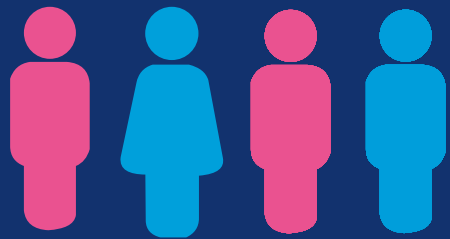
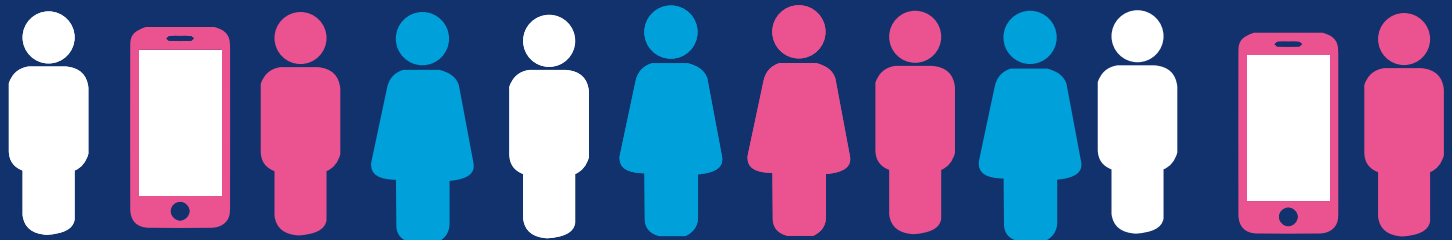


# My Story Matters



#TalkaboutToxic

Survey results



ON OUR  
RADAR



Ending  
domestic  
abuse



# About SafeLives

We are SafeLives, the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good.

We work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. We want what you would want for your best friend. We listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of our thinking. We look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. And we challenge perpetrators to change, asking ‘why doesn’t he stop?’ rather than ‘why doesn’t she leave?’ This applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship.

Last year alone, nearly 11,000 professionals working on the frontline received our training. Over 65,000 adults at risk of serious harm or murder and more than 85,000 children received support through dedicated multi-agency support designed by us and delivered with partners. In the last three years, nearly 1,000 perpetrators have been challenged and supported to change by interventions we created with partners, and that’s just the start.

Together we can end domestic abuse. Forever. For everyone.

## **We want what you would want for your best friend**

- Action taken before someone harms or is harmed
- Harmful behaviours identified and stopped
- Safety increased for all those at risk
- People able to live the lives they want after abuse has happened



# About On Our Radar

We are a specialist group of journalists, technologists, digital storytellers and development practitioners. We work together to tackle voicelessness, surfacing stories from unheard groups worldwide.

Those on the frontlines of humanity’s toughest challenges hold incredible insight. We amplify unheard voices so that they can shape the future.

We build reporter networks, design innovative communications solutions, develop technology for connectivity and co-produce award-winning media.

# Acknowledgements



We are extremely grateful to Comic Relief, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and The Clothworkers' Foundation for funding this project.

Our thanks go to those partners and organisations who shared the survey with their networks.

Our biggest thanks go to those young people that responded to the survey and shared their stories with us.

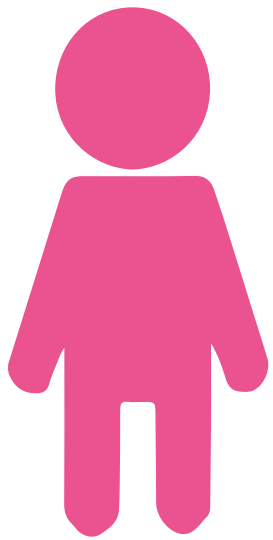
# #TalkaboutToxic

## Key findings

“ **69%** of teens would use the word **toxic** to describe harmful relationships ”

