

# **Love Struck:** *Dating Abuse Up Close*

## Discussion Guide

Developed by  
[www.OutrageUs.org](http://www.OutrageUs.org)<sup>1</sup>

**TOYOTA**



<sup>1</sup> Teri Faragher, M.S.W. and TK Logan, Ph.D. February 2015. Support for the video was provided by Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Kentucky and donations to OutrageUs. For more information about OutrageUs, go to [www.outrageus.org](http://www.outrageus.org) or email [teri.outrageus@gmail.com](mailto:teri.outrageus@gmail.com).

## Introduction to Discussion Guide

*Video Length: 17 minutes*

**Content of the Video:** Three survivors discuss their experiences and the impact of dating abuse on their lives. A friend of one of the survivors and a detective who worked with another survivor in her efforts to achieve safety are also interviewed.

**Caveat:** The survivors interviewed are not a representative sample of all victims, or survivors, of dating abuse. They are, however, women who experienced dating abuse and were willing to share their stories to help others. Victims of dating abuse are male and female, of every race, ethnicity, and faith and come from all socio-economic backgrounds.

**Purpose of this Discussion Guide:** The following questions and ideas are intended to help prompt and guide discussion when showing the videos in dating abuse support groups and educational forums. Please do not feel limited by these suggestions. You and the participants in your group or forum may want to lead the discussion in a different direction. Please use your own judgment as to the appropriateness of these questions and ideas for your specific audience.



**CONTROL**



## Questions and Ideas for Group Discussion

### **Question 1: What are some of the themes or patterns in the experiences described by the survivors featured in the video?**

Some of the themes in the video include:

- **I am not that person** – Many victims of dating abuse do not see themselves as victims. They want to believe that if they love the abuser enough, he/she will change or they feel that abuse is something different, often more extreme than what they are experiencing.
- **I felt so lucky** – Abusive relationships are generally easy relationships to get into because abusers are usually very attentive and passionate in the beginning of the relationship.
- **I was suffocating** – Over time, abusers take more control of victims' lives and become more possessive. In other words, abusers start and continue to cross their partners' personal boundaries. Victims may not even realize what is happening but they do recognize that their freedoms seem more limited. They begin to feel suffocated.
- **His mood was up and down and it was confusing** – Victims often say that being with their abuser is like being with two different people, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It is very confusing when someone is kind and loving one minute and mean and hurtful the next minute.
- **He put me down and I started to believe him** – The confidence many people have when they enter a relationship is eventually eroded by constant put-downs when the relationship becomes abusive. When you hear something often enough, over and over, it is human nature to start to believe it; to internalize it.
- **I shut everyone out** – There are many reasons that victims become isolated. Usually, the abuser does not want the victim to be around friends and family and the victim often complies to try to please the abuser. Since the victim's friends and/or family often do not like the abuser, it is just easier to cut off ties with them. In addition, victims are often embarrassed and ashamed by what is happening to them, even though it isn't their fault.
- **I felt so helpless** – It takes a lot of strength on a daily basis to survive an abusive relationship, but abusers often make victims feel like there is nothing they can do but submit to their demands. Ashley said, "There was nothing that was mine anymore. Everything was his... I just let him have control because it was easier than having to fight against it and having him win anyway."
- **I tried to break it off but he wouldn't leave me alone** – When victims try to end the relationship, abusers will often step up their efforts to exert control.
- **I broke up with him, then he started stalking me** – Stalking can indicate an increased level of risk for victims and can cause them to live in constant fear for their safety. Overall, 1 in 6 women and 1 in 19 men will be stalked in their lifetime.

**Question 2: Was there anything “special” about the young women in Love Struck that made them more vulnerable to dating abuse than other young women? If you met one of them at a social gathering, would the word “victim” come to mind?**

The women in the videos do not fit any stereotypical myths about victims of dating violence. They are not weak, dependent or passive. They do not have low self-esteem, though their self-esteem may have been affected while they were in the abusive relationship. They are just young women who, like most of us, hoped for a loving relationship.

Overall, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 20 men are abused by, and afraid of, an intimate partner. Most victims are between the ages of 11 and 24 the first time they are abused by an intimate partner.

**Question 3: The survivors in the video talked about when they first met and started dating the men who ended up abusing them. They said things like “we just clicked,” “everything hit it from the start,” and “he just swooned me.” At the beginning, were their relationships different than other new relationships? If so, how were they different?**

The dating relationships featured in Love Struck seemed very promising at the beginning, so they were very easy relationships to get into. The survivors all described how lucky they felt... at first. They also all described relationships that seemed to get serious very quickly. They and their dating partners started to spend most of their time together soon after meeting, often to the exclusion of time with family and friends. While many relationships that are intense in the beginning do not become abusive, it is important to maintain connections with family and friends. If a new boy/girlfriend really cares about you, he/she will want to know the people who are important in your life, not isolate you from them. In the beginning of a relationship, it is often difficult to tell the difference between someone who loves you and someone who wants to control you.

