

# 42 relationships

## Getting Started – Online Dating

**So, how do you find dates in the LGBTQ+ world if you're under 18 and in a school or college with mostly not-LGBTQ+ people?**

**A lot of people end up turning to apps (yes, the apps you're not supposed to be able to use until you're over 18 but we'll gloss over that bit...) The obvious advice would be not to use them, because they're for made for people over 18 for a reason. But, if you choose to go down the road anyway, we'd far rather you do it safely and smartly, so here are a few tips:**

### **Be prepared**

**A lot of messages on "dating" apps aren't about dating at all, they're about sex and hook ups. Sometimes you might get messages that are pretty... "intense"! If someone doesn't even start with a "hello" that's really not a great sign, and if things start explicit, it's probably only going to going to get more explicit as things go on. We're not saying there's anything wrong with sex, but you're a person, not a piece of meat – don't let people treat like you are one!**

### **Be safe**

**So, none of this is meant to scare anyone, honest! But it's just worth being smart about things when you can.**

**If you're talking to someone online then keep in mind a few things:**

- **Only send messages within the app or site your in (try not to give out your personal number the instant you run out of free messages!)**
- **Be wary about photographs (Even without "dodgy intentions" people's photos might look totally different!)**
- **Don't give out personal info (like your address) that could be used to find you IRL**
- **Don't send nudes! If you're under 18 a nude selfie is distributing Child Pornography and you can get in a fair bit of trouble for it. If this is something you're worried about we'd encourage you to head to [www.thinkyouknow.org.uk](http://www.thinkyouknow.org.uk) where they can give more detailed advice.**

**If you do meet someone online and want to meet them in person, then be smart about that too! Even the most savvy of us can get Catfished! Here are a few things to do if meeting someone for the first time:**

- **Meet somewhere public**
- **Tell a trusted person where you're going to be**
- **Plan to have a trusted person ring or text you to give you an excuse to leave "unexpectedly" if you**

have to

- **Tell a trusted person that you'll text or ring them an certain intervals to say you're alright**
- **Take a photo of who you're meeting (do it as a selfie together if it helps) and send that photo to a trusted person**
- **Keep "location services" on on your phone**

## **Be yourself!**

**Cheesy right? Honestly though, it just always come down to this. What's the point of putting a ton of energy into pretending to be something you're not? Sure you might get that "special person", but then what? Keep putting in that energy to be something you're not for ever? Never really know if they like you for you or for "you"? What happens to them when they realise you pulled the wool over their eyes?**

**Be yourself! It's so much easier!**

## **What's "exploitation"?**

Sometimes relationships can go bad, (or start bad for that matter...) Sometimes it can be really hard to see things clearly from inside a relationship and even harder to do something if you feel things aren't quite right.

It's not always easy to know if you're being exploited in a relationship. That's pretty much how exploitation works –

it's behaviour that manipulates you into thinking a relationship is balanced, fair or "mutually beneficial", when in reality it isn't. Things don't have to turn violent to be exploitative.

It can be really hard to take a step back from a relationship and see what's sometimes going on, and that's why often it's friends, family, schools or colleges that get involved after spotting something they're not comfortable with.

Being exploited can happen to anyone. Seriously. It's worth repeating; ANYONE! No matter how smart, tough or "street wise" they are, and realising you've been exploited doesn't make you daft or incompetent in any way.

## **WORRIED YOU MAY BE BEING EXPLOITED?**

Knowing if you're being exploited isn't always easy. It may be a niggling feeling that something isn't right, or maybe someone else has told you they're worried about your relationship but you just don't see it yourself yet. You might end up feeling you "owe" someone something intimate, even though no obvious demands have been made.

Sometimes it may feel you're getting exactly what you want. It might involve stuff like sharing a few pics or having sex with someone, but it might involve any kind of intimacy in exchange for something. Arrangements like this are often exploitative; offering something in return for any kind of

sexual activity or intimate stuff just isn't OK. Sex and intimate stuff need to be something you mutually choose to do, not an arrangement or trade you come to or something you owe someone.

Whilst anyone can end up in an exploitative relationship, sometimes queer relationships can be quite vulnerable. It can be easy to end up feeling alone as a young LGBTQ+ person and depending on your circumstances, your dating pool might feel pretty small. Annoyingly there are some people out there who might try to take advantage of that. And sometimes that can turn exploitative. Here's a few things to keep an eye out for (they're from the [ThinkUKnow](#) site, which is a great resource to check out);

## **Loads of attention**

We all want attention (!) but sometimes it can be a bit much... Are they always there after school or college? Do they message all the time? Do they give you your own space as well?

## **Lots of gifts**

Gifts are great, but if they come thick and fast, or keep coming out of the blue then that's a bit unusual. They don't have to ask for anything in return there and then, but slowly they might make things unbalanced and soon you might feel you should do something in return.

