

Making Sense of Relationships

Lesson 2:

Unhealthy relationships

Key stage 4

NSPCC

In partnership with

PSHE
Association



Lesson 2: Unhealthy Relationships

Key stage

4

Context

This is the second in a series of three lessons that focus on both empowering and supporting young people as they develop relationships. This lesson focuses on how to recognise unhealthy relationships as well as how, where and when to seek help.

While PSHE education lessons should be pacy, of course you want to meet the needs of your pupils. Since the activities take one hour to complete, this lesson is planned as a minimum one-hour lesson. But pupils can gain more from a longer in depth exploration of an activity, so long as

you are comfortable leading the discussion and you feel pupils are progressing towards the objectives. If you want to do this, you might want to extend the time to two lessons.

Note:

None of the lessons are designed to be taught in isolation. They should always form part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme. These lessons would fit comfortably within other learning about relationships and sex education or as part of your teaching about online safety.

Learning objectives

- We are learning how to recognise abuse in intimate or sexual relationships
- We are learning how to seek advice or support if we have concerns about ourselves or someone we know

Intended learning outcomes

- ✓ I can identify different forms of abuse and describe possible effects on the victims of abuse
- ✓ I can recognise that abuse in a relationship is always wrong, and that both men and women can be perpetrators and victims of abuse
- ✓ I can identify the range of support available for those in abusive relationships and could confidently access this support for myself or others

Resources required

- Box or envelope for anonymous questions
- Post it notes or flip chart paper and pens for graffiti wall
- Resource 1: *Silent debate sheets*
- Resource 2: *Diary entries – Group A and Group B*
- Resource 3: *Emotions cards (optional)*
- Resource 4: *Teacher support sheet*
- Resource 5: *Page from Childline website (optional)*

childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/friends/helping-friend/

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying Resource Guidance before teaching this lesson for guidance on establishing ground rules, the limits of confidentiality, communication and handling questions effectively.

Key words

Consent, coercion, pressure, abuse

Baseline activity

Introduction 5 min

Revisit ground rules and remind pupils of the importance of keeping personal stories private. Draw attention to the anonymous question box and remind them that they can submit questions at any time, whether during or after the lesson.

Next share the learning objectives and outcomes with pupils. Explain that today the class will explore the behaviours in unhealthy relationships, the consequences of abuse, as well as the importance of seeking help for themselves and for others.

Explain that before starting today's lesson, you intend to answer the pupils' questions from their exit cards in the previous lesson. The most effective way to do this is to have read and grouped the questions before the lesson, so that you can answer several questions at once.

NB: If the questions allow, you should draw out key themes around coercive and manipulative behaviour, including how to recognise and respond in a safe and assertive way. Whenever possible, avoid using worst-case scenarios that are intended to induce shock or fear. Instead always contrast a negative example with a positive example showing how a healthy relationship could handle it differently. Aim to empower young people by teaching them how to recognise signs, where to seek help and how to support a friend if they have concerns.

You may find the PSHE Association's **guidance on teaching about consent** useful when preparing to answer pupils' questions.

Reconnecting activity 5 min

Remind pupils of their learning about healthy relationships in key stage 3. Ask for a response to the question "What words would you use to describe the features of a positive, healthy relationship?" Tell them they are working against the clock, with two minutes to add ideas to a graffiti wall. They could complete the wall with post-it notes stuck at the front of the room, or on large flipchart paper stuck to the walls.

Don't forget to write down a quick summary of the most common words, such as honesty, trust, respect, love, understanding. Before exploring unhealthy relationship behaviours, it is really important that pupils have a clear idea what a positive, healthy relationship is like, and what someone in a relationship has a right to expect.

Baseline assessment 10 min

Conduct a silent debate by placing around the room large A3 sheets with prompt questions on them (see resource 1). In response to the questions, pupils should move around the room silently and write ideas onto the sheet. They are allowed to:

- respond to the question by explaining their idea or viewpoint
- respond to an idea or viewpoint someone else has written (either agreeing or disagreeing)
- ask a question or respond to a question written by someone else.

Remind pupils that the same ground rules for discussion apply, even though they are not speaking to each other. They should make sure their written comments are respectful of others' opinions, and they must not use inappropriate language or share personal experiences.

You may wish to circulate the room and supervise comments during this activity. To gain an understanding of your pupils' beliefs, prior knowledge and misconceptions, summarise the main themes from their responses. Using this baseline information, adapt the lesson's teaching and discussions to promote progress and address potential stereotypes.

Core activities

Diary entries 10 min

Split the class into two groups: Group A and Group B

Tell them that throughout the lesson, they are going to look at two completely different scenarios of relationship abuse, with an opportunity to share their ideas as a whole class at the end. It is important that they only work with members of their own group until instructed to do otherwise.

