

Friends CAN TELL



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FRIENDS CAN TELL - FACILITATOR NOTES

Getting Started

These are notes to help you run peer support spaces: the peer Support Session plans which have content, questions and activities to generate discussions, which helps you plan for practical elements of running the sessions like writing a group contract and making sure people feel listened to. These are to help you host spaces to talk about toxic relationships and see how young people can help a friend if they think something isn't right in their relationship.

Group Agreement

A group agreement is a list of things everyone in the group agrees to do to make the sessions run well. Some things that are commonly on a group agreement are:

1. Be open and accepting of other people's opinions.
2. Listen to people rather than talking over others.
3. Leave space for everyone to speak - try to notice if you are talking a lot!
4. Keep anything said in the sessions private, unless someone says they or someone else is in danger. Then the support contact for the group will be told to keep everyone safe.
5. Keep personal stories that others might find upsetting for different space.

What others might you want to add? How will you ask other people to agree to it? How will you make sure everyone can make changes so everyone has a say in what makes the space comfortable?

Winning the class over

The session works best when students feel open and comfortable talking about their thoughts and experiences. You could start the session with a 'Yes Set': three things that students can say 'yes' to before the session has started. This way they get used to responding in a positive way. For example: "is everyone having a good day?" "We're here today to talk about online gaming. Are you ready?" "Are you looking forward to taking part in some fun activities?"

There may be students who deliberately say 'no' to try to disrupt the class – but don't worry, move on and remember that the teacher will be there to help if any students misbehave.

Use humour and think about ways to make the topic lighthearted.

Where possible seat the class in a circle to encourage open discussion. It's great for students to feel like they're not in a normal school lesson as they're more likely to take part and have fun.

Planning for Challenges

What might be difficult about running this group?

Some things we thought of are below. Think about how you might approach them. Add more challenges you can think of below and plan for them too.

No one speaking

Three things I can do if this happens are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

People speaking over each other

Three things I can do if this happens are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Someone getting upset

Two things I can do if this happens are...

- 1.
- 2.

Someone saying they're in danger

If this happens, try and stay calm.

If they are in danger of getting hurt right that second, you should call the police on 999.

If there is time to talk to them, you should tell the person responsible for pastoral care. It can help to make it clear that this isn't because you're trying to get people into their business, but because you care about them and think their safety is important and want to make sure they get all the support they need. If it's possible, you should speak to pastoral care together so the person in danger can explain the situation in their own words and stay informed about what is happening.

Peer Supporters Practitioner Training

Watch advice to help you run the peer supporter sessions, either as a young person or a youth worker supporting a young person

<https://yourbestfriend.org.uk/peersupporters>

Signposting

Sometimes someone might not be in danger of harm but might need help beyond what the group can offer. This might be if they have some feelings they're finding distressing or if they need practical help. Here are some places you can signpost them to so they can get the help they need.

You might feel like you want to be the one to help them out of kindness and care. Try to resist that as these organisations are experts and will be really good at helping them quickly and to a high standard!

The Proud Trust

[0161 660 3347](tel:01616603347)

theproudtrust.org

Support for LGBTIQ+ young people through youth groups, peer support, mentoring schemes and a webchat.

The Mix

[0808 808 4994](tel:08088084994)

[85258](tel:85258) (crisis messenger service, text THEMIX)

themix.org.uk

Support and advice for people under 25, offering these services:

- Helpline
- Crisis messenger textline
- Discussion board
- Webchat
- Short-term counselling by phone and online

Muslim Youth Helpline

Free and confidential faith and culturally sensitive support services for young people

0808 808 2008

Childline

Call, chat or email about any problem big or small

0800 1111

Kooth

kooth.com

Safe, anonymous online community and counselling for young people. Check on the website if it's available in your area.

Tellmi - app

tellmi.help

A safe, anonymous app where you can talk to other young people about how you're feeling or what you're experiencing.

Tellmi is moderated to keep you safe and also has counsellors if you need more support.

Young Minds

85258 (crisis messenger service, text YM)

youngminds.org.uk

Mental health support for young people, parents and carers. Includes a crisis text messenger service, plus information about mental health problems and medication.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

The freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline

[0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)

Initial Assessment Metric

Please complete the following questionnaire before beginning the programme. These are confidential and will only be accessed by the course tutor as evidence of the course effectiveness.

Name (initial and last name only): _____

<i>Please give your answers based on your feelings/thoughts over the last 2 weeks</i>	<i>Scale 1 - 5 (1 is completely and 5 is not at all)</i>				
<i>I feel tense, anxious or nervous when I go online</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I have felt tense, anxious or nervous about my friend</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>My friend's boyfriend is always with her</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I had the confidence to disagree with my friends</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I feel frustrated as my friend is getting influenced but she won't listen to me</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>My friend is unaware of the dangers in her life</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I need to keep a close watch on my friend</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I want to move away from the toxic influence, but I can't</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I am worried if I say anything, it will damage my friendship</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation Assessment Metric

Please complete the following questionnaire at the end of the programme. These are confidential and will only be accessed by the course tutor as evidence of the course effectiveness.

Name (initial and last name only): _____

<i>Please give your answers based on your feelings/thoughts over the last 2 weeks</i>	<i>Scale 1 - 5 (1 is completely and 5 is not at all)</i>				
<i>I feel tense, anxious or nervous when I go online</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I have felt tense, anxious or nervous about my friend</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>My friend's boyfriend is always with her</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I had the confidence to disagree with my friends</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I feel frustrated as my friend is getting influenced but she won't listen to me</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>My friend is unaware of the dangers in her life</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I need to keep a close watch on my friend</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I want to move away from the toxic influence, but I can't</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I am worried if I say anything, it will damage my friendship</i>	1	2	3	4	5

In order to understand the metrics, please use this space to delve slightly more into the statements:

I feel tense, anxious or nervous when I go online:

I have felt tense, anxious or nervous about my friend:

My friend's boyfriend is always with her:

I had the confidence to disagree with my friends:

I feel frustrated as my friend is getting influenced but she won't listen to me:

My friend is unaware of the dangers in her life:

I need to keep a close watch on my friend:

I am worried if I say anything, it will damage my friendship:

I want to move away from the toxic influence, but I can't:

SCHEME OF WORK

Venue

Start Date

Learning Outcomes (LO) By the end of the course, young people will be able to:

1 Understanding the ease of manipulation online

2 Recognising healthy/unhealthy relationships

3 Identifying red flags in a relationship

4 Building confidence to speak out

5 Developing understanding friendships

6 Learning what support is available

Teaching Methods Key:

Dis. – Discussion

Proj. – Project Work

Trip – Field Trip

Q&A – Question & Answer

Res. – Research

Role – Role Play

Session Number	Content/Topic	LO Ref No. (As Above)	Teaching And Learning Methods Including Suggested Activities	Resources	Evaluation & Assessment of Learning
	Immediate online pressures				
	Commonness of control				
	Blinded by the butterflies				
	Opening their eyes				
	Time to step in				
	Seeking support			Self-care guide	

Theme 1 - Immediate online pressures

Young people are dealing with demands and stresses online when they engage with online spaces. Whilst managing these multiple connections and beginning relationships online, they are exposed to immediate online pressures, including unwanted personal/sexual comments, being asked for nudes, receiving unwanted sexual images/nudes, and unwanted people messaging them. There is a need for young people to be able to access resources to keep themselves and their friends safe, and deal with these pressures.

70% Have received unwanted sexual images/nudes when chatting and linking with other young people online (27% had 'very often' or 'often')

This was even more frequent in 20-24 year olds, but a concerning amount of 13-15 year olds had experienced these pressures.

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Ghosting away from trouble

Several also noted, in former years, they worried about not being nice to someone but now realise that their safety and security is more important. Many described 'ghosting' or 'blocking' any communication or contacts they find troubling.

"But I've also had a guy I did tell I wanted to end things continue to harass me on several social media platforms, so I had to ghost and eventually block!" - Young person, 20-24 years

The danger at any age

Young people aged 20-24 confirmed the dangers to those who are younger.

"I was just going to say I've experienced quite a lot of people being quite forward when they like slide into your DMs like, and it's happened quite a lot as well like with my partner's ten-year-old sister and it's quite scary when things like that happen." - Young person, 20-24 years

Some young people also spoke of networks in school where nude photos are coerced from young people and shared.

The easiness of manipulation online

Young people are also open to being emotionally manipulated by people they have only met online – especially younger age groups. This can also generate a possible false intimacy more rapidly.

Those in the 13-16 year old group mentioned this issue more frequently than in the other age groups.

"It's very much easier for people to hide their real identities online or not tell the full truth. I think people...like they know each other less than in the past and they start talking to each other and being, getting closer to each other because of the internet." - Young person, 13-16 years

17% of young people had never had unwanted personal/sexual comments when chatting/linking online.

16% had never had unwanted people messaging them.

42% Have 'very often' or 'often' experienced unwanted people messaging them when chatting and linking with other young people online.

- Trigger warning - Please be aware these stories are hard to read. -

"He got suspicious as to where I was and began shouting"

Last year on my way home from school I stopped by the shops to get my boyfriend presents for his birthday. I turned my location off on Snapchat beforehand to make it a surprise. He got suspicious as to where I was and began shouting thinking that I was doing something bad behind his back. He never believed that I was just getting him his birthday presents... It was my fault for making him suspicious in the first place I guess but he would also limit my contact with people because he didn't like me being around them.

