



Session One

What is 'teenage relationship abuse'?



It is important to read the **Disrespect NoBody discussion guide in full before starting this session. There is advice on how to run each session and how to set clear ground rules/working agreement before any discussion takes place. This session covers some very serious themes on relationship abuse and you should ensure it is suitable for the young people you are working with, considering their age and maturity.**

The session delivered in full will take up to 80 minutes, which can be delivered in two shorter sessions or, if time is short, teachers/facilitators are advised to focus on the following sections (drawing out key points from the remaining sections throughout the activities):

- **Starter activity**
- **Understanding relationship abuse**
- **Warning signs and asking for help**

These sessions are not intended to be taught in isolation but should be part of a planned programme that includes learning about positive, healthy relationships.

Session objective:

To deepen understanding of relationship abuse, how to identify it and how to access support.

Intended learning outcomes:

By the end of this session the young people will be able to say:

- I understand and can explain what is meant by the term 'relationship abuse'.
- I understand and can identify the different types of abuse that can be present within relationships.
- I have some ideas about how to get help with relationship abuse.

Having agreed ground rules/working agreement for the session (see discussion guide), explain to the group that you are going to show a short film about young people and relationships. If they are upset or feel uncomfortable about anything they see and hear they can leave the room (explain where to go) and/or speak to you privately after the session. You can explain that this film is part of the 'Disrespect NoBody' campaign and they might have seen it before.

The following session is based on the 'Relationship Abuse' film clip which you can view on the 'Disrespect NoBody' campaign website www.disrespectnobody.co.uk or on DVD. See **Resource A** on how to order the DVD.



Starter activity (10 minutes)

Ask the group to brainstorm in pairs or small groups how a person might feel if they are in a healthy, positive relationship.

Next ask them to brainstorm the features of a healthy, positive relationship.

Take feedback, drawing out feelings such as happy, confident, secure, in love, and features such as honesty, trust, equality, respect, friendship and so on.

Remind the group of any previous learning about recognising healthy, positive relationships and explain that whilst people can sometimes fall out, or have difficulties in healthy, positive relationships, the session(s) they will be doing based on the Disrespect NoBody campaign will focus on relationships and relationship behaviour that is not a feature of a healthy, positive relationship and that it is important to recognise this so that their relationships will be healthy, positive and safe, with the features and feelings they just identified.

Understanding relationship abuse (10 minutes)

Show the short film. Facilitate a group discussion to get a spontaneous reaction to what they have just seen. Suggested questions to prompt discussion include:

- What are your initial thoughts?
- What do you think about the way the characters (puppets) in the film are behaving?
- What do you think about the behaviours which were mentioned in the film?

The films we use as discussion starters focus on male characters as the abuser and female characters as the victim. While evidence consistently shows that most abuse in relationships is perpetrated by men against women, it is important to let the group know that abuse can happen within any relationship, this includes heterosexual relationships where the female is the abuser and the male is the victim, as well as within lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships, while we know that trans people are also disproportionately vulnerable to abuse.

Follow this up with further questions which will get the group to think more about relationship abuse. Depending on the size of the group you can either do this with the whole group or split them into smaller groups to discuss together and report back to the whole group.

What do they think are abusive behaviours? Suggested questions to prompt discussion could include:

- From what you have just seen in the film, and thinking about how relationships can sometimes not be so good, what sort of things do you think are 'abusive' or disrespectful (unhealthy) relationship behaviours?
- Is it possible that while there is attraction between two people, it may be that one of them can still behave abusively towards the other (or both towards one another)?

Understanding healthy and less healthy behaviours (10 minutes)

Then ask the group to consider what they think the difference is between being controlling and manipulative versus having a 'normal' healthy argument. Perhaps ask them to shout out ideas that you capture on the white board, or put their ideas on post-it notes to be collected later.

You will then need to explain and clarify what's healthy and what's not and what's abusive. Abusive behaviour can include: violence (hitting, kicking, slapping); emotional (making someone afraid, humiliating and putting them down); and sexual (forcing them to do sexual acts without consent). A list of warning signs of potential abusive behaviours is in **Resource C** (this resource is for your guidance and not intended to be read out to the group – instead, draw and build on the ideas they suggest using this for reference). Make it clear that in a healthy relationship both partners treat each other with respect.

