HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M INVOLVED IN A CONTROLLING OR ABUSIVE DATING RELATIONSHIP? There are a variety of warning signs that may indicate you are in a controlling or abusive relationship. These signs can be subtle, such as requests from your partner to limit contact with others, frequent check-ins throughout the day, or pressure to increase the seriousness of the relationship. If your partner pressures you into sexual activity, this may also be a sign of a problem in your relationship. These actions are easily mistaken for romance and love. Although feeling wanted and loved by another person can be flattering, very emotionally intense statements such as “I can’t live without you” could signal that your dating partner does not have healthy boundaries. In fact, these are warning signs that your partner might not have a healthy understanding of dating relationships. Such a situation can escalate into a more abusive relationship in the future.¹

There are also more obvious signs that you are in a troubled relationship. You may need to get help or get out of your relationship if your dating partner frequently blames you for situations, makes fun of you or humiliates you, has severe mood swings or always seems angry, often appears jealous when you spend time with others, or tries to intimidate you by yelling, breaking things, threatening to hurt you, or threatening self-harm. If your partner forces you to engage in sexual activity or has become physically violent with you (hit, pushed, slapped, pulled your hair, kicked, or scratched you), you need to get help from an adult immediately.¹

MAYBE THIS IS LOVE? Love is based on mutual respect, equality, and trust.² Love is not based on control, possessiveness, and/or aggression. It is normal to have arguments or difficult interactions some of the time, but how these conflicts are handled between dating partners can be an indication of the healthiness of the relationship. Respecting one another’s values, opinions, and ideas, even when you do not agree, is part of a happy and successful relationship. Dating partners who are equals and who respect one another do not belittle each other’s values or opinions. They do not attempt to control the other partner’s social activities or the amount of time that is spent with family or friends. Instead, they encourage each other to explore individual interests and goals. If your relationship is built on trust and respect, there is never a need to constantly check up on one another. Partners who respect one another do not try to embarrass one another or resort to name calling. Mutual respect means never putting your hands on one another in an aggressive or violent way. Conflicts can be resolved in a healthy way by talking the issue out, listening and respecting your partner’s feelings and opinions, and then coming to a mutual agreement, or agreeing to disagree.²

WHAT CAN I DO IF I'M A VICTIM OF DATING VIOLENCE? You are not alone. There are many people out there who can help you in this difficult situation. The first thing you should do is reach out to your parents or another trusted adult. Teens sometimes do not reach out to adults because they fear being misunderstood or do not want to disclose personal information. You may be pleasantly surprised at how a parent or an adult will respond in this situation.

It is definitely worth a try because adults often have good advice and are able to help teens navigate such situations.

If the problem is serious and you are considering breaking up with your partner, your parents or another knowledgeable adult may be able to help you create an exit plan to keep you safe during your transition out of the relationship. It is understandable that you may not like the idea of breaking up with your partner, especially if you have been with him/her for a long period of time.² However, your safety should always be your top priority. If you or your parents need more information, loveisrespect.org is a helpful organization that includes safety recommendations on its website. You may need legal advice from professionals if you use the legal system. The Victims of Crime Resource Center is a good resource that can lead you in the right direction. Your emotional well-being is as important as your physical well-being. Counseling can help you make sense of what is happening and has happened to you. It can also help you understand that the violence perpetrated against you is not your fault. Whether or not you decide to break up with your partner, counseling can help guide you through the many emotions that will inevitably arise during this time.²

I HAVE DIFFICULTY CONTROLLING MY ANGER AND JEALOUSY. WHAT CAN I DO IF I'VE BEEN ABUSIVE? It is possible to change the way you behave, but the first step in the process of change is realizing that there is a problem with your behaviors or beliefs. Getting help to stop abusive behavior is an important first step, but this will only work if you are committed to changing.² You can seek help from a parent or another trusted adult. There may also be teen dating violence support groups online or in your area that can provide you with emotional and social support. Many national organizations have information for those involved in dating violence, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and loveisrespect.org (see below). Keep in mind that resources such as these do not replace counseling or engagement in in-person services. In-person services can be an important part of helping you avoid the emotional, physical, and legal ramifications of engaging in violent behavior in dating relationships.¹

RESOURCES
• National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline 1-866-311-9474
• Victims of Crime Resource Center 1-800-VICTIMS
• Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence www.veiloviolence.org/datingmatters
• Cyber Bullying Resource Center http://cyberbullying.us/
• loveisrespect.org www.loveisrespect.org
• Mentors in Violence Prevention Program http://www.mympnational.org/
• National Sexual Violence Resource Center www.nsvrc.org
• Teen Dating Violence Technical Assistance Center http://www.breakthecycle.org