

Digital Dating Abuse

Top Ten Tips for Teens

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“Digital dating abuse” involves using technology to repetitively harass a romantic partner with the intent to control, coerce, intimidate, annoy or threaten them. Given that youth in relationships today are constantly in touch with each other via texting, social media, and video chat, more opportunities for digital dating abuse can arise. Below are ten tips to help keep teens safe online when it comes to romantic relationships.

1. CONSIDER THE CONTEXT OF YOUR TEXTS. Teens sometimes report feeling more confident communicating via text instead of face-to-face, especially when it comes to personal or sensitive topics – and often in romantic situations. However, always remember that your love interest may misinterpret the content of your text or make assumptions about your meaning because they can’t see your facial expression or body language, or pick up on the tone or inflection in your voice. If it’s a difficult conversation, it is always best to have it in person. Don’t risk misunderstandings. And ask for clarification if your love interest texts you something that causes any concern or question.

2. BE MINDFUL THAT YOUR LOCATION MAY BE SHARED THROUGH POSTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, OR EVEN VIA YOUR FAVORITE TEXTING/MESSAGING APP. Some teens report using social media as a way to track or “stalk” one another. You can turn off location sharing in each social media app you use, and automatically strip every photo or video of any “metadata” by adjusting your Messaging settings. If you feel that your significant other is demanding to know your whereabouts, doesn’t allow you to go certain places, or implies that you “owe” them information about what you are doing or why, those are signs of an unhealthy, abusive relationship. In healthy relationships, people feel free and comfortable to live their life without constantly reporting back to their partner.

3. DO NOT BE PRESSURED TO SHARE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PASSWORDS. Studies show that when teens who have shared social media passwords break up, there is a likelihood for privacy invasions, impersonation, posting inappropriate comments, and even getting locked out and having to start over with a new account. If you have given your ex-boyfriend or girlfriend your password (intentionally or unintentionally), change it immediately. This includes the lock code on your phone.



4. BEWARE OF GUILT-TRIPPING AND PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVENESS. If your partner is making you feel guilty about not handing over your passcode, not giving them sexual photos or any other related matter, then they lack respect for your privacy and individuality. If they say or do things that are hurtful or backhanded just to get you to respond in a certain way, recognize that they are trying to control you. Both of these are signs of an abusive relationship. In a healthy relationship, your partner will never try to shame or pressure you into doing something you are not completely comfortable with.

5. DECIDE YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH BLOCKING, MUTING, UNFRIENDING, AND UNFOLLOWING EX-BOYFRIENDS OR EX-GIRLFRIENDS. Do you really want to keep giving them access to all of your posts and content? Will knowing that they see what you share affect your actions? Do you always want to be thinking about how they might interpret the fact that you double-tapped on a new guy’s picture, or accepted a new girl’s follow request? That seems like a lot of unnecessary stress and pressure, and a lot less freedom than you should have. If a relationship ends, or if things go sideways with someone and you stop “talking,” you may be better off cutting them off to avoid further drama.

6. DETERMINE HOW OFTEN TO STAY IN TOUCH VIA TEXT OR OVER THE PHONE. In a healthy relationship, your partner will be considerate of your feelings and the contact level will be mutual, whereas in an unhealthy relationship, your partner may be more demanding and neglect your feelings or comfort level in this area. In a healthy relationship, both people care equally about the other's comfort level and emotions. There should be mutual agreement about how often you communicate. Be wary of repetitive insistent messages and/or calls demanding a response. Reacting or responding to this type of behavior in an obligatory manner may create an environment that invites more of it.



7. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BOUNDARIES. Just because you might be in a relationship with someone, it doesn't give them the right to go through your phone or know what you are doing every minute of the day. Going through your partner's phone or social media without their permission is unhealthy, controlling, and abusive behavior. In a healthy relationship, you and your partner will mutually trust one another and respect personal boundaries. If your partner goes beyond the boundaries you feel comfortable with, you must communicate that to them and see if they are willing to reestablish your trust.

8. IF SOMEONE ASKS YOU FOR NUDES OR SEXUAL PHOTOS OR VIDEOS OF YOURSELF, DON'T FEEL OBLIGATED TO SHARE THEM. Even if you trust your partner or know that they will delete the pictures immediately, we know of numerous cases where the content gets out beyond its intended audience. Sharing content like this also can create an unhealthy power imbalance in your relationship. If your love interest has images of you, they may share the images with their friends just to gain popularity or "cool points." Once someone has explicit photos or videos of you, they can use them as leverage or blackmail to control you and get you to do things you would never do. Also remember that pictures and videos you post – but do not specifically share – can still be saved and sent around without your knowledge.

9. BE MINDFUL TOWARDS YOUR PARTNER WHEN YOU ARE TOGETHER. Being in a relationship means being considerate about your significant other's feelings. Many couples complain that their partner spends too much time on their phones, laptop, or gaming console while they spend time together. Even when couples are on dates, much of that time may be spent scrolling through social media feeds, texting others, etc. Some teens in relationships have reported feeling jealous or not important enough to their love interest because of the latter's inability to stay off their devices when together.



10. BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVERSHARE. Since a major method of communication in teen dating relationships is through messaging and social media, it becomes easy to engage in candid self-disclosure and personal sharing of really private thoughts. Of course, this is fine in a long-term relationship where trust has been established over many months, but it can lead to issues if done prematurely. For example, if you are not positive that you can fully trust them, something incredibly intimate and private that you share with them may be shared with others. You may also get caught up in unhealthy emotions without balance or long-term perspective that time provides, which often leads to unhealthy decisions with your partner. Take your time to really get to know the other person, and don't rush intimacy just because it feels good to unload yourself and share everything about yourself as soon as possible. It's just not wise.