"I find it hard to trust people because of him"

He always wanted to do things and wanted sex and nudes and I'd always say no and he'd beg and beg until I said yes. Even after I broke up with him he threatened me and blackmailed me and made me so insecure and uncomfortable around people. He lied to me so many times about everything and would straight up flirt with other girls right in front of me. I find it hard to trust people because of him.

"We became friends online and it would lead to sexual dares or sexual roleplaying"

I was 18. I had just turned 18. He was also 18. We knew each other from class and we would only talk online. We became friends online and it would lead to sexual dares or sexual roleplaying. I told him 'no, stop' but then he wouldn't talk to me. So I did things for him occasionally and when I confronted him he said 'I didn't pressure you'.

"From his last message, he still thinks he did nothing wrong."

He asked me to send a picture of myself, saying I was pretty and I was boring and frigid if I didn't. He would say how ugly he was. He sent shirtless pictures of himself. I was 12, he was 15. I tried to make him feel better about himself, but it made him angry so I stopped. He'd give me compliments. After a month I decided to block him. He made himself out to be someone I could turn to. He used me to make himself feel better. I haven't heard from him since. From his last message, he still thinks he did nothing wrong.

"He started asking me for all of my passwords for my social media"

I met a boy who seemed perfect. We got into a relationship after about a week and things were good. Skip about 2 weeks and he started asking me for all of my passwords for my social media. If I refused, he would get angry at me. Sometimes he would get physical with me like punch or kick me if I refused to do something. He started to tell me that I couldn't see my family or friends. It was horrible. Thankfully I managed to get out of this relationship before things got worse.

"He went thru my phone and called/texted me nonstop"

He was my first, he constantly pursued me, telling me he loved me and he couldn't handle my rejection so I gave in and dated him, I fell for him straight away. He had another gf the whole time, broke up with me for her after a few

months using me for my body. When I found out he begged for me back, telling me he's gonna kill himself. He went thru my phone and called/texted me nonstop till I answered or he'd turn up to my house. When I told his family he tried to turn it on me, telling them I was the one cheating on him.

"He doesn't want me speaking to any boys at school..."

"My boyfriend and I are in a long distance relationship. He says that I should always make sure that I cover my shoulders, don't show my legs and wear modest clothing. He doesn't want me speaking to any boys at school either and would like me to send pictures of what I wear so he can approve it before I leave the house. I love him though, and he says it's because he doesn't want boys staring and that he doesn't want to lose a good thing (me).

"I had to ghost and eventually block!"

I've had a guy I did tell I wanted to end things continue to harass me on several social media platforms, so I had to ghost and eventually block!

"He's publicly named me and has many photos that identify who I am"

I sent nude images, with consent, to a guy online. Recently he shared the images on his story on social media. A few of my friends recognised me... He did not have my consent and I spoke to Childline, who was very helpful, but I didn't file a report... I received a lot of verbal abuse from the guy online and was being blackmailed to send more photos. I blocked him, which made him extremely angry and he came back with a new account threatening me more. Sending more photos to me and posting more on his story. He's publicly named me and has many photos that identify who I am.

"This is a common excuse..."

Someone sent me nude pictures and claimed it was an accident/sent to the wrong person. This is a common excuse used when the response to illicit pictures is negative.

"When I was 11, I was on Snapchat and someone I didn't know added me"

When I was 11, I was on Snapchat and someone I didn't know added me, I added them back thinking it was nothing but they kept messaging me. I opened a snap video to see a nude of a man who looked older than me... he proceeded to ask me to send back, insisting that if I didn't it was a bad thing because he had sent me photos of him. I said no but then he would call me a little girl (I hadn't shown my face) and then told me my address. I didn't think I had snap maps on but I must have and it really scared me. I only told my parents after a few days and the only reason I did was because I was scared he was going to do something to my family, I was scared to go in my bedroom for months... I thought it was all my fault and that I would get screamed at if I told anyone.

83% Have experienced unwanted personal/sexual comments when chatting and linking with other young people online

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Things to think about

How might we?

These are just some of the many questions that might prompt answers:

- How might we provide young people with ways to manage these pressures online?
- How might we help young people when their offline world collides with their online world so much that they can't escape the pressures?
- How might we help someone show their friend what's happening to them online?
- How might we help someone deal with a situation where their friend has private images shared with others?

72% Very often' been asked for nudes when chatting and linking with other young people online

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Theme 1 - Immediate online pressures - Activity

Megan and Harry have been going out for 2 months. He's told her he has changed his status to 'single' on Facebook and that if she doesn't sleep with him this weekend the relationship is permanently over. Natasha is good friends with Megan. Natasha sees Harry's status change and goes to see if Megan is ok and if they have broken up.

What can you do if this happens?

Let's look at the scenario and discuss what could happen:

Scenario:

Natasha: Hey hun are you okay? Thought I'd check in and see how you are

Megan: I'm ok (crying), I think Harry's breaking up with me

Natasha: Is this about Facebook?

Megan: Yes, he's changed his status and if I don't sleep with him this weekend, it's over.

Natasha: How do you feel about that?

Megan: It's just so embarrassing, look, I didn't want anyone to know, but I'm still a virgin, I wanted my first time to be special and not like this and I'm not sure I feel it yet for Harry.

Natasha: So what is he saying? Is he trying to pressure you?

Megan: Yeh, if I don't do it this weekend he'll go with someone else, you know how popular he is, and he said he'll spread it all over Facebook that I'm frigid and a virgin.

Natasha: That's terrible. He wouldn't do that if he really cared about you. You know my Jake was really patient and understanding and he waited no problem and just was really supportive about the whole thing. You can't sleep with him if you don't want to, if you're just doing it cos he's pressuring you then you're not really consenting are you? It'd be like rape.

Megan: I just don't know what to do

Natasha: I really think you have to consider whether you want to continue with this guy. It's not normal to threaten someone you're supposed to care about.

Megan: Yeh, I know.

Theme 2 - The commonness of control

Toxic, coercive and controlling behaviours are so common in young people's relationships that they are considered normal. Young people, across all age groups, identified and named a range of abusive behaviours such as emotional manipulation, gaslighting, coercive control, blackmailing, grooming and guilt tripping. This all created a normality for pressures around sending nudes, deciding on clothing, checking phones, keeping tabs on where time is spent and with whom, and isolating people from friends. We need to de-normalise any form of coercive and controlling behaviour so that young people know that it's not ok.

71% Have seen, or have had a friend talk to them about behaviours that worry them in friends' relationships. This is even higher in young people aged 20-24 years (79%) and non-binary young people (78%).

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Manipulation draws young people back in

Several young people highlighted the psychological manipulation used to draw a person back into the relationship, including the use of individuals threatening to harm themselves if a relationship ended.

"And the whole I can't live without you is so manipulative! I've known people threatening suicide to keep people in abusive relationships" - Young person, 20-24 years

Isolation enables control

Young people told us that manipulation is used in relationships to distance and isolate young people from their friendship groups.

"From my experience of, like, people that I've seen as well, when guys...emotionally manipulate you to like, not hang out with your friends...like, they'll say things about your friends so like, because they don't really like you hanging out with them."

Young person, 20-24 years

"I have friends who in the name of having a boyfriend, don't hang out with any other person...it's like they're in a cage...they love the cage for like two months...but after that they realise that, a cage is a cage no matter how designed and beautiful it is...and I think a lot of relationships with young people nowadays is like a cage. They're just trapping each other."

- Young person, 13-16 years

"I think it's very common and very rarely spoken about! When someone asks for pictures of your outfit to ensure it's not too revealing"

- Young person, 17-19 years

Whilst young people are recognising and identifying non-physical abusive behaviours, in discussions they described a commitment fuelled by normalisation of these behaviours in their peer groups and a need to fit in.

"I've done it [sending nudes] once where, like, I felt like I had to do it to fit in...it's a case of self-confidence as well. Maybe getting a compliment off a boy will make you feel pretty in that sense as well."
- Young person, 13-16 years

25% Only a quarter of young people would definitely seek professional support if they saw a friend experiencing controlling behaviours.

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

How would you help a friend going through this?

- Trigger warning - Please be aware these stories are hard to read. -

These are all real stories as told to us by young people:

"Other girls said what a great boyfriend he must be"

My friend's boyfriend was sometimes a bit rough with her. Pulling her about, not actually hitting her. He would grab at her clothes. He made little digs all the time, putting her down and making her feel she's not good enough. When others were there he was sweet, hold her hand. Other girls said what a great boyfriend he must be.

"Her low self esteem/worth was destroyed by the girl she was dating"

My friend was in an emotionally abusive relationship, although she didn't realise for a little while. The girl she was dating would manipulate her into thinking her friends hated her... Her low self esteem/worth was destroyed by the girl she was dating. As time went on, it lead to sexual abuse as she was told she had to do xyz, otherwise the girl would kill herself. My friend became super stressed and constantly anxious that if she didn't do what her girlfriend asked, she'd have the responsibility of her life on her hands.

As her friend, I felt helpless, I couldn't stop her seeing her as she would have a panic attack that the girl would end her life. Eventually, my friend made the decision that enough was enough. I supported her, was a shoulder to cry on and physically hid her phone for a weekend whilst she broke up with the girl. The girl manipulated my friend to feel guilty for breaking up with her, and has since tried to ruin many of my friend's other friendships. She's not been in another relationship since.

"He kicked her out, leaving her stranded with no way home"

My friend is a couple of years older than me, and her boyfriend was a few years older than her and lived in another county... Behind her back, he'd cheat, he'd say horrible things about her and tell people he was single. One day, when she went over, he was intoxicated and shouted such mean things to her and made her really upset. He kicked her out, leaving her stranded with no way home... I listened to her story and it broke my heart. I stayed by her side when she needed me but had no idea what else I could do. She told me he'd get in trouble and ruin his chances in work if we did anything.

