

# Abuse in relationships hurts mental health

Harmful relations with friends and significant others create lasting effects on student interactions and well-being

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Editor's note: The names [Lily], [Roxie], and [Alyssa] have been changed to legally protect the identity of the students

Couples walk into the school, happily holding hands. They smile at each other as they talk and prepare for the day. Unfortunately, not all relationships are like this.

Plastered around the school are posters and flyers showing hotlines to call and websites to visit for those stuck in an unhealthy relationship, but for what reason?

"1 in 3 young people will be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship," said therapist Vanessa Blades "Roughly 33

percent of adolescents in America are victim to sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional dating abuse."

From violence to hateful speech, abuse is more common than most people think. Mental, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse are the main forms of abuse. These kinds of abuse are seen in relationships, even relationships among teenagers.

Abuse is defined as any action that

intentionally harms or injures another person. In short, someone who purposefully harms another in any way is committing abuse," said Blades.

Abuse among relationships can happen any age, any race, or any gender can experience a form of abuse from a partner, and it is not just one type of abuse that people can experience.

"Though there tends to be some trends of adult males being prominent perpetrators of abuse, any person can be a perpetrator or victim of abuse," said Blades. "Unfortunately, some people do not realize that they are being abused; some people do not even realize that their aggressive actions towards someone they are in an intimate relationships with [be it familiar or romantic] could be defined as abuse."

Abuse can happen to anyone. While it statistically is more prevalent in females, males can be abused as well.

"Yeah, I'll have students come into my office, and both male and females, and they'll be in an abusive relationship, and they may not know it. They may not realize that it's not a healthy relationship, and they think that's just part of dating someone and we teach kids that it's not a normal part of the dating process," said assistant principal Joe Voelker. "If you date someone, that person helps you and helps make you a better person, not tries to tear you down or control your actions."

When people talk about abuse, many will talk about physical harm, but relationship abuse can occur in different

areas.

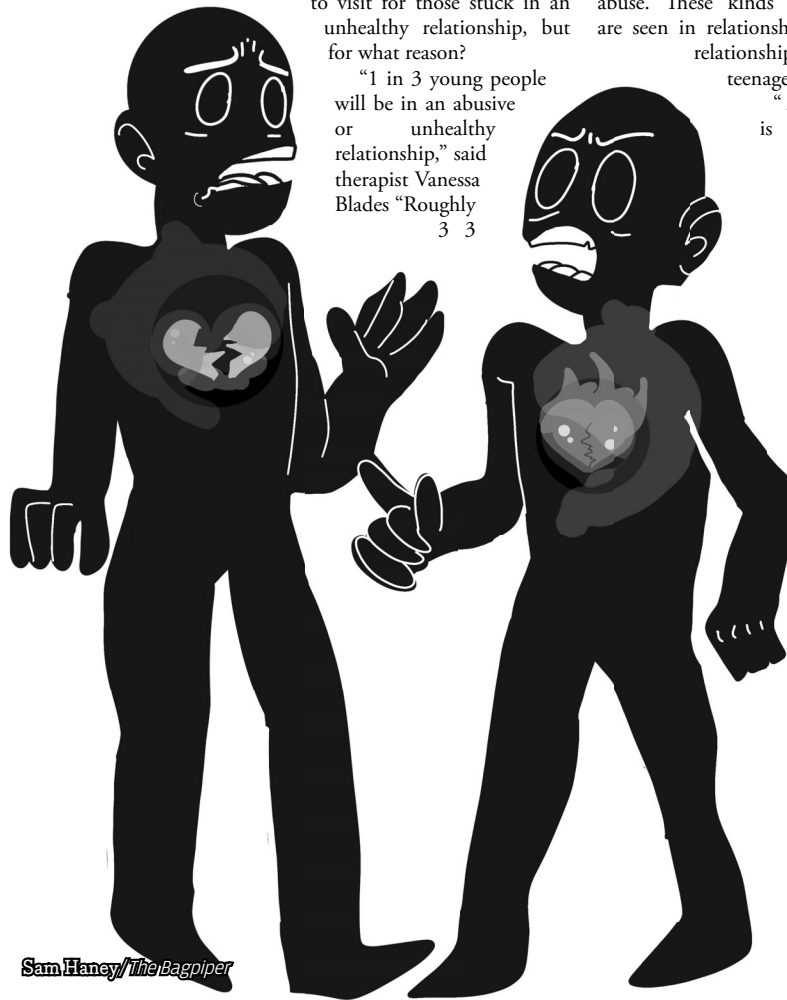
"Well, certainly [it is abuse] if there's any physical harm that is being done. It can also be verbal abuse, it can be anything that is hurtful mentally or it's a relationship that you're not happy with or you may feel depressed or just unhappy all the time because of how someone is treating you that we constitute an abusive relationship," said counselor Mark Clark. "It doesn't just have to be physical abuse or harm."

