Verbal & Emotional Abuse

The Language of Control

By June Hunt

“You’re worthless!” . . . “You’ll never amount to anything!” . . . “I wish you had never been born!” Words like these in childhood can wound the heart for a lifetime.

And further wounding takes place in adulthood when “control” is the name of the game. Threats like . . . “If you leave me, I’ll hurt the children!” or “I’ve taken the keys—you’re not going anywhere!” . . . are both emotionally and verbally abusive and are ways of maintaining control in relationships.

Abuse can also be perpetrated without a word—whether with degrading looks, obscene gestures or threatening behaviors. These actions inflict immense pain and impede emotional growth, You don’t have to allow an abuser to make you feel worthless. Jesus says that you have great God-given worth . . .

Luke 12:6-7

DEFINITIONS

A. What Is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is the unseen fallout of all other forms of abuse: physical, mental, verbal, sexual and even spiritual abuse. People often minimize the importance of emotions. Yet with deeply wounded people, feelings can be the driving force behind their choices. At that point, for those people, their emotions become the life-sustaining element of their very beings. Emotional abuse strikes at the very core of who we are . . . crushing our confidence . . . wearing away our sense of worth. At one point in his life, even Job experienced this same torment.

Job 19:2

- Emotional abuse is any systematic, ongoing, negative behavior used in an attempt to control or hurt another person. Not a one-time act or an infrequent practice, emotional abuse ranges from consistent indifference to continual belittling of character.

— All forms of abuse—emotional, verbal, mental, physical, spiritual and sexual—damage a person’s sense of dignity and God-given worth.

— All forms of abuse wound the spirit of a person and, therefore, are emotionally abusive.

Proverbs, the book of wisdom says,

Prov 18:14

- Emotional abuse or “psychological mistreatment” scars the spirit of the one abused.
— The damage from emotional abuse lasts far longer than damage from any other kind of abuse. A broken arm will soon heal; a broken heart takes much longer.

— After extended periods of emotional abuse, many victims lose hope, feeling that life is not worth living.

*Prov 13:12*

- Emotional abuse can be passive-aggressive.

  Passive-aggressive abuse is always indirect and underhanded; hence, the term is *passive-aggressive*.

  — *Passive-aggressive abusers* express their anger through nonassertive, covert behavior. They often manipulate themselves into a position of dependence, then, with underlying anger, they become faultfinders of the people on whom they depend.

  — Victims of *passive-aggressive* people feel perplexed and dismayed at being the target of punitive and manipulative behaviors. Friends of *passive-aggressive abusers* often become enmeshed in trying to comfort or console them in response to their claims of unjust treatment and their inability to handle life on their own.

  Passive-aggressive abusers need to recognize and resolve their very real anger and take to heart God’s warning . . .

*Eccl 7:9*

- Emotional abuse can be either *overt or covert rejection*.

  — *Overt rejection* is defined as open or obvious behavior that conveys the message that a person is unwanted or unloved (belittling your own child).

  — *Covert rejection* takes place in subtle ways that may or may not be intended by the perpetrator (neglecting to spend adequate time with your child).

**Biblical Example**

**Both Overt and Covert Rejection: Tamar**

(*Read 2 Sam 13.)*

**Overt Rejection:**

Tamar was raped and rejected by her half brother Amnon.

**Covert Rejection:**

Their father, King David, did not make his son bear the responsibility for the sexual violation of his daughter.

“What does the Bible say about emotional abuse?”

The Bible doesn’t use the term emotional abuse, but it does instruct us as to how we are to treat one another. The Bible details numerous attitudes and actions we should have toward each other. If we go by these guidelines, we will never be abusive toward anyone.
B. What Is Verbal Abuse?

Verbal abuse is a form of overt emotional abuse. A skilled woodsman wields his weapon carefully, chopping repeatedly on a precise spot until the targeted tree falls. This lumberjack takes pride in controlling himself and his weapon, never striking a careless blow. By contrast, a verbal abuser has a tongue out of control and hacks away at another person. This abuser is skilled in his ability to hack away, caustically cutting heart and soul.

Ps 52:4

- Verbal abuse is the systematic, ongoing use of harmful words or sharp tone in an attempt to control or dominate another person.
  — Abuse involves mistreatment; an intentional misuse of something or someone.
  — Verbal abuse is always destructive.

Ps 52:2

- Verbal abuse injures the feelings of others with reviling, insulting or contemptuous words.
  — The Hebrew word for revile is gadaph, from a root word which means “cut” or “wound.”
  David, who had been reviled by Saul, expressed pain over his unjust treatment, when he said,

Ps 44:15-16

- Verbal abuse often seeks to injure the reputation of others . . .
  — using tactics such as backbiting, barbs or belittling talk
  — using strategies such as slander, slurs and lies

Ps 52:3

C. What Is Brainwashing?

Many prisoners of war have succumbed to brainwashing—an effective tactic used in psychological warfare. This term refers to a systematic, forcible indoctrination that puts pressure on prisoners to relinquish their beliefs and accept opposite beliefs. Unfortunately, you don’t have to be in a prisoner of war camp to be brainwashed. Your captor could be a significant member of your own family or a new set of acquaintances. In whatever circumstance brainwashing occurs, the damage can be devastating . . . systematically wearing away your sense of self-worth and confidence . . . causing you to distrust yourself and even to lose touch with reality.

Gal 4:17

Verbal and Emotional Tactics Used in Brainwashing

- Verbal Brainwashing
— Intimidation—implying that your failure to comply with all demands or adopt all the abuser’s attitudes or beliefs will result in severe consequences
— Indoctrination—repeatedly implanting messages contrary to your presently held values
— Discrediting—belittling your “outside” family and friends who disagree with the abuser
— Degrading—Engaging in name-calling, insults, ridicule and humiliation
— Labeling—claiming that your thoughts are childish, stupid or crazy

*Ps 35:20*

- **Emotional Brainwashing**
  — Isolation—depriving you of all outside sources of emotional and social support
  — Induced exhaustion—keeping you up late, interrupting your sleep, causing sleep deprivation
  — Excessive compliance—militantly enforcing trivial demands
  — Ignoring—withdrawal of emotional support but later denying it
  — Forgetting—intentionally failing to keep promises and agreements
  — Exploiting—using you or someone close to you for self-serving interests or gain

*Ps 10:2*

**CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

Words possess immense power. Through a word, God created the world. Through “The Word made flesh” (John 1:14), He saved the world. Words can be life-giving as well as life-threatening—life-giving by inspiring us to be all we were meant to be... life-threatening by destroying our hopes and dashed our dreams. Ultimately, words move from being positive to being abusive when they hurt our hearts and harm our relationships. The Bible says,

*Prov 18:21*

**A. What Are Your Words Really Saying?**

Words have the ability to build others up or to tear others down.