"She made new accounts, and he found them"

"...he'd send unsolicited d pics and message her asking for pictures. I felt so helpless, like all I could do was comfort her and make sure she was okay afterwards. I didn't know what I could do to help her. She made new accounts, and he found them. She blocked him, he made new accounts, pretending to be someone else. It would've really helped to have more information available to us about what we could have done or where we could've gone for support. I felt like I had failed as her friend.

"He puts his no caller ID on and will call LITERALLY 100 times and text her threats"

One of my best friends from secondary school got into a relationship with a guy that was bad news. It was the first time she was introduced to a seriously scary and threatening environment where she felt (and I felt too) that she couldn't get out of. This guy would take her out to places and then all of a sudden get into an argument with her and smash her face...she's shared photos of bruises and wounds with me.

He was so controlling. He always wanted to know who she was speaking to and try to accuse her of cheating. He'd get angry and throw her phone into the RIVER, which she told no one about (but me). He hit her so hard one time he had to take her to the hospital 'cause he freaked out. When he got there, he started screaming at her and drove off even though she was caught in the car door. He'd showed up at her house (her parents didn't know about her relationship) and would threaten her parents.

...I really didn't even know what to say to her when she told me she went back and he'd abused her again. I really saw it as her walking back into fire... this guy keeps trying to get to her. He puts his no caller ID on and will call LITERALLY 100 times and text her threats. It's so bad that my friend tells me to regularly check her location to make sure she's where she's supposed to be and that he hasn't kidnapped her...

"She wasn't 'allowed' to meet up with friends or work certain days"

A friend found herself in a very controlling relationship where she wasn't 'allowed' to meet up with friends or work certain days. This meant she started to isolate herself from her closest friends in order to please her boyfriend.

"He could get into these moods..."

My friend is really caring and one of the people she was living with was having some mental health problems... she was being kind to him and helping. They were friends and then started sleeping together... He could get into these moods where she said he would become like someone else and would want to hurt himself... she became his sole support. She didn't feel attracted to him anymore, but once he made moves and she said she wasn't into it, he said "Well then go, and I'll be here, on my own"...

I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay, and that her roommate should seek help... She felt so guilty for not taking better care of him and I, gently but firmly, said I understood where she was coming from, but this was not her responsibility. We would keep talking about this over a few months. I told her that she had been psychologically abused and that I thought he had raped her when he implied he would hurt himself if she didn't sleep with him...

"My friend was dating a guy who would coerce her into doing drugs"

My friend was dating a guy who would coerce her into doing drugs and put her down so her mental health suffered. She really liked him and saw the red flags but chose to ignore them. I tried to convince her to leave him but she wouldn't listen and I didn't even see telling her family as an option. Luckily he moved away but I didn't/don't know how to get a friend out.

"My friend is in a toxic relationship. All the signs are there..."

My friend is in a toxic relationship. All the signs are there... She has told stories of being pressured into sex, of him managing her birth control, not respecting boundaries, lots of arguing, and being coercive. However, she has become increasingly hard to talk to. She herself has become volatile and difficult to support. She has become manipulative to us as her friends, and often blows small things into massive arguments, or tries to control us... it puts us all in a very difficult position. She is very hard to get through to. She acknowledges he is not great but just says "it's not forever", yet still continues to stay with him...

"He rings her all the time"

My friend's boyfriend's job means that he is on the road all day. Because of this, he rings her all the time, just to chat, as he says it's a boring job. I've told her that this isn't normal as he knows everything she is doing and who she is with and that it's unhealthy that he gets frustrated or annoyed at her when she doesn't answer him...

Myself and her other friends have tried to link her in with support groups or to speak with DA services but she doesn't want 'intervention'. All I can do at this time is to be here to offer someone to talk to and try to help her see what support is there but it's tough.

"She couldn't move on from him because of his manipulation"

I had a friend who'd broken up with their boyfriend of 4 years when I met her. Despite leaving because it was a toxic, controlling relationship, he still had her under 'his control'. She was stuck, her mental health wasn't great, and she couldn't move on from him because of his manipulation. Countless friends had tried to tell her he wasn't treating her right, but she just didn't want to listen.

Thankfully, she did listen to me, and slowly he started to lose that control; she's finally moved on. But, I worry about her. She doesn't trust anyone. She doesn't think it's 'bad enough' to seek counselling, and tbh if she did, where would she go for it anyway?

"It can also be easy to laugh off serious problems"

My friends knew/know about a lot of what went on... lots of them had similar experiences themselves... we didn't realise things like sexual coercion were wrong & didn't know how to identify sexual abuse, so weren't in a position to support each other. Instead I remember laughing about tactics to physically block unwanted sexual contact by our boyfriends for as long as possible before giving up to just get it over with.

Although there is a lot more awareness of abusive/controlling behaviours, I think a similar issue still exists amongst friends. I think when two friends are experiencing similar issues it can incorrectly validate these behaviours as being the norm. It can also be easy to laugh off serious problems amongst friends as a way of coping with information which you don't know how to help yourself or someone else with.

"It is through speaking to friends myself that I realised that my first relationship was toxic"

It is through speaking to friends myself that I realised that my first relationship was toxic. He was manipulative and at times his behaviour was illegal. Being only 19 at the time, I didn't recognize this until I told friends about him and they supported me with ending the relationship and keeping my mental health stable. As a result I am always very open with friends about my current relationship and always offer non-judgmental advice to my friends to keep the culture of sharing as it is so important to rely on people you trust in these instances.

"He always seemed to have great excuses for his behaviour"

It was my first serious relationship and he always seemed to have great excuses for his behaviour. I was mentally, physically, emotionally and sexually abused by him, losing my virginity to rape. He would beat me every time I would say 'no' to him and would force me to perform sexual acts.

After that, I had such low self-esteem and confidence, I just lost all will to fight. I had no one to support me... I had to face the abuse and its consequences all by myself. I even stopped fighting back against guys who were trying to force themselves on me on a night out so I've actually lost count on how many times I've been raped. I reported it once but was told nothing could be done and to be more careful next time so I stopped reporting them. The world is so dangerous for a woman that you learn to just accept your fate or never leave the house again...

"It slowly got abusive and I didn't see it happening until one day I realised I was isolated from everyone"

At 17 I entered an abusive relationship. It slowly got abusive and I didn't see it happening until one day I realised I was isolated from everyone, my grades had suffered and I was contemplating suicide. I didn't know about the support I could have and I felt as though I couldn't go to the police as I was led to believe this was normal behaviour.

"I didn't know what to do as I had to see him everyday"

I was in a toxic relationship with someone in my class. There were red flags straight away, but I didn't know what to do as I had to see him everyday. I let so many things slide. He was a bully and gaslighted everyone in his life, but people believed all his lies.

One afternoon, I broke down with a teacher I trusted. I told her everything and I felt heard, however it all went downhill straight away. The college allowed him to finish the course AND stay in my class after constant harassment, even the police being called on him. The things he did weren't exactly crimes, however harassing and stalking is a concern.

"My friends were really worried about me"

My friends were really worried about me. He used to shout at me for hanging out with other boys and for not spending every minute of my time with him. I would be at the gym, leave and I would have 50 missed calls and a lot of angry texts, even though I told him where I was.

He was 2 years older than me so was really strong and bigger than me. He used to be really mean to me but be really apologetic minutes later... It got to the point that I was scared to be

around him. I stopped seeing my friends, stopped my hobbies, isolated myself at school and I was basically at his disposal. It finally ended when I found out he was having sex with other girls and I told my mum everything that was happening.

I don't think I was in an abusive relationship because people have it so much worse than I do. I just had no idea what to do. I was scared, worried and felt forced to push my friends away when I needed them the most. Life hasn't been the same since.

"When I confronted him he said 'I didn't pressure you!'"

I was 18. I had just turned 18. He was also 18. We knew each other from class and we would only talk online. We became friends online and it would lead to sexual dares or sexual roleplaying. I told him 'no, stop' but then he wouldn't talk to me. So I did things for him occasionally and when I confronted him he said 'I didn't pressure you'.

"My girlfriend calls me fat and says I need to go on a diet"

My girlfriend calls me fat and says I need to go on a diet. I find it hard to be happy near her and scared to break up. She sometimes treats me like an object and tells me what to wear and do.

"I had to go to a family funeral so he faked being in a car crash so I came home early"

When I was 16 I started to see a guy a few years older than me. He was well known in the area so everyone knew me as his lady. He used to buy me new phones and gifts. I had to go to a family funeral so he faked being in a car crash so I came home early. He told me people were after him as he owed them money, he knew I was saving for a school trip and asked me to loan my savings, he never repaid me. He got people to break into my house twice and stole a laptop. He used to threaten other male friends.

"It got to the point that if I got a notification on my phone, I'd feel physically sick"

I was in a relationship for 7 months. At the beginning, he was sweet and cared about me. 4 months in, he pressured me into having sex. I didn't want to, but was scared he'd get angry. I said yes but the whole time I was frozen. When he was angry, I'd be frightened that he was going to physically hurt me. The last 2 months, the only contact we'd have would be him getting angry at me. Other than that, nothing. It got to the point that if I got a notification on my phone, I'd feel physically sick.

