



Unhealthy Connections

PSA COMPANION GUIDE



When we think of abuse, we usually think of physical violence – stuff that everyone can see, actions that leave a bruise; but abuse can happen in lots of different ways, including things that are done and said over texts, comments, and DMs. It’s harder to see the marks those behaviors leave. When unhealthy behaviors happen on our phones, it can feel very lonely and overwhelming because other people can’t see what’s going on and offer support.

If we could say something to the characters in One Love’s new PSA — Mario, Stephanie, Ruth, and Kayla —it would be that they don’t have to suffer alone, and that we all deserve healthy relationships. When we can recognize the signs of healthy and unhealthy behaviors in ourselves and others, we can better choose how we want and deserve to be treated. If someone continues to treat us in an unhealthy way, we get to choose what kind of role they play in our lives.

Learn more about the [10 Signs of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships](#) and how they show up for Mario, Stephanie, Ruth, and Kayla below.

What unhealthy behaviors did you notice in these relationships?

POSSESSIVENESS
Isolation
Belittling

They’re Not Your Friends

→ **Isolation:** When Kayla tells her partner that she’s just hanging out with her friends, he immediately responds, “They’re not your friends.”

Your partner might try to undermine your relationships by making you doubt whether your friends and family care for you, or by asking you to choose between them and the

other people in your life. Even in a crowded party, Nina’s partner’s texts made her feel isolated and alone. Know that a healthy partner will encourage you to spend time with people outside of your relationship. Your partner doesn’t need to be best friends with your friends and family, but they do need to respect the friendships that you choose to have.

→ **Possessiveness:** Kayla’s partner uses the location feature on her phone to track where she is.

Being in a relationship does not mean that you can or should have constant access to your partner’s whereabouts – especially, as seems to be the case with Kayla, without

their consent. If a partner tries to control where you go, what you do, and who you spend time with, take that very seriously. In a healthy relationship, your partner respects that you have a life outside of your relationship and encourages your independence.

→ **Belittling:** When Kayla pushes back against her partner's demand that she leave the party, he cuts her down by telling her the only reason she's out is because she's "desperate for attention."

Belittling comments are used to break down a person's confidence – after a while, you begin to believe the insulting things being said to you. If your partner insults you, shuts you down, or lashes out at you, that's a sign that the relationship is unhealthy. In a healthy relationship, partners are kind to one another and make each other feel good about themselves.

MANIPULATION GUILTING

Can We Just Talk?

→ **Manipulation:** When Ruth tells her partner she doesn't want to send a pic, rather than respect her boundary, he tries to convince her that her boundary isn't necessary by saying, "Please, just one pic. I swear I won't send it to anyone."

Ruth's partner is only focused on getting what he wants. He isn't respecting that Ruth is saying no or taking responsibility for how uncomfortable his ask is making her feel. It can be upsetting when someone sets a boundary with us or turns us down, but no matter how we feel in the moment, we need to respect their boundary and not pressure them to do something they don't want to.

→ **Guiting:** When he realizes asking isn't working, Ruth's partner threatens to walk out. "I thought you were into this, but if not..." – making it seem as if it's Ruth's job to keep him happy and interested.

In relationships, sometimes we find ourselves doing things because we're afraid the person will leave us or think less of us if we don't. You are allowed to set boundaries and have them be respected. Remember, there is no need to defend or explain your boundary

multiple times. No relationship should make you feel as though you are compromising who you are for the sake of your partner. If your boundaries don't line up with someone else's, it might be time to consider if the friendship or relationship is a good fit for you.

GUILTING Volatility Intensity

You Always Ignore Me!

→ **Guiting:** Mario's partner accuses him of "always" ignoring her and tells him he is "making" her behave the way she is.

Sometimes people who get angry and lash out will make you think that it's your fault or that you caused them to feel and act that way. While something you did or said may have gotten the person angry, how they handle their emotions is COMPLETELY their responsibility and never yours.

→ **Intensity:** Mario's partner texts him repeatedly and gets angry when he doesn't respond right away.

While it's natural to be curious when your partner does not reply to you as quickly as you might hope, their response or information about what they are up to is not owed to you.

→ **Volatility:** No matter what Mario says, his partner's actions become more forceful with each passing second – and from their conversation, it's clear this isn't the first time this has happened.