Hand Group A: *Three Diary Entries Group A sheet*

Hand Group B: *Three Diary Entries Group B sheet*

In pairs, ask pupils to read the diary entries from three different characters talking about the same event. These diary entries are intended to be difficult to infer from, as controlling behaviours and relationship abuse often are difficult to interpret for those involved, particularly as the indicators can be very subtle to begin with. As a result, your pupils may need support to interpret the background story behind the entries.

Next ask them to respond to the following questions.

1. *What do you think happened? How can you tell?*
2. *What types of abuse have been referred to?*
3. *How is Alina feeling about her relationship?*
4. *Why is she feeling this way?*
5. *How is Bradley feeling about his relationship?*
6. *Why is he feeling this way?*
7. *Should either person be feeling this way in a healthy relationship?*
8. *How is Jamie feeling?*
9. *What do you think might happen when the characters see each other tomorrow?*

(Pairs should write down their responses at this stage and save them for later.)

To get an indication of what your pupils are thinking, circulate and observe discussions.

You may choose to provide Resource 3, a set of cards with emotions written on each, which pupils could place into piles for each character. Some emotion cards may not be appropriate for any character, and should be discarded.

For pupils who need a challenge:

Pupils should write a script for the conversation between the target of abuse (Group **A = Alina**, Group **B = Bradley**) and their friend Jamie when they see each other the following day. How might they try to explain what happened? How might their friend react? What would be the most positive way to react?

Circles of support 5 min

Explain to pupils that this activity is going to be reflecting on who can help in a situation when a relationship becomes abusive. Ask pupils to draw (or provide a diagram) of four concentric circles, labelled Friends, Family, School and Other. Ask pupils to focus on either Alina or Bradley (for this activity, pupils could focus on either character no matter which group they were put in at the start of the lesson as both the target of abuse and the perpetrator are in need of different types of support) and think about the circles of support they have available to them. Ask pupils to reflect on how these different groups (friends, family, school, other) might know that the characters needed help. They should then annotate in each circle what they think each group (friends, family, school, other) might say or do to help the characters in the situation they are in. Explain to pupils that "other" might include sources of online support (such as Childline), the police, youth club etc.



Challenging perceptions 10 min

Reveal to pupils that both Group A and Group B have been given the same scenario with reversed roles. In Group A's diary entry, the perpetrator of abuse was Bradley. In Group B's diary entry, Alina was the perpetrator of abuse. Through a whole class discussion, explore if pupils had a different perception of the abuse and of the relationship depending on the sex of the abusive partner and target, starting by inviting pairs from both Group A and Group B to share their answers to the diary entries first activity.

NB: It is important to read the teacher support sheet before leading this class discussion.

You may wish to further explore pupil's attitudes using some of the following questions:

- 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?
- Which sex do you think is statistically more likely to experience relationship abuse? Why do you think this?
- What more could be done to support male victims of relationship abuse?
- Why might Bradley find it hard to seek help?
- Is this scenario and its discussion points only applicable to heterosexual couples?

NB: The groups may have had very different perspectives on the relationship depending on whether or not the person being abused was female. If so, it is important to explore these attitudes and why they exist. Alternatively, the groups may have made similar decisions regardless of the sex of the victim. In which case, it may be useful to identify to pupils that attitudes have not always been this way in the past but that understanding and beliefs are changing around recognising and supporting male victims of relationship abuse. While anyone can be the target of abuse in a relationship, it is important to acknowledge that statistics show women are far more likely to be targets and men to be perpetrators.

Assessment for and of learning

Focusing on Jamie 10 min

Sometimes when someone is in a relationship it can be hard for them to recognise when they are experiencing abuse or to know how to seek help. Friends can play a really important role in recognising abuse and seeking help on another person's behalf.

Which of the following statements do you think are true about Jamie? These statements are intended to facilitate class discussion, which could be done as a whole group by holding up True/False/Not Sure cards, or by standing at different parts of the classroom to represent True / False/ Not Sure, or as a small group task after which pupils then feedback their decisions:

1. *Jamie thinks Alina and Bradley's relationship is going really well.*
2. *Jamie is worried about losing their friendship.*
3. *Jamie wants to help their friend.*
4. *Jamie doesn't think it's their place to get involved.*
5. *Jamie is scared of Bradley (or Alina).*
6. *Jamie doesn't know where or how to seek help.*
7. *Jamie is not a good friend.*
8. *Jamie has a responsibility to help even if it will upset someone.*

If it doesn't come up in discussion, explain that even though there are things holding him/her back, Jamie does want to help their friend and wouldn't want to see them hurt or unhappy. Even though it can be hard, friends should try to seek support for one another. Remind pupils of all the skills, actions or language that are available for Jamie, already identified in the circle of support activity.

