

TEEN TALK (an original column from The Daily Record)

April 3, 2005

QUESTIONS! You got 'em—we want 'em! Put "Teentalk" in the subject line and email us: teentalk@the-daily-record.com

YOU: Here's my problem—my boyfriend treats me badly. I just don't know what to do about it...I like him so much! What can I do?

TEENTALK: You didn't give us much info, so let's get one thing straight right off the bat: If your boyfriend has *ever* hit you or forced himself on you in any way, you need to tell an adult and then break up with him immediately. Even if he's "only" verbally abusive—that is, he calls you names or threatens you but has never hurt you physically—you need to dump him, fast. A guy like that is dangerous, and *you deserve better*. Even if he's really sweet sometimes—and even if he apologizes for his bad behavior—he's not worth it. Be very careful, though: Make sure your parents or other adults are around when you break up with him, and let them know what's up. **DO NOT ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE ALONE WITH HIM.** Tell him very clearly and calmly that you don't like how he's behaving and you don't want him to be your boyfriend anymore. Once you're out of the relationship, you may want to find a counselor to talk to about what attracted you to him and signs to watch for so you can avoid this type of guy next time. They're trouble, and a nice girl like you can do so much better.

OK, now that *that's* clear...what if he's just not being as nice as he could be? Well, you can give him the benefit of the doubt—maybe he just doesn't realize how badly he's acting. If you want him to change, you'll have to try talking to him about it. Use lots of positive language ("I really like you!") and remember those "I" statements! Talk about how *you* feel ("I get embarrassed when you tell me I'm wrong in front of your friends")—*don't* bombard him with his faults ("You always put me down in front of your friends"). See if he's willing to change. Above all, remember that you deserve to be treated with respect! No matter how much you like him, if he's not willing to be the nicest guy he can be, it's time to move on.

YOU: I'm having trouble concentrating. It's hard to explain, but it's like I'm always spacing out or daydreaming. I don't mean just once or twice during the day--more like 5-10 times. Sometimes I get called on in class and it's like I was on another planet or something. Can you help?

TEENTALK: First off, we want to know if you're getting enough sleep. Studies show that teens need about 8½ hours *each night*. You can try to "catch up" on the weekends, but that's just not the same as getting a full 8½ hours every night. Sleep deprivation can easily cause you to space out during the day. If sleep isn't the issue, is there something on your mind? If you're really focused on something else (a girlfriend/boyfriend, problem at home, grades, sports issues, etc.), it can totally take over your thinking, at least temporarily. Also, are you bored in school? If everything is either too easy or too hard or just plain old *boring*, you can also find yourself getting lost in daydreaming as an escape. So, what to do? First, try to figure out what's causing the problem. If you're not getting enough sleep, make a point of getting at least 8½ hours each night for a full week. If it helps, you'll know you've found at least part of the problem. Try keeping a log for a week, too: Every time you catch yourself spacing out, write down the time and place and what you were thinking about. If it's always the same problems, try talking them out with someone, writing them down, or

thinking them through in the evening. Then, when you head out the door to school, remind yourself to *leave your problems at home!* If boredom at school is the issue, talk to your counselor about finding *something* to help you get interested. (Sometimes, though, it's just a matter of practice to learn to stay focused on the task at hand. Not everything we do can be fascinating.) If, in spite of your best efforts, you still can't concentrate, talk to your doctor, just to make sure there's no medical basis for your inattention. The good news is that you're really trying to come back down to earth! Good luck!