

DATING SAFETY

FOR TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

Healthy relationships respect boundaries, independence, and personal safety.

Dating is an important part of growing up, developing relationships, and learning what we want and need from a partner.

Whether you're navigating your first relationship, meeting someone through a dating app, or getting to know someone new, understanding personal safety is an important part of the experience.

Dating safety isn't about assuming everyone has bad intentions. It's about recognizing concerning behavior, establishing boundaries, making informed decisions, and knowing when to walk away.

And remember: Someone being interested in you doesn't mean they're entitled to your time, attention, affection, or body.

01 | RECOGNIZE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Respect isn't something you should have to earn.

Healthy relationships are built on mutual respect, trust, communication, and independence.

Green flags include:

- Respecting your boundaries without pressuring you.
- Accepting "no" without punishment or manipulation.
- Supporting your friendships and outside interests.
- Communicating without threats or intimidation.
- Taking responsibility for mistakes.
- Respecting your privacy and independence.
- Making you feel comfortable expressing your opinions.

Disagreements happen in healthy relationships. The important distinction is how people handle them.

REMEMBER: A healthy relationship doesn't require you to sacrifice your independence to keep someone happy.

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02 | RECOGNIZE RED FLAGS

Pay attention to patterns, not just promises.

Concerning behavior doesn't always begin with obvious threats or physical aggression.

Warning signs may include:

- Repeatedly ignoring your boundaries.
- Becoming angry when you spend time with others.
- Demanding access to your phone or accounts.
- Monitoring your location or activities.
- Pressuring you to move faster than you're comfortable with.
- Using guilt, jealousy, or threats to influence your decisions.
- Attempting to isolate you from friends or family.
- Blaming you for their anger or behavior.
- Intimidating you during disagreements.

One uncomfortable interaction doesn't necessarily tell you everything about a person. But repeated boundary violations, controlling behavior, and escalation deserve attention.

REMEMBER: An apology without meaningful behavior change doesn't erase a pattern.

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03 | UNDERSTAND CONSENT & BOUNDARIES

Consent is ongoing. It can change. And it matters every time.

Being in a relationship doesn't eliminate the need for consent.

Consent should be freely given, informed, and specific to the activity.

Understand that:

- You can say no at any time.
- You can change your mind.
- Agreeing to one activity doesn't mean agreeing to another.
- Dating someone doesn't create an obligation to physical intimacy.
- Pressure, threats, and manipulation undermine consent.
- Someone who is incapacitated cannot consent.
- Silence or a lack of resistance isn't automatically consent.

You also have a responsibility to respect other people's boundaries.

REMEMBER: Consent isn't something you convince someone to give.

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04 | PLAN SAFER FIRST DATES

A little planning can create more options.

Meeting someone new should be enjoyable, but taking basic precautions is reasonable.

Consider:

- Meeting in a public location.
- Arranging your own transportation.
- Letting a trusted person know your plans.
- Keeping your phone charged.
- Having a way to leave independently.
- Avoiding sharing your home address too early.
- Being mindful of alcohol or other substances that affect judgment.
- Establishing a check-in plan with someone you trust.

For teens, dating plans should be age-appropriate and follow applicable family rules. Younger teens may benefit from group activities and clearly arranged transportation.

REMEMBER: Having your own transportation and an exit plan gives you more control over your decisions.

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05 | WATCH FOR MANIPULATION & CONTROL

Control isn't love. Jealousy isn't proof of affection.

Some unhealthy relationships begin with intense attention that gradually becomes pressure or control.

Pay attention when someone:

- Demands constant communication.
- Becomes angry when you don't respond immediately.
- Uses threats of breaking up to get their way.
- Makes you feel guilty for having boundaries.
- Pressures you to abandon friendships or activities.
- Uses private information against you.
- Threatens self-harm to prevent you from leaving.
- Makes you feel responsible for managing their emotions.

A partner threatening self-harm should be taken seriously, but you are not responsible for staying in a relationship to prevent it. Seek help from trusted adults, crisis services, or emergency responders when appropriate.

REMEMBER: You can care about someone without accepting controlling or threatening behavior.

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06 | PROTECT YOUR DIGITAL PRIVACY

Dating someone doesn't mean surrendering your privacy.

Digital boundaries are part of healthy relationships.

Consider:

- Keeping passwords private.
- Reviewing location-sharing settings.
- Being cautious about sharing intimate images.
- Recognizing pressure to provide access to messages.
- Understanding that private content can be copied or shared.
- Watching for impersonation, threats, or online harassment.
- Knowing how to document and report concerning behavior.

If someone threatens to share intimate images, seek help. Don't assume you have to handle it alone.