If your partner's anger confuses, intimidates, or scares you, that's a big problem. Anger is a normal emotion; it is what we or our partner does when angry that can be unhealthy. When a person regularly lashes out physically or verbally using anger as the excuse, that is abuse.



MANIPULATION

Isolation

It's Her or Me!

- **Manipulation:** When Stephanie tells her partner she doesn't like how she is behaving, Stephanie's partner's demands, "Then just unlike her post."

Her partner tries to intimidate Stephanie into doing what she wants, and that need for control is unhealthy. If your partner feels the need to check your texts, or gets jealous when you like someone else's post, those are strong signs that they don't trust you. Instead of acting in unhealthy ways, it's important for your partner to understand why they're feeling mistrustful and talk to you about it.

- **Isolation:** Stephanie's partner insists that Stephanie block her friend in order to prove she's not cheating. She tells Stephanie, "It's either her or me."

Sometimes in unhealthy relationships, a partner will use accusations of being unfaithful to control and isolate their partner. Accusing you of cheating may lead you to drop everything to respond to their call or text, or even spend less time with your friends to avoid the constant accusations and possible threats.

Mario, Stephanie, Ruth and Kayla all either say something or act in a way that shows they have experienced the unhealthy behavior from their partner before. It can be tempting to look at an unhealthy relationship, and think, "They should just leave. I would!" What might cause someone experiencing unhealthy or abusive behavior from their partner to stay in that relationship?

There are lots of reasons why people stay in unhealthy or abusive relationships, including safety, finances, logistics, and love. Maybe there are still some good things Mario, Stephanie, Ruth, and Kayla see in their partner and hope things will get better or that it's their job to save them. Maybe they're afraid of what will happen if they try to leave, believe their partner's behavior is their fault, or – particularly in the

case of Mario, a man experiencing abuse – feel embarrassed to admit what is happening. Maybe they want to leave, but don't know how or don't want to be alone. No matter why someone stays in a relationship, they are not responsible or asking for the abuse.

If Mario, Stephanie, Ruth, or Kayla decide they do want to break up with their partner, how can they do it in a safe way?

A safety plan is a personalized plan to make sure you are leaving your relationship in a safe and healthy way. The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is during and post-breakup. During this time, your partner might escalate their aggression to keep you from leaving, so taking the time to plan a breakup is always a good call. Spur of the moment breakups can lead to an unhealthy and potentially dangerous on-again, off-again pattern. If a breakup is planned, it is more likely to last.

SAFETY BREAKUP PLANNING

Safe breakups involve looping in other people like friends, family members, school resources, and trained professionals.

- **Let friends, family members, school staff, or a trusted adult know** that you are ending your relationship, so that they can become your eyes and ears to help limit your partner's access to you
- **If you do not have people who can support you, consider calling a hotline**, like the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-7233). Hotlines are there for so many reasons, including when we are feeling confused or overwhelmed by a relationship and just need to talk it out with someone
- **If you don't feel safe, don't break up in person.** Sometimes the safest way to break up is by phone or social media, even if it feels impersonal or cruel
- **If you break up in person, always do it in a public place.** Have friends or a trusted adult wait nearby, and take a cell phone with you if you have one



- **Change your ex's access to any location sharing or online passwords**, and take steps to limit or end in person and social media contact
- **Remember that it's normal to miss your partner after a breakup**, even if the relationship was unhealthy. Write down your reasons for ending the relationship and keep them as a reminder for later on. Give a copy to a trusted friend who you have identified to be part of your support system

If you are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, you should know that the abuse is not your fault and that you deserve to feel safe. Asking for help to leave a relationship that no longer makes you happy or threatens your safety is a sign of strength, and there is no weakness in leaning on the people and resources around you. You do not have to be in immediate crisis to use these resources. Preparation is key in keeping yourself as safe as possible.



What does a healthy relationship even look like?

With so many unhealthy relationship behaviors in tv shows, movies, song lyrics, and, sometimes, even among the people around us, it can be hard to know what a healthy relationship looks like.

In a healthy relationship, people don't let feelings of jealousy, insecurity or anger get out of hand and lash out. They talk about the source of their feelings without making their feelings other partner's responsibility or fault.

In a healthy relationship, both partners feel comfortable and safe expressing their thoughts and boundaries to the other person. They feel heard and respected, even if their partner has a different perspective, and work together to find a compromise or mutual understanding.

These are just a few signs of a healthy relationship. To learn more about One Love's 10 Signs of a Healthy Relationships, visit joinonelove.org.