"I always felt really vulnerable around him"

My first boyfriend tried to come on to me a lot and I'd say no (I'm a virgin and didn't feel ready). He kept being more needy and saying 'I'm just going to keep asking until you say yes'. I am in a wheelchair so I often felt uneasy because he would have to help me into my chair, so I wouldn't be able to move off the sofa if he didn't help. I always felt really vulnerable around him. We aren't together now. I realised I shouldn't feel uncomfortable around someone who was supposed to love me. I'm just glad he didn't do anything to me.

"I'd always say no and he'd beg and beg until I said yes."

He always wanted to do things and wanted sex and nudes and I'd always say no and he'd beg and beg until I said yes. Even after I broke up with him he threatened me and blackmailed me and made me so insecure and uncomfortable around people. He lied to me so many times about everything and would straight up flirt with other girls right in front of me. I find it hard to trust people because of him.

"I had a boyfriend who would accidentally hit me"

I had a boyfriend who would accidentally hit me and spend all his time with other girls and say they were just friends. He always wanted me to spend time with him and not my friends. Whenever he was stressed or annoyed he took it out on me but whenever we were with friends he would be nice and caring. He's yelled at me before so I got scared and ran off and he then grabbed my waist and refused to let me go and got in my face and told me off for running away from him. He always pressured me into doing things that I didn't want to do.

"It was my fault for making him suspicious in the first place..."

Last year on my way home from school I stopped by the shops to get my boyfriend presents for his birthday. I turned my location off on Snapchat beforehand to make it a surprise. He got suspicious as to where I was and began shouting thinking that I was doing something bad behind his back, he never believed that I was just getting him his birthday presents... It was my fault for making him suspicious in the first place I guess but he would also limit my contact with people because he didn't like me being around them...

"He is kind of controlling but I don't really mind..."

I was 12 when I got with my boyfriend, we were going to the same school. He started saying sexual things to me (he was also 12) and said "if you don't feel the same, we may need some time apart." I really loved him and told him I felt the same. He is kind of controlling but I don't really mind because he says he is only doing it because he loves me the way I am and doesn't want me to change, so he says that if I do things like wear makeup or dye my hair, he will dump me. I do as he says so that we can stay together and be happy.

"He'd constantly pressure me..."

I was 14, he was 16. I had other friends outside of the relationship, and any time I didn't hang out with him, he'd get mad and say stuff like 'you love me right?'. So I'd hang out with him. He'd constantly ask to 'do stuff', and sometimes I just wasn't in the mood to do anything or at least I was uncomfortable, but if I said I didn't want to, he'd ignore me in his bedroom for hours, so I'd just sit there in silence until I gave in. He'd constantly pressure me saying things like 'don't you love me? then do it'.

"He told me what to wear when we were going out"

I started dating this guy and he insisted on paying for everything. He would buy me things and take me on expensive dates. He started to belittle me, make me feel bad about my body and compare me to other women as a 'joke'. We would argue and he would apologise but continue doing it. He told me what to wear when we were going out. When I tried to leave he said I should feel bad about all the money he had spent on me. He got his friends to message me after I blocked his number.

47% said they would 'never' talk to friends about toxic or unhealthy relationships at work

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Things to think about

These are just some of the many questions that might prompt answers:

How might we help friends spot early signs or red flags?

How might we help reset what is accepted as 'normal'?

How might we help young people help a friend who is under manipulated influence?

How might we...?

Young people say they want more information about early signs of abuse, healthy vs unhealthy relationships, and 'red flags'; Anything to be able to demonstrate to their friends that toxic relationships are a widespread issue, not just a personal one. They also talked of anonymous chat rooms/forums to talk to other people in the same situation.

What information are young people asking for?

Young people talked about campaigns, using ads on social media to raise awareness. They mentioned the need for information to be relatable, relevant, funny but with a serious message, songs instead of written text, short, colourful, snappy quotes, influencers, authentic voice, more positive messages.

They say 'what works' is taking a non-judgemental, non-pressuring, empowering approach with friends. Ideas included a pros/cons list, domestic abuse quiz to tick off the red flags, real life stories.

What have young people said they need?

Young people talked about campaigns, using ads on social media to raise awareness. They mentioned the need for information to be relatable, relevant, funny but with a serious message, songs instead of written text, short, colourful, snappy quotes, influencers, authentic voice, more positive messages.

They say 'what works' is taking a non-judgemental, non-pressuring, empowering approach with friends. Ideas included a pros/cons list, domestic abuse quiz to tick off the red flags, real life stories.

72% Had been asked for nudes

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Theme 2 - The commonness of control – Activity

What are coercive and controlling relationships? How are they abusive?



Kelly doesn't see her family much anymore, even though she misses them. Pete doesn't like her to. He says she doesn't need them anyway, she only needs him from now on.

STARTER:

Challenge: Does Kelly's situation sound worrying to you? Why / why not?

More challenging: Define coercion and control. How might Kelly be in a coercive and controlling relationship.

Mega challenge: 'It is okay in some circumstances to be in a relationship with someone you are frightened of.' Is this a valid statement or not? Analyse the idea.

Theme 3 - *Blinded by the butterflies*

This theme shows why young people, who are in a relationship, may not be able to see the “red flags” or understand their friends concerns at certain behaviours. Some young people talked about ‘butterflies’ relating to feelings of love or nervousness/adrenaline. Others, especially in the 13–16 year-old group, noted if someone is in their first relationship, they might confuse warning signs with the intensity of being in love. Similarly, some young people highlighted that compliments and attention received at the start of a relationship can create a feeling of excitement and intoxication whereby unhealthy behaviours are excused or ignored. How do we help them see past the butterflies?

Confusing behaviour with love

Young people can confuse controlling behaviours with socially accepted ideas of love caring and protection. Many young people emphasised how initially controlling behaviours, such as intense jealousy or monitoring, can be as seen as complimentary.

“At the beginning you’re like, “oh this is like really nice. They’re looking out for me.” Things like that, but after being in the relationship for a while, you start to see their true colours” - Young person, 13-16

“You can get caught up and think, oh, actually, this is really nice in really enjoying it, oh he's very protective, because somebody stared at me or wolf whistled at me, and he shouted at them or hit them, like you think, oh, I'm very protected, when really there's more... something more like happening” - Young person, 20-24 years

Is this how love feels?

If young people don't know what love feels like, it's easy to give meaning to an emotion themselves, and if they do that, they may not realise anything is wrong.

“Like your instincts are telling you that there’s something wrong but...maybe you’ve never experienced love before and this is what people have been talking about, this is what love is meant to feel like.” - Young person, 20-24

72% Have been asked for nudes when chatting and linking with other young people online (32% 'very often' or 'often' and only 28% had never been asked for nudes).

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How would you help a friend going through this?

“This is what love is meant to feel like”

Like your instincts are telling you that there’s something wrong but...maybe you’ve never experienced love before and this is what people have been talking about...this is what love is meant to feel like.

"At the beginning you're like, 'oh this is like really nice. They're looking out for me.'"

At the beginning you're like, 'oh this is like really nice. They're looking out for me.'. Things like that, but after being in the relationship for a while, you start to see their true colours.

"You can get caught up"

You can get caught up and think, oh, actually, this is really nice in really enjoying it, oh he's very protective, because somebody stared at me or wolf whistled at me, and he shouted at them or hit them. Like you think, oh, I'm very protected, when really there's more... something more like happening.

"I was in love and didn't know any better."

I met my friends when I was nervous to go out alone due to being harassed. He found us and shouted in my face, humiliating me. He threatened to hit me. I did as I was told and went to where he was and he shouted "you never try hard enough". I was in love and didn't know any better. When he stayed at mine he always wanted to have sex. He'd guilt trip me until I said yes. I got severely depressed. I'm out of that relationship and in a new one and I've realised how toxic the relationship was. I'm still fighting depression but I'm much happier in myself.

Things to think about

How might we?

These are just some of the many questions that might prompt answers:

- How might we help young people know what love is and what it definitely isn't?
- How might we help young people know what feelings require help?
- How might we help young people question new behaviours?
- How might we help young people reflect on relationships when they might not have any space between them and their partner?

45 % Said self-doubt would 'definitely' stop them talking to a friend.

Theme 3 - Blinded by the butterflies – Activity

Your friend stays in the relationship and continues to experience toxic behaviours

What can you do if this happens?

Let's look at the scenarios and what could happen in each one:

Scenario 1: Stick around, be kind and understanding. Trust your friend is doing their best. And also look after yourself...it's so important to self-care.

What could happen? Your friend has someone supportive in their life that they can talk to, trust, and ask for help.

Scenario 2: Stick around, be kind and understanding. Give everything you've got to your friend, and don't worry about yourself.

What could happen? You get burnt out and your friend can't rely on you as a source of support.

Scenario 3: Get tired of your friend's changed behaviour and ask them why they aren't over it.

What could happen? Your friend feels judged and doesn't rely on you as a source of support. Remember, your friend might make choices that you don't expect or don't make sense to you, but often the toxic person has manipulated their whole world view. Sometimes the toxic person can literally remove the ways to get help, like your friend's car, phone, or money.

Theme 4 - Opening Their Eyes

This theme illuminates how young people would go about helping a friend who they had concerns for in a relationship. Some young people noted they would tell their friends in a straightforward way about their partners worrying behaviours and suggest they should end the relationship. Others felt they would advise their friend to “be on guard” and keep a close watch on them. Young people frequently try to help friends with toxic relationships but find it difficult. The main barriers that stop them talking to a friend are damaging their friendships, self-doubt and fear (younger age groups and those from a black or minoritised community were less likely to talk to a friend due to self-doubt and fear.)

