

NSPCC Talk Relationships Ages 14-16

Lesson 3 - Resource 1: Silent debate

- What are the features of abuse in a relationship?
- What should someone do if they think they are experiencing abuse in a relationship?
- What could someone do if they were concerned that their friend was experiencing abuse in a relationship?
- What are the emotional consequences for people involved in abuse in a relationship?
- What could happen to someone who was found to be abusive toward their partner?
- Is the abuse in relationships likely to be different if it involves a man and a woman, or people who are in a same sex relationship?

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Lesson 3 - Resource 2a: Three diary entries - Group A

March

Alina's diary

I'm so lucky that he still wants to be with me. Sometimes I think I am such a waste of space. It upsets me so much that I make him angry, but today was a good day, because he accepted my apology and said we can get our relationship back on track. It was really stupid of me to have looked at that other guy when we went out. Of course other boys were going to be flirting with me, I should have realised it would have made him jealous and embarrassed. But I promised I won't wear anything like that again - I don't want everyone thinking I'm a slut! I just hope Jamie won't think too badly about him, I'll have to explain when I see her in the morning.

Bradley's diary

I feel a bit bad but... she just makes me so angry sometimes. When I saw her looking at that guy! How could she do that to me? I thought I was going to kill him. She always helps calm me down, and I know she doesn't mean to make me angry. I called her a slut, and I know I shouldn't have done. I just need to make her realise how good we are together. After everything I've done for her - I bought her those really expensive trainers last month - I'm still paying them off. I know I've got my flaws, but if she loves me, she'll realise I didn't really mean it and that we're good together most of the time.

Jamie's diary

Tonight was scary. I've never seen him like that before. I knew he was a bit weird, and sometimes I've noticed Alina sort of flinches when he comes close to her, but tonight was something else. I've tried to tell her before that he is a creep, but she didn't speak to me for a week and just spent all her time with him instead. What can I do? I want to be a good friend to her but she'll hate me if I say anything. Maybe it's just their business. Most of the time she seems happy, it's only when they argue that things get out of control. She says they made up, so maybe I should worry less.

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Lesson 3 - Resource 2b: Three diary entries

- Group B

Bradley's diary

I'm so lucky that she still wants to be with me. Sometimes I think I am such a waste of space. It upsets me so much that I make her angry, but today was a good day, because she accepted my apology and said we can get our relationship back on track. It was really stupid of me to have looked at that other girl when we went out. It felt like she only caught my eye for a second, but Alina said I had been staring at her for ages. I should have realised it would have made her jealous and embarrassed. But I promised I won't do anything like that again - I don't want everyone thinking I'm sleeping around! I just hope Jamie won't think too badly about her, I'll have to explain when I see him in the morning.

Alina's diary

I wish I could control myself... he just makes me so angry sometimes. When I saw him looking at that girl! How could he do that to me? I thought I was going to kill her. He always helps calm me down, and I know he doesn't mean to make me angry. I shouted some really offensive stuff at him, and I know I shouldn't have done. I just need to make him realise how good we are together. After everything I've done for him - I bought him those really expensive trainers last month - I'm still paying them off. I know I've got my flaws, but if he loves me, he'll realise I didn't really mean it.

Jamie's diary

Tonight was awful. I've never seen her like that before. I knew she was a bit weird, and sometimes I've noticed Bradley gets really quiet when they're together, but tonight was something else. I've tried to tell him before that she is controlling, but he didn't speak to me for a week and just spent all his time with her instead. What can I do? I want to be a good mate to him but he'll hate me if I carry on pushing it. Maybe it's just their business. Most of the time he seems fine, it's only when they argue that things get out of control. He says they made up, so maybe I should worry less?