*Eph 4:29*

**Words that Hurt**

- Attacks a Person’s Identity
  — You are something wrong.
  — You are intrinsically bad.
- Yelling
  — “Shut up!”
  — “You look awful.”
• Name-calling
  — “You stupid idiot!”
  — “You crazy fool!”

• Insults
  — “You’re worthless!”
  — “You’re disgusting!”

• A Negative Picture of the Past
  — “I wish you’d never been born.”
  — “I should have had an abortion.”

• A Negative Picture of the Present
  — “You can’t do anything right.”
  — “Get lost!”

• A Negative Picture of the Future
  — “You’ll never amount to anything.”
  — “You’re hopeless.”

**Words that Heal**

• Addresses a Person’s Action
  — You did something wrong.
  — You did something bad.

• Discussing
  — “Please listen, we need to talk about ________________.”
  — “Let’s discuss what is appropriate for you to wear to the family reunion.”

• Casting a Vision
  — “You are good at ________________.”
  — “You have definite creativity.”

• Compliments
  — “Your life has so much value.”
  — “I can see areas where you have much appeal!”

• A Positive Picture of the Past
  — “I was glad the day you were born.”
  — “I knew God had a special purpose for you when you were born.”

• A Positive Picture of the Present
  — “You do a lot of things right.”
  — “You’ll always have a home in my heart.”
• A Positive Picture of the Future
  — “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”
  — “God has a future filled with hope for you.”

  *Jer 29:11*

**B. What Are Characteristics of Passive-aggressive Behavior?**

Passive-aggressive behavior is a form of covert emotional abuse. The more overt forms of abuse such as physical bashing, verbal raging or name-calling are easy to identify, but the more covert forms, like passive-aggressive behavior, can be much more difficult to detect, although they are just as emotionally abusive. Passive-aggressive people express anger indirectly and seek to get their needs met in evasive, underhanded or deceitful ways. While some people are unaware that they engage in such hurtful behavior patterns, others are quite intentional in their actions.

  *Job 11:11*

• Tactics used in this type of emotional abuse may include the following:
  
  — **Invalidating**—Refusing to acknowledge reality by saying, “I never said that.” or “I don’t know what you are talking about.”
  
  — **Minimizing**—“You’re just too sensitive,” or “You’re exaggerating,” or “You’re making a big deal out of nothing.”
  
  — **Countering**—“You couldn’t possibly feel that way.”
  
  — **Trivializing**—“If you had really studied, you could have made a 100 on the test instead of a 98.”

  **Methods of Sabotage**

To gain covert control and personal power, the passive, emotionally abusive person may employ some of the following methods:4

• **Fostering chaos**—leaving work and projects incomplete in ways that “seem” intentional

• **Telling lies or half-truths**—habitually offering “reasons” (excuses) for not fulfilling commitments

• **Procrastinating**—operating with a uniquely individual sense of time that results in regularly missed deadlines, giving the impression that they have little regard for the negative impact on others

• **Chronic lateness**—exercising control by keeping people waiting

• **Ambiguous**—sending mixed messages, leaving others in a wake of confusion about what was said or what was meant

• **Instructing**—offering unsolicited advice on a continual basis

• **Passive intake**—giving the impression that your concerns are heard and understood, but then disregarding them

• **Protecting and helping**—extending their helpfulness in a way that leaves you in their debt
• **Quick change artist**—changing the subject and diverting attention from conversation that feels threatening to them

• **Withholding affirmation**—holding power over you emotionally by failing to give desired compliments and deserved credit

• **Crossing boundaries**—taking advantage of those with weak or underdeveloped boundaries

  *Ps 59:12-13*

C. **What Are Types of Emotionally Abusive Rejection?**

Rejection is common to all of us. We have been unjustly rejected by a prospective employer, not chosen by a team captain, jilted by a date or ignored by an acquaintance. Yet, while we may have had our feelings hurt or our ego wounded, it didn’t last long and left no permanent scars. However, there are types of rejection that can cut like a knife and pierce like an arrow to the heart.

*Ps 5:9*

**Examples of overt, abusive rejection:**

• The parent who deserts the family.
• The parent who tells a child, “I wish you had never been born.”
• The parent who tells a child, “You are a disgrace to this family.”
• The parent who tells a child, “You’re just like your sorry father.”
• The parent who tells a child, “I wish you were like your brother.”
• The parent who tells a child, “You will never amount to anything.”
• The parent who tells a child, “You were a mistake...You were an accident...You were the wrong gender.”

**Examples of covert, abusive rejection:**

• The parent who constantly “raises the bar with excessive requirements”
• The parent who demands more than the child is capable of giving
• The parent who withholds love
• The parent who overindulges
• The parent who overprotects
• The parent who divorces
• The parent who commits suicide

D. **What Is the Cost of Abuse?**

There is always a price to be paid for pain... a loss to be incurred by the recipient of abusive words and hurtful gestures. The cost is often unseen... It is extensive, inner deprivation that can continue to damage
Victims of Abuse May Experience . . .

- loss of self-worth, increased self-doubt
- loss of self-confidence, increased self-consciousness
- loss of self-perception, increased self-criticism
- loss of happiness, increased emotional flatness
- loss of freedom, increased vigilance
- loss of inner peace, increased “peace-at-all-cost”
- loss of self-assurance, increased anxiety
- loss of security, increased desire to escape
- loss of trust, increased distrust
- loss of sexual identity, increased sexual confusion
- loss of a clear conscience, increased guilt or shame
- loss of friendship, increased isolation
- loss of faith, increased fear
- loss of safety, increased insecurity
- loss of self-respect, increased self-destruction
- loss of optimism, increased pessimism
- loss of pride, increased self-hatred
- loss of hope, increased despair

E. What Erroneous Statements Are Made by Victims of Abuse?

Check any that apply to you:

- “I am defective.”
- “I am bad if I feel angry.”
- “I will never measure up.”
- “I am bad for having needs.”
- “If I am good, I will be loved.”
- “Bad love is better than no love at all.”
- “I am a worthless and unlovable person.”
- “Mistakes only confirm my worthlessness.”