49% Said they would 'definitely' be worried about damaging their friendship, if they brought things up

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Another way in...

Some young people believed that maintaining a relationship with the person causing harm would be helpful. They felt that this would prevent their friend being isolated and they could call out any unhealthy behaviours in front of their friend.

“Rather, I’d try to hang out with her more. Let her know I’m there for her, and include him in activities. Then every time he shows this kind of behaviour, I’d call him out on it.” - Young person, 17-19

“Making it clear that you don’t... that’s not funny, that’s not okay sort of putting them in their place a little bit. Without making the situation worse, but making sure that it’s known that, that’s actually not funny for you at all. Stand up to hurtful comments.” - Young person, 20-24 years

Helping them see it themselves

Young people felt the best approach (some through actual experience) was to try to make their friend aware to what was happening but in a non-judgemental and non-condescending way. They felt this would help them recognise behaviours, and come to their own conclusions without shutting the conversation down.

“So we, we, sort of, went through, we had, like, a pros and cons list, so we went through all the pros and we went through all the cons and it, sort of, made her realise how, how, like, tipped the scales were, if that makes sense and we gave her advice and we, we tried to tell her that it wasn’t, it wasn’t, like, a normal relationship, like, the dynamic wasn’t normal and it helped her understand.” -

Young person, 13-16

“So, personally, I would be...what did it feel like when he was...if you don’t give me the nudes, we’re gonna have to take some time apart, what do you think about that? Rather than me putting my input in which is fair but she might not listen to that.” - Young person, 20-24

Supporting friends...

Many young people stressed the importance of continuing to support their friend, whatever decisions they made, by championing their self-esteem and confidence. Several young people felt that a friend seeing or listening to advice

from other sources could help 'open their eyes' as it would be seen as impartial and not a friend's personal judgement.

"The best thing that I did was to be there for her. Not try and pressure her into breaking up with him, because that's, kind of, being just as bad as him, but, like, to just be emotionally there for her and make sure you're there to comfort her whenever she's down."

- Young person, 13-16

38% Said fear would 'definitely' stop them talking to a friend.

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How would you help a friend going through this?

**These are all real stories as told to us by young people
- Trigger warning - please be aware these stories are hard to read. -**

"It is through speaking to friends myself that I realised that my first relationship was toxic"

It is through speaking to friends myself that I realised that my first relationship was toxic. He was manipulative and at times his behaviour was illegal. Being only 19 at the time, I didn't recognize this until I told friends about him and they supported me with ending the relationship and keeping my mental health stable. As a result I am always very open with friends about my current relationship and always offer non-judgmental advice to my friends to keep the culture of sharing as it is so important to rely on people you trust in these instances.

"We went through all the pros and we went through all the cons"

We went through all the pros and we went through all the cons and it, sort of, made her realise how, how, like, tipped the scales were, if that makes sense and we gave her advice and we, we tried to tell her that it wasn't, it wasn't, like, a normal relationship, like, the dynamic wasn't normal and it helped her understand.

"The best thing that I did was to be there for her."

The best thing that I did was to be there for her. Not try and pressure her into breaking up with him, because that's, kind of, being just as bad as him, but, like, to just be emotionally there for her and make sure you're there to comfort her whenever she's down.

"I'd try to hang out with her more"

I'd try to hang out with her more. Let her know I'm there for her, and include him in activities. Then every time he shows this kind of behaviour, I'd call him out on it.

"I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay"

My friend is really caring and one of the people she was living with was having some mental health problems... she was being kind to him and helping. They were friends and then started sleeping together... He could get into these moods where she said he would become like someone else and would want to hurt himself... she became his sole support. She didn't feel attracted to him anymore, but once he made moves and she said she wasn't into it, he said "Well then go, and I'll be here, on my own...".

I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay, and that her roommate should seek help... She felt so guilty for not taking better care of him and I, gently but firmly, said I understood where she was coming from, but this was not her responsibility. We would keep talking about this over a few months. I told her that she had been psychologically abused and that I thought he had raped her when he implied he would hurt himself if she didn't sleep with him.

"She doesn't want 'intervention'"

My friend's boyfriend job means that he is on the road all day. Because of this, he rings her all the time, just to chat, as he says it's a boring job. I've told her that this isn't normal as he knows everything she is doing and who she is with and that it's unhealthy that he gets frustrated or annoyed at her when she doesn't answer him...

Myself and her other friends have tried to link her in with support groups or to speak with DA services but she doesn't want 'intervention'. All I can do at this time is be here to offer someone to talk to and try to help her see what support is there but it's tough.

44% vs 56% Non-binary young people were more likely to say self-doubt would definitely stop them than cisgender young people (56% vs 44%)

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Things to think about

How might we?

These are just some of the many questions that might prompt answers:

- How might we help a friend talk through signs in a relationship, so that their friend will see the details themselves?
- How might we use data and storytelling to show young people signs that they might not spot in their own relationships?
- How might we create spaces where young people can hear from outside their own circle of trust?

45% Said self-doubt would 'definitely' stop them talking to a friend

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Theme 4 - Opening Their Eyes - Activity

Say you've noticed a behaviour and ask your friend how they feel

How could you do it?

You might mention you've noticed a behaviour you think is toxic or a red flag and ask your friend about it, trying to sound curious or concerned rather than judgemental. This will help your friend feel safe to share their feelings honestly.

What could happen if you do this? Let's look at the scenarios:

Scenario 1: Your friend says everything is fine or they're not ready to talk.

What do you do? Be kind and be understanding. You can be a big help to your friend just by listening to what they want to say, showing that you believe them and showing that you care. They might be feeling low, sad, or angry because they are being hurt, so a caring response will help them cope.

What happens? Your friend trusts you and feels they can open up to you.

Scenario 2: Your friend says they don't feel good about their relationship.

What do you do? Ask your friend how you can help them. Be kind and be understanding. You can be a big help to your friend just by listening to what they want to say, showing that you believe them and showing that you care. They might be feeling low, sad, or angry because they are being hurt, so a caring response will help them cope.

What happens? Your friend tells you what support they need.

Scenario 3: Your friend says they don't feel good about their relationship.

What do you do? Challenge their partner on their behaviour.

What happens? Their partner gets aggressive with you or isolates your friend from you.

Scenario 4: Your friend says they don't feel good about their relationship.

What do you do? Say that their partner is toxic or showing red flags.

What happens? Your friend feels judged and doesn't open up, and they won't rely on you for help.

Theme 5 - Time to step in

This theme reveals the point in a friend's relationship that would prompt young people to intervene. Some young people mentioned that they would do if they witnessed obviously harmful behaviours e.g., name-calling, offensive comments this would also be a sign of their friend needing help

9 in 10 of the young people that had seen, or had a friend talk to them about worrying behaviours, 9 in 10 had talked to their friend to try to help them with a toxic or unhealthy relationship

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Stepping in earlier...

One young person noted that they wouldn't go to the trouble of stepping in if the person was experiencing gaslighting as, "it's so strong they don't even realise it" (Young person, 17-19). This highlights the need for awareness of the psychological impact to young people of non-physical abuses and advice needed to support friends. As one young person commented:

"I feel like the things that would probably make us all probably step in it's probably too late by then. Like if she was hit or... it's probably a bit late by then because she's already had all of this going on. All the trauma to begin with"
Young person, 20-24

Not realising it's important...

Some young people showed awareness of intervening safely to help or getting their friend help if their phone or social media was being monitored. Others noted young people of their generation might not seek help as they minimise these types of problems.

"Yes, I feel like there's a step in our generation maybe of downsizing your problems a bit. So, being in a situation like this, or a situation where you have problems and going, 'Well I can't really speak to somebody professional, because my problems aren't big enough.'
Young person, 20-24

When is the time to step in?

79% said the threat of physical violence or 92% said actual physical violence would be the time to step in and seek professional support. Of course, this may mean that intervention is happening too late.

"Definitely when it gets physical. So, when Georgie's threatening to hit her. Like, that's definitely where the line completely ends" - Young person, 13-16

79% / 92% The threat of physical (79%) or actual physical harm (92%) would be when young people say they would definitely seek professional support.

How would you help a friend going through this?

- Trigger warning - Please be aware these stories are hard to read. -

"I asked my friend if she was ok in her relationship"

I asked my friend if she was ok in her relationship, it seemed like something was wrong in her body language but she said she was ok. She told me that her boyfriend said he didn't like her talking to anyone else about her relationship, because it made him insecure. She didn't feel free to talk to her friends about how she felt.

"I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay"

My friend is really caring and one of the people she was living with was having some mental health problems... she was being kind to him and helping. They were friends and then started sleeping together... He could get into these moods where she said he would become like someone else and would want to hurt himself... she became his sole support. She didn't feel attracted to him anymore, but once he made moves and she said she wasn't into it, he said "Well then go, and I'll be here, on my own...".

I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay, and that her roommate should seek help... She felt so guilty for not taking better care of him and I, gently but firmly, said I understood where she was coming from, but this was not her responsibility. We would keep talking about this over a few months. I told her that she had been psychologically abused and that I thought he had raped her when he implied he would hurt himself if she didn't sleep with him.

"She was only 14 or 15 at the time and he was in his late 50s"

When I was a teenager, my best friend started being being paid for sex by her boss. She was only 14 or 15 at the time and he was in his late 50s. We didn't really know what to do at the time and she was very confident and jokey about it. We didn't understand grooming as an idea. We didn't think to report it to the school as they had handled a previous safeguarding issue with this friend really badly... he hid her from his wife. He was paying her hundreds of pounds...

