



Nineline **1-800-999-9999** it's free!

## relationships

Are you or a friend coping with a problem friendship, boyfriend, girlfriend, authority figure, cult or gang?

### what is a relationship?

Relationships can either build you up or bring you down. If you, or a friend, are coping with a problem **friendship, boyfriend, girlfriend, authority figure, cult or gang** this is the place to talk to someone who can help.

You will have a lot of relationships in your lifetime - relationships with family, friends, teachers, bosses even religious mentors. Good relationships should be supportive, respectful and non-judgmental. But bad relationships can become controlling, disrespectful and even abusive.

Conflicts in relationships often creep up when one person sees the opportunity to take advantage of the other person's low self-esteem. As a teenager you might find yourself feeling especially vulnerable to these kinds of relationships because you may find yourself turning to others for advice and support more and more as you grow older - both people your own age (friends, boyfriends, girlfriends) and older (teachers, bosses, religious mentors).

Peer pressure is especially strong among teenagers who are eager to be accepted. Some peer pressure - to join in athletic or academic activities - is good. But some peer pressure - to have sex, drink, do drugs, join a cult or gang - is negative. When adult authority figures (teachers, bosses or religious mentors) are controlling, disrespectful or abusive of you, it can be even more difficult to stand up for yourself.

In either case, you need to be strong, find someone to talk to who will boost your self-esteem so you can turn these bad relationships around or leave them altogether!



## are their different kinds of relationship problems?

**Friendships** should be supportive, respectful and based on common interests. But sometimes jealousy, possessiveness and control issues can threaten to 'break up' a non-romantic friendship. Try talking with your friend about why the friendship isn't working for you anymore. If they won't take the time to listen and try to work things out, you may realize you have outgrown this friendship. It is hard to admit this and, sometimes, losing a friend can lead to feelings of grief or depression. It's important to remember that as you grow and change, so will your interests and your choice of friends.

**Dating a boyfriend or girlfriend** is an important experience similar to getting to know a friend. A good relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend is based on mutual respect, shared interests and sexual attraction. Although dating doesn't have to be about sex – think of it as a chance to get to know someone you have a romantic interest in.

Sometimes relationships with a boyfriend or girlfriend go sour. Jealousy, possessiveness, anger or issues of power and control can spoil the romance. You and your partner may be mature enough to talk about these problems and work them out by yourselves or with the help of someone you trust. Generally, dating should be an exciting and happy time so, if you and your partner don't have the skills to work things out, be careful not to settle for a "problem relationship" where one partner emotionally or physically abuses the other.

If your relationship gets out of control, here are a few tips:

1. Tell a trusted adult immediately, and ask for help getting out of the relationship.
2. If you are afraid of your partner, try not to go places by yourself.
3. Don't let your partner enter your home or car when no one else is around.
4. Call 911 if you need immediate help to keep you safe.
5. Contact your local domestic violence agency. They can offer counseling, legal advocacy (for help in pressing charges or getting an order of relationtion), and other services.
6. Call the Nineline to talk or find an agency in your area: 1-800-999-9999.

**Authority figures**, like a teacher, boss, religious mentor, sitter, stepparent, parent's boyfriend or girlfriend, a counselor or other staff in a foster or group home, can sometimes take advantage of their authority. Normally these are people you should look up to and trust to help you make important decisions in your life as a teenager. But if an authority figure is emotionally or physically abusive, you need to tell someone you trust. When someone under the age of 18 is physically, sexually or emotionally hurt or taken advantage of by someone responsible for protecting them, it is considered child abuse. The abuse may happen only once, but often it will continue until you or someone else tells someone who can help.

**Cults** are difficult to recognize, difficult to resist and even more difficult to leave. There are different kinds of cults – religious, satanic/ritual, new age, political and commercial. They use similar techniques to control their members including extreme peer pressure to make you feel like you belong. They also use isolation, sleep deprivation, sensory overload and poor nutrition to put you into an accepting, non-



questioning state of mind to better control you. If you join a cult, you may find yourself in a situation where you have no control over your life, your finances or your relationship with friends and family outside the cult. You might even experience negative physical and psychological side-effects. The best way to avoid this is to resist joining but once you've joined, you will need to find someone you trust to help you find the strength to leave. **Gangs** also prey on vulnerable, insecure kids who want to "belong" to a "family" of their peers. But once you join, you are subjected to a lot of controlling behavior aimed at making you participate in illegal, sometimes violent, activities.

Approximately 37% of students reported a gang presence in their schools. If you feel that there is a problem with gang presence in your school, here are some steps you can take:

1. Tell an adult. Don't worry about telling on your peers - by notifying someone in a position of authority, you could be preventing some young people from getting hurt.
2. In general, avoid gangs and gang members. Do not hang out where they do. Do not have friends who are members of gangs. Do not emulate them in any way: their manner of dressing (their colors), their handshakes, their signals, their life styles. If you want nothing to do with them, then have nothing to do with them.
3. Respect yourself and others equally. Many gang members place a high priority on respect, and offering this respect and recognition could help you out of a difficult situation. Show self-respect by refusing to be baited into a fight, or by accepting a compromise to a dispute.
4. Act confident. Gang members look for people who appear vulnerable or timid. By looking confident and secure, even if you are only pretending to feel that way, you will not be identified as a target.
5. Avoid going places alone. Gangs prefer to intimidate shy, quiet loners, not groups of people.
6. Whenever possible, walk away from a confrontation. If you cannot walk away, try to de-escalate the situation by remaining calm, using humor, or just say that you really cannot get into this right now.
7. Never argue with someone who is armed or under the influence. Someone like this is too unpredictable.



## do I have a problem relationship?

If you answer yes to two or more of the questions below, you might benefit from talking to someone you trust about your relationship problems or seek counseling.

*(Note: This quiz is not meant to replace a clinical diagnosis by a licensed physician. It is only meant to give an indication of a possible problem.)*

1. Is the person you're in a relationship with too demanding?
2. Does the person you're in a relationship with put too many limits on you?
3. Do you feel the person you're in a relationship with doesn't understand you?
4. Does the person you're in a relationship with get on your nerves or irritate you?
5. Does the person you're in a relationship with embarrass you?
6. Do you distrust the person you're in a relationship with?
7. Does the person you're in a relationship with act irrationally jealous?
8. Does the person you're in a relationship with use alcohol or drugs to excess?
9. Is the person you're in a relationship with the victim of verbal or physical abuse?
10. Is the person you're in a relationship with verbally or physically abusive to you?
11. Are you angry towards the person you're in a relationship with?
12. Do you feel violent towards the person you're in a relationship with?



## how do I get help?

**Child Help USA**, 1-800-422-4453, provides crisis counseling, referrals and help in reporting child abuse.

**National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence**, 1-888-222-2000, provides information and referrals for help.

**Anti-Gang Hotline**, 1-800-445-3632



## how can the Nineline help me?

Just call the **Covenant House Nineline** at **1-800-999-9999**; TTY: 1-800-999-9915 or follow this link to the **Nineline Forum on relationships**. The Nineline staff is ready to talk with you any time of day. You talk. We'll listen.

We can help you figure out what to do.