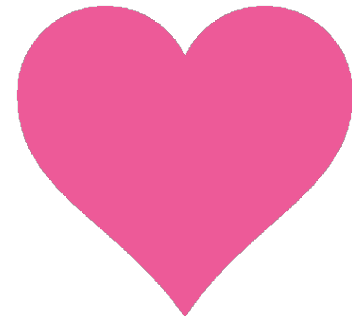
**66%**

would go to their best friend for relationship advice



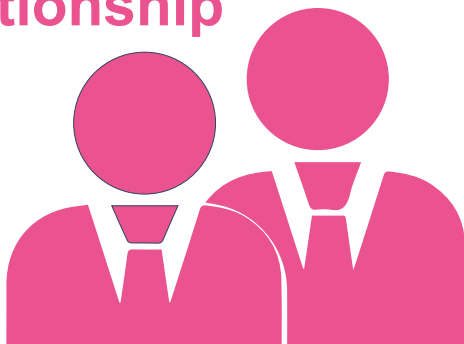
**51%**

would most want support to understand what is and isn't **OK** in relationships



**18%**

want guidance on what to do if you see a friend is being harmed by a relationship



**30%** who shared their story with us spoke about sexual assault

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**“It gave me panic attacks and every time I see him I feel like I can't breathe.”**

Survey respondent

# Aims

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SafeLives and On Our Radar are collaborating with Comic Relief and young people across the UK to use digital tools to understand and address abusive behaviour in teenage relationships. There is very little research and evidence gathered to truly understand the needs and manifestations of those experiencing abuse in teenage romantic relationships. We wanted to change that.

With our project, My Story Matters, we put young people between the ages of 13-18 in charge of leading the design of the project and the tech solution we develop. We looked at the way in which stories from survivors can support young people to seek support and advice at the right time and in a healthy way.

As part of this discovery phase, SafeLives and On Our Radar worked alongside our Young People Steering Group to develop a short interactive survey for young people to complete. The title of the survey, 'TalkAboutToxic', was chosen by the Steering Group. Through the survey we wanted to validate what young people had already told us through interviews and workshops, about how young people view domestic abuse and behaviours in relationships and where they might trust to go for help and support. We intended to capture a national response and diversity across the country. The results would help us to gain a broad range of valuable insights that would be used to design a product to support young people in abusive relationships that are all too often overlooked. It was available online, and shared via social media, as well as through known organisations and contacts to share across their networks. Launched on Valentine's day, it was available for 6 weeks until 31 March 2020.

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## Responses

We received a total of 507 responses to the survey between 14 February and 31 March 2020. There were 40 submissions that did not contain any data, and so these were removed. A further seven were removed due to inappropriate answers given. This left a total of 460 responses used in the following analysis.

# Key Findings

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## Demographics

Two thirds (68%) of respondents were female and a quarter (27%) were male. A small proportion (2%) of respondents did not describe themselves as male or female. There were a small proportion (3%) of respondents who described themselves as transgender.

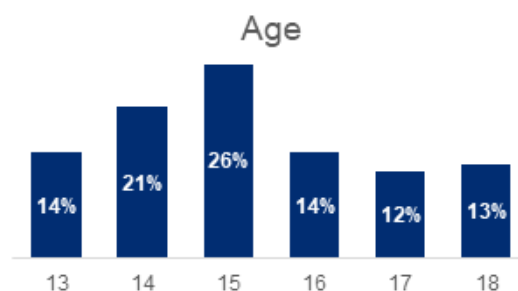
The chart below shows the age range of respondents, with the most common age being 15.

Three quarters (74%) of respondents identified as being straight, with 9% identifying as bisexual, 2% as lesbian and 2% as gay. A further 3% described themselves as having sexuality not listed.

Over a third (36%) said that they would describe themselves as living in a town. A fifth (21%) said they lived in a city while 14% lived in a rural area. However, there was some overlap, with some respondents choosing more than one type of location. Taking this into consideration, 33% said town only, 19% said city only and 12% said rural area only. Less than one in ten (8%) said that they live with a disability, while a third (31%) had experienced periods of poor mental health. A small proportion (4%) said they were in or have an experience of being in care.

Respondents were asked how they would define their ethnicity. This was a free text box, so respondents were able to record any answer they wished. The most common response given was White British (22%), followed by White (16%), British (12%) and English (4%). A small proportion of respondents (7%) said that English was not their first language.

Figure 1: Age of survey respondents





## Language

Respondents were asked what words or phrase felt most appropriate to describe teen relationships that they thought might be unhealthy or harmful. The most common words chosen from the list provided were toxic (69%), controlling (61%) and manipulative (55%). The least common were coercive (24%), intimate partner violence (31%) and domestic violence (36%), all words commonly used within the sector.