Discuss with the group what the difference between a normal argument or bickering and controlling behaviour is. If necessary, explain that controlling behaviour is trying to force someone to do something that they don't want to do, or to stop them from doing something that they do want to do, using intimidation, manipulation, implied threats, isolation and so on.

Also, clarify that a 'normal' healthy disagreement can happen between two or more people who feel able to express their views and opinions but they know it's important to respect the views and opinions of others. A healthy disagreement normally involves negotiation ('a bit of give and take') and no one person emerges the 'winner' or the 'loser'.

Understanding emotional abuse versus physical abuse (15 minutes)

Ask the group to stand in a space. Indicate an imaginary line across the space where one end is 'strongly agree' and the other is 'strongly disagree'. As you read the following statements, ask the young people to stand along the continuum to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree. Ask volunteers to explain why they chose that position.

Statements:

- It isn't really abuse if it's not physical.
- In the film the 'hands' talk about 'turning to violence when your girlfriend disagrees with you'. It is sometimes justified to hit your partner during an argument.
- Physical abuse is more serious than emotional abuse.

As the group is discussing these points it is important to clarify and explain that emotional abuse is just as serious as physical abuse. The impacts of emotional abuse can also be very long-lasting.



Key points to ensure the group understand (where time allows, these could be adapted to form a true/false/not sure quiz):

- Relationship abuse happens when one person hurts or bullies another person who is or was their partner, or who is in the same family. The perpetrator of such abuse is always responsible; no one else is to blame.
- It can happen between people of any age, nationality, religion, race or family background, including young people.
- It can happen between young people who are going out together, people who are living together, have children together or are married to each other. It can happen either when people live together or separately.
- Relationship abuse can also happen after a relationship has finished.
- In heterosexual relationships, while women are disproportionately the victims of abuse, men can also be victims of abuse and can often find it harder to seek help.
- Abuse can happen in same-sex relationships and in relationships involving a trans person and may, in such cases, have its own unique characteristics. For example, it could involve threatening to 'out' someone as lesbian, gay, bi or trans. Or it could also involve pressuring someone to 'prove' their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Abuse within relationships is often a repeated pattern of behaviour.
- It often includes several different types of abusive behaviour, including physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse.
- People use both physical and emotional abuse to control other people they have a relationship with.

Make it clear that controlling behaviour is strongly associated with physical violence – people who use controlling behaviour are likely to go on to use violence or are already doing so.

Understanding controlling behaviour (15 minutes)

This section builds on the previous discussion to explore how people might use controlling behaviour. In pairs or small groups, ask the young people to brainstorm the controlling behaviours they saw in the film. Take feedback and perhaps collect their ideas on the board.

Notes to facilitators

Behaviours exhibited in the 'Relationship Abuse' film are as follows:

- checking people's phone and controlling who they can talk to
- telling people what to wear
- pressuring people to send a nude selfie
- pressuring people to have sex
- physical violence

Discuss with the group what they think about these controlling behaviours, reminding them that such behaviours can happen in diverse types of relationships. If young people suggest that there are circumstances in which such behaviours are acceptable, such as if their partner has cheated on them before and they check their phone because they don't trust them, make sure that the group understand that it's never acceptable to use controlling behaviours in any circumstances. It is essential to mention that the Serious Crime Act 2015 created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or familial relationships, meaning that such behaviours can have serious legal repercussions. See **Resource E** for further information on crimes within the Sexual Offences Act.



Warning signs and asking for help (15 minutes)

Explain that this section focuses on the warning signs of an abusive relationship and what people might be able to do to help someone who is being abused. A list of warning signs of potential abusive behaviours are listed in **Resource C**.

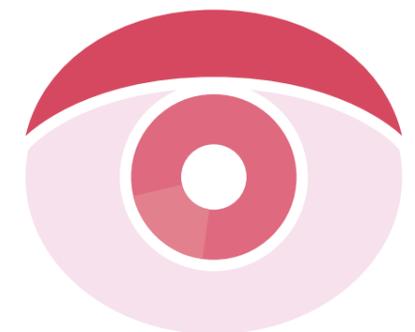
Ask the young people to think about the film they have seen and the discussions you have had and then discuss these questions (you could show them on the board or produce discussion prompt sheets, set up a 'graffiti wall' for them to write ideas on, or use 'Post-its' which can be added to large sheets of paper with the questions around the room):

- What warning signs might indicate that someone is in an abusive relationship?
- What other warning signs can you think of that might mean someone is being abusive to their partner?
- What stops people asking for help?

