

Why Does My Friend Stay In Their Abusive Relationship?

Dating Violence is a pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner.

Dating Relationship means a romantic or intimate social relationship between two individuals.

Break the Cycle engages, educates and empowers youth to build lives and communities free from domestic and dating violence.

People who have never been in an abusive relationship often wonder why someone doesn't just leave the person who is abusing them. However, actually leaving can sometimes be more complicated than it seems.

What do I need to know?

There are many reasons why a person in an abusive situation will remain in the relationship. If you have a friend dealing with an abusive partner, you can better support them by understanding the various obstacles they may be dealing with when trying to leave or seek help.

Conflicting emotions:

- **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 their relationship as abusive.
 - **Fear:** They may be afraid of what will happen if they decide to leave the relationship. If your friend has been threatened in the past by their partner, or by their family and friends, they won't feel safe leaving.
 - **Fear of Being "Outed":** If your friend is involved in a same-sex relationship and has not yet come out to their friends and family, their partner may threaten to reveal this secret. This may feel especially scary for teens who are just beginning to explore their sexuality.
 - **Embarrassment:** It's hard to admit that you've been abused. Your friend may feel that they've done something wrong by becoming involved with an abusive partner. They may worry that their friends and family will
- **Low Self-Esteem:** If your partner constantly puts you down and blames you for things, it can be easy to believe those things are true and that the abuse is your fault.
 - **Love:** Your friend may still be hoping that the abuser will change (if a person you love tells you they'll change, you'll want that to be true). They often 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 about the abuse for fear that no one would believe them or that everyone would 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 and/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 child with both parents together, even if that means enduring the abuse. Also, the abusive partner may threaten to take or harm the child if your

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Distrust of Adults or Authority:

- **“Puppy-love” Phenomena:** Adults often don’t believe that teens experience true 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 would take them seriously.
- **Distrust of Police:** Many teens do not feel that the police can or will help them, so they don’t report the abuse.
- **Language Barriers/ Immigration Status:** Someone may fear that reporting the abuse will affect the processing of their immigration status. Also, if their first language isn’t English, it can be difficult to express the depth of the abuse to others.

Reliance on 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.
- **Disability:** If your friend is physically dependent on their abusive partner, they can feel that their well-being is connected to the relationship. This makes it seemingly impossible to leave.

What can I do?

If you have a friend or family member who is in an abusive relationship, the most important thing you can do is be supportive and listen to them. Understand that leaving an abusive relationship is never easy, and your friend may not yet be ready or able to leave. Let them know that there are various options and resources available to help them, even if the obstacles make it seem like staying in the abusive relationship is their only option.

For more information, you can visit loveisrespect.org.