Prov 15:4
— “I need other people’s approval in order to be happy.”
— “Other people’s feelings are more important than mine.”
— “If people I care about reject me, then I must be unlovable.”
— “I need to be independent because others are untrustworthy.”
— “I will not ever let anyone get close enough to hurt me again.”
— “I am responsible for the behavior and feelings of those around me.”
— “I am responsible to bring about change in others when I see that it is needed.”
— “I must be dependent on others who are wiser and stronger than I am.”
— “Everything I do is wrong—I can’t do anything right.”
— “Nothing matters anymore; life is hopeless.”
— “Whatever you want makes me happy.”
— “I don’t see any way out.”

“What hope is there for anyone broken by abuse?”

For the one who has been broken by abuse, God offers great hope. That hope is in Himself. Begin to deepen your dependence on the Lord and seek His comfort and healing.

Ps 146:5-6

Ps 34:18

F. Do Your Relationships Bear Good Fruit?

Are you in an abusive relationship? Have you experienced an unhealthy dynamic between you and someone close to you? Many people fail to recognize that they are in an abusive relationship because abuse has been “their normal” for so long. If you look closely, you can evaluate the “health” of any relationship by seeing the type of fruit it produces—whether the fruit is good or bad. Jesus said,

Matt 7:18-20

The Fruit Test

As a help in realistically evaluating a relationship close to you, take “The Fruit Test.” Ask yourself if you and the other person exhibits the “fruit” listed below.

Fruit of the Abusive Spirit

(what the sin produces)

(Gal 5:15,19-20)

• Biting
  — Having a sharp, biting tongue that often hurts the heart
• Devouring
  — Being overcontrolling so that one’s identity seems destroyed
- Hatred  
  — Displaying disdain or animosity toward another person
- Discord  
  — Starting arguments that result in tension and strife
- Jealousy  
  — Viewing others as rivals, while possessively wanting to exclude them
- Rage  
  — Displaying out-of-control anger
- Selfish Ambition  
  — Seeking to satisfy personal desires over the desires of another
- Dissensions  
  — Frequently voicing disagreements and disapproval
- Factions  
  — Causing splits between others instead of seeking unity

**Fruit of the Holy Spirit**
(what the Spirit produces)
(Gal 5:22-23)
- Love  
  — Seeking to do what is in another’s best interest
- Joy  
  — Living with an inner gladness of heart regardless of challenging circumstances
- Peace  
  — Displaying tranquility in the midst of hardships and trials
- Patience  
  — Enduring difficulties calmly without complaint
- Kindness  
  — Expressing genuine care and helping with a benevolent heart
- Goodness  
  — Displaying moral character and godly virtue with a pure heart
- Faithfulness  
  — Being loyal to appropriate significant relationships
- Gentleness  
  — Treating others with sincere respect, displaying a soothing disposition
- Self-control
— Exercising restraint rather than choosing to be undisciplined
(Later ask someone close to you—someone who will tell you the truth—someone whom you trust to help you evaluate your responses.)
The Bible says (Luke 3:8).

**CAUSES OF ABUSE**

“How can he be so cruel?” “How can she be so insensitive?” “Why would he talk that way?” These are **real questions** that victims of abusers ask. Understanding the **real answers** can give you wisdom and discernment regarding your relationships.

*Ps 51:6*

**A. What Is the Breeding Ground for Abusers?**

Has someone implied that you were abusive? If the statement is true, do you want to change? In order to heal from the wounds of the past, you need to face the fact that your past was painful and seek to understand its painful impact on your past and present relationships. You can courageously choose to face the areas in your life that need healing, or you can refuse and remain a victim of your past . . . and continue to make others your victim.

*Jer 17:14*

**The Background of Abusers**

Evaluate your own childhood:
- You experienced some type of abuse by one or both parents.
- You felt “different” as a child.
- You felt belittled or bullied by schoolmates.
- You stuffed your emotions.
- You learned your parents’ ways of maintaining control.
- You didn’t have a safe place to express feelings.
- You think “your normal” is normal—but it is not.
- You never dealt with your underlying feelings of anger.
- You never developed sensitivity to the feelings of others.

**“Feeling Different” in Childhood**

Abusers usually felt singled out. They felt that they were different in several of these areas:
- too short or too tall
- too fat or too thin
- too dark or too light (skin color)
• physical features too large (nose, ears, feet)
• physical features unwanted (freckles, acne, buck teeth, hair color)
• athletically challenged (awkward or uncoordinated)
• academically challenged (mentally slow, ADD or ADHD)
• physically challenged (disabilities, poor eyesight, hearing problems or speech difficulties)

Matt 6:27

B. What Influences Predispose Children to Become Abusers?

Not all children who experience abuse become abusers; however, most abusers were once abused in one way or another. This raises the question: “Why do some children become abusers while others don’t?” Certain factors predispose children to make particular choices regarding how they respond to their experiences. The one thing they all share in common is that each young spirit was crushed by heartache. The Bible says,

Prov 15:13

• Temperament
  — The child is willful and assertive.
  — The child is confident and forceful.
  — The child lacks compassion and empathy for others.
  — The child exerts power and control over peers.

• Personality
  — The child is aggressive and impulsive.
  — The child is competent and secure.
  — The child has an inflated ego and a sense of entitlement.
  — The child is competitive and dominates relationships.

• Environment
  — The child experiences some form of abuse within the home.
  — The child spends excessive, unsupervised hours watching violent TV programs and sitcoms laced with sarcasm.
  — The child forms the belief that being mean to others is the best form of self-protection.
  — The child is unable to safely express anger and frustration at home.

C. Why Do Some Become Abusers . . . and Others Do Not?

All children are impacted by abusive treatment. Some take the path of succumbing to abuse and defining themselves by that abuse. Others take the path of rising above abuse and defining themselves by other values.
Three Paths to Travel

Many people wonder, Why did I have to travel down this path of abuse? You may not know the exact answer for some time, but you can know that as long as you continue to entrust your life to the Lord, He will direct your path each step of the way, and you can be an overcomer.

#1 The Path of a Victim
— The child internalizes abusive experiences.
— The child blames himself or herself for the abuse.
— The child feels deserving of abuse.
— The child seeks out abusers in adulthood who look strong.
— The child remains a victim of abuse.

