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## The New Normal Toolkit

This toolkit was created to supplement the webinar “The New Normal,” hosted by loveisrespect, a project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline and Break the Cycle. Its contents are intended as educational materials for programs, service providers and adult allies who work with young people.

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# Dating Abuse Statistics



Dating abuse is a big problem, affecting youth in every community across the nation. Learn the facts below.

## Too Common

- Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year.<sup>1</sup>
- One in three girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.<sup>2</sup>
- One in ten high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>3</sup>

## Why Focus on Young People?

- Girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence, almost triple the national average.<sup>4</sup>
- Among female victims of intimate partner violence, 94% of those age 16-19 and 70% of those age 20-24 were victimized by a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>5</sup>
- Violent behavior often begins between the ages of 12 and 18.<sup>6</sup>
- The severity of intimate partner violence is often greater in cases where the pattern of abuse was established in adolescence.<sup>7</sup>

## Don't Forget About College Students

- Nearly half (43%) of dating college women report experiencing violent and abusive dating behaviors.<sup>8</sup>
- College students are not equipped to deal with dating abuse – 57% say it is difficult to identify and 58% say they don't know how to help someone who's experiencing it.<sup>9</sup>
- One in three (36%) dating college students has given a dating partner their computer, email or social network passwords and these students are more likely to experience digital dating abuse.<sup>10</sup>
- One in six (16%) college women has been sexually abused in a dating relationship.<sup>11</sup>

## Long-lasting Effects

- Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications by putting the victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior and further domestic violence.<sup>12</sup>
- Being physically or sexually abused makes teen girls six times more likely to become pregnant and twice as likely to get a STD.<sup>13</sup>
- Half of youth who have been victims of both dating violence and rape attempt suicide, compared to 12.5% of non-abused girls and 5.4% of non-abused boys.<sup>14</sup>

## Lack of Awareness

- Only 33% of teens who were in an abusive relationship ever told anyone about the abuse.<sup>15</sup>
- Eighty-one (81) percent of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue.<sup>16</sup>
- Though 82% of parents feel confident that they could recognize the signs if their child was experiencing dating abuse, a majority of parents (58%) could not correctly identify all the warning signs of abuse.<sup>17</sup>

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# Help a Friend



Watching a friend go through an abusive relationship can be very scary and you may feel like you're not sure how to help them. The decision to leave can only be made by the person experiencing the abuse, but there a lot of things you can do to help your friend stay safe.

## What Do I Need to Know?

If your friend or family member is undergoing the serious and painful effects of dating abuse, they may have a very different point of view than you. They may have heard the abuse was their fault and feel responsible. If they do choose to leave, they may feel sad and lonely when it's over, even though the relationship was abusive. They may get back together with their ex many times, even though you want them to stay apart. Remember that it may be difficult for your friend to even bring up a conversation about the abuse they're experiencing.

## What Can I Do?

- Don't be afraid to reach out to a friend who you think needs help. Tell them you're concerned for their safety and want to help.
- Be supportive and listen patiently. Acknowledge their feelings and be respectful of their decisions.
- Help your friend recognize that the abuse is not "normal" and is NOT their fault. Everyone deserves a healthy, non-violent relationship.
- Focus on your friend or family member, not the abusive partner. Even if your loved one stays with their partner, it's important they still feel comfortable talking to you about it.
- Connect your friend to resources in their community that can give them information and guidance. Remember, [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) can help.
- Help them develop a safety plan.
- If they break up with the abusive partner, continue to be supportive after the relationship is over.
- Even when you feel like there's nothing you can do, don't forget that by being supportive and caring -- you're already doing a lot.
- Don't contact their abuser or publicly post negative things about them online. It'll only worsen the situation for your friend.

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## But My Friend is the Abuser!

It is difficult to see someone you care about hurt others. You may not even want to admit that your friend, sister or son is abusive. But remember, when you remain silent or make excuses, you're encouraging their hurtful ways.

