

## SO HOW DO I TALK ABOUT BAD THINGS I'VE EXPERIENCED?

It's often not as easy as we wish it was (or as easy as 'just tell!') You might want to protect your friends and loved ones from hearing things we think will upset them- or maybe people have been rude or toxic when you've tried before. Still, it can be good to let people who care for you do just that- and it teaches them that they can speak out, too. Let's use dating violence as an example. Let's say you were in a toxic, abusive relationship in the past, and you want to talk to your new partner or your best friend about your experiences.

### 1 | Conversational Consent

Before the conversation starts, it's good to make sure everyone is in the same emotional place. An easy way to start would be to ask them something like: "Is this a good time to talk to you about my old relationship? I want to talk about some things that happened with my ex."

This gives your friend or partner the chance to understand that the conversation is serious to you, and should help them prepare themselves to respond. It also gives them a chance to let you know if they're not in the right place right now, and when would be better. If you really want to talk, and they can't, it might be time to reach out to other resources- like counselors, chat, or text lines.

### 2 | Start Small

You may find you feel better just expressing the fact that something happened. For example- "My ex used to criticize my body and make fun of me all the time. It seemed like any time I was happy with something or proud of myself, I had to be punished for it."

You don't have to disclose everything all at once- or at all if you're not ready or comfortable. Your experiences are your own, and in a conversation about violence, you should be in charge of how they're expressed. If your friend or partner presses for more details than you're comfortable with, remind them that just choosing to share can be difficult.

### 3 | Check in Emotionally

Talking about our trauma can bring up a lot of emotions- sadness, guilt, and fear, but also happiness, relief, and optimism about the future. It's complex, and people's responses to two very similar things can be very, very different. Once you've told your friend or partner, pause and consider how you're feeling- and remind yourself that it's normal to feel any range of things and that those emotions won't be the same for long.

After you've gone through these steps, remind yourself that as you work on this skill, it will get easier. We hope that this advice will help you feel more confident and make it easier to talk about hard topics with the people you love the most!

