

## **MANIPULATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

We are all susceptible to being controlled in relationships, whether it be friends, romantic partners, or others. When we allow another person to manipulate us, we are indirectly participating with their wish to control our feelings and thoughts through deceptive and exploitative means. A manipulative relationship is one-sided and unbalanced, advancing the goals of the manipulator at the expense of the person being manipulated. This type of relationships is very unhealthy. For it to change, you must first recognize the signs of manipulation. There are effective ways to address the situation if you believe your child is in a manipulative relationship. **Signs your child may be in a controlling/manipulative relationship:**

- ✓ Everyone who cares about your child (i.e. family, friends, teachers, coaches, etc.) has expressed concern for him/her, or feel as though your child is pushing them away.
- ✓ Your child won't participate in activities that doesn't involve his/her partner or that his/her partner would not enjoy.
- ✓ Your child obsesses or worries about doing activities that doesn't involve his/her partner.
- ✓ Goals and activities that used to be very important to your child have suddenly been pushed to the back burner.
- ✓ Your child is changing their future plans based on his/her relationship and his/her partner's goals and dreams (this may include changing school plans or jobs).
- ✓ Your child's plans are based on what his/her partner wants.
- ✓ Your child is being cut off from his/her friends and family because their partner is jealous or possessive.
- ✓ Your child's partner needs to know where s/he is at every minute and overreacts to things such as being late or turning off the cell phone.
- ✓ Your child's partner uses backhanded compliments ("your lucky I love you so much, cause who else would put up with you?") or directly puts him/her down.

*While your child may not be in a manipulative relationship, if you are noticing any of the above, it is cause for concern and should be looked into further.*

### **What to do if you think your child is in a controlling/manipulative relationship:**

- ✓ Let your child know that his/her partner is probably great in many ways, (charming, attractive, etc.) but may still be a controlling/manipulative person. Provide concrete examples of the changes you have noticed.
- ✓ Remind your child that he/she cannot hope to change this person. This never works.
- ✓ Don't blame your child for staying in an unhealthy relationship. People who are controlling and manipulative can appear to be quite intelligent, charismatic, charming, and confident people, so it can be quite easy to feel attracted to them and care for them even if they are being disrespectful.
- ✓ Breaking up is hard to do. Make sure you are there for your child, and provide your child with support and also advice. With controlling/manipulative partners it is best to cut off all

contact, meaning not responding to texts, emails, phone calls, etc. Support your child in this effort.

- ✓ Make sure your child has the proper support system in place— trusted adults s/he can speak with openly (whether it be a parent, friend, teacher or even mental health professional). People who are controlling/manipulative oftentimes exploit weaknesses in their partners such as fears of abandonment, loneliness, feelings of low self-worth, need to rescue or fix someone, etc. In order for your child to not get involved with another controlling/manipulative partner, it is important that s/he has someone s/he trusts to speak with and explore these possible patterns.
- ✓ Not every controlling or manipulative person is dangerous, but some are. If your child's ex-partner is continuing to contact your child whether by text, email, letters, phone, through friends or in-person, enlist the help of police (restraining order) and mental health specialists. It is a good idea that your child save all text messages, emails, phone messages etc. for evidence for police.