While the least common phrases were those we expected, they were still chosen by a fairly large proportion of respondents. Respondents were able to choose more than one phrase, and while over half (53%) had chosen between one and three phrases, with over a quarter (28%) choosing just one, one in five (18%) had selected all eight phrases, which goes up to 23% for 15 year olds, the most common age group.

When looking at only the 130 that selected one phrase, toxic is still the most common chosen (38%), but this is now followed by harmful (17%) and then controlling (12%). Again, the least common phrases were coercive (1%), intimate partner violence (1%) and domestic violence (2%), only chosen by one or two respondents. When looking at responses by age, we see that that as age increases, the proportion of respondents choosing toxic goes down and the proportion choosing harmful goes up.

When looking at those that identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) compared to those that identified as straight, we see similar results whether looking at all responses or only those that had selected one word.

Where one word was selected, for both groups the most common phrase chosen is toxic (41% and 42% respectively). Where there was some slight difference was with those that chose controlling, which was chosen by a greater proportion of those identifying as straight (14% compared to 4%) and those that chose the word manipulative, which was chosen by a greater proportion of those that identified as either lesbian, gay, or bisexual (17% compared to 10%).

Figure 2: Words to describe harmful relationships

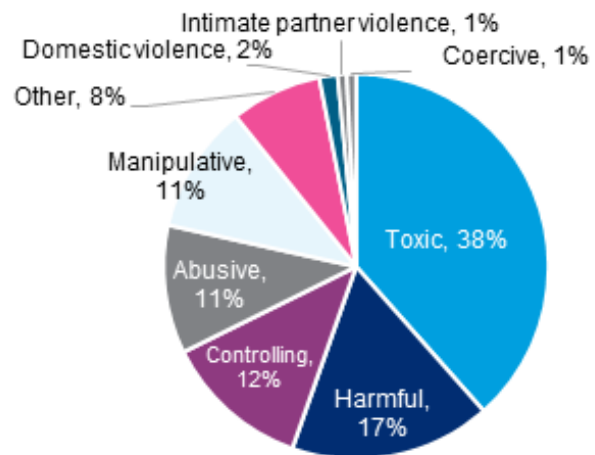
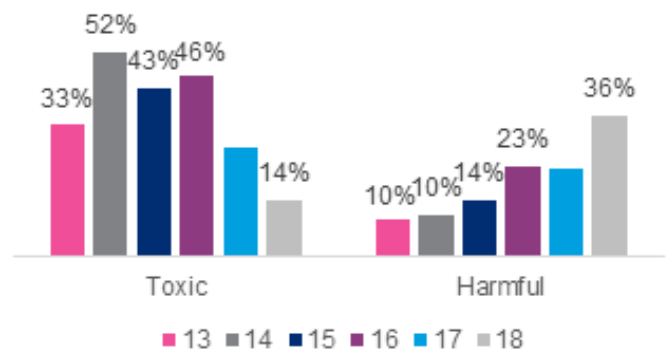


Figure 3: Words to describe harmful relationships - responses by age

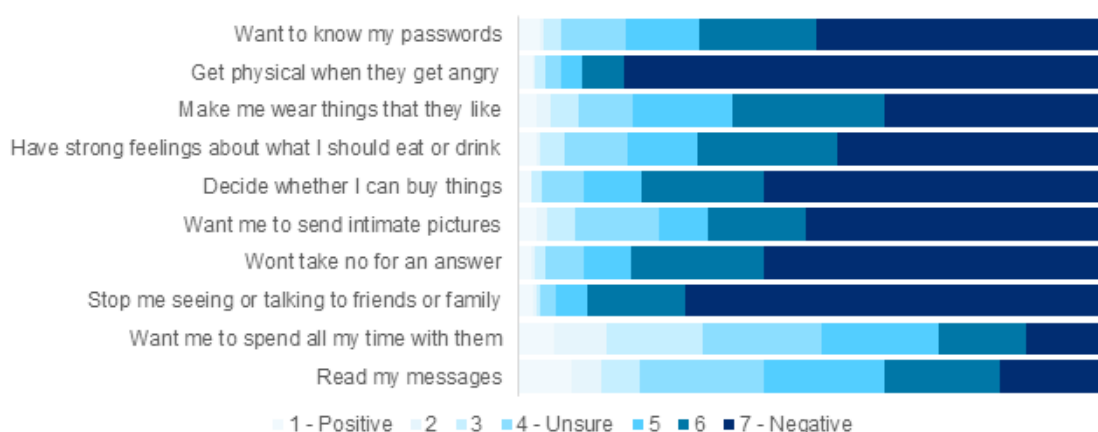


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## Behaviours

Respondents were asked to rate ten different behaviours found within relationships on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being positive and 7 being negative. The chart below shows how respondents answered for each behaviour.

