

U Choose to Know

Sex education and abusive relationships: What you need to know



When you teach sex education (and maybe even when you teach other topics), the subject of abuse within relationships is likely to come up. Abuse is also sometimes called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and unfortunately, it's common: it affects 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men in the U.S.

Even students who haven't experienced abuse directly know that it happens. They hear stories and see abusive relationships depicted in movies and TV, and some see it firsthand in their homes and communities. They want to know what's normal, what's not, and what they can do to help themselves or someone they care about.

Here are a few key things to keep in mind so you can be ready to talk about relationships:

Students need to know that abuse doesn't just mean physical violence. It can also include:

- » Controlling behavior: This can involve controlling who a partner sees, what they do, isolating a partner from their friends or family, stalking, and even controlling whether or not the partner is allowed to use birth control.
- » Threats and intimidation: This can include threatening suicide or threats to hurt other loved ones.
- » Emotional abuse: This includes hurting a partner's feelings on purpose, constant criticism, sharing the other's personal information, "gaslighting" (making people question things they know are true), or blaming the partner for feelings the abuser has.

There are many possible warning signs that a relationship is at risk of being abusive. A few common ones are:

- » checking the other's phone without permission, even if they seem to just be joking around,
- » constantly monitoring the other's whereabouts,
- » wanting to be together 24/7,
- » a past history of abuse or physical aggression, or
- » jealousy or a lack of trust.

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Focus on the functional knowledge students need. Students may have a lot of stories to share—and have a lot of questions—about abuse. You probably won't have as much time as you want to spend on this topic, so focus on these takeaway messages:

- » Abuse is not normal, even if it might seem common.
- » Abuse is not just about physical violence.
- » Abuse is not the victim's fault.
- » It can be hard for people to get out of abusive relationships, so being supportive is important.
- » If they ever feel unsafe, they should tell someone and get help.



Want to learn more? Check out the unit on relationships in the free, on-demand *Teacher's Guide to Sex Ed* online course on [Blackboard](#) and click on the U Choose logo to get started.

 **Other resources to check out:**

The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), is staffed 24/7. They also have a [safety plan](#).

[Love is Respect](#) has great resources, including a quiz people can take to assess their relationships, information on signs of abuse, and ideas about what to do.



For more information, visit: UChooseBaltimore.org