In some ways, emotional and mental abuse can be worse than physical abuse.

"He was controlling and possessive. He also manipulated every situation to somehow make me feel bad for anything," said "Roxie," an FC student who said she was once in an emotionally abusive relationship. She said she had a "gut feeling that I was in one," but she ignored her apprehensions.

"The most common kind of abuse tends to be verbal or psychological abuse, usually either by a family member, romantic partner, or person in power, which can be more difficult to recognize sometimes due to differences in how persons view verbal exchanges such as from a cultural or disciplinary standpoint if you are looking at parent-child relationships," said Blades

"Every time I was wrong, or even if we were in an argument he would call me names and make me feel like I didn't mean anything to him," said "Lily." "It hurt me, I don't know myself anymore." Lily is an FC student who was in an emotionally



abusive relationship not long ago. "He just didn't care about me and made it obvious enough to hurt me, on purpose."

According to *loveisrespect*, an organization that helps those who have or had an abusive relationship and inform people about them, abusive relationships at a young age puts, "the victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior and further domestic violence." In addition, they said that, "One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence."

These effects can be absolutely devastating, and can leave a person with long lasting problems with self-esteem and self-worth, and even mental issues like post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, abuse that occurs at or from a young age can cause personality disorders.

"Victimized people commonly develop emotional or psychological problems secondary to their abuse," said Blades, "including anxiety disorders and various forms of depression."

Sexual abuse can also transmit STDs, some of which can not be cured.

"Sexual disorders may be present. Sex may be experienced as particularly undesirable, or physically or emotionally painful. Alternatively, sexual promiscuity may be observed with the increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy that

such behavior carries. Severe abuse can even lead the victim to contemplate suicide or carry out suicidal impulses," said Blades.

People can be abused in these ways even by ones that they love.

"I was in a relationship with my ex-boyfriend about two years ago. The relationship had a lot of problems like fighting, which would rarely get physical, and sexual abuse. We really

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assistant principal

loved each other and everything was so good for two years but we broke up for a year and when we got back together things were different. We fought all the time and we were both toxic to one another," said "Alyssa," an FC student who was in a physical and sexually abusive relationship for about a year. "He would pressure me for sex or make me feel bad if I didn't. When we fought and it got physical it never got too crazy or anything past shoving or slapping. I knew it was a toxic abusive relationship all along but I loved him and thought that we could always work out and fix things because that's what he told me."

The effects of abuse, depending on the type, can be short term or long term.

"It made me so insecure. Everyday was unpredictable. We couldn't go a week without fighting, and I based my

happiness off him. I felt so trapped, like I couldn't live my own life. I craved his validation but was never satisfied," said "Roxie."

Students have different options when seeking help, including reaching out to school faculty.

"The office, they can go to their counselor or an administrator or really any trusted adult in the building," said Voelker. "They have a teacher, coach, whoever, and they should be able to help them."

There are also options outside of the school grounds where people can receive help. These resources can be over the phone or through online messaging.

"I always recommend the Center for Women and Families. It's local, they have a 24 hour call line, they are always available to help," said officer Robbie Woodruff. "They [also] do have sources for males going through an abusive relationship."

Those who come out of the abuse have scars from their experience. Some even learn valuable lessons from it.

"It ended when he finally gave up and admitted that he cheated on me for the second time. It affects me now because I can't trust another person or really love another person like I did before," said "Alyssa." "Something I want people in a relationship to know is that if your partner and you are having problems try to solve them the best you can but if it's hurting you more to put in the effort then to just let it go. Love hurts and it's hard sometimes but I'm grateful for that experience because it taught me valuable lessons on how to love."

## Hotlines:

### The Center for Women and Families

**24 hour crisis + information**

**hotline:**

**1-844-BE-SAFE (1-844-237-2331)**

**Love is Respect:**

**1-866-331-9474**

**Rainn:**

**88-656-HOPE**

**General Crisis text line:**

**TEXT SUPPORT to 741-741**

### Websites for more information:

**[loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)**

**[domesticshelters.org](http://domesticshelters.org)**

**[mentalhelp.net](http://mentalhelp.net)**

**[dosomething.org](http://dosomething.org)**

**[rainn.org](http://rainn.org)**