**Question 4: As the relationship developed, what behaviors and characteristics did the dating partners exhibit that made the survivors realize that they wanted to end the relationship?**

Following is a list of some of the behaviors and characteristics cited by the survivors in the video:

- Control
- Possessiveness
- Extreme jealousy
- Put-downs and denigrations
- Isolation from family and friends
- Monitoring of the victim’s phone, social media accounts, etc.
- Surveillance of the victim (in her neighborhood, at work, etc.)
- Taking and/or damaging the victim’s property
- Harming the victim’s pet
- Mood swings (Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde)
- Mixed messages
- Attempts to limit the victim’s freedom
- Threats to harm the victim and others
- Physical abuse



**JEALOUSY**



**ISOLATION**

**Question 5: Ashley's friend was concerned about her and tried to talk to Ashley about her concerns. Ashley secretly wanted her friend's help but continually tried to convince her friend that everything was okay. If you had a friend who you thought was in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, what could you do to help him/her?**

Ashley's friend felt that she wasn't able to help Ashley, but the fact that she continued to be there for Ashley and to convey her concerns let Ashley know that her friend cared about her and had not given up on her. That is important because the more isolated victims become, the more alone and trapped they feel and the more powerful the abuser seems.

A good first step to figure out how to help a friend is to call the National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline at 1-866-331-9474 or the National Domestic Abuse Hotline at 1-800-799-7233. If your friend is ready to take this step you can encourage him/her to call, but friends and family members can also call to discuss their concerns and to learn about local resources. National hotline counselors can give you the number of your local domestic violence program and the local crisis counselors can tell you what resources and protections are available in your community. Of course, if you think someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

If you are in middle or high school it is important to discuss your concerns with an adult you trust. Your friend's safety is more important than keeping a secret. Also, remember that while it is good to speak up when you are concerned, it generally is not a good idea to confront the abuser yourself. That could be dangerous for you and your friend.

**Question 6: What if you or your friend is the abuser?**

Victims are in danger in abusive relationships, but abusers often suffer serious consequences too. While abusers may feel that they are in control they quickly lose that control when the school system and/or the criminal justice system becomes involved. Communities are taking dating abuse much more seriously than they did in years past and abusers are more likely to be arrested, have a protective order taken out against them, and/or be ordered to attend a Batterers Intervention Program. In addition, abusers may be punished by suspension from school, academic and sports activities or loss of employment. They may also be ostracized by their peers.

Aggressive behavior is generally learned and it can sometimes be changed. Abuse is always a choice. If you are concerned about a friend, talk to him/her if you can do so safely and, if not, talk to a trusted adult or call a hotline to seek advice and ask what help is available. If you are concerned about your own behavior, step back from the relationship before you do something you will regret for the rest of your life. Get help before someone forces you to get help.

**Question 7: Deanna’s boyfriend stalked her while they were dating and after she ended the relationship. How does someone know they are being stalked?**

Stalking is a pattern of behavior that makes the intended victim fear for her/his safety. Some common stalking behaviors are:

- Following
- Showing up in unexpected places
- Calling or texting repeatedly
- Sending unwanted cards, gifts, or messages
- Driving by or hanging around victim’s home, school or work
- Using technology (like computer spyware, hidden GPS and cameras) to track the victim
- Using public records or on-line search services, hiring investigators, or going through the victim’s garbage to get information about the victim
- Keeping tabs on the victim through family, neighbors and friends
- Threatening people or pets the victim loves
- Damaging property

**Question 8: People often ask, “Why don’t victims of dating abuse just end the relationship?” What happened when the women in the video decided to do that? Were they able to “just end the relationship”?**

A better question to ask is “why doesn’t he just leave her alone?” The survivors in the video described being stalked, threatened, harassed and stabbed AFTER they ended the abusive relationship. Dating abuse is a pattern of coercive control and abusers try to maintain control even after a break-up. When the victim tries to end the relationship, the abuser often steps up efforts to exert control, and sometimes resorts to extreme measures. Ending the relationship is often the most dangerous time for a victim. That is why it is critical for victims to decide when and how it is safest to let the abuser know it is over.

**Question 9: Ashley’s boyfriend came to her workplace and slit his wrists when she tried to break up with him. Why do you think he did that? Were there any underlying messages for Ashley?**

A threat of suicide or a suicide attempt can be a cry for help, but in an abusive relationship it also is often a way to manipulate and threaten the other person. The fact that Ashley’s ex-boyfriend came to her workplace to slit his wrists suggests that he wanted her to feel responsible for his well-being, thereby trapping her in the relationship. When suicide is threatened in an abusive relationship, there also can be an underlying message of “If I can’t have you no one will.” A suicide threat in an abusive relationship can mean that the victim is also in danger.

