



Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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This Is Not a Test!: Missy Elliott Tells Teens to Break the Cycle of Violence

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Hip-hop star Missy Elliott is the new spokesperson for Break the Cycle, the national organization that works to prevent domestic and dating violence through education, free legal services, advocacy, and support for young people. As spokesperson, she gives Break the Cycle an exceptional donation, but her commitment is not purely financial.

Elliott, who grew up with domestic violence, says her new role fulfills a personal dream to help teens understand and prevent violence in their relationships. Sex, Etc. spoke with Missy Elliott about her own experiences with domestic violence and commitment to educating young people about dating and domestic violence.

Sex, Etc.: You mentioned in the campaign press release, "I know how domestic violence can affect a family, and I want to do everything I can to stop it from happening to others." Have you been a victim of domestic violence?

Missy Elliott: My mother was abused by my father until I was 13 years old. At the time, I didn't know what I could do or who I could turn to. Even though both my parents loved me, it was an unhealthy situation. I promised myself that if I ever had the chance to speak out and reach people, I'd help get the word out about domestic violence and let people know that help is available.

Sex, Etc.: How do you feel dating violence affects today's society, particularly teens?

Missy Elliott: Dating violence is a huge problem in America—people might not realize that one in three teens experiences some kind of abuse in a romantic relationship. Teens really need to be educated about dating violence and domestic violence and the law, so they can have healthy and safe relationships.

Sex, Etc.: Were you educated about these issues when you were a teen?

Missy Elliott: No. When I was in school, they didn't talk about teens experiencing dating or domestic violence. It's a problem, because kids might not realize they're in an unhealthy relationship—they might not see the warning signs early on. That's why I think Break the Cycle's work is so important. They go into schools and teach kids about domestic violence and the law—and they let them know that help is available.

Sex, Etc.: So, do you think high schools need to do more to educate teens about violence in relationships?

Missy Elliott: Yes. We have to give teens important health information, like the warning signs of abuse, so they can make good choices for themselves. We can only stop domestic violence if we reach kids early and teach them about healthy relationships. We need to make sure they understand the issue, so that they don't end up on either side of an abusive relationship.

Sex, Etc.: How can teens get more involved in this issue?

Missy Elliott: They can educate themselves about domestic violence and keep their eyes open to what's going on around them. If they have friends who are in unhealthy relationships, they should encourage them to get help. If they want to get more involved with the issue, they can volunteer with domestic violence organizations where they live.

Sex, Etc.: Do you have any other advice for teens?

Missy Elliott: Everybody deserves a healthy relationship. If you're being abused, don't be afraid to tell someone you trust and get help.

Am I in an Abusive Relationship?

Does the person I am with:

- Get extremely jealous or possessive?
- Accuse me of flirting or cheating?
- Constantly check up on me or make me check in?
- Tell me how to dress or how much makeup to wear?
- Try to control what I do and who I see?
- Try to keep me from seeing or talking to my family and friends?
- Have big mood swings—being angry and yelling at me one minute, and the next minute being sweet and apologetic?
- Make me feel nervous or like I'm "walking on eggshells"?
- Put me down or criticize me and make me feel like I can't do anything right or that no one else would want me?
- Threaten to hurt me?
- Threaten to hurt my friends or family?
- Threaten to commit suicide or hurt himself or herself because of me?
- Threaten to hurt my pets or destroy my things?

- Yell, grab, push, shove, shake, punch, slap, hold me down, throw things, or hurt me in any way?
- Break things or throw things when we argue?
- Pressure or force me into having sex or going farther than I want to?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be in an abusive relationship.

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