

Teachers, Coaches and Other Adults

Approaching a student about their relationship can be a challenge. When there might be abuse, it is particularly delicate. For teens, having just one supportive adult in their life could mean the difference between staying with an abuser and getting help. Here are some ways that you can be a supportive ally inside and outside of the classroom.

What to Look For

- Change in personality: an engaged student stops participating in activities; an outgoing student becomes withdrawn.
- Change in behavior: no longer spending time with the same people; unable to concentrate; stops turning in work or performance declines; constantly checking their phone; only spending time with their partner.
- Change in appearance: wearing clothes that are inappropriate for the season which can be used to cover up bruises; dramatic weight loss or weight gain; bruising.
- Change in schedule: onset of frequent lateness or absences.

Conversation Starters

- I noticed (your performance has changed, you don't spend time with this friend anymore, you seem like you're having trouble concentrating, etc.). Can we talk about this?
- I've seen a lot of students with relationships in my classroom, but I noticed that sometimes your partner says some hurtful things to you. How do you feel about that?
- I noticed that bruise on your face. I'm a safe person to talk to if there is something going on; if you don't want to tell me today, you can come to me at any time.
- How does your partner feel about your decision (to join the soccer team, to apply to college across the country, to quit that club, etc.)?

What to do

- Believe them.
- Simply listen and be supportive without judgement. Making someone feel bad about their relationship not only reinforces what the abuser tells them, but may shut them down from ever disclosing again or getting help.
- Tell them that the abuse is not their fault.
- Refer them to the appropriate resources.

What NOT to do

- Wait for them to come to you.
- Pretend you don't notice anything.

- Approach their abuser or get other friends of the student involved.
- If you offer explanations, solutions or give advice, make sure you don't make it sound like it is something they *must* do; be advised that they will most likely decide what to do on their own.

Where to go from here

- Do not report abuse or threaten to report abuse unless you are mandated to do so. Often, attempts to protect a teen from their abuser can have dramatic consequences for them that can result in more severe abuse, because their abuser got in trouble. Whether or not a teen decides to end their relationship, maintaining your status as an adult who is safe to talk to is the most important thing.
- Know what resources are available through your school including referrals to guidance counselors, social workers, and peer support groups.
- Every county in New York State has a local domestic violence program with advocates standing by to help. The New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline can help find a program near you. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call 1-800-942-6906, text 844-997-2121 or chat at opdv.ny.gov.
- An advocate can provide more information about how to create a [safety plan](#), how to get an order of protection, how to get counseling and how to be a better ally.

Resources

- [Information for Schools](#)
- [Coaching Boys into Men](#)
- [JWI: All Adults Can Make a Difference](#)
- [Love is Respect](#)
- [Take a Stand for Healthy Relationships](#)

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 911.