Ultimately, the abuser is the only person who can decide to change, but there are things you can do to encourage them to be better. It's not easy for abusive people to admit that their violent behavior is a choice and accept responsibility for it. They may benefit from having control over their partner and may turn to you to help justify the abuse. Do not support the abuse in any way. Remember, you're not turning against your friend or family member -- you're just helping them have a healthy relationship.

- Learn the warning signs of abuse so you can help your friend or family member recognize their unhealthy or abusive behaviors.
- Your friend may try to blame the victim for the abuse. Don't support these feelings or help justify the abuse.
- Help your abusive friend focus on the victim's feelings and the serious harm they're experiencing. Don't support your friend's efforts to minimize the severity of their behavior.
- Don't ignore abuse you see or hear about. Your silence helps the abusive person deny that their behavior is wrong.
- Convince your friend that getting professional help is important. Encourage him or her to find a program that can help and have a list of resources ready. Chat with a peer advocate for help.
- Stay in touch with your friend or family member about the abuse. Be there to support the abuser over the long-term.
- Remind them that change will create a better, healthier relationship for both partners.
- Set an example by having healthy relationships in your own life.

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Knowing that your son or daughter is in an unhealthy relationship can be both frustrating and frightening. But as a parent, you're critical in helping your child develop healthy relationships and can provide life-saving support if they're in an abusive relationship. Remember, dating violence occurs in both same-sex and opposite-sex couples and either gender can be abusive.

## What Do I Need to Know?

You can look for some early warning signs of abuse that can help you identify if your child is in an abusive relationship before it's too late. Some of these signs include:

- Your child's partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- You notice unexplained marks or bruises.
- Your child's partner emails or texts excessively.
- You notice that your son or daughter is depressed or anxious.
- Your son or daughter stops participating in extracurricular activities or other interests.
- Your child stops spending time with other friends and family.
- Your child's partner abuses other people or animals.
- Your child begins to dress differently.

## What Can I Do?

- Tell your child you're concerned for their safety. Point out that what's happening isn't "normal." Everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship. Offer to connect your son or daughter with a professional, like a counselor or attorney, who they can talk to confidentially.
- Be supportive and understanding. Stress that you're on their side. Provide information and non-judgmental support. Let your son or daughter know that it's not their fault and no one "deserves" to be abused. Make it clear that you don't blame them and you respect their choices.
- Believe them and take them seriously. Your child may be reluctant to share their experiences in fear of no one believing what they say. As you validate their feelings and show your support, they can become more comfortable and trust you with more information. Be careful not to minimize your child's situation due to age, inexperience or the length of their relationship.
- Help develop a safety plan. One of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship is when the victim decides to leave. Be especially supportive during this time and try to connect your child to support groups or professionals that can help keep them safe.
- Remember that ultimately your child must be the one who decides to leave the relationship. There are many complex reasons why victims stay in unhealthy relationships. Your support can make a critical difference in helping your son or daughter find their own way to end their unhealthy relationship.

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## But My Child Isn't in an Unhealthy Relationship

It's never too early to talk to your child about healthy relationships and dating violence. Starting conversations -- even if you don't think your child is dating -- is one of the most important steps you can take to help prevent dating violence. Here are some sample questions to start the conversation:

- Are any of your friends dating? What are their relationships like? What would you want in a partner?
- Have you witnessed unhealthy relationships or dating abuse at school? How does it make you feel? Were you scared?
- Do you know what you would do if you witnessed or experienced abuse?
- Has anyone you know posted anything bad about a friend online? What happened afterwards?
- Would it be weird if someone you were dating texted you all day to ask you what you're doing?