He distributes controlling behaviour... he limits her from being able to see her friends. She's also told me that he can be very aggressive and shout and throw things, though she's never told me he's sexually violent or physically violent.

While I have always told her that I'm here for her if she ever needs it, and while I have often expressed concern for her wellbeing, I have avoided criticising him or giving her any kind of ultimatum as I don't want this to lead to her being alienated or not having friends to go to.

...I am now very frustrated that the school didn't notice the signs of her being groomed (more

money, missing school, acting out, overly sexual language and behaviour) when she had previously been very academic and 'well behaved'. I wish we had the understanding of grooming at the time, when we could have got parents or the police involved. Now it is too late as she is an adult.

"I kept being her listening ear and let her know that what was going on was not okay"

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coming from, but this was not her responsibility. We would keep talking about this over a few months. I told her that she had been psychologically abused and that I thought he had raped her when he implied he would hurt himself if she didn't sleep with him.

"Gaslighting and manipulation turns life into hell"

I think people see young people as naive and stupid, but I'm fully aware of what people like that can do. It always starts small and with resources maybe people can learn what to look out for.... Gaslighting and manipulation turns life into hell and I wouldn't want any young people to experience, especially in a place of education.

46% Said they would 'often' or 'very often' talk to their friend at school.

68% Of young people would 'often' or 'very often' talk to their friends face to face about toxic relationships.

44% Said they would 'often' or 'very often' talk to their friend at college/university.

45% Would 'often' or 'very often' talk to their friend via a messaging app.

42% Said they would 'often' or 'very often' talk to their friend via social media.

63% Of non-binary young people would 'often' or 'very often' talk via social media or **61%** via a messaging app.

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Things to think about

How might we?

These are just some of the many questions that might prompt answers:

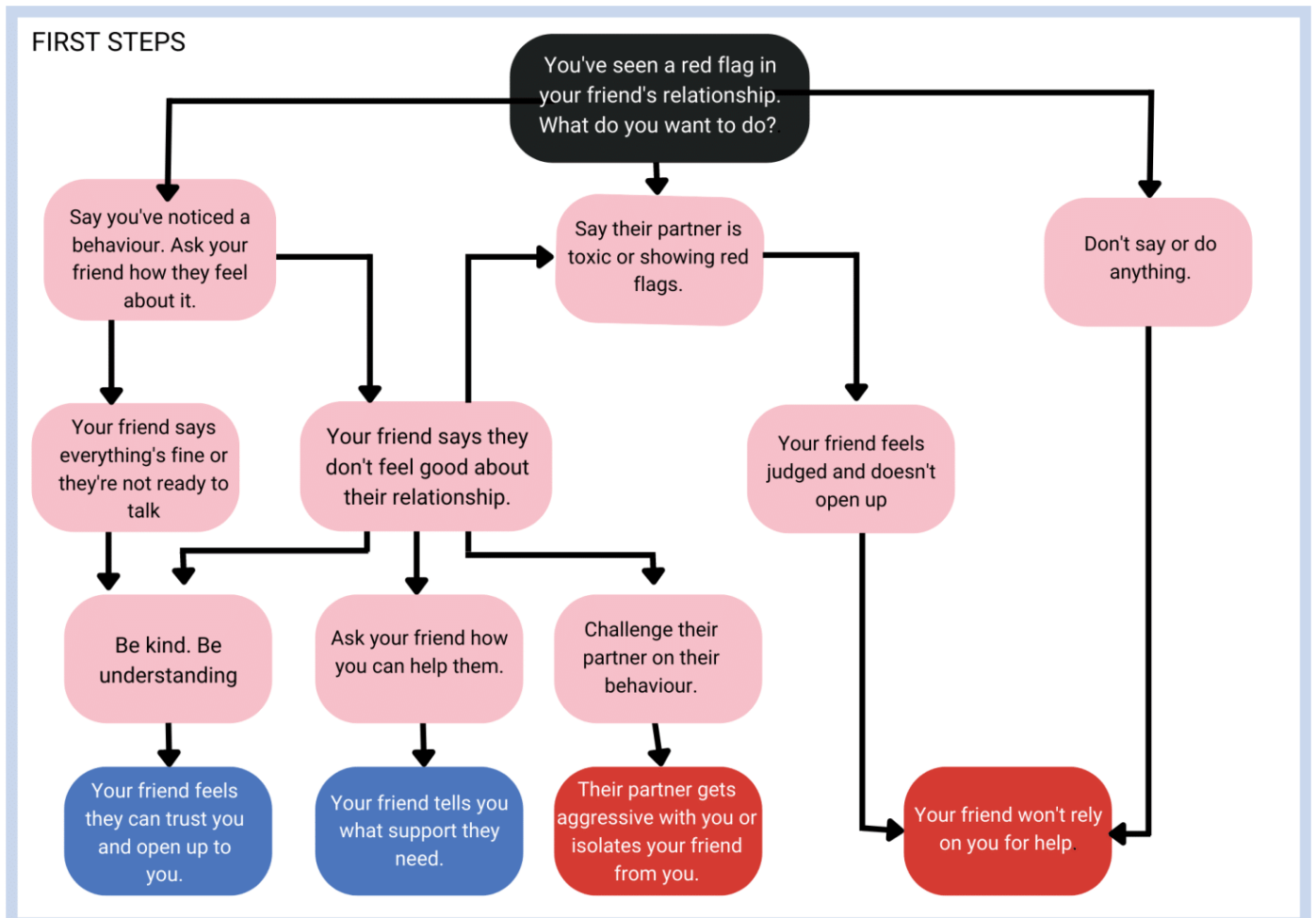
- How might we help friends to know that what seems 'normal', isn't?
- How might we inspire friends to see red flags and step in sooner?
- How might we find ways for friends have conversations that inspire their friends to open up sooner?
- How might we help friends know what to say to those ask for help on behalf of their friend?
- How might we help the friend look after their own mental health whilst helping?

64% Would definitely seek professional support if a friend was saying they were scared

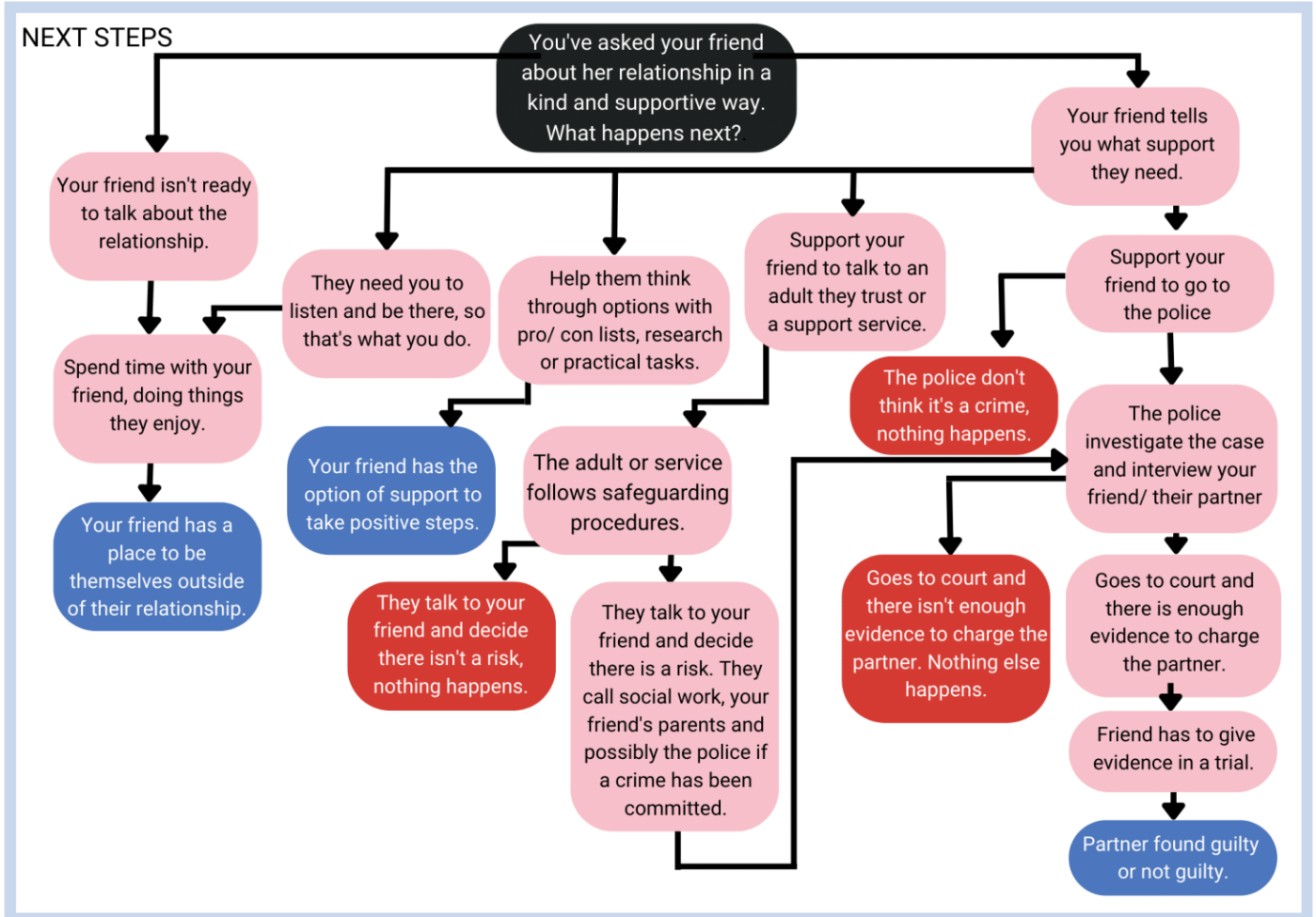
54% Would definitely seek professional support if a friend's mental health was suffering

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Theme 5 - Time to step in - Activity



NEXT STEPS



LONG TERM



Theme 6 - Seeking support

This theme explores when and where young people would go to seek support to help a friend. Many, especially the younger age groups, said they would go to a trusted adult such as siblings, an older family member or parents. Some mentioned schoolteachers although there were mixed opinions over this due to concerns around confidentiality. In the focus groups, young people had very mixed feelings about “seeking support” from professionals. The concerns about trust, not feeling a professional would help unless there was physical harm and a general feeling professionals don’t listen to young people was reiterated in some comments in the survey. A key aspect that came out was that young people would not go to a professional without their friend knowing and approving (this is difficult as their friend may not think they're experiencing anything wrong).

