



Thinking about breaking up:

Breaking up can be a very difficult decision. Sometimes people say "why don't you just break up with them?", but often they don't understand how hard it can be to leave. You may be reluctant to break up, for lots of different reasons like:

- you love your boyfriend/girlfriend because they are still good to you sometimes
- you hope they will change
- you are scared to leave them because of what they could do
- all your friends have boyfriends / girlfriends and you'd feel left out or alone without them
- you feel worthless without them
- he/she says he/she loves you
- you feel you can't avoid them because they are at the same school or have the same friends.

It can be really hard to break up, especially if you still love them or if they say they love you. But if someone is treating you badly, this is not showing you love or respect. This kind of treatment can be very damaging for your self confidence. You deserve to have someone who *says* they love you and *shows* you that they love you by always treating you with respect.

Your boyfriend/girlfriend may really try to pressure you if you try to break up. If they think you will leave them, they might improve their treatment of you for a while but then go back to their old behavior later, when they feel in control again. This is a common pattern in abusive relationships. Be suspicious if they promise to change when you leave or threaten to leave. If they haven't respected your rights in the relationship so far, then how likely is it that they will change their attitude now?

The abuse and violence probably won't just go away - in fact, usually people say it gets worse over time. Some have found that the abuse increased when they have tried to break up. Think carefully about your physical safety - if you are afraid of your boyfriend/girlfriend, take these feelings seriously because you could be in real danger.

Take your safety seriously. If you feel unsafe or threatened by your boyfriend or girlfriend, think of ways to protect yourself.

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If you are still with them:

You might not feel able to break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend at the moment. But there are still things you could do to help you to feel safer in the relationship.

- Tell friends or family and get them to help protect you by being around when your boyfriend/girlfriend is there
- Try not to be alone with them
- Think of ways to stay in control of the situation. For example, if you are out, arrange another way of getting home rather than going with them, or try not to drink too much or use other drugs. Take extra money in case you need to call a taxi or use the telephone.
- Have an excuse prepared so you can leave quickly if you feel uncomfortable or scared.
- Have a code word or signal that you can use to get friends to help you
- If you go to school with him, you could talk to a teacher or other staff member you trust to help protect you
- Carry a cell phone and call 911 if you are in danger.
- If you want to break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend but are scared about their reaction, you could consider telling them over the phone, rather than in person. Or you could tell them when there are other people around.

After you have broken up with them:

You might still have to have contact with your ex-, especially if you are at the same school or have mutual friends. They might still try to contact you after you have split up. You could try the suggestions above, and also think about these ideas.

- Have an answering machine or someone else take messages from them
- Arrange a safe place to stay where they can't contact you
- Talk to someone about what you could do legally to protect yourself from any more violence. Call MAAV at 781-662-2010.

If you are being harassed or stalked:

- If your ex- starts harassing or stalking you, you must end all communication. DO NOT respond to or negotiate with them.
- Do not be manipulated into any "one last times."
- Treat the person as if he or she is dangerous and stay away from that person whenever possible.
- Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES should you ever be alone with this person.
- Tell your parents, friends, teachers, the police. The more people who know, the safer you will be. Remember, it is not your fault.