Figure 4: Rating negative behaviours



For eight of the behaviours the most common score given was 7, showing that respondents felt these were negative behaviours. There were two behaviours where answers were more mixed. These related to reading messages and wanting to spend all their time together. For both behaviours there were slightly more answers around the unsure mark (score 4) (21% and 20% respectively) and both had the largest proportion of positive responses (score 1) (9% and 6% respectively).

When looking at responses by sexuality, we see very little difference in answers for each of the behaviours between those that identify as straight and those that identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

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## Advice

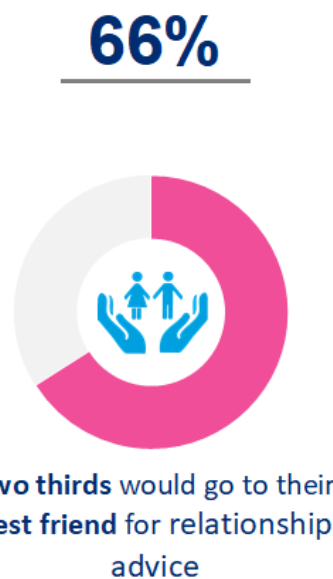
We asked respondents where they go for advice when they are not clear on what is healthy or not in a relationship. The most common answer was best friend, selected by two thirds (66%) of respondents. Family members were next with half (50%) of respondents selecting parent and a quarter (25%) saying they would go to a brother or sister. Only small percentages of respondents chose options outside of friends or family. Teacher was chosen by 15% and a member of a youth service was chosen by 12%.

There was an interesting difference when respondents were split by gender. The most common person to go to for advice for male participants was a parent (64%), followed by best friend (54%). However, for female respondents, best friend was most common (71%) followed by parent (47%). The proportion of males who would go to teachers for advice was also greater than that of females (22% compared to 13%).

There were also some differences when looking at sexuality. For those that identified as either lesbian, gay or bisexual, there were bigger proportions of those that would seek advice from a wider friendship group (32% compared to 16%), teacher (19% compared to 14%), youth service (19% compared to 10%), and websites (25% compared to 14%). For those that identified as straight, there were bigger proportions of those that would seek advice from parents (53% compared to 40%), and best friend (67% compared to 60%).

A sixth (17%) of all respondents would look at websites online, which was the same for female respondents and male respondents (both 17%). A slightly smaller proportion (13%) would go to social media. This is important as it shows that online and social media are not natural places for relationship advice. This gives an opportunity to 'fill a gap' and create an informative space that is more relevant and appealing to this group.

Figure 5: Most common person to go to for advice



Respondents were asked separately what websites or apps they would use if they used their phone or laptop for advice. The majority of respondents (60%) said this did not apply to them. Of those that did give an answer, the most common given was Google (42%), in that they would put their question into the search engine to see what advice comes up. Interestingly, the second most common was ChildLine (18%). This was by far the most common specific website given. Other support websites mentioned included Kooth (4%), Mind (1%) and stonewall (1%). Social media made up most of the other responses, with the most common being Instagram (10%), Snapchat (8%), YouTube (6%) and Facebook (5%).

Unsurprisingly, those that would look for advice via ChildLine were mostly younger respondents with the vast majority (84%) aged 13-15.



## Content

Respondents were given a choice of three different areas that the content could focus on and were asked which one they felt would be most helpful to young people. Half (51%) of respondents chose 'help understanding what is OK and not OK in a relationship', a third (31%) chose 'advice on getting out of a relationship that feels unsafe' and 18% chose 'guidance on what to do if you see a friend is being harmed by a relationship.'