So, what would cause them to seek support? Young people in the focus groups talked about “The time to step in” being if a friend was threatened with physical harm (Some young people acknowledged this would probably be too late and intervention is needed sooner.) The survey confirms the threat of physical harm (79%) or actual physical harm (92%) would definitely be the point at which a young person would seek professional support. We need to find ways to inspire young people to seek support sooner, and clearly show them where to go.

79% / 92% The threat of physical (79%) or actual physical harm (92%) would be when young people say they would definitely seek professional support

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Does the support or advice understand?

When discussing professional support, young people listed a number of options including domestic abuse helplines, therapists, police, mental health websites and support from college or University. However, young people who were aware of professionals did seem to have personal or work related experience and/or parents who had knowledge of the subject through their own occupations. Within the discussions, there were also suggestions that although the young people were listing possible suggestions, in actuality, they would not use these options themselves.

“I would suggest a friend call a helpline 100% but if I'm honest I wouldn't use one myself ironically - I think there's a stigma around them sadly.” - Young person, 20-24

“Yeah there's something about helplines that can be intimidating.” - Young person, 20-24

Several young people highlighted benefits of talking to a professional, such as, as you would be hearing an independent point of view or you would have a formal record of complaint. However, again there were differing opinions on seeking professional help amongst the young people. A few young people noted worries about services that would become involved if you sought professional help. Others pointed out, if a friend said no to a suggestion of professional help, they would respect their wishes.

“I would suggest going to the police just so there is a formal record of complaint in case anything escalated further down the line.” -

Young person, 20-24

“I'm not of the opinion that like the police can really help in these situations personally.” - Young person, 20-24

Young people discussed searching for help online although the younger age groups didn't feel they would find suitable content for them.

“I think it would be quite hard to find online, because I think it would be mainly aimed for people who are older and

not people who are, like, in secondary school or fourteen and seventeen.” - Young person, 13-16

Some young people felt they wouldn't be able to find an answer online due to the complexity of the problem. Several young people had also had concerns about whether professional support would be culturally competent and services having cultural understanding.

“Like, I feel you can't really Google, 'how do I get out of an abusive relationship because I'm a Muslim and nobody in my community can know.'” - Young person, 20-24

Talking to friends...

As previous research has shown, some young people noted they would prefer to talk to their friends before a professional although discussions emerged where a few young people highlighted the possibility of gossip between networks.

“Friends as peer support can be amazing. But I would probably go to an older friend as they would have more understanding than someone who is quite young although there is the higher risk of gossip.” - Young person, 13-16

Where do you actually turn to?

Although young people were mentioning trusted adults as contacts for support, some were uncertain where they would access them.

“That's the thing... trusted adults, but I'm not sure where they are.” - Young person, 13-16

“Personally, I don't think I'd ever go to anyone in school. I don't trust anything in school because everything we ever say at school always goes back to our parents somehow, even if they say they won't tell anyone.”
- Young person, 13-16

Nearly half of young people said they would 'very often' or 'often' talk at school (46%), via a Messaging App (45%) or at College/Uni (44%)

Non binary young people are more likely to talk (very often/often) via social media (63%) / 61% Messaging App (61%) than the overall sample

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

- Trigger warning - Please be aware these stories are hard to read. -

"We worry all the time and feel we've lost her to him"

My friend has always had a low self esteem and often talked about her 'knight in shining armour.' She met this guy and he swept her off her feet. It was very sudden. He moved in with her after 2 weeks. Proposed within 6 months, married within 2 years and a baby not long after that... she was starting to say that she's unhappy and feels trapped. She's tried to leave a few times and each time he threatens to kill himself and she goes back.

During lockdown he smashed up the house and she finally left and the police put in a no contact order... 6 weeks later he was back... It feels as if she's been brainwashed.

The last conversation I had, made me feel like I was crazy. Suddenly he was a god and we were all trying to sabotage their relationship. It was a complete reversal. It was like there was no talking to her. Like she was under some sort of spell. It's been months since he came back and she's blocked all her friends and family. Even her parents and she was

so close to her mum. We worry all the time and feel we've lost her to him and just hope nothing awful happens.

.... I wish I had grown up knowing more about how abusive relationships start. I wish there was more that could be done about coercive relationships.

"When she told us, we got her help and made sure we were always available to talk if we wanted to"

My friend from school was in a relationship with a boy who she had been with for a couple of years... they were engaged. When we left school she slowly became distant and wouldn't reply to our texts or would find ways to cancel on us. We asked her so many times if she was ok and she said she was.

When he cheated on her, they broke up and she told us that he had been sexually and emotionally abusing her. He used to manipulate her into thinking that if she saw us, it meant she didn't want to be with him. He would do things sexually that she did not want to do. When she told us, we got her help and made sure we were always available to talk if we wanted to.

"I'll always wish I had the confidence to stand up and do more"

My best friend has been in an emotionally and financially abusive relationship for a couple of years now. We would have long conversations about him over the phone and over WhatsApp. I told her from day one he was a bad idea, I constantly told her she should leave and was worth better. But she just couldn't pull herself out of it. I couldn't understand what she could see in this man.

The hardest part for me was feeling so powerless. She would swear she was leaving him but be back the next week. I've found her crying on the stairs because he'd kicked doors off the hinges at home...

She would swear she was leaving all the time but the next week he would be back and then she would go silent. She wouldn't talk on the phone in front of him because she couldn't be open and herself, and couldn't answer questions about what had happened.

I could see her being harmed mentally but felt going to the police was overstepping the mark and could turn her against me. It was just a feeling of utter powerlessness. Seeing your friend be knocked down to the absolute depths of despair and not feeling able to help... I wish I had been able to do more or had more information on how to help before it got to this point.

The social worker told her she's been in an abusive relationship and I think it took a social worker to tell her for it to really hit home. I told her all the time he was abusive, but he would get back in her head and gaslight her into believing it wasn't abuse. He'd tell her that they were just as bad as each other and needed to work harder on the relationship.

...I almost feel guilty like a bystander. I'll always wish I had the confidence to stand up and do more. Maybe if there was more support out there for "the friend" and that invisible front line more girls would be able to break their friends out of abusive relationships.

"I suggested she talk to a teacher, but she felt too uncomfortable to do that"

When me and my best friend were 13, a male classmate kept calling her several times throughout the day. She didn't respond at first, so he took to texting her repeatedly... I suggested she talk to a teacher, but she felt too uncomfortable to do that. Later on, that boy confronted her... She told him that she wasn't interested in talking to him

and threatened to tell her elder brother. He finally stopped troubling her after a few days, but it left a scar on all of us. The boy had even talked to her father on the phone, mimicking a girl's voice, introducing himself as a friend.

"Myself and her other friends have tried to link her in with support groups"

My friend's boyfriend's job means that he is on the road all day. Because of this, he rings her all the time, just to chat, as he says it's a boring job. I've told her that this isn't normal as he knows everything she is doing and who she is with and that it's unhealthy that he gets frustrated or annoyed at her when she doesn't answer him...

Myself and her other friends have tried to link her in with support groups or to speak with DA services but she doesn't want 'intervention'. All I can do at this time is be here to offer someone to talk to and try to help her see what support is there but it's tough.

"When I told his family he tried to turn it on me"

He was my first, he constantly pursued me, telling me he loved me and he couldn't handle my rejection so I gave in and dated him, I fell for him straight away. He had another gf the whole time, broke up with me for her after a few months using me for my body. When I found out he begged for me back, telling me he's gonna kill himself. He went thru my phone and called/texted me nonstop till I answered or he'd turn up to my house. When I told his family he tried to turn it on me, telling them I was the one cheating on him.

"My friend had to phone him and say it was over because I was too afraid"

I had a boyfriend who was in my sports club. He wanted to do sexual things all the time. I had panic attacks. I was a year younger. He would say things to me like '*I can't wait until you're sixteen so we can have some fun*'. He would touch me inappropriately in public such as grabbing my bum in front of other club members. I tried to move away, he pulled me back. He didn't like it when I asked him to slow down. It got so bad that my friend had to phone him and say it was over because I was too afraid.

64% Said they would definitely seek professional support if a friend was saying they were scared

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

"The college allowed him to finish the course AND stay in my class"

I was in a toxic relationship with someone in my class. There were red flags straight away, but I didn't know what to do as I had to see him every day. I let so many things slide. He was a bully and gaslighted everyone in his life, but people believed all his lies.