# **Not wanting you to hang out with your friends**

Most people are interested in who their partner is friends with. If someone is trying to separate you from your friends, saying they don't like them or that they're not good for you, and you should hang out with them instead, that's a bit of a warning sign – it makes you more dependant on them which isn't a good place to be.

## **Having big mood swings**

Everyone has ups and downs – here we mean bigger swings. Things like shouting and arguing one minute and being all apologetic and intimate the next. If you end up feeling responsible for those mood swings, or responsible for calming them down, that can be a way of controlling someone.

## **Broken promises**

Even with the best of intentions, promises sometimes get broken, but if they're being used to get you to do something now that's a bit of a worry too.

## **What you can do**

If you worried then there's 2 things we'd suggest

First – Go with your gut. If you have a feeling that things are a bit off, then don't wait to find a check list and weigh up

whether something is exploitative or not – trust that feeling. It can be really easy to “reason” yourself out of your worries and downplay them, but if you’re not feeling safe or in control then take action.

Secondly – We’d really encourage you talk to someone about your concerns. It can be anyone you know that you trust or there are a number of support organisations you can talk to as well that are listed in this section. If you’re worried about getting your partner into trouble then a lot of the organisations below allow you to talk anonymously and you can always just ask up front what their “confidentiality policy” is (which means what they’ll do with the information you give them).

Abuse can take many forms and doesn’t have to be physical violence. It can be emotional, sexual or physical and they’re all horrible to experience.

Emotional abuse is when you are put down; made to feel stupid or unattractive or “less” than others. Sexual abuse is forcing or coercing someone into sexual activity they don’t want to do (have a look at the consent section above for more info). Physical abuse is hitting, slapping or otherwise injuring someone.

Looks black and white right? But it’s not always easy to know where you stand. Is shoving someone during a heated argument physical abuse? Is asking someone for sex until they “yes” sexual abuse? When does playful “banter” and

mocking become emotional abuse? (Just so you know, for us; yes shoving is abuse, yes wearing someone down till they say "yes" is abuse, and well, if you don't find it funny, it's not "banter", it's abuse...)

There's always strong feelings involved in relationships too. It can be incredibly difficult to acknowledge someone you love might also be abusing you. And incredibly difficult to know what to do if that is the case.

And, just so you know:

- It's never "just that once"
- It's never your fault
- It's never something you deserve
- You can escape it

If you're worried about being in an abusive relationship take a look at the "who can I talk to?" tab below or find someone you trust, a friend, parent, teacher, anyone and talk to them. The contacts below will all keep your confidentiality, and many you can use anonymously if you're worried your partner might get upset that you've used them. You can always use a public phone to call the free numbers and local libraries can give you free internet access if you don't want to use a home computer or device. Make sure you feel safe however you speak to someone.

Abusive relationships live off of silence and secrets. If you talk about it, you can destroy that silence and take those first steps to making things better.



# WORRIED ABOUT A FRIEND?

If you're worried someone you know may be being exploited or abused in some way it's incredibly important to speak to someone about it.

This can be a tough position to be in and it might feel that, whatever you do, your friend could get hurt. It can be harder if it feels you're breaking someone's trust if they've told you something private.

Things may well get awkward and you may need to have a couple of conversations that are uncomfortable, but the impact that an unhealthy relationship can have is huge and they can be really destructive – it's so important to speak up if you're worried!

What can you do about your concerns then?

We'd always urge you to speak to an adult you trust. If that person's a professional, like a teacher or support worker, they'll know exactly who to get involved and should explain what will happen with the info you're sharing. They might have to share some of that info with another professional to get advice and if it's really serious, to decide if it's something that needs the police involved.

If you choose to talk directly to the person you're worried about then be prepared they may not see things the same way as you. In fact, if they're still in an unhealthy relationship, they might not see it like that, so it may be a

tough conversation.

They may feel you're saying they're weak or daft, even if you never say anything like that. They may feel you're trying to take away something valuable to them. Be patient and kind, and let them know you don't think anything less of them and it's because they're worth so much to you that you're concerned.

Even if things "blow up" and it feels like things are getting out of hand, always remember you've acted out of genuine concern for someone.

## **WHO CAN I TALK TO?**

There's some great sites that talk a lot about exploitation and abuse – click on the names to go straight to their sites. You can also ring ChildLine or the NSPCC for advice too, 24 hours a day.

[ChildLine](#): 0800 1111

NSPCC helpline: 0808 800 5000

[Manchester survivors](#) – a really great organisation for male survivors of abuse

[Change project](#) – lots of work around domestic abuse for both victims and perpetrators

[Gallop](#) – any forms of violence towards LGBTQ+ people including relationships

[CEOP](#) – great resources if you're worried about something online

[Relate](#) – general relationship advice and online counselling

[FPA](#) – advice around sex and consent

[The Brook](#) – advice for young people about sex and relationships