Signposting support 5 min

It is important at this point to signpost areas of support both inside and outside of school. For example: members of the pastoral team, the school safeguarding lead, local charity organisations or online and phone services such as Childline and the NSPCC (see also extension activity 2 below). Pupils could then suggest which support service might be most appropriate for someone seeking help for a friend.

Extension and home learning

Extension activity 1:

Ask pupils to imagine that Jamie has decided to seek help for their friend. They are now going to write a second diary entry from Jamie's perspective, which should explain:

- why they decided to help
- what they did
- where they might go for further support
- how all the characters are feeling now
- what has happened to the couple's relationship?
- what the possible consequences are for the perpetrator of relationship abuse.

Extension activity 2:

Encourage pupils to seek expert views about how to end relationship violence and relationship abuse by writing to two different charity organisations.

refuge.org.uk – support services for women and children

womensaid.org.uk – support services for women

standingtogether.org.uk – support for both men and women

mankind.org.uk – support for men

respect.uk.net – support for perpetrators

Encourage pupils to focus on charities with two different approaches, for example Refuge and Respect (who focus on protecting the target of abuse and supporting the perpetrators respectively), or Women's Aid and Mankind. The response letters could then be compared in a short report, explaining the different opinions and approaches expressed by the two groups.

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Resource 1

Silent debate

“What are the features of an abusive relationship?”

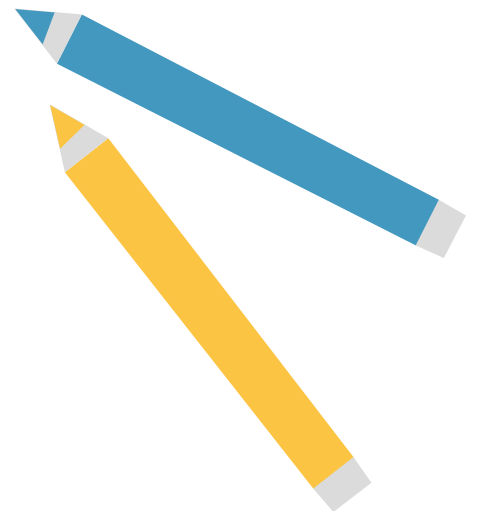
“What should someone do if they think they are in an abusive relationship?”

“What could someone do if they were concerned that their friend was in an abusive relationship?”

“What are the emotional consequences for people involved in an abusive relationship?”

“What could happen to someone who was found to be abusive to their partner?”

“Is relationship abuse likely to take on a different form if it is perpetuated by a man / woman / LGBT partner?”



Resource 2

Three diary entries

March 2018

GROUP
A

DIARY ENTRY 1

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 been wearing that outfit 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 that short 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.

Alina

DIARY ENTRY 2

I wish I could control myself... she just makes me so angry sometimes. When I saw that guy looking her up and down! How could she make me look like such a fool? 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 that really expensive necklace last month, I'm still paying for that. I know I've got my flaws, but if she loves me, she'll realise I didn't really mean it.

Bradley

DIARY ENTRY 3

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.

Jamie

March 2018

GROUP B

DIARY ENTRY 1

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 a player! I just hope Jamie won't think too badly about her, I'll have to explain when I see him in the morning.

Bradley

DIARY ENTRY 2

I wish I could control myself... he just makes me so angry sometimes. When I saw him looking at that girl! How could he make me look like such a fool? I thought I was going to kill him. He always helps calm me down, and I know he doesn't mean to make me angry. I called him a man-whore, 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 that really expensive watch last month, I'm still paying for that. I know I've got my flaws, but if he loves me, he'll realise I didn't really mean it.

Alina

DIARY ENTRY 3

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?

Jamie

Resource 3

Emotion cards (optional resource)

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



Resource 4

Teacher Support sheet: unhealthy relationships



Diary entries

1. What do you think happened? How can you tell?

2. What types of abuse have been referred to?

The diary entries have been left intentionally ambiguous to encourage pupils 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 key to draw out that there is clear emotional abuse and that the target of the abuse is being manipulated through using guilt, criticism, gift-giving and controlling behaviour. It is suggested through the diary entries that the incident involved was a very heated argument and incredibly 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.

3. How is Alina feeling about her relationship?

4. Why is she feeling this way?

5. How is Bradley feeling about his relationship?

6. Why is he feeling this way?

It is important to draw out the subtleties and complexities of emotions experienced in an abusive relationship. It is clear that in both scenarios, the target of abuse (either Alina or Bradley) has been made to feel guilty for the way they have behaved / clothes they have worn: that it is 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 there is nothing a person could have done to 'deserve' to be treated in an abusive manner. They are demonstrating very low self-worth and express a desperation to stay in the relationship. Pupils often find it hard to understand why someone in an abusive relationship doesn't just leave, so it is important to 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 to leave the relationship, or feel practically unable to do so.

