Support their security in their self worth.
- **Shared Power:** Make decisions with your partner
- **Communication:** Be willing to have open and spontaneous dialogue with your partner. Listen to what they are saying; don't assume you know what they mean if you don't understand ask them to clarify. Make sure they are finished talking before you begin talking. Be willing to compromise in a conflict situation.^{xiii}

Conflict Resolution: How To Fight Fairly

Couples often look upon conflict as a threat, and something to be avoided. Whenever there is a conflict it needs to be addressed, if it isn't it endangers the health of the relationship. Every relationship has conflicts, the key to successful conflict resolution is to fight fair. There are some examples of fair fighting:

- **Remain Calm:** By remaining calm it is more likely that the other person will consider your viewpoint.
- **Express Your Feelings in Words, Not Actions:** Telling someone directly and honestly how you feel can be a powerful form of communication. If you start to feel so angry that you think you may lose control, take a 'time out' and do something to calm yourself; a walk, play with the dog or cat, do the dishes-whatever works for you.

- **Be Specific About What Is Bothering You:** Vague complaints are hard to work on. Other people are not mind readers no matter how close you are.
- **Deal With Only One Issue At a Time:** Don't introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. This avoids the 'kitchen sink' effect where a person throws in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.
- **No "Hitting Below the Belt:"** Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.
- **Avoid Accusations:** Accusations will cause others to defend themselves. Instead, talk about how your partner's actions made you feel.
- **Don't Generalize:** Avoid words like 'never' or 'always.' Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.
- **Avoid "Make Believe:"** Exaggerating or inventing a complaint, or your feelings about it, will prevent real issues from surfacing. Stick with the facts and your honest feelings.
- **Don't Stockpile:** Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive. Try to deal with problems as they arise.
- **Avoid Clamming Up:** When you become silent and stop responding to your partner, frustration and anger can result. Positive results only happen when there is two-way communication.
- **Establish Common Ground Rules:** You may want to ask your partner to read and discuss these tips with you. When a couple accept positive ground rules for managing a conflict, resolution becomes more likely.^{xiv}

After reading this book, you may have questions since you have been given a lot of information. To help focus ask yourself; do I feel I'm in a abusive relationship; how can I keep myself safe until I'm ready to leave; what do I need to do to be safe when I'm ready to leave; am I willing to devote the effort it takes to create a healthy relationship?

ⁱ *The Hartford Courant, Conn., lifestyle column: Program Attempts To Stop Dating Violence Before It Starts* By: Campbell, Susan, Hartford Courant, The (CT), Aug 06, 2006

ⁱⁱ National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, Lesbian and Gay Power and Control Wheel, Retrieved June 27, 2008 from

<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Lesbian-GayPCwheelINOSHADING.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ AARDVARC.org, Collection of Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Information, Retrieved December 5, 2008 from <http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/gay.shtml>

^{iv} National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Dating Abuse Statistics, Retrieved March 14, 2008 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/DatingViolence.htm>

^v Teen Relationships 411, "What is Abuse: The Cycle of Violence," Retrieved 8-14-08 from http://www.teenrelationships411.org/abuse_cycle.html

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} National Domestic Violence Hotline

^{ix} Ibid

^x Ibid

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, *Equality Wheel for Teens*, Retrieved November 24, 2008 from;

<http://64.233.169.132/search?q=cache:xT-tAmGFxEcJ:www.vahealth.org/civp/projectradarva/Tools%2520and%2520Forms/Wheels/TeenEqualityWheel.pdf+equality+wheel+for+teens&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us>

^{xiv} Ragle, John Ph.D., *Fighting Fair to Resolve Conflict*, Retrieved November 24, 2008 from; <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/booklets/fighting/fighting.html>