#2 The Path of an Abuser
— The child internalizes abusive experiences.
— The child blames others for the abuse.
— The child feels others are deserving of abuse.
— The child seeks the weak in order to look strong.
— The child becomes an abuser.

#3 The Path of an Overcomer
— The child initially internalizes abusive experiences, but later externalizes them.
— The child initially blames self or others for the abuse, but later forgives all involved in the abuse—including self.
— The child initially feels deserving of abuse or power, but later feels deserving of loving, trusting relationships.
— The child initially seeks out abusers or victims, but later seeks out well-adjusted people.
— The child initially remains a victim or becomes an abuser, but later rejects both roles and becomes emotionally healthy.

Prov 3:5-6

“Why do people who are being abused continue to stay in abusive relationships?”

One major reason is fear. Isa 21:4 says, “My heart falters, fear makes me tremble.” Instilling fear is a powerful weapon used to control another person. One effective strategy that instills fear is the use of demeaning messages such as verbal threats to inflict physical harm. Another fear tactic is to leave or to withdraw emotional support. The basic underlying fear, however, is not having the three basic needs met—the needs for love, for significance and for security. Yet the Lord wants us to turn from fear to faith and to trust Him to meet our deepest needs.

(Prov 29:25)
D. Root Cause of Abusive Relationships

Healthy relationships are those in which the people involved have a clearly defined sense of their own identity. Without a clear understanding of who we are and of our God-given worth, it is difficult to maintain functional, ongoing relationships that enrich everyone involved. A relationship will not always be smooth, but it can provide a safe, trusting environment where there is no fear of intimacy and one in which each person knows how to communicate personal needs and desires to the other.

Unhealthy relationships generally reflect an inability to understand and work within appropriate boundaries. Since unhealthy boundaries are almost always the result of being raised in some variation of a dysfunctional family, the likelihood that children raised in such families will develop healthy boundaries is limited.

The pain from not having their God-given needs for love, for significance and for security met in childhood carries over into each subsequent relationship in which they expect, or insist, that these needs be met.

Wrong Belief of Victims:

“I am responsible for the way others treat me. I deserve to be mistreated because, at my very core, I am a bad person. Therefore, bad things should happen to me. If I would just be a better person, people would treat me better. I don’t have a choice about being mistreated. I must be doing something wrong or I wouldn’t be treated this way. If I just try harder to do what is expected, I can make things better. If not, maybe I deserve to be unhappy.”

Right Belief:

I realize that I have been living a lie, believing that I am to blame for being mistreated and believing that my happiness will come from a human relationship. I have a choice about being around anyone who mistreats me. I don’t want to have a false loyalty and false expectations that if I just change, the abuse will stop. I will no longer live for the approval of others but will rely on the Lord to meet my inner needs because my value and worth come from Him who loves me unconditionally. Only the Lord can meet all my needs.

Wrong Belief of Abusers:

I am not responsible for the way I treat others; they are to blame. If people wouldn’t make me mad, I wouldn’t treat them badly. They are the ones who should change, not me. There’s nothing wrong with me. People just need to accept me the way I am.”

Right Belief:

I realize that I am responsible for the way I respond to others. No one deserves to be mistreated. No matter how people act toward me, it is my choice as to how I act toward them. God has given me the strength through His Holy Spirit within me to treat everyone with love and respect. I do not need to try to control people because God is in control, and He is the only one who can meet my deepest needs.

Phil 4:19

“How can I overcome the damage that I suffered in my past? Why do I keep repeating the same unhealthy relational patterns, and how can I change these harmful behaviors?”
God often allows difficulties in life to wake us up to our need to understand our personal attitudes and actions and then to take responsibility for them. You will be drawn to the same relational dynamics over and over until you overcome the past by allowing God to train you and to produce a harvest of peace and righteousness in you.

Heb 12:10-11

STEPS TO SOLUTION

A. Key Verse to Memorize

Rom 13:10

B. Key Passage to Read and Reread

Matt 12:34-37

Have you ever spilled a glass of milk and watched it pour across the table top and off the edges onto the carpeted floor below? You wish you could somehow catch it and put it back into the glass, but it pours through your fingers and will not be contained. You are left with a mess to clean up. You might successfully wash the tabletop and clean up the residue of spilled milk from the carpet . . . but not so with words. Once they have been spilled out on a person, damaging the soul and hurting a relationship, you can’t wash them away or clean up their residue. Their effects may linger forever, causing permanent scars of sorrow on another’s heart. God hears and judges your every word as it spills out from the overflow of your heart!

Matt 12:34-37

Words that are good do not come from the mouths of those who are evil.—Matt 12:34

Out of the overflow of your heart come the words you say.—Matt 12:34

Righteousness flows from good that is stored in your heart.—Matt 12:35

Deeds of evil are stored in the heart of one who is evil.—Matt 12:35

Spoken words said in carelessness will bring condemnation on those who will be held accountable on the day of judgment.—Matt 12:36

C. Is This the Language of Love?

Abuse occurs when one person repeatedly interacts with another person in an unloving manner. Abuse violates the way God tells us to love one another. The best description of love is found in 1 Cor 13, often called the Love Chapter. If you wonder whether you are being verbally abused, write out the exact words spoken to you and ask yourself . . .

- “How does this make me feel?”
- “Does this sound like a conversation between friends?”
- “Would Jesus speak to me in this way?”
- “If I said these words, how would the other person react?”

Compare the words spoken to you with 1 Cor 13—this is God’s standard.
The Language of Love Inventory

Answer “Yes” or “No”

- **Love is . . .**
  - *Patient*—Were these words spoken in haste?
  - *Kind*—Were these words harsh?

- **Love is not . . .**
  - *Proud*—Are these words arrogant?
  - *Rude*—Are these words disrespectful?
  - *Self-seeking*—Are these words self-serving?
  - *Easily angered*—Are these words hostile?

- **Love does not . . .**
  - *Envy*—Are these words resentful?
  - *Boast*—Are these words self-inflating?
  - *Delight in evil*—Are these words malicious?

- **Love always . . .**
  - *Protects*—Do these words attack?
  - *Trusts*—Do these words create doubt?
  - *Hopes*—Do these words create despair?
  - *Perseveres*—Do these words lessen motivation?

- **Love . . .**
  - *Keeps no record of wrongs*—Are these words stored up offenses?
  - *Rejoices with the truth*—Are these words inaccurate?
  - *Never fails*—Are these words causing defeat?