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Lesson 3 - Resource 2c: Emotion cards

Frightened	Lonely	Guilty	Angry
Concerned	Confused	Insulted	In love
Worried	Scared	Happy	Excited
Insecure	Jealous	Embarrassed	Loyal
Sad	Rejected	Awkward	Fed up

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Lesson 3 - Resource 3: Teacher support sheet

Further guidance on the Diary Entries activity

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 1-2:

What do you think happened? How can you tell?

What types of abuse have been referred to?

- The diary entries have been left intentionally ambiguous regarding specific behaviours, to encourage young people to think deeply about the example and to try to recognise warning signs and key indicators of abuse without it being made explicit to them.
- It is clear that there is emotional abuse and that the target of the abuse is being manipulated through using guilt, criticism, gift-giving, and controlling behaviour. It's suggested that the incident was a very heated argument and involved intimidating behaviour. There are some indications that there may be physical abuse, or threat of physical abuse in this relationship, although this is less clear.

Guidance for managing discussion around Questions 3-6:

How is Bradley/Alina feeling about his/her relationship?

Why is he/she feeling this way?

- It is important to draw out the subtleties and complexities of emotions experienced in an abusive relationship. In both scenarios, the target of abuse (either Alina or Bradley) has been made to feel guilty and that the actions of the person carrying out harmful behaviours are somehow their fault.

While guilt is a common feeling to experience in an abusive relationship, it is important to emphasise that the target of abuse is never to blame, that they have a right to feel safe, and that there is nothing a person could have done to 'deserve' to be treated in an abusive manner.
- Young people often find it hard to understand why someone in an abusive relationship doesn't just leave, so draw out that abusive relationships are complex, and the target may still feel they love their partner and value the 'good times' they spend with them in between the bad. They may feel afraid or scared to leave the relationship, or in relationships between adults they may feel unable to do so practically.
- Similarly, people carrying out harmful behaviours in many cases do feel love for their partner, and genuine remorse for the way they behave. They often struggle with managing their own emotions such as jealousy, embarrassment, and anger. They may promise never to do it again and genuinely mean it when they say this. However, these are not excuses for harmful and abusive

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behaviour and despite the complexity of emotions experienced by both partners, abuse in any form is never acceptable. In many cases, it can also be unlawful.

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 7:

Should either person be feeling this way if this were a healthy relationship?

- Guide young people to reflect on their prior learning about rights, values and communicating respectfully from the prior two lessons. It's important for young people to recognise that in a healthy relationship, people should not be made to feel guilty for the actions of another person and have the right to live without abuse or fear of this.

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 8:

How is Jamie feeling?

- Encourage young people to reflect on the role of a friend in such situations, as they may be the first to notice signs of an abusive relationship. However, it can be challenging for friends who may be feeling scared of the abusive partner, scared of losing their friendship, unsure about how to help and uncertain of their own accuracy in identifying the abuse. Friends can often feel guilty about not helping whilst also feeling powerless about what to do. If they feel safe and able to do so, a young person may be able to help a friend by seeking support from a trusted adult such as a member of school staff.
- Childline has further advice for friends who are concerned:
www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 9:

What do you think might happen when the characters see each other tomorrow?

As every relationship is different, there are many possible responses to this question which young people may identify, or which you may wish to draw out.

- It is possible that the incident will be forgotten and ignored, to avoid a difficult conversation.
- The target of abuse may feel the need to make excuses for the person enacting harmful behaviours.
- Jamie may wish to raise their concerns with their friend and offer some advice, which may or may not be well received by the target of abuse. People in an abusive relationship can find it hard to recognise or admit that they are in an abusive relationship and may become defensive.

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Encourage young people to think about the most positive reaction the characters could have to one another.

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 10: Does abuse always look like this?

Abuse in relationships can take a range of forms beyond those explored in this scenario, and the target of abuse might respond differently to the perpetrator.