Need more tips to get started? Here are some other ways you can prepare to talk to your child about healthy and unhealthy relationships:

- Do your own research on dating abuse to get the facts before talking to your teen or 20-something. Start with the information and resources on [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).
- Provide your child with examples of healthy relationships, pointing out unhealthy behavior. Use examples from your own life, television, movies or music.
- Ask questions and encourage open discussion. Make sure you listen to your son or daughter, giving them a chance to speak. Avoid analyzing, interrupting, lecturing or accusing.
- Keep it low key. Don't push it if your child is not ready to talk. Try again another time.
- Be supportive and nonjudgmental so they know they can come to you for help if their relationship becomes unhealthy in the future.
- Admit to not knowing the answer to a particular question. This response builds trust.
- Reinforce that dating should be fun! Stress that violence is never acceptable.
- Discuss the options your child has if they witness dating abuse or experience it themselves.
- Remind your son or daughter they have the right to say no to anything they're not comfortable with or ready for. They also must respect the rights of others.
- If your child is in a relationship that feels uncomfortable, awkward or frightening, assure them they can come to you. And remember -- any decisions they make about the relationship should be their own.
- Contact Break the Cycle to find out if there are dating violence prevention programs in your community. If not, work with Break the Cycle to bring abuse prevention to your local school or community group.

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# the relationship spectrum

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in the middle.

## Healthy

relationships are based on equality and respect.

Respect  
Good communication  
Trust  
Honesty  
Equality

You make decisions together and can openly discuss whatever you're dealing with, like relationship problems and sexual choices. You enjoy spending time together but can be happy apart.

## Unhealthy

relationships are based on attempts to control the other person.

Breaks in communication  
Pressure  
Dishonesty  
Struggles for control  
Inconsiderate behavior

One person tries to make most of the decisions. He or she may pressure their partner about sex or refuse to see how their actions can hurt. In an unhealthy relationship, you feel like you should only spend time with your partner.

## Abusive

relationships are based on power and control.

Accusations  
Blame shifting  
Isolation  
Pressure  
Manipulation

One person is making all of the decisions -- about sexual choices, friend groups, boundaries, even what's true and what's not. You spend all of your time together and feel like you can't talk to other people, especially about what's really happening in your relationship.

For more information, visit [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

  
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# Know Your Relationship Rights

You have rights in your relationship. Everyone does, and those rights can help you set boundaries that should be respected by both partners in a healthy relationship.

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- You have the right to privacy, both online and off
- You have the right to feel safe and respected
- You have the right to decide who you want to date or not date
- You have the right to choose when/if you have sex and who you have sex with
- You have the right to say no at any time (to sex, to drugs or alcohol, to a relationship), even if you've said yes before
- You have the right to hang out with your friends and family and do things you enjoy, without your partner getting jealous or controlling
- You have the right to end a relationship that isn't right or healthy for you
- You have the right to live free from violence and abuse



## Setting Boundaries

Whether you're casually hooking up or have been going out for a while now, setting boundaries is an important part of any relationship. It's good for both individuals to be on the same page. To have the healthiest relationship, both partners should know each other's wants, goals, fears and limits. You should feel comfortable communicating your honest needs to your partner without being afraid of what he or she might do in response. If your partner tells you that your needs are stupid, gets angry with you or goes against what you're comfortable with, then your partner may not be showing you the respect you deserve.

Talking about your boundaries with your partner is a great way to make sure that both of your needs are being met and you feel safe in your relationship. Here are some things to think about when setting boundaries in your relationship:



### Emotional

- **The L Word:** Saying "I love you" happens for different people and different times in a relationship. If your partner says it and you don't feel that way yet, don't feel bad -- you may just not be ready yet. Let your partner know how it made you feel when they said it and tell them your own goals for the relationship.
- **Time Apart:** As great as it is to want to spend a lot of time with your partner, remember that it's important to have some time away from each other too. Both you and your partner should be free to hang out with friends (male or female) or family without having to get permission. It's also healthy to spend time by yourself doing things that you enjoy or that help you relax. You should be able to tell your partner when you need to do things on your own instead of feeling trapped into spending all of your time together.