For images taken when someone was under 18, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Take It Down service may help limit their spread.

REMEMBER: Trust doesn't require unrestricted access to your devices, accounts, or location.

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07 | KNOW WHEN & HOW TO LEAVE

You don't need a dramatic incident to decide a relationship isn't right for you.

You can end a relationship because you're unhappy, uncomfortable, incompatible, or simply no longer interested.

You don't have to prove someone is dangerous to decide you don't want to continue dating them.

If you choose to end a relationship:

- Consider whether an in-person conversation is safe.
- Tell a trusted person about your decision.
- Avoid isolated locations if you're concerned about the person's reaction.
- Arrange independent transportation when appropriate.
- Keep communication brief and clear.
- Seek assistance if the person becomes threatening or refuses to respect your decision.

Important: If a partner has been controlling, threatening, or physically abusive, ending the relationship can increase danger. A personalized safety plan developed with a qualified advocate may be safer than a direct confrontation.

REMEMBER: You don't owe someone continued access to you because you've dated them.

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08 | TRUST YOUR JUDGMENT & ASK FOR HELP

You don't have to figure everything out alone.

Sometimes people recognize concerning behavior but hesitate to act because they don't want to overreact, embarrass themselves, or hurt someone's feelings.

Pay attention when:

- You feel pressured to ignore your boundaries.
- You're afraid of how someone will react to your decisions.
- You change your behavior to avoid making someone angry.
- You feel increasingly isolated.
- Someone's actions don't match their promises.
- You're uncomfortable but feel obligated to continue the relationship.

Uncomfortable feelings aren't proof of someone's intentions, but they're a valid reason to slow down, reassess, or leave.

Talk to a trusted adult, friend, counselor, or qualified support organization when you need guidance.

REMEMBER: Asking for help is a strength, not a failure.

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PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

YOUR DATING SAFETY CHECKLIST

Before a date or when evaluating a relationship, ask yourself:

- ☐ Do I feel comfortable expressing my boundaries?
- ☐ Does this person respect my decisions?
- ☐ Can I spend time with friends and family without conflict or pressure?
- ☐ Do I have control over my transportation and communication?
- ☐ Does this person respect my digital privacy?
- ☐ Do I feel safe saying no?
- ☐ Can I disagree without fear of intimidation or retaliation?
- ☐ Do I recognize any patterns of manipulation or control?
- ☐ Do I have trusted people I can talk to about my relationship?
- ☐ Do I know how to leave or seek help if circumstances change?

You don't need a perfect relationship or a perfect score on a checklist.

But if you're consistently uncomfortable, afraid, pressured, or controlled, those concerns deserve attention.

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FOR PARENTS: KEEP THE CONVERSATION OPEN

Teenagers may hesitate to discuss dating problems because they're afraid of judgment, punishment, or being told they're too young to understand relationships.

Instead of focusing exclusively on rules, talk about what healthy relationships look like.

Ask questions such as:

"How does this person treat you when you disagree?"

"Do you feel comfortable telling them no?"

"Do they support your friendships and interests?"

"If something happened that made you uncomfortable, would you feel comfortable telling me?"

Listen without immediately criticizing their partner or dismissing their feelings.

If your teen discloses abuse, prioritize their safety, listen without blame, and seek appropriate professional support.

The goal is to remain someone your child trusts when they need help.

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WHEN A RELATIONSHIP BECOMES UNSAFE

Dating violence can include physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, threats, intimidation, and patterns of coercive control.

It can happen in teenage relationships, college relationships, and adult relationships.

If you or someone you know is experiencing dating abuse, confidential support is available.

Love Is Respect — Dating Abuse Support

www.loveisrespect.org

Call **866-331-9474**

Text **LOVEIS** to **22522**

National Domestic Violence Hotline

www.thehotline.org

Call **800-799-SAFE (7233)**

If you're in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

If someone may be monitoring your phone or online activity, consider using a safer device to seek assistance.

REMEMBER

Healthy relationships should add to your life, not require you to surrender control of it.

Dating should be an opportunity to learn about yourself, connect with others, and build meaningful relationships.

You won't always recognize every warning sign, and you cannot control someone else's behavior.

But you can learn to identify concerning patterns, establish boundaries, protect your independence, and recognize when it's time to seek help.

You deserve respect. You deserve autonomy. And you never have to earn the right to feel safe.

Knowledge creates options.

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KEEP LEARNING. KEEP GROWING.

Knowledge is just the beginning. Take your training further with our free and paid online courses at Hero Self Defense Academy, where you'll build practical skills, strengthen your awareness, and learn to take a proactive approach to your personal safety.

Visit meangirlselfdefense.com to explore our training programs, find an instructor, or register for an upcoming seminar.

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