- Someone who is the target of abuse might respond angrily and be upset with their partner. The abusive partner might try to 'make it up' to them. A different response by the target of abuse, or by the person enacting harmful behaviours after an incident, does not mean that the behaviour by the person enacting harmful behaviours is any less abusive.
- Young people may suggest that there are other controlling and abusive behaviours not included in this discussion, and that this might be experienced differently at different ages. For example, someone might experience controlling behaviours regarding access to their finances, and this would be an example of economic abuse.

Further guidance on the Circles of Support activity

Key warning signs that the family and friends of Alina and Bradley might have noticed:

- becoming quiet and withdrawn
- unexplained bruising
- lack of financial independence
- extremes of emotion (becoming very angry or sad without obvious cause)
- not spending time with friends or losing interest in hobbies.

In some cases, the target of abuse may need to recognise for themselves that they need support, for example seeking help from an online service or phone line, or in school support services.

Key indicators that a person is experiencing abuse in a relationship:

- becoming a lot more self-critical
- worrying about how a partner might react to what they say or do
- feeling stressed and having difficulties eating or sleeping
- giving up on their own opinions and thinking their partner is right about everything.

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Teachers can find out more on the following website:

www.victimsupport.org.uk/crime-info/types-crime/domestic-abuse/recognising-signs-domestic-abuse

Further guidance on the Challenging Perceptions activity

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 1-3:

How did Group A feel about Alina's situation?

How did Group B feel about Bradley's situation?

Was there a difference in the level of concern between groups?

There may be a split between Groups A and B, with different perceptions based around gender stereotypes:

- Group A may have felt more sympathetic towards Alina than Group B feel towards Bradley.
- Group B may consider the abusive situation less serious if Bradley is the target of the abuse and feel that he could handle the situation on his own by "standing up for himself" or "being a man".

Challenge this potential disparity in views and reinforce that while statistically abuse is more likely to be displayed by a male partner towards a female partner, this does not make any individual instance of abuse any less traumatic for the target, or anyone less worthy, or in need of support.

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 4:

Which sex do you think is statistically more likely to experience relationship abuse?

Women continue to be statistically more likely to be the target of relationship abuse reported to the police and support organisations. In the year ending March 2021, nearly three quarters of domestic abuse victims were female¹. Emphasise that this does not mean that men do not experience domestic abuse. Explain that statistics are only based on those cases that are reported, and further work is being undertaken to understand the breadth of experiences of relationship abuse that go unreported for people of any sex or gender identity.

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 5-6:

Why might Bradley find it hard to seek help?

What more could be done to support male victims of abuse in relationships?

¹ Statistics from [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2021](#)

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There continues to be stigma attached to male victims of relationship abuse and to attitudes about masculinity. Young people may suggest that men don't want to appear weak or believe they are more able to manage the situation themselves. Most victims of relationship abuse worry about the attitudes of their friends and family, and this might be more likely for men. There are also fewer specialist support services and charities focused on supporting male targets of abuse, however more are appearing and more awareness is being raised through campaigns such as: www.ncdv.org.uk/male-domestic-violence-awareness-week

Guidance for managing discussion around Question 7:

Is this scenario and the points discussed only applicable to mixed sex couples?

The diary entries both present mixed sex couples and it is important to also reflect on the impact of relationship abuse in the LGBTQ+ community.

- Lesbian women report similar rates of domestic abuse as heterosexual women.
- Bisexual women are twice as likely to report intimate partner violence compared to heterosexual women.
- Gay and bisexual men may be twice as likely to experience domestic partner abuse compared to heterosexual men.
- Transgender people may experience higher rates of domestic abuse than other groups. ²

There are also some specific forms of abuse relevant to LGBTQ+ people, for example 'outing' (telling other people that someone is LGBTQ+ without their permission as a form of control over a partner, or threatening to do so). LGBTQ+ people are also more at risk of experiencing domestic abuse at home from family members. It is important to emphasise that regardless of sexual orientation or gender, everyone has the right to be free from abuse in relationships.

² Source: [LGBT+ Domestic abuse service provision mapping study - galop](#)