### Physical

- **Take Your Time:** Don't rush it if you're not ready. Getting physical with your partner doesn't have to happen all at once if you're not ready. In a healthy relationship, both partners know how far each other wants to go and they communicate to each other if something changes. There isn't a rule book that says you have to go so far by a certain age or at any given time in a relationship, so take things at your own pace.
- **Sex Isn't Currency:** You don't owe your partner anything. Just because your partner takes you out to dinner, buys you a gift or says "I love you" doesn't mean you owe them anything in response. It isn't fair for your partner to claim that you don't care about them because you won't "go all the way." Even if you've done it before, you are never required to do it just because your partner is pressuring you. Remember, no means no.



## Digital

- **Passwords are Private:** Even if you trust your partner, sharing passwords for your phone and website accounts isn't always the best idea. Just like you should be able to spend time by yourself, you are entitled to your own digital privacy. Giving your partner access to your Facebook or Twitter allows them to post anything they want without getting your permission first. They can also see everyone that you talk to, which may cause unwarranted jealousy, especially if there isn't anything going on. Just to be safe, your password should be something that only you know so you know you always have control of your information.
- **Photos and Sexting:** Similarly to your physical boundaries, it's important to have digital boundaries about what you're comfortable sending via text message. Once you've hit send on a photo or text, you lose control over who sees it. If your partner sends you an inappropriate picture and demands that you send one back, you should be able to express to them that you aren't comfortable sharing that over text message without them getting angry or threatening you.

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## Boundaries are all about respect.

You and your partner **should know what is too far in all aspects of your relationship so that both of you feel safe. Do you have a question about setting boundaries in your own relationship? Call, chat or text us and we'll talk it out with you.**



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chat

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You deserve to be in a safe and healthy relationship, whether in person or online. If your partner is digitally abusive, know their behavior is not acceptable and could be illegal. Check out our tips below for staying safe on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, foursquare and others.

- Only post things you want the public to see or know. Once it's online, it's no longer under your control.
- Be protective of your personal information. Your phone numbers and addresses enable people to contact you directly, and things like your birth date, the schools you attended, your employer and photos with landmarks may make it easier for someone to find where you live, hang out or go to school.
- Set boundaries and limits. Tell people not to post personal information, negative comments or check-ins about you on social media. Ask people not to post or tag pictures if you're not comfortable with it.
- You can keep your passwords private -- sharing passwords is not a requirement of being in a relationship.
- Don't do or say anything online you wouldn't in person. It may seem easier to express yourself when you are not face-to-face, but online communication can have real-life negative consequences.

## Abuse or Harassment

- Don't respond to harassing, abusive or inappropriate comments. It won't make the person stop and it could get you in trouble or even put you in danger.
- Keep a record of all harassing messages, posts and comments in case you decide to tell the police or get a restraining order.
- Always report inappropriate behavior to the site administrators.

## Leaving an Abusive Relationship

- If you are leaving an unhealthy relationship, start by blocking your ex on Facebook and other social networking pages. We recommend you don't check-in on foursquare or other location-based sites or apps -- you don't want your ex or their friends tracking your movements.
- Adjust your privacy settings to reduce the amount of information that particular people can see on your page. Privacy settings on sites like Facebook allow the user to control how their information is shared and who has access to it. Remember, registering for some apps require you to change your privacy settings.
- Avoid posting private details on your friend's pages. They may not have appropriate settings and doing so may allow someone to see your movements and location. The same goes for tagging yourself in pictures.

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- Consider what is called a “super-logoff” -- deactivating your Facebook account every time you log off and reactivating it every time you log back on. This way, no one can post on your wall, tag you or see your content when you’re offline, but you still have all of your friends, wall posts, photos, etc. when you log back on.
- While it is inconvenient and may seem extreme, disabling your social networking page entirely may be your best option to stop continued abuse or harassment.

### **Your Friends’ Safety**

If your friend is in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, be careful what you post about them. Pictures, locations, check-ins -- even simple statements can be used to control or hurt them. If you’re unsure of what’s ok to post, get your friend’s permission before you click “Share.”

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# Texting and Sexting



Next to talking one-on-one, texting is currently one of the most instant forms of communication. While texting might be the perfect platform to say a quick “hi,” there are some things to watch out for in a textual relationship with your partner.