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**D. Can You Have Victory over Being Verbally Abused?**

Is there any hope for verbally abusive relationships? Granted, no magic dust will defuse the dynamic, but with hard, consistent work, progress can be made, change can occur and even victory can be achieved. Those who seek to control or to overpower you with verbal bombardments may not be as strong and self-assured as they appear. If they express inappropriate anger toward you, realize that their assaults are not about you but about them. The source of their insensitive attacks is a heart that suffers from emotional deficits originating in the past and from a choice to respond to that abuse by abusing others. Additionally, be aware that you may have unresolved anger from abuse in your past that magnifies the abuse you are experiencing now. Ask God to reveal any bitterness that has grown in your own heart from past or present abuse.
Heb 12:15

Taking the Following Seven Steps Is Essential to Victory

#1 Face the Problem

• Decide to identify any verbal abuse. Does the other person . . .
  — say things that seem designed to make you feel guilty?
  — always claim to be right?
  — put you down in humorous or sarcastic ways?
  — become your judge and jury?
  — bring the past up over and over?

• Decide to communicate your position to the abuser.

• Decide that you are no longer going to tolerate the abusive behavior.

• Decide that you will look at and resolve your own anger from past or present verbal abuse.

Ps 139:23-24

#2 Understand the Source of the Problem

• Know that many verbal abusers were themselves abused or neglected in one way or another as children. (Some, however, were not abused as children and simply learned abusive behavior later in life.)

• Know that verbal abusers lack sympathy and feel justified in their abuse.

• Know that uncontrolled outbursts of anger can be triggered by depression, stress, anxiety, worry, frustration or insecurity.

• Know that you are not the cause of the abuse (although you will be blamed).

Prov 18:15

#3 Confront the Problem

• Communicate an attitude of caring.
  — “I want you to know that I care about you.”

• Communicate that you have been deeply hurt by the abusive behavior.
  — “I feel deeply hurt by your tone of voice when you talk to me.”

• Communicate your desire for a positive relationship, but make it clear that you will no longer tolerate verbal attacks.
  — “I want to support you, but I will no longer tolerate abusive behavior from you.”

• Communicate truth without condemning.
  — “I want our relationship to continue, but if you choose to continue belittling me, I will know that you don’t value me, and I will leave.”
#4 Take Responsibility for Yourself

- Resist becoming defensive.
- Resist retreating into a shell.
- Resist the familiar “victim-martyr” role.
- Resist retaliation.

*Rom 12:17-18*

#5 View the Abusive Person from God’s Perspective

- See the person as someone for whom Christ died.
- See the person as having God-given worth.
- See the person as capable of being changed by Christ.
- See the person as having legitimate God-given needs that He is willing to meet.

*Phil 4:19*

#6 Love Unconditionally

- Love is not a feeling, but a commitment to do what is right.
- Love looks for ways to meet the needs of another.
- Love seeks to do what is in the best interests of another.
- Love says, “I care enough about our relationship to work to make it a positive one.”

*Prov 10:12*

#7 Practice a Powerful Prayer Life

- Remember that God cares more about both of you than you care about each other.
- Remember that prayer is the surest path to healing and wholeness.
- Remember that you need to pray for healing for both you and for your abuser.
- Remember to thank God for all that He is teaching you in the midst of this trying time.

*1 Thess 5:17-18*

E. How Do You Confront and Cope with Emotionally Abusive People?

Although victims of verbal and emotional abuse generally feel inadequate and powerless to stop an abusive relationship, appropriate confrontation is often necessary in defusing emotional abuse. Ignoring it won’t make it go away. Wishful thinking won’t make it better. And believing that loyalty means remaining quiet is dangerously erroneous.

When hurtful words and actions are exposed as unacceptable and viewed as intolerable, the foundation is laid for change to occur. It will come slowly and will likely be met with much resistance by the abuser.
When power is the goal and control is at stake, an unrepentant abuser will repeatedly change tactics in an attempt to maneuver around each boundary you set, always looking for some way to put you in a position to be manipulated. To remain silent in such a relationship is not love but fear . . . and is harmful rather than helpful. 

Proverbs 27:5

**Start Educating Yourself**

- Emotional abuse can be going on for years before victims realize the difficult dynamics in their relationships.
- Abusers can be calculating, and their behavior may be deliberate and designed to keep them in control.
- Once your eyes are opened to the tactical behavior of the abuser, much of your discouragement will begin to dissipate. (Only then will you be able to establish a more level playing field.)

Proverbs 1:5

**Set Boundaries**

- Communicate that you will not be treated with disrespect.
  — “I feel great disrespect because of the way you are treating me. I will not stay here if you continue to disrespect me.”
- Be specific about what behavior is acceptable.
  — “I won’t continue to talk with you if you continually interrupt me.”
- Refuse to accept excuses and reasons for repeated inconsiderate behavior.
  — If the other person says, “I didn’t mean to be so late—some people I needed to see came by.” You say, “That does not make what you did acceptable because you could have phoned me. From now on—unless you call—I will go on with my plans without you.”

Proverbs 12:18

**Seize the Moment**

- Speak up as soon as they begin to change the subject or to twist your words around to mean something other than what you intended.
  — “You just changed the meaning of my words. I didn’t say that. What I said was What are you hearing me say?”
- When they say something absurd, repeat it back to them.
  — “So what you are saying is ____? Is that accurate?”
- Remain calm. They want a strong reaction from you.
  — “Do we need to discuss this at a later time? If you want to continue now, I need you to speak with more restraint.”
Seek to Surface Their Hostility

- Acknowledge that you sense their anger.
  — “I sense that you are feeling angry.”
- Confirm that it is permissible to be angry. (Never attempt to humor them out of their anger.)
  — “At times anger is justified.”
- A person may need help recognizing the cause of their anger, but don’t try to psychoanalyze them.
  — Ask, “What triggered your anger?”

Prov 20:5

Soften the Confrontation Process

- Confront the behavior, not the person.
  — “I care about you, but I dislike what you are doing. What can I do to help you stop ________?”
- Avoid threats, sarcasm, hostility, put-downs or judgment of their intentions.
  — “If you are angry with me, talk with me and help me to understand why. But please stop your present behavior.”
- When you don’t get a clear, direct, to-the-point answer, ask again (respectfully).
  — “Let me ask again . . . why did you tell me you were coming to the ceremony, but then you never showed up?”