Splitting responses by gender shows the same pattern for both male respondents and female, although the proportion of males who would prefer help understanding what is and is not OK is greater than the proportion of girls (63% compared to 46%). Over a third (35%) of females would prefer advice on getting out of an unsafe relationship, which compared to less than a quarter (22%) of males.

Looking at sexuality also showed the same patterns. Help understanding what is and is not OK was selected by 52% of those that identified as straight and although a slightly smaller proportion of those that identified as either lesbian, gay or bisexual chose it (46%), it was still the most common selected. Similarly, there was a slightly greater proportion of those identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual who wanted advice getting out of a relationship (36% compared to 30%), while the proportion who wanted guidance for a friend was the same (18%).

The chart below shows the options chosen across different age groups. As shown, the order of the three options does not change by age.

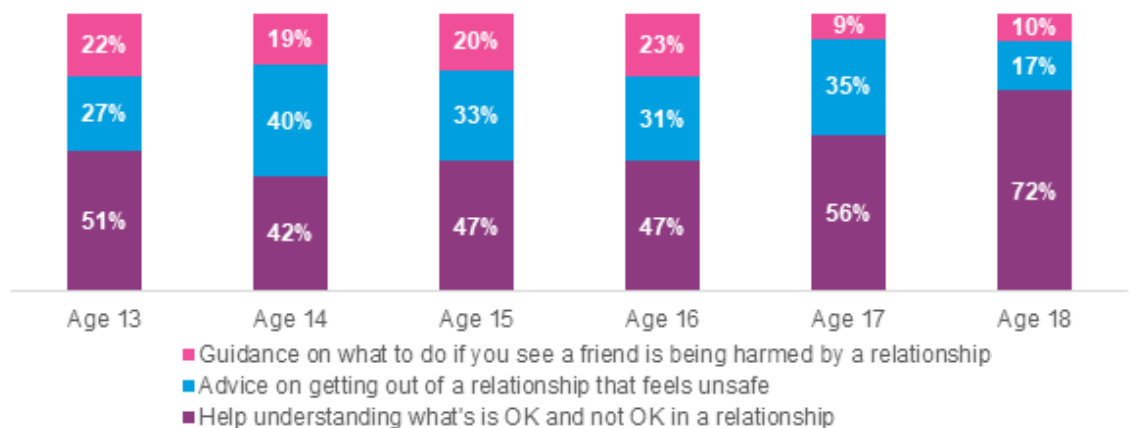
Figure 6: Respondents on what would be most helpful for young people



**51%**

would prefer to have guidance on what is OK and not OK in a relationship

Figure 7: Respondents on what would be most helpful for young people by age



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## Stories

There were 20 respondents who were willing to share their story with us. Most stories were from female respondents (75%), with one story from a male (5%) and one story from someone who gave their gender as other (5%). Those providing stories were a mix of ages, with 55% aged 13-15 and 45% aged 16-18. Two in five (40%) stories were from someone who identified as straight, while four (20%) were from someone who described themselves as bisexual and one (5%) as lesbian.

Two thirds (65%) of the stories were about their own relationships, with three (15%) describing abuse within the family home and two (10%) telling us about a relationship their friend was in. The most common type of abuse within the stories was sexual (30%), while two (10%) told us of physical abuse. Young people also shared stories of coercive and controlling behaviours, using words such as manipulated/ive (20%), controlling (15%), coercion (5%) and emotional blackmail (5%).

Survivor responses:

**“At the beginning, he was really sweet and he cared about me. But about 4 months in, he pressured me into having sex. I didn't want to say no because I was scared he'd get angry. He got angry a lot.”**

**“I thought we were in love and dating so went along with anything he wanted.”**

**“Sometimes I notice he manipulated me like not really obviously or anything but he'd tell me to do stuff and I felt I didn't have a choice.”**

**“He started asking me for all of my passwords for my social media. If I refused, he would get angry at me. Sometimes he would get physical with me. A few times if I refused to do something he would punch me and kick me. He then then started to tell me that I couldn't see my family or friends. It was horrible.”**

Anger was a common theme and was mentioned in four (20%) of the stories. Three (15%) mentioned that their partner was older than them.

A third (35%) described the impact of the behaviours on them. Three (15%) were in fear or scared of their partner. One person said the behaviours led to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. One said they felt trapped, and one person said they felt hurt. For one person, the behaviour led to panic attacks. One young person, who was in a wheelchair, said they felt vulnerable. One person said they were made to feel guilty.

