My boyfriend hits me: Should I go back to him? [1]

Dear Alice,

I've been with my boyfriend for over two years now. We were great during the first year, but our relationship has become abusive. I remembered that I was the one who first laid a hand on my boyfriend. Then, that's when it all started. Every time we get into a fight, it frequently ends in violence. But now he becomes the aggressor. He's the one who hits me first. I don't hit back anymore, but this doesn't seem to stop him. He ended up taking me to the hospital to get stitches in my head after he hit me. The hospital asked questions and I covered up for him, but the police didn't believe me and arrested him. He said he's going to a counseling program to get better. He still loves me and realized the horrible things he has done. He said he wants to get back together after the program. Is there a chance for him to get better? Should I go back to him?

Answer

Dear Reader,

As you and many others know, abusive relationships can be confusing and complex because they often have lots of positive aspects along with the hurtful and horrible ones. From your letter, it also sounds as though you are confused about your role in the violence, particularly the times when you hit your boyfriend, too. It is important that you have recognized not only your boyfriend's abusive behavior, but also your own need for some effective, healthy communication and coping skills.

First, you could explore what you want from this relationship. Aside from the physical violence, what parts of it are unhealthy? Do you know why you hit your boyfriend a while back: were you feeling helpless, angry, hurt, or something else? These emotions can be communicated in ways other than physical violence. Identifying the feelings that led up to expressing yourself this way could help you understand what motivated your behavior. Knowing some characteristics of Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships [2] might be helpful when considering what you want from a partnership, and whether or not these needs can be met in your current one. General information about relationship violence in Abusive girlfriend [3] may also be helpful.

Did/does your relationship include controlling or manipulative behavior? Domestic and dating violence often encompass more than physical violence. Emotional and psychological abuse is frequently present that may or may not be accompanied by physical violence. For example, does your partner criticize you, put you down, try to isolate you from your friends, or insist on knowing where you are at all times? There can be forced or unwanted sex in relationships,
and this is also abuse.

You also asked if violent people can stop being violent. This is a complicated question. Although your boyfriend loves you and knows that what he did to you was wrong, the fact remains: someone whom you love and trust seriously hurt you, which is painful and difficult to understand. The fact that your boyfriend wants to change his violent behavior could be a hopeful sign considering that one must be ready and willing to change before change can actually happen. However, many men and women who hit their partners want to change, yet may not have the coping skills to know how to do just that. A violence intervention program, such as the one your boyfriend is in, could help. Unfortunately, research shows that patterns of violence are often deeply rooted and can be difficult to replace. It can take years for someone to alter violent behavior (if s/he is ever able to), and s/he must make a consistent and persistent effort.

Making a decision to stay or leave can be extremely difficult and complicated, and it is not something most people "figure out" in a day or two. It can take awhile to know what is the best decision for you. There are ways that you can look at and evaluate your situation that might help you to explore what you want to do, and what your next steps will be. You could ask yourself,

"Will I ever be able to feel fully safe with this guy?"
"What are my reasons for wanting to go back to him?"
"Am I afraid of being alone, or not having him in my life?"
"What would my life be like without him?"

These are questions that you'd likely explore during counseling, which could be helpful now and in the future.

Here are some resources for assistance:

**At Columbia and Barnard:**

- **Columbia Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)** [4]
  - x4-2878 (to make an appointment to speak with a counselor)
- **Barnard Student Health Services ? Rosemary Furman Counseling Center** [5]
  - x4-2091
- **Barnard-Columbia Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center** [6]
  - x4-WALK (24-hour advocates)
  - x4-HELP (Peer Counselor Help line available 7 - 11 PM, 7-days-a-week)

**Off-campus:**

- **24-hour National Domestic Violence Hotline** [7]
  - **1.800.799.SAFE (-7233)** available 24/7
- **Safe Horizons** [8] (in New York City)
  - **212.577.7777**
- **The Safety Zone** [9]

A web site with information on available abuse and domestic violence resources, particularly those in New York State. Nationwide resources are listed under "web links."

**New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project** [10]
As your boyfriend is getting help and counseling, you might consider what support would be most helpful to you. Can you talk to friends and family? Can you visit a counselor? Making a major decision can be daunting, but talking to people to help clarify your feelings and needs may help you figure out what decision is best. Keep working to find the support you need, Alice!

Category: Nonconsensual Relationships

Related questions

Best friend in an abusive relationship with his wife
Abusive girlfriend
Sister in battered relationship
Healthy versus unhealthy relationships
What about emotional abuse?
We love each other, but we fight all the time...

Published date: May 05, 2000
Last reviewed on: Oct 10, 2008

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.
If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/my-boyfriend-hits-me-should-i-go-back-him#comment-0

Links