Eph 4:2-3

Stay in the Present

- Focus on the issue at hand.
- Don’t bring up past issues.
- Don’t let the other person get you off track.

Prov 4:25-27

Squelch Unrealistic Expectations

- Don’t put your hope in any expectation that abusers will change, but put your confidence in God and in His sufficiency.
- Be aware that you cannot make them change no matter what you do, how much you try or how good you are as a person.
- Know that change will occur only after they admit they have a problem and begin receiving
Strengthen Your Relationship with the Lord

- Look first to the Lord for discernment about your relationship.
  — Ask the Lord to give you wisdom, insight and direction as you seek to honor Him in all your relationships.
- Claim Scripture in order to renew your mind so that you will not continue to live as a victim.
  — Get involved in a Bible study and memorize and rehearse Scriptures daily that emphasize your worth and the authority you have as one who is a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Live dependently on Christ, who lives within you.
  — Don’t try to live out of your own resources. Several times throughout the day present yourself to the Lord and acknowledge your total dependence on His resources.

2 Peter 1:3-4

F. How Do You Build Personal Boundaries?

All countries establish clear geographical boundaries, and some even protect these boundaries by strict control of who enters or leaves. Additionally, laws are established that apply to everyone living or traveling within those borders. People need to do the same! Certainly not with roadblocks, soldiers and guns, but God does want us to establish personal boundaries in our relationships for our own emotional health and to protect the treasure God has in us. We need to strictly guard who has access to our hearts and minds.

Do you feel that someone often takes advantage of you? Are you expected to meet all the needs of someone else? Do certain people expect you to help them, but then fail to help you when you need help? Does someone take advantage of you at work by piling one priority on top of another? Do you feel manipulated by someone’s lies, half-truths, procrastination and lateness? These are all examples of a lack of emotional boundaries. And when they occur often, they are significant threats to your being free to serve God and to become all He wants you to be. Learn to draw the line on people who would cross your boundaries and put you in bondage!

Gal 5:1

Step One: Place boundaries around your heart.

Be careful where and on whom you spend your emotions. Put firm boundaries around the things in which you are emotionally invested. Completely giving your heart away will cause you to stumble and will cause your devotion to turn from God to someone else.

Prov 4:23

Step Two: Learn that it’s okay to say no.

Many people who lack boundaries are not in touch with their true feelings . . . or if they are, they don’t think they have the right to say no. Do not listen to lies about being selfish or uncaring when you refuse to comply with someone’s wishes. Jesus set many boundaries while He was here on earth, and He said no to many people,
including His disciples. He knew that the “No” was necessary for Him and for them.

Jesus said,

*Matt 5:37*

**Step Three: Start being assertive.**

People who are nonassertive would benefit from “Assertiveness Training” classes. Nonassertive behavior allows others to violate your personal rights; by your behavior you actually permit the infringement. The typical reason people continue to be nonassertive is to avoid any kind of conflict, but the consequences are horrendously hurt feelings and deeply devalued self-worth. Assertively “standing up for yourself” in a respectful, appropriate manner is acting in accordance with Jesus’ instructions.

*Matt 18:15*

**Assertiveness Training 101**

**Ways to Deliver Your Message Objectively Without Inciting Anger**

*“When I . . . .”*

Without judging, describe some specific behavior of the other person that violates one of your boundaries.

— “When I hear that several extra people are coming for dinner and I have not been given sufficient notice, I am caught off guard.”

*“The result is . . . .”*

Describe specifically how the other person’s behavior affects your life. Avoid, “You make me . . . .”

— “There will often not be enough food prepared.”

— “I feel . . .” Describe how you are feeling.

— “I feel embarrassed, ill-prepared and inadequate, and I also feel taken advantage of.”

*“I want . . . .”*

Describe what you would like to hear or to have happen.

— “I want to please you by serving (your friends or business acquaintances), but I need you to call and give me enough notice to prepare adequately.”

**Step Four: Draw the line!**

Each of us has personal, emotional and physical boundaries that should not be invaded. Do you know your specific boundaries? Do you know how to respond when your boundary limits have been trampled? Do you know where to draw the line? To help identify your boundaries, pay attention when your emotions are intense, dark, shaming or guilt-ridden in response to something someone has said or done to you. . . . your boundaries are being crossed. The following responses will help you educate those in your life who are verbally and emotionally *crossing the line!*

*Prov 27:6*
• **Inform:**—“Do you realize that you are speaking loudly.”
  
  “Do you know how your words are sounding?”
  
  “Do you know that you are saying things that are making me feel uncomfortable?”

• **Identify:**—“Please lower your voice.”
  
  “Please stop using that kind of language.”
  
  “Please explain your anger.”

• **Implore:**—“I need for you to stop saying the things you are saying.”
  
  “I need for you to stop these painful outbursts.”
  
  “I need for you to stop hurting me in this way.”

• **Insist:**—“You must stop speaking to me in that tone of voice.”
  
  “You will have to change this way of communicating with me.”
  
  “You may not continue to hurt me in this way.”

• **Instruct:**—“I will no longer allow you to hurt me like this.”
  
  “I will no longer allow you to talk to me in this way.”
  
  “I will no longer allow that tone of voice in my presence.”

• **Invite:**—“I am open to working this out when you can be reasonable.”
  
  “I care about you and our relationship, but you must change your ways of communicating with me.”
  
  “I am willing to go to counseling with you if you will agree.”

• **Impact:**—“I am now leaving in order to protect myself.”
  
  “Because this behavior is unacceptable to me, I am going to distance myself from you for awhile.”
  
  “If you continue with this behavior, I will consider all my options regarding our relationship.

**Step Five: Appropriate God’s will for your life.**

Some people can make you feel as though your personhood has been swallowed up by a very strong, controlling personality. Close the door on your fear of displeasing others by establishing boundaries. Begin to redefine your own, separate identity by daily choosing to live according to God’s will.

*Rom 8:15*
God’s Will for You

- God’s will is that you be treated with respect.
  
  *1 Peter 2:17*

- God’s will is that you be heard and taken seriously.
  
  *James 1:19*

- God’s will is that you express appropriate anger and that anger toward you be expressed appropriately.
  
  *Eph 4:26*

- God’s will is that you participate in and benefit from mutual submission.
  
  *Eph 5:21*

- God’s will is that you speak truthfully from your heart and that others speak truthfully to you.
  