Survivor responses:

**“It gave me panic attacks and every time I see him I feel like I can't breathe.”**

**“It made me feel really uncomfortable and I became scared about what he would do to me next.”**

Three young people that shared stories told us what would have helped them at the time. One person thinks teens need more advice identifying unhealthy relationships. Two people would have liked advice on what was right or wrong in a relationship, with one saying specifically they would have preferred this from a person rather than an app or website.

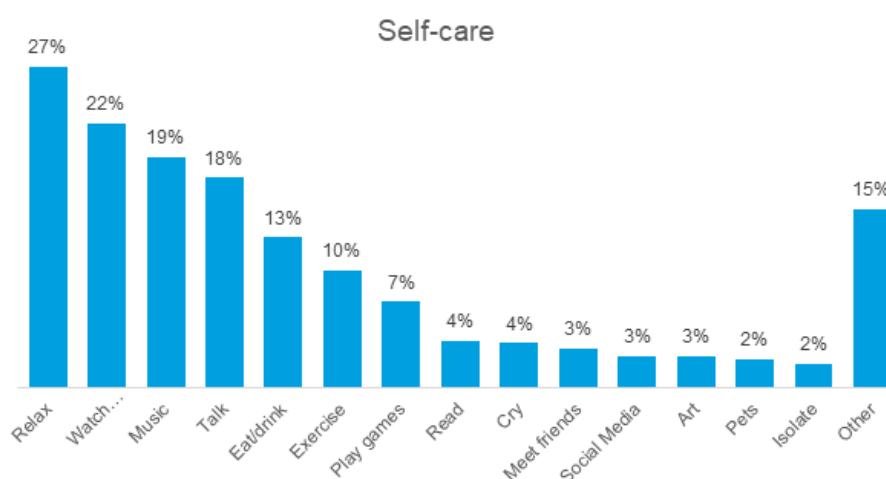
**“I didn’t know what to do and advice about dos and don’ts in a relationship would’ve helped.”**

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## Self-care

Respondents were asked what they did for self-care. This was an open question, and there were 741 comments from the 460 respondents. These comments were coded under 15 categories, which can be seen in the chart below. Percentages are out of the total number of respondents.

Figure 8: Categories of self-care activities



The most common theme was around relaxing. Of the 124 comments related to this theme, 29% mentioned sleeping, 28% would have a bath and 21% would do some form of pampering or skin care such as a face mask or spa treatment.

Of those that would watch something, this was most commonly Netflix (25%), films (22%) or TV (22%). One in six (16%) of those that would watch something would watch YouTube. The vast majority of comments relating to music were in relation to listening to it (91%), while a small amount would play a musical instrument (7%) or sing (2%).

Most people that talked would do so with their friends (43%) or with one friend in particular (9%). Family was also common (33%), which included parents (11%), mum (6%) and dad (1%). A small proportion would talk to someone they trust (4%).

Comments relating to exercise were varied. Of the comments related to this theme, the most common were playing sport (27%) or going to the gym (20%). Respondents would also dance (13%), swim (9%), walk (9%), go horse riding (7%), cycling (2%), run (2%) or do yoga (2%).

**“He started asking me for all of my passwords for my social media. If i refused, he would get angry at me. Sometimes he would get physical with me. A few times if I refused to do something he would punch me and kick me. He then then started to tell me that I couldn't see my family or friends. It was horrible.”**

Survey respondent



# Conclusion

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The aim of this survey was to solidify what we had been told in other parts of the discovery phase through interviews and workshops with young people. The results concur with what we had found. Respondents to the survey agreed that they would prefer guidance on what is and what is not OK in relationships. The behaviour ratings also show that there are some behaviours, such as reading messages and wanting them to spend all their time together, where the line is blurred.

They also agree with our assumption that the current language used in relation to adult domestic abuse, including the phrase domestic abuse itself, is not what they would relate to themselves. Instead words such as toxic and harmful should be used.

The results also show that online and social media are not natural places for relationship advice. This gives an opportunity to 'fill a gap' and create an informative space that is more relevant and appealing to this group.

Moving forward, these results will be used to inform the next phase of the project, the design phase.



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