

Abusive Relationships May Start Younger Than You Think

A letter I received from one of my readers has stuck with me for a long time. The young woman was only in her teens, yet she was having some serious difficulties with her boyfriend. The young man was being manipulative and abusive. I offered what little advice I could, then prayed she would be okay, because she admitted she was afraid for her life.

The last I heard she was doing fine. I won't take credit for that. I was concerned almost from the moment I read her first message, that I was not qualified to offer her any advice. I can empathize, but I have quickly learned empathy may not be enough.

Still, it bothered me enough that I have since begun to form relationships with professionals who can help guide me if the same sort of situation should come up again. Because without the right direction, some of these are problems can end tragically, or impact on a woman's life for many years.

An example of this is a young woman in her early twenties, I will call Kate. Kate was only fourteen when she met her abusive boyfriend. She admits she had no idea there was anything wrong in their relationship.

"At the time, I believed that our relationship was normal," admits Kate.

Her boyfriend seemed to have a potpourri of abuse, which is not unusual. He was physically, verbally and emotionally abusive.

Without details, Kate explained that he would hit, slap, push and shove her round. His verbal abuse ranged from swearing at her, to making distasteful sexual references. And while she states his emotional abuse was in the form of withholding affection when angry, she still suffers the results of it.

"I could only admit it to myself that something was wrong," Kate explained. "I only admitted it to someone else years after it was over."

Sadly, her relationship only ended when he moved away. I say sadly, not because it wasn't her good fortune to have it end; rather because she still lives with the fact that she might have continued to take such treatment had he not been the one to end it.

"I still suffer from the emotional torment, as well as the psychological affects, and physical scars," Kate admits. "Even after nine years."

Because I personally know Kate, I can say it has indeed affected her self-esteem and both her mental and physical health. She is a delightful young women with so much potential, but unfortunately, she struggles daily to overcome many obstacles. Many caused by someone she loved and thought loved her.

It's probably easy for many of you to understand and imagine this happening. There is a good chance it is happening to some of you right now. If that is the case, I hope you will not remain silent like Kate did.

Instead, speak out as my reader did. Get help from a professional, and that may even mean law enforcement if you feel you may be in danger if you try to end an abusive relationship. There are also many counseling services available to you. Look in the phone book, or look on the web. If you can't find someplace local or where you feel comfortable, contact me. As I said, I've begun forming a relationship with a counseling group, and the most valuable thing I may be able to do for you is give you information on how to contact them.

But first, please try talking to a teacher, pastor, friend or family member. Find a support group. And get out of that relationship. You deserve better. Just like Kate now knows she deserved better. And my other reader realized she, too, deserved better.

As I once realized, I deserved better. Yes, my friends, it happened to me too. But this is not about me. I've carried my scars inside me, and it has taken a very long time for me to overcome most of them. But this isn't about me. It's about any of you out there who are still in abusive relationships. Get out and get help. Your future depends on it.