  *Eph 4:25*

- God’s will is that you be allowed to make mistakes and to take responsibility for them and that others would take responsibility for their mistakes as well. The apostle Paul said,
  
  *Phil 3:12*

- God’s will is that you be able to say no without feeling guilty.
  
  *Titus 2:12*

- God’s will is that you refuse that which violates your own conscience.
  
  *1 Cor 8:12*

- God’s will is that you give and receive only justifiable rebukes.
  
  *Prov 28:23*

- God’s will is that you appeal to a higher authority if need be. The apostle Paul, when slandered by Jewish leaders, said,
  
  *Acts 25:11*

- God’s will is that you remove yourself from an abusive situation.
  
  *Prov 22:24*

- God’s will is that you seek emotional and spiritual support from others.
  
  *Heb 10:25*


G. Changing the Course of Abusive Relationships
Change is always both the by-product and the goal of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of a believer. The Bible calls it “transformation,” and it is the expected outcome for all Christians in their walk with the Lord. God’s plan is that every child of His be conformed to the image of His Son . . . that we take on His character qualities and accurately represent Him to the world. In this way, we will “glorify the Lord.”

2 Cor 3:17-18

- **Change your mind. . . . That’s repentance.**
  — Thoughts hold us captive to wrong patterns and habits.
  
  2 Cor 4:2

- **Change your actions. . . . That’s obedience.**
  — A changed mind will result in changed conduct and actions.
  
  2 John 6

- **Change your attitude. . . . That’s compliance.**
  — Adopt an attitude of cheerfulness, gratefulness and a willingness to comply.
  
  Col 3:16-17

- **Change your feelings. . . . That’s forgiveness.**
  — Feelings often flow as a result of actions, so look at the sins others have committed against you from God’s perspective, and trust Him to exact justice, as you extend forgiveness.
  
  Matt 6:14-15

- **Change your words. . . . That’s confession.**
  — Words have the power to either change the situation or the way you look at the situation, which will actually change you.
  
  1 Peter 3:10-11

- **Change your thoughts. . . . That’s renewal.**
  — Develop the ability to think and to speak about your situations in the same manner as God sees them.
  
  Rom 12:2

H. **Healing the Broken Heart**

No one escapes the pain of a broken heart. In the Hebrew language, the meaning of the phrase translated “broken-hearted” is literally “shattered.” And no one lives very long in this fallen world without experiencing that “shattering” and the all-encompassing pain that accompanies it. Many never heal from heartbreak because they avoid dealing with their pain by blocking out, denying or burying the memories. But the path the Lord has prepared will heal your deepest hurts if you allow Him into the innermost part of your heart where He can spread His balm throughout your entire being . . . spirit, soul and body.

Ps 147:3
• Give your heart to the Lord, allowing Him to be your Deliverer.
  — Acknowledge your inability to heal yourself and accept the fact that God is the source of all growth and healing.
  — Realize that the abuse you have suffered may have actually altered your brain chemistry and created some physical problems.
  — Ask the Lord to heal your past pain and to soothe your soul as you take refuge in Him and draw on His strength.
    
    *(Ps 18:2)*

• Know that you are never alone.
  — Realize that everyone experiences loneliness and pain—it’s part of the path of life.
  — Continually thank the Lord that He is always with you.
  — Build a network of friends who care about you and who will support you both spiritually and emotionally.
    
    *1 Cor 5:3*

• Search for truth.
  — Discern the truth about what has caused your past woundedness and your present struggles.
  — Search out the truths of God’s Word that strengthen and encourage you.
  — Seek the truths of Biblical principles and the wise counsel of trustworthy people to aid you in understanding and addressing your situation.
    
    *Ps 25:5*

• Address your legitimate emotional needs.
  — Understand that you have three God-given needs—the need for love, for significance and for security.
  — Understand that proper self-esteem comes from viewing yourself through God’s eyes.
  — Understand that God never withholds His love from you, though you may not have sensed that you were loved by your parents or your spouse.
    
    *Neh 9:17*

• Pay attention to your own feelings and perceptions.
  — See the abuse for what it is . . . it is actual abuse!
  — Know that you’re not going crazy—you are not nuts.
  — If you felt abused, acknowledge that what happened is unacceptable.
    
    *John 8:32*

• Clear your mind of confusion.
  — Realize that you have been a victim of confusing, mixed messages.
— Seek help from a safe, trustworthy person to sort through the confusing words and to distinguish the truth from the lies.
— Refuse to be confused if the abuser reverses the blame by putting it on you or counters what you are saying.

*Gal 5:10*

- Acknowledge your negative feelings.
  — Make a list of any negative feelings such as anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, hate or revenge.
  — Be honest with God about these feelings—He knows you have them, and He understands why.
  — Ask God to cleanse you from unhealthy, negative attitudes.

*Ps 51:7*

- Forgive your offender.
  — List each offense committed against you by each offender.
  — Release each offense and the pain it caused into the hands of God.
  — Choose, as an act of your will, to release each offender to God for His judgment.

*Col 3:13*

- Allow yourself to grieve.
  — Write down all the losses that have occurred in your life.
  — Allow yourself time to grieve. Weep by yourself or with a friend.
  — Write the word “Finished” beside each painful memory.

*Eccl 3:1,4*

- Realize that healing is a process . . . not an event.
  — Refuse to seek quick fixes and painless solutions.
  — Develop an understanding of the activities that promote healing.
  — Grow in patience as you embrace the “journey” of the healing process.

*James 5:10-11*

- Develop a ministry of healing for others.
  — Ask God for a compassionate heart that is sensitive toward those who have experienced abuse.
  — Be prepared to share your experience when God brings other victims across your path.
  — Ask God to fill you with a passionate desire to comfort others by sharing your healing with them.

*2 Cor 1:3-4*
I. Steps to Recovery for Victims of Abuse

Recovery—healing—is a process that occurs over time and is a result of hard, but productive work. Rarely is it accomplished in a moment or in a single experience. All the practical insights and suggested solutions for recovery can be summed up in nine steps that are illustrated in the following confessions.

Step One:

“I recognize that I am powerless to heal the damaged emotions resulting from abuse, and I look to God for the power to make me whole.”

Step Two:

“I acknowledge that God’s plan for my life includes victory over the experience of abuse.”

Step Three:

“The person who abused me is responsible for the acts committed against me and for the words spoken to me. I will not accept the guilt and the shame resulting from those acts or words.”

Step Four:

“I am looking to God and His Word to find my identity as a worthwhile and loved human being.”

