

Partner violence: Know the signs of a harmful relationship

By Natalie McGill

Relationships are important, and having a partner to share the ups and downs of life can be extremely rewarding. But not all relationships are healthy, especially those that involve intimate partner violence. That's why it's important to recognize the signs and know when to get help.

Intimate partner violence is a pattern of harmful behavior from someone you're in a romantic or sexual relationship with, says Mikel Walters, a behavioral scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Violence can take different forms, from physical and sexual abuse to stalking and psychological aggression. And the problem is more common than you might think.

A 2011 report from CDC found 12 million women and men were victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the prior 12 months. About 24 percent of

female victims and 14 percent of male victims experienced severe physical violence at the hands of their partner.

"It affects so many people," Walters says. "Violence is a crucial public health problem that has the potential for immediate lifetime health consequences. Sexual violence, stalking and intimate partner violence are widespread throughout the U.S. and affect millions of adults."



If you're a victim of intimate partner violence, it's important to realize that it is not your fault. Always call 911 if you feel your life is in danger and go to an emergency room if you are hurt. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available any time at 1-800-799-7233 to talk to you and give advice. You can also talk to a school counselor or your doctor.

Sometimes people who are in abusive relationships are afraid or embarrassed to seek help. Always keep your safety in mind. And know that the abuse may get worse.

Counseling may be an option, but in many



>> For information on intimate partner violence, visit www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention or call 1-800-799-7233

cases, ending your relationship may be the best decision. Domestic violence counselors and shelters can give you advice on what steps to take, or how to leave your partner. Many services are available for free, so don't let that be a barrier.

After you've left the relationship, it's still important to think of your safety. Change your phone number and the locks at your home. If it's not safe to stay there, stay with a friend or relative or call a shelter, says the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Never stay somewhere alone if you feel threatened.

If you leave a partner who you're married to or are living with, make sure you take important papers such as your marriage license and police and medical reports that document your abuse. And if you end up meeting with your former partner, always make sure it's in a public place.

While a victim of partner violence may not be able to prevent it, changing attitudes about what makes a healthy relationship is important for people at risk for partner violence. After you've left an abusive relationship, talking to a counselor or friends can help you work through the experience and develop future healthy relationships.

"Promoting healthy respectful relationships among adults is vitally important to preventing intimate partner violence and addressing messages that promote nonviolence," Walters says.



Are you a victim of partner violence?

While some instances of intimate partner violence are obvious — such as being physically injured by a partner — others are more subtle. Sometimes people aren't aware that they are being abused. But there are warning signs that can tell you whether you're in an abusive relationship, says the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health. According to the office, you may be abused if your partner:

- ◆ Constantly monitors what you're doing.
- ◆ Repeatedly accuses you of being unfaithful without cause.
- ◆ Gets very angry after drinking or using drugs.
- ◆ Blames you for her or his violent outbursts.
- ◆ Controls how you spend your money.
- ◆ Decides things for you that you should be allowed to decide, such as what you should wear or eat.
- ◆ Humiliates you in front of others.
- ◆ Destroys your property or things that you care about.
- ◆ Prevents or discourages you from seeing family and friends, or from going to work or school.
- ◆ Threatens to harm himself or herself when upset with you.



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