## Texting Too Much

If your partner texts too much, it’s not only irritating, but unnecessary. Keeping in touch with your significant other throughout the day can be thoughtful, but constant contact is probably over-doing it. Consider talking to your partner about giving you a little bit of space. Remember, if they’re using texting messaging to monitor everywhere you go, that is a warning sign of abuse.

## Sexting

Does your partner ask for inappropriate pictures of you? Or send them to you? Even if you trust that your partner will be the only one to ever see the pictures, you can never guarantee that they won’t end up on someone else’s phone or online. Seriously consider playing it safe and making a policy of not sending and instantly deleting inappropriate photos. The same goes for webcams and instant messaging, too. Remember you never have to do anything you aren’t comfortable with, no matter how much your partner pressures you.

Sexting can also have legal consequences. Any nude photos or video of someone under 18 could be considered child pornography, which is always illegal. Even if whoever sent the image did so willingly, the recipient can still get in a lot of trouble.

## Reading Someone Else’s Texts

Does your partner ask to read your texts? Or read them behind your back? Healthy relationships are built on trust, not jealousy. You have the right to privacy and the ability to talk to whomever you like. You may want to explain to your partner that you have nothing to hide, but don’t like them going through your phone or deciding who your friends are. If your partner refuses to change, you could be in an unhealthy relationship.

## Threats over Text

Threats over text should be taken seriously -- try not to write them off as angry venting. Keep track of threatening texts and think about talking to someone you trust about what is happening. Being in a violent relationship is dangerous -- don’t going through it alone.

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## What Can I Do?

Whether you feel like your partner is already using their cell phone in an abusive way or you're trying to prevent it, here are tips to keep you safe and healthy:

- Remember, it's ok to turn off your phone. Just be sure your parent or guardian knows how to contact you in an emergency.
- Don't answer calls from unknown or blocked numbers. Your abuser can easily call you from another line if they suspect you are avoiding them.
- Don't respond to hostile, harassing, abusive or inappropriate texts or messages. Responding can encourage the person who sent the message and won't get them to stop. Your messages might also get you in trouble and make it harder to get a restraining order or file a criminal report.
- Save or document troublesome texts as you may need them later for evidence in case you file a criminal report or ask for a restraining order.
- Many phone companies can block up to ten numbers from texting or calling you. Contact your phone company or check their website to see if you can do this on your phone.
- If you are in or coming out of a dangerous relationship, avoid using any form of technology to contact your abuser. It can be dangerous and may be used against you in the future.
- It may seem extreme, but if the abuse and harassment don't stop, changing your phone number may be your best option.

If you are feeling threatened or suffocated by your partner's constant calls or texts, it may be a sign that you are in an unhealthy and potentially abusive relationship. When your partner says or does things that make you afraid, lowers your self-esteem or manipulates you, it is called verbal or emotional abuse. You have the right to be in a safe and healthy relationship free from all types of abuse.

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# Take Action



Everyone deserves to be in a safe and healthy relationship. You can help make that happen by raising awareness about the issue, saying something about abuse when you see it and organizing your friends to make a difference. Here are some easy ways to get started:

## Take the Pledge

Teens and young adults across the country are pledging to keep their relationships free from abuse. They are sending a message that abuse is not acceptable in our schools, communities or hearts. Promote safe and healthy relationships by being a role model. Take the dating pledge at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) and then talk to your friends about it.

## Get the Word Out

There are so many ways to raise awareness about dating abuse and healthy relationships. You can:

- Make a poster and get permission to put it up in a public place.
- Create a PSA (check out our YouTube channel to get started).
- Write a story or blog.

Just use your creativity to make a difference! Send us a copy of whatever you create and we'll try to feature it on our blog. Thanks! On Facebook or Twitter? Bring attention to teen dating abuse by encouraging your friends and family to visit [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org). Your words can make a difference! Here are some sample posts to get you started:

- One in three teens experience some form of relationship abuse and two thirds of them never tell anyone. Help change this -- Visit [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) today.
- Everyone has the right to a safe and healthy relationship. Find out more at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).
- Love is not abuse. Break the cycle. Visit [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) today.