One afternoon, I broke down with a teacher I trusted. I told her everything and I felt heard, however it all went down hill straight away. The college allowed him to finish the course AND stay in my class after constant harassment, even the police being called on him...The things he did weren't exactly crimes, however harassing and stalking is a concern.

"I told Childline and the police came over and dealt with it"

I was in a relationship with this boy. I found out his dad is a domestic abuser. This boy that I was dating kept on hurting me. One time, he grabbed my breast and squeezed and shook it and it left me a bruise. A few times he did stuff that I didn't want him to do like touch my butt and stroke my stomach. It made me feel really uncomfortable and I became scared about what he would do to me next. I told Childline and the police came over and dealt with it. Now I am no longer scared of him.

"My friends would tell me that it was okay for him to check my messages"

I went out with a boy who would tell me that nobody else would love me. He'd message other boys from my Facebook and Instagram to tell them to back off because I had a boyfriend. He would constantly check my messages and message me to ask where I was. My friends would tell me that it was okay for him to check my messages, it meant he

really cared about me. Now that I'm slightly older I now see that it wasn't a healthy relationship. I was scared to leave because I didn't have the confidence to say no.

"I ended up calling the police after I broke up with him as he kept threatening me and my friends"

I ended up calling the police after I broke up with him as he kept threatening me and my friends. The police turned up to his house and told him to leave me alone, a couple days later he was round the corner of my guy friend's house waiting for him and me, yelling at me from across the street.

"I'm struggling. I'm back in counselling and got people who support me."

I've had anxiety, depression and suicidal intentions. At the beginning, he was kind. I told him I was suicidal; he'd tell me I was being too self-centred. I tried to overdose whilst together. I met someone else. I broke up with him over text because it didn't feel safe to see him. He told me that he was my only chance to not be alone, and if I killed myself, it would save him a lot of tears. I'm struggling. I'm back in counselling and got people who support me. Being suicidal doesn't just go away, but I'm trying my hardest, I'll be okay.

54% Said they would definitely seek professional support if a friend's mental health was suffering

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

Things to think about

How might we?

- How might we help friends see red flags earlier?
- How might we help friends know where to turn to?
- How might we help friends find confidence in the information they find?
- How might we help friends find the answer they can use to clear cut questions/situations?

1. 68% Said they would 'very often' or 'often' talk to friends about toxic or unhealthy relationships face to face (other)

Survey of 641 young people aged 13-24 across England and Wales - August 2021

What are we doing about this?

We're currently working with young people in England and Wales to explore these insights so that we can co-produce resources to tackle the problem. We'll then need your help to get them out into places where young people spend time, both offline and online.

Theme 6 - Seeking support - Activity

Your friend tells you what support they need

What can you do? Let's look at the scenarios:

Scenario 1: Help them think through their options with pros and cons lists, do some research, or find practical tasks to do together.

What could happen? Your friend has the option of support to make positive steps.

Scenario 2: Support them to go to an adult they trust or a support service.

What happens? They follow safeguarding procedures (Look for these on your school/support service website. You have a right to ask what these are.) and one of two things happens:

1. They talk to your friend and decide there isn't a risk, and nothing else happens.
2. They talk to your friend and decide there is a risk. They call a social worker, your friend's parent, and possibly the police if a crime has been committed.

Scenario 3: There is a risk and it's necessary to go to the police. Support your friend to go to the police.

What could happen? One of two things can happen here:

1. The police investigate the case. The partner and your friend are interviewed by the police. Depending on this the case might go to court. (The police will need to gather evidence to put together a case. This might include interviewing your friend, their partner, and maybe other people like you, who might be witnesses. They might also take your friend's phone if there are messages which have evidence in them.)
2. The police don't think a crime has happened and they don't investigate.

Scenario 4: After the police interview, the case goes to court. This will happen because there is enough evidence for the partner to be tried in court.

What could happen? Your friend has to give evidence and your friend's partner is found guilty or not guilty. In either case, your friend will need your support.

Sessional Feedback form

Reflections for each week – to do at the end of each session

What do we think about today's session? Was it...?

- Flexible
- Inclusive
- Open-minded
- Equal
- Supportive

What was the best bit of today's session?

What's one bit you'd change?

Is there any information that you could do with knowing more about?

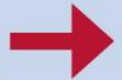
SPOT THE RED FLAG

Can you tell the part that went wrong in this situation...?

Well... I'm not sure if I'm quite ready yet.

We've been together for a while now so I think it's about time. Why are you worried?

You're probably right, maybe I'm just too tense?



THE MIX

#FriendsCanTell



Your Best Friend

RED FLAG:

Sexual pressure or objectifying

Well... I'm not sure if I'm quite ready yet.

We've been together for a while now so I think it's about time. Why are you worried?

You're probably right, maybe I'm just too tense?



Trying to persuade someone to have sex through emotional blackmailing is known as **sexual pressure**.

Validating the relationship through romantic or sexual acts and physical appearances is called **objectification**.

IT IS A **RED FLAG** if your friend's partner:

- Sets the pace and gets physically intimate really quickly
- Tells them that it's 'hot' that they are transgender or queer
- Judges them for their sexual history
- Talks about other people's looks all the time



Your friend might say:

He says I'm 16 now so I should be ready and it's normal.

He just gets really sulky if we don't have sex.

I guess it is stupid that I have a problem with him finding it attractive that I'm trans.



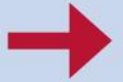
SPOT THE RED FLAG

Can you tell the part that went wrong in this situation...?

What are you doing later?

Well... I'm going to football practice with Nate! We're getting dinner after that.

Can you not go please? I just don't want you to go out today, especially with him.



THE MIX

#FriendsCanTell



RED FLAG:

Shrinking your world/Cutting off your support

What are you doing later?

Well... I'm going to football practice with Nate! We're getting dinner after that.

Can you not go please? I just don't want you to go out today, especially with him.



No one is obligated to cut ties with friends or family, or to give up hobbies, dreams and ambitions for a partner. If someone is using a relationship as an excuse to limit your personal agency, they are **shrinking your world** and **cutting off your support**.

IT IS A **RED FLAG** if your friend's partner:

- Doesn't let them connect to LGBT+ spaces without them
- Makes them cut contact with you or other friends
- Won't commit but expects your friend to
- Puts them off doing hobbies or following dreams



Your friend might say:

He said he'll tell everyone what kind of girl I am if I leave.

He's not ready for anything serious but it's not right for me to see anyone else.

I think I'd rather just spend the weekend with my partner, they are everything I need.



SPOT THE RED FLAG

Can you tell the part that went wrong in this situation...?

Hey babe, I know I was mean to you yesterday.

Yeah, I still feel really hurt about that.

I really couldn't help it, you know I was just having a bad mental health day...



THE MIX

#FriendsCanTell



Your Best Friend

RED FLAG:

Using mental health as a weapon

Hey babe, I know I was mean to you yesterday.

Yeah, I still feel really hurt about that.

I really couldn't help it, you know I was just having a bad mental health day...



Mental health is never something to be used as an excuse for hurtful behaviours directed towards the other person in a relationship. In this case, wrongdoings are not justified by having a 'bad mental health day'.

IT IS A **RED FLAG** if your friend's partner is:

- Threatening suicide if they leave
- Telling them they can't go out or have other friends etc, because of their anxiety
- Saying their bipolar disorder makes them lose their temper or means they are more in love



Your friend might say:

He says he just couldn't live without me, he loves me so much!

I don't know how she'd cope if I wasn't with her...

I have to take this call from my partner, it's an emergency



Signs of a Healthy Relationship

GOOD COMMUNICATION



Good communication is about being open and honest, where both people listen and ask thoughtful questions. When disagreements happen, partners take time to talk things through and try to understand the challenges each other face.

What does 'good communication' look like?

Your partner is open and expressive about their feelings and encourages you to be the same

Your partner is always listening to you and trying to understand what you need

Your partner never uses an argument as an excuse to insult you

Your partner is willing to admit their own faults and take responsibility for their actions

#FriendsCanTell

**THE
MIX**

#FriendsCanTell
Green Flags:



Signs of a Healthy Relationship

NO SEXUAL PRESSURE



No sexual pressure means the friendship part of the relationship is highly validated and your partner doesn't try to persuade you into more sexual interactions, because physical intimacy doesn't need to be rushed and isn't the only proof of how relationships escalate.

What does 'no sexual pressure' look like?

Your partner doesn't try to take over the ability to set the pace

Your partner understands that everyone's sex drive is different

Your partner is observant about your mood

Your partner takes your wellbeing seriously

#FriendsCanTell

**THE
MIX**

#FriendsCanTell
Green Flags:



Signs of a Healthy Relationship

RESPECT



Respect in a relationship is simple, in the most basic way, your partner should respect and support you as an equal and decisions should always be shared, instead of taking over 'authority' within the relationship.

What does 'respect' look like?

Your partner asks you for your opinion before making decisions

Your partner speaks kindly to you in conversations

Your partner supports your interests, hobbies and ambitions

Your partner listens to and validates your feelings and emotions

#FriendsCanTell

Signs of a Healthy Relationship

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES



Respecting boundaries is giving clarity about what each other want, need and should avoid and validating these principles. Despite the challenges, appreciating partners for growing up in different cultures and ideologies can be enlightening.

What does 'respecting boundaries' look like?

Your partner learns about your needs and beliefs

Your partner understands your cultural and religious boundaries

You and your partner can both exchange opinions on the openness of the relationship

Your partner doesn't expect you to give up an ideology that's important to you

#FriendsCanTell