Teaching Guide
September 2025

INTIMACY & DATING AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

Welcome to SafeBAE's Teaching Guide

This guide was created to accompany our short film *Intimacy After Sexual Assault*, produced in partnership with Teen Vogue and featuring SafeBAE Co-Founder Ella Fairon and Henry O'Neal.

Navigating Dating After Sexual Assault

After experiencing sexual assault, dating can feel especially challenging. Many survivors live with post-traumatic stress (PTSD), and intimacy may sometimes be triggering. At the same time, every survivor's experience is unique. This guide is designed to provide tools and support for both survivors and their partners as they navigate healthy relationships after sexual assault.

Please Note

Because these conversations can surface strong emotions or even lead to disclosures of abuse, we encourage you to take steps to create a supportive classroom environment including:

- **Inform school counselors in advance of teaching this content and ask them to be available for students who may need additional support.**
- **Let students know they may step out or take a break if the material feels overwhelming.**
- **It is also important to remind students that school staff are typically mandated reporters; be clear about your school's policies and state laws so that students understand the limits of confidentiality before choosing to disclose.**

Please also share national, 24/7, confidential support resources with your students:

Text: LOVEIS to 22522
Chat: www.loveisrespect.org
Call: 1.866.331.9474

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Guidance for Survivors

Be Aware of Self-Care and Self-Harm

- Some survivors may feel drawn to new partners who are also unhealthy or abusive. Try to notice if patterns of unsafe or harmful relationships are developing.
- Sometimes survivors may even mirror harmful behaviors as a coping strategy. If you notice this in yourself, seek support from a trusted friend, counselor, or therapist.
- Avoiding trauma is common, but it can sometimes lead to risky behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, withdrawing from supportive relationships, or seeking unsafe sexual encounters. Be gentle with yourself, and reach out for professional help if you notice these patterns.
- Some survivors stay in contact with their abuser. If this feels true for you, know that you deserve safety. Seek support from trusted people who can help you stay safe.
- Ask close friends or family to share honestly if they notice signs of risk-taking or unhealthy relationship patterns.

Acknowledge How You're Feeling

- Feelings of shame are common after assault, but remember: it is never the survivor's fault. It may take time to unlearn self-blame, but committing to self-care and healing can help.
- Communicate openly with new partners and ask for patience and understanding as you heal.
- When and if you feel ready, you may choose to share some of your story with your partner. You never have to go into detail or disclose anything you are not comfortable sharing.
- Take as much time as you need to feel physically and emotionally safe with someone again. If anyone pressures you into intimacy, that is not a healthy partner.



What might be some healthy ways to check in with yourself?

Healing Resources

Healing after sexual assault is not a straight line — some days will feel easier than others. The most important thing is to stay committed to your healing, surround yourself with supportive people, and keep communicating your needs and boundaries.

Professional and Peer Support

- Consider connecting with a therapist, psychiatrist, or peer support group.
- Some therapists specialize in trauma and may recommend alternative approaches that work differently for each person.
- Learn more about evidence-based trauma treatments, such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), at www.emdria.org or www.emdr.com.

Reconnecting With Yourself

Try practices that help you feel grounded and present in your body:

- Mindfulness meditation (even while walking or eating, simply notice your sensations and feelings in the moment)
- Journaling
- Going for walks
- Yoga, Tai Chi, or Qigong
- Artistic expression (any creative outlet that feels safe and fulfilling)

Setting and Protecting Boundaries

- Pay close attention to how people, places, and situations affect you. If something feels uncomfortable, frightening, or uneasy, honor that response.
- Once you identify the boundaries you need, share them clearly with others.
- You never need to justify your boundaries. Be direct and assertive when communicating them.
- Do not allow others to violate your boundaries. If someone doesn't respect your boundaries, they are not respecting you.
- It is often easier to start with stricter boundaries and relax them over time if you feel safe doing so.