You can also post the videos and blogs throughout this site on your Facebook or Twitter. Together, we'll let everyone know that love IS respect.

## Get Political

Every day local, state and federal officials make decisions that impact your life. Even if you can't vote yet, you can be heard! Speak out and let the people who represent you know your opinion. Tell them that dating abuse is an important issue that should be addressed. Download our template letter to send to elected officials in your area. Most federal legislators have email systems built into their web pages -- you can find your representative by visiting [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

Speak out in your community. Call your local school board or city council and request to speak about dating abuse at their next meeting. Use our template and information on [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) to talk about dating abuse and explain how they can help you prevent it. Change starts with one voice -- so your community is counting on YOU!

For more information, visit [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)

Repurposing is allowed and encouraged.  
Please contact [loveisrespect](http://loveisrespect.org) for more information.

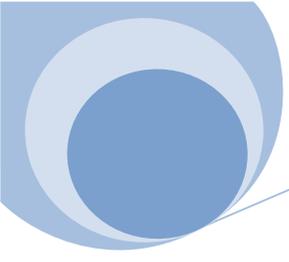
connect now!

chat at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

 text "loveis" to 22522

 call 1-866-331-9474

Discuss your options confidentially.  
Peer advocates are available 24/7.



## Tweak Your Speak

Whether you're leading a discussion in a classroom or having a casual conversation with a friend or family member getting down to what words young people use to describe a partner, dating, or relationship is important.

Break the Cycle created the Tweak Your Speak activity to encourage caring adults or those who want to learn more about teen lingo, to understand that words change over time, especially with technology!

### So how do you *tweak your speak*? It's easy – really!

- Start with a list of commonly used words like dating, relationships, boyfriend, and girlfriend. Ask the young people around you if they use these words with their friends or if there are other words they use.
- Take the list they share for other words and get them to describe what they mean. Do these words imply any type of commitment? Many relationships today are casual or not committal. If the group you're working with alludes to this, ask them to describe what makes a relationship serious or not.
- Don't forget to connect the discussion to technology or digital communications. How do the terms they use for dating, relationships or partner change online (e.g. social media) or via text.

Here are some popular words today that we've heard young people use across the country. Challenge yourself, do you know what these words mean? (Answers are on the back of this page)

- BAE
- Situationship
- Side
- Main
- Wifey
- DM

Let us know how you "Tweak'd Your Speak" We'd love to hear what words you and your group discussed! Tag us on:



@breakthecycledv



Facebook.com/breakthecycle

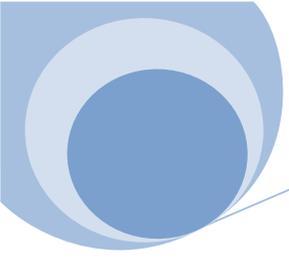


@breakthecycle

Email:

[info@breakthecycle.org](mailto:info@breakthecycle.org) with "Tweak Your Speak" as the subject.

Break the Cycle inspires and supports young people to build healthy relationships and create a culture without abuse. Our dynamic and diverse team believes that all young people deserve to live in a world where they can thrive. Our values and work centers young people and their lived realities, leadership, vision, and hopes for the future.



## GLOSSARY

**BAE:** Before Anyone Else – it’s an acronym

**Situationship:** not a committed relationship like hooking up

**Side:** often referred to as “side chick” when someone is in a committed relationships but is open to having more partners.

**Main:** often referred to as “main squeeze” the person who is your one and only or in open relationships you have a main and a side.

**Wifey:** often used with hubby words used to define boyfriend or girlfriend.

**DM:** social media reference. “It goes down in the DM” is a song lyric and refers to Direct Messaging. When you send a private message to someone. Often used when you don’t want their or your partner to find out.