Why might someone who is being abused find it difficult to leave an abusive partner or take other action to protect themselves? Think about the practical, emotional and other possible consequences of leaving or taking action. Violence can sometimes escalate when a relationship ends, so victims should seek advice on how to do this.

Make sure that young people are aware of the organisations which can offer help and advice, especially if they are thinking about leaving an abusive relationship. A list of organisations which offer help, which you can print and give to the young people, is in **Resource D**.

In groups, ask young people to have a discussion about things that friends and family might do to help someone who is being abused. Take feedback and make a list. Bear in mind that this can be an incredibly complex situation – it might be that they believe a friend they really care about is abusing another friend they really care about. Only begin such a conversation if you feel you have time to do the discussion justice, otherwise use **Resource D** to signpost pupils to sources of support for those who have been abused or are at risk.



Notes to facilitators

Review the young people's ideas and discuss how effective the suggestions might be.

Remind them only to use safe methods, avoiding risky strategies such as physically tackling the abuser. Stress that, as a minimum, they should try to identify a safe person that they could ask for help (this could be a school counsellor, a parent or other relative, a teacher, a youth worker, another trusted adult). If they are really worried about their own or someone else's safety they should report their fears to the police as well, or use the sources of support highlighted in **Resource D**.

Support for lesbian, gay, bi or transgender young people

Some young people may also be questioning their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity or in the process of transitioning and could also be in an abusive relationship.

Abusive relationships can start with verbal or emotional abuse and could happen to anyone and in any relationship. An abusive partner may threaten to 'out' them, pressure them into a sexual act to prove their sexual orientation, or for example stop them from attending medical appointments relating to transition.

Organisations listed in **Resource D** provide support to all young people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people. Galop provides specific support to all LGBT young people. Their national LGBT domestic abuse helpline provides confidential support to all members of the LGBT communities, their family, friends and agencies supporting them. You can find out more on their website: <http://www.galop.org.uk/contact-us/>

Following the discussion, it is important that you let the group know that there are organisations which can provide support and advice for them, or their friends who may be in an abusive relationship. A list of the sources of help and advice that are available is in **Resource D**. Make sure these are accessible to the young people, it is preferable to print them out so they can be taken away with them, rather than relying on the young people to copy them down, as they may not wish others to see that they are choosing to write them down. If this is not possible it is better to insist that everyone copies them down.

Plenary (5 minutes)

Conclude by asking everyone what they have learnt. Focus on the fact that there are warning signs of an abusive relationship that everyone needs to be familiar with and act upon.

- Remind young people that relationship, domestic and sexual abuse is unacceptable and in many cases criminal. The police do take this seriously and have specially trained officers to respond to domestic abuse.
- Stress that abuse can never be justified and that nobody ever deserves to be abused. Anyone who is affected by the issues should talk to an appropriate adult about making themselves safer.

Suggested questions to help prompt discussion, or for private reflection:

- Do you feel differently about anything as a result of what you have seen and heard in this session?
- Has anything surprised you/shocked you?
- If someone asked you what you thought was 'abuse' would you describe more things/behaviours now than you would have before?
- If you thought a friend was experiencing any form of abuse, would you know how to get help?
- How would you react if you knew someone was experiencing abuse but someone said 'it's nothing to do with us – it is between them? If he/she doesn't like it he/she can leave?' Why might people say this? Do we have a responsibility to help? What might happen if we do nothing? How might we feel about that?
- If this happened to you, would you end the relationship? What could happen if you didn't? If you needed help who would you go to? What might stop you from going for help? After what you have heard today what might encourage you to seek help?

Check that the session's objectives have been met and the young people can now say:

- I understand and can explain what is meant by the term 'relationship abuse'.
- I understand and can identify the different types of abuse that can be present within relationships.
- I have some ideas about how to get help with relationship abuse.

