

Love shouldn't hurt like this...

It's wonderful to be in love. It's exciting, romantic, and fun, and you feel like nothing can go wrong. You worry, you wonder if the person you love really loves you, or if he or she is cheating on you. However, knowing that love hurts doesn't mean you should expect to get hurt. You shouldn't be belittled, slapped, embarrassed in front of your friends, pushed, yelled at, forced to have sex if you don't want it, controlled, or afraid of the person you're dating.

Getting hurt like that isn't love. It's dangerous. It's violence. It can happen to anybody, even if you're smart or popular or strong or sophisticated. It doesn't matter who you're seeing. It happens to girls and to boys. It happens in same-sex relationships.

At first, if it happens to you or to a friend, you might not understand what exactly is happening. You're thinking, "I can handle this. I can make it stop"; or "There's no black eye. I'm not getting pushed down a stairway." "I shouldn't take put-downs so seriously." or you're thinking, "He only gets jealous because he loves me." "She only slapped me to show attitude." "She won't love me if I don't do everything she wants, when she wants it." "To show my love, I should want to spend every spare moment with him."

Or maybe you do get it. You know things aren't right, but you feel alone. You're ashamed to tell your friends. You're afraid the explosions and jealousy will get worse if you tell anyone. You're afraid to tell your parents because they might make you break up. You also may be afraid of losing your boyfriend or girlfriend or you think it's worth it to put up with anything just to have someone special in your life.

Every relationship has problems. That's part of a relationship. However, if you see patterns of uncontrolled anger, jealousy, or possessiveness, or if there is shoving, slapping, forced sex, or other physical violence then it's time to find help. For example, imagine that your best friend is dating someone who thinks and acts this way. Would it seem okay? Would you want them to stop hurting each other? Would you treat your best friend this way?

You have the right to be treated with respect and to not be harmed physically or emotionally by another person. Violence and abuse are not acceptable in any relationship. Love shouldn't hurt like this...

"What's the first step in turning the situation around?"

Take it seriously. Listen to yourself. If you feel that someone is abusing you, trust those feelings. Take it seriously.

"What's the Second Step?"

Take care of yourself. You're too valuable to settle for love that hurts. Don't stay silent—find support and help. Start by talking to someone. A counselor, a coach, a teacher, a parent, a doctor, a minister or rabbi, or a close friend can help you get an objective opinion of the situation.

They may also have some good ideas to help you stop the hurting and start talking to each other about what you really want and need in a relationship.

Statistics to know

Nearly one in 10 high school students will experience physical violence from someone they're going with. Even more teens will experience verbal or emotional abuse during the relationship.

Between 10 and 25 percent of girls between the ages of 15 and 24 will be the victims of rape or attempted rape. In more than half of those cases, the attacker is someone the girl goes out with.

Girls are not the only ones who are abused physically or emotionally in relationships. Boys also experience abuse, especially psychological abuse. Boys rarely are hurt physically in relationships, but when it happens, it's often severe. Boys also can be pressured or forced into unwanted sex, by girls or by other boys.

Violence happens in same-sex relationships, too. When it does, gay and lesbian teenagers often don't know where to turn for help. If they are not comfortable telling people that they're gay, that makes their situation even harder.

Often a relationship doesn't start out violent, but the violence starts after the two people have known each other for a while. The one big exception is forced sex (sometimes called "date rape" or "acquaintance rape"). Forced sex can sometimes happen the first or second time two people go out, especially when one person has very little dating experience and is afraid to say "no."

If you think something is wrong, it probably is. You may feel anxious, have trouble sleeping, or experience a change in appetite or weight. Your body may be telling you that something is not right—pay attention to these signs.

Remember, listen to your inner voice and trust it. Don't let your insecurities or doubts make your decision.

Get help and take care of YOU first. Everything else will fall into place.

**Information from: American Psychological Association 750 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20002