Guidance for Partners



Be Patient and Understanding

- Your partner's emotions may sometimes feel overwhelming or hard to understand. Many of these reactions are linked to trauma or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Be patient, and encourage your partner to seek professional support if they want help managing triggers.

Communicate Openly

- Talk with your partner about what helps them feel safe and supported.
- Ask how you can show up for them in daily life and in your relationship.

Guidance for Partners

Notice Patterns and Behaviors

- Be aware if your partner is struggling with unhealthy behaviors or coping in ways that may harm themselves or others. Encourage them to seek help when needed.
- Remember that you also deserve kindness and patience in the relationship. Supporting your partner does not mean accepting harmful treatment.

Practice Active Consent

- Always make sure your partner feels completely comfortable before engaging in any sexual activity.
- Don't rely only on verbal "yes" — pay close attention to body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- If there's any doubt, stop and check in. Consent must be ongoing, enthusiastic, and free from pressure.

Affirm Their Worth

- Remind your partner that they are not defined by their assault. Affirm their strengths, their healing journey, and who they are beyond trauma.

Encouraging Healing and Respecting Boundaries

- Encourage your partner's healing, and if they are comfortable, participate in supportive activities with them.
- Never pressure your partner into sexual activity. If they are not comfortable with something you suggest, respect their boundary and let it go.
- If your partner seems distant, distracted, or "checked out" during intimacy, they may be dissociating — a common trauma response. Stop immediately. Do not continue.
- Gently check in with them and offer comfort through conversation, grounding techniques, or simply being present.
- Only continue physical intimacy on another day when they feel ready, able, and fully present.



Watch "SafeBAE Co-Founder Ella Fairon & Henry O'Neal talk about intimacy after sexual assault"

Reflection Questions:

- What are some of the ways Henry supports Ella in feeling more comfortable and in working through her triggers?
- How might these approaches inspire or inform how you support a partner or friend who has experienced trauma?



More Ways to Help

Remind survivors that the assault was not their fault.

Encourage their healing journey, and if they're comfortable, help them find supportive resources.

Respect their privacy. Don't press them to share parts of their story before they're ready.

Never suggest doubt, blame, or judgment about their experience.

Show solidarity: if you hear victim-blaming, slut-shaming, or rape jokes, speak up and stand with survivors.

Discussion Prompts:

- What are some other specific ways — big or small — you could show support for a partner or any survivor?
- What are some verbal and physical signs that your partner is comfortable in a situation? What are signs they might not be?
- How can you balance supporting a survivor while also taking care of your own emotional health?

Dating after sexual assault can feel overwhelming, but with patience, communication, and care, healthy relationships are possible. Survivors may face more challenges in this process, yet partners also need to tend to their own mental health and seek support when needed. Ultimately, each person is responsible for their own healing. While partners can play a supportive role, they are not substitutes for trained professionals. If you or your partner are struggling, we strongly encourage reaching out to a mental health professional or local support services for guidance and care.

We hope this guide was useful for you and helped spark meaningful conversations with your students. Your feedback is invaluable to us. Please take a moment to complete our short survey — and if you used this guide in a classroom setting, we encourage your students to fill it out as well. You can access it directly here: **https://forms.gle/SpZiCHDUkBU5kZcQ9**

To go deeper, we encourage you to explore our other teaching guides that connect closely with the themes in *Intimacy & Dating After Sexual Assault:*

- ***#KnowB4UNude*** — a non-judgmental guide and PSA about the risks of sexting and image-based harm.
- ***Shifting Rape Culture*** — a guide for unpacking cultural norms, media messages, and everyday behaviors that normalize sexual violence.

We also encourage you and your students to stay engaged with SafeBAE and continue building safer, more respectful school communities. Here are a few next steps you can take:

- **Become a Certified Peer Educator**
- **Start a SafeBAE Club Chapter**
- **Bring Our Programs to Your School**

Thank you for your commitment to empowering youth, supporting survivors, and creating a culture of consent.

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