Similarly, perpetrators of abuse in most 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 abusive behaviour and despite the complexity of emotions experienced by both partners, it is important to continue to emphasise throughout the discussion that abuse in any form is never acceptable.

7. Should either person be feeling this way in a healthy relationship?

This would be an opportune time to refer to the graffiti wall reconnecting activity at the start of the lesson and emphasise the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship. Even though both partners might feel that they love each other and want to be together, it is clear that the feelings expressed by both are incompatible with a healthy relationship.

8. How is Jamie feeling?

It is important to encourage pupils 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 in their own accuracy in identifying the abuse. Friends can often carry around guilt about not helping whilst also feeling powerless about what to do. These feelings are explored later in the lesson, and NSPCC also has further advice for friends who are concerned:

[childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships](https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships)

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 pupils may identify or which teachers may wish to draw out. It is possible that the incident will be forgotten and ignored in order to avoid a difficult conversation. It is likely (as indicated in the diaries) that the target of abuse may feel the need to make excuses for the perpetrator. Alternatively, 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. Often, people in an abusive relationship find it hard to recognise or admit that they are in an abusive relationship and may become defensive. Try to encourage pupils to think about the most positive reaction the characters could have to one another.

Circles of support

A key part of the learning for this activity is to help pupils recognise the key warning signs that the family and friends of Alina and Bradley might have noticed, for example 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 require support, for example seeking help from an online service or phone line. It is also helpful to draw out some of the key indicators that a person is in an abusive relationship, such as becoming a lot more self-critical, worrying all the time about how your partner might react to things you say or do, feeling stressed and having difficulties eating or sleeping, giving up on your own opinions and thinking your partner is right about everything.

Teachers could find out more on the following website:

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

Challenging perceptions

1. How did Group A feel about Alina's situation?
2. How did Group B feel about Bradley's situation?
3. Was there a difference in the level of concern between groups?

It is likely that the class split between Groups A and B will demonstrate alternative perceptions based around gender stereotypes. For example, Group A may have, on the whole, felt much more sympathetic towards Alina than Group B feel towards Bradley. It is possible that pupils in Group B may consider the abusive situation far 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" / "being a man" etc. It is important to draw out and challenge this potential disparity in views and to reinforce that while statistically abuse is more likely to be perpetrated by a male partner towards a female partner, it does not make any individual instance of abuse any less traumatic for the target or anyone less worthy or in need of support.

4. Which sex do you think is statistically more likely to experience relationship abuse? Why do you think this?

Women continue to be statistically more likely to be the target of relationship abuse, with one in four women likely to experience abuse at some point during their lifetime. One in nine women are physically abused. One in six men are likely to experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Remind pupils that statistics are only based on those cases that are reported to the police or other support organisations, and that many more cases remain unreported.

5. What more could be done to support male victims of relationship abuse?

6. Why might Bradley find it hard to seek help?

There continues to be a stigma attached to male victims of relationship abuse and to attitudes about masculinity, which may have already been demonstrated by pupil responses in discussion. Pupils 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:

ncdv.org.uk/male-domestic-violence-awareness-week

7. Is this scenario and its discussion questions only applicable to heterosexual couples?

The diary entries both present heterosexual couples and it is important to also reflect on the impact of relationship abuse in the LGBT community. LGBT people are statistically as likely as women (one in four) to experience a form of relationship abuse in their lifetime and the problem is still under-reported, as in heterosexual relationships. There are also some specific forms of abuse relevant to LGBT people, for example 'outing' (telling other people you are LGBT without your permission) as a form of control over a partner or threatening to do so. LGBT 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 relationship abuse.

For teachers who wish to find more information about this issue, the following websites are available:

endthefear.co.uk/same-sex-domestic-abuse/

stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/criminal-law/domestic-violence

Together we can help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives. Together we can protect children at risk. And, together, we can find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

We change the law. We visit schools across the country, helping children understand what abuse is. And, through our Childline service, we give young people a voice when no one else will listen.

But all this is only possible with your support. Every pound you raise, every petition you sign, every minute of your time, will help make sure we can fight for every childhood.

[nspcc.org.uk](https://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a school subject that supports pupils to be healthy, safe and prepared for modern life. The PSHE education curriculum covers a range of pressing issues facing children and young people today, including those relating to relationships, mental and physical health, staying safe and aware online, financial literacy and careers.

The PSHE Association is the national body for PSHE education. A charity and membership organisation, the Association works to improve PSHE education standards by supporting over 20,000 teachers and schools with advice, training and support. Find out more at **[pshe-association.org.uk](https://www.pshe-association.org.uk)**