Step Five:

“I am honestly sharing my feelings with God and with at least one other person as I try to identify those areas needing cleansing and healing.”

Step Six:

“I am accepting responsibility for my responses to being abused.”

Step Seven:

“I am willing to accept God’s help in the decision to forgive myself and those who have offended me and to trust Him in the process of doing so.”

Step Eight:

“I am willing to mature in my relationship with God and with others.”
Step Nine:

“I am willing to be used by God as an instrument of His healing and restoration in the lives of others.”

Ps 30:11-12

J. Restoration for the Abuser

Have you tried to communicate your heartache to a loved one who has hurt you, yet there’s no indication that your pain was heard? Perhaps your many appeals for some kind of compassion, understanding or even acknowledgement have been fruitless because the abuser is simply not empathetic. When one has been treated callously throughout childhood, the hard exterior that develops does not allow sensitive emotions to come in or go out. And without empathy, a person is incapable of being sensitive to the emotional pain of someone else.10

Who Can Break through the Abuser’s Hardened Wall of Defense?

Rom 7:24-25

In order for change to occur—for the relationship to be healed—the sovereign, loving work of God in the heart of the abuser will be necessary. But the one who has been abusive must be willing to meet certain criteria.

- Honesty is required of the one who has been abusive.
  - Are you aware that many abusers have no idea that they are abusive? Is it possible that you may have been abusive?
  - Will you be willing to consider that you may not be in touch with your own emotions because they have been buried for so long?
  - Will you acknowledge that you tend to place all blame on another person and that you believe you are always right?
  - Will you concede that you may be in denial about the seriousness of your behavior?

Prov 12:17

Honesty Test

- Has a loved one ever said that you were emotionally insensitive and uncaring?
- Has a loved one ever said your behavior is abusive or unreasonable?
- Has a loved one said you act “nicer” when you are with others than when you are alone with that person?
- Has a loved one said that you tend to overreact?
- Do you avoid responding to questions that you don’t like?
- Do you get angry when asked questions that you don’t like?
- Do you refuse to acknowledge your past negative behaviors?
— Do you have a short fuse that ignites anger?
— Do you think your personal interaction could be destructive?
— Have you previously had several failed, unresolved relationships?

If you answered yes to at least three of these, the chances are good that you are abusive to someone.

Prov 16:11

- Desire to change is uppermost.

Ps 139:23

Do’s and Don’ts for Taking Responsibility

Don’t make excuses for your behavior. (“I was out of control because of the alcohol.”)

Don’t vent your pent-up anger on another person. (Anger that is bottled up needs to be resolved and dissipated, not spewed out.)

Don’t say, “You’re the reason I am so angry.”

Don’t say, “I can never please you!”

Don’t say, “After all I do for you, it’s never enough.”

Don’t use harsh, belittling or sarcastic statements.

Don’t withdraw emotionally.

Do . . . Understand that feeling angry is not a sin.

Do . . . Recognize and admit that you may not know how to handle your anger.

Do . . . Realize that you may be using your anger to get your own way.

Do . . . Begin to see things from another’s point of view.

Do . . . Recognize that courageous people are willing to admit their weaknesses.

Do . . . Realize that you can change . . . it’s never too late.

Do . . . Be willing to bring in friends and family members for accountability.

Prov 27:9

- Reflection is beneficial.

1 Cor 13:12

Most families will have some issues of control, but some children are subject to the more extreme methods of power and authority than would be considered normal. Usually when a parent is severely and overtly dominant, a child’s feelings are stepped on, and personal expression is stifled. Then an atmosphere of fear invades the family. Children grow up with a negative emotional focus on the offending person, vowing to never be like the father who always broke promises or the mother who was strict and unnurturing. Although the behavior of the children, when they are grown, may not be the same as the behavior of their offending parents, their emotional focus may cause them to develop the same attitudes of resentment and
bitterness they had so resented in their parents.

**Heb 12:15**

**Points to Ponder**

— Was there anyone in my family of origin who was overtly or covertly controlling of everyone?

— Is there anyone in my past toward whom I still harbor some resentment?

— Have I vowed that I will never have the same behavior as one or both of my parents?

— Do I have a negative focus on one or both parents?

— Do I still feel the need to talk about the inappropriate behavior of my parent or parents?

— Am I still angry over the way a loved one was treated by another?

— Have I learned to objectively love the parents God gave me in spite of their faults and inabilities to communicate love?

**Mark 11:25**

- Anger management is mandatory.

People who have difficulty with anger control may express their anger in two ways. If you vent your anger at someone else, your anger is explosive, but if you keep your anger bottled up, your anger is implosive. Explosive anger is outwardly abusive, while implosive anger is inwardly abusive. Both are damaging to relationships. God does not condemn our feelings of anger, but He does require that both kinds of anger be expressed appropriately.

**Ps 4:4**

- Use self-control techniques.

**Step One: Discover your trigger points.**

— Be aware of when you are feeling irritated or aggravated.

— Take note when a quick feeling of anger explodes in your mind.

— Listen to yourself and realize when you are behaving badly, performing poorly or snapping at those close to you.

— Stop! Take a few moments and give yourself time to discover the source of your anger.

**Prov 4:5**

**Step Two: Restrain angry thoughts and actions.**

— Turn your thoughts toward Christ: *Lord, may I have Your peace.*

— Count to 10 before you respond.

— Walk away, and then come back after your feelings are under control.

— Take a “time-out” for 15 or 20 minutes, if necessary.
Ps 37:8

Step Three: Choose the right time and the right way to express your feelings.

— Train yourself to keep a lid on your anger until your agitation is calmed.
— Try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view.
— If you are angry at another person, ask, “Is there a time when we could speak about something important to me?”
— If you have anger turned inward, talk with a friend and seek an objective view on the situation.

Prov 29:22

Step Four: Be aware of your early family background.

— Read about and recall your early family dynamics.
— Did you discover that it was not safe to express anger?
— Did you learn that explosive anger was a means of control?
— Have you now learned to see your family through the eyes of an adult?

1 Cor 13:11

Step Five: Begin absorbing truth.

— Pray for the Lord to reveal to you how he sees you—the person He created you to be before abuse marred and changed you. He will do this with love.
— Pray for the Lord to reveal His love for you.
— Acknowledge that you have God-given worth. Don’t let others define who you are.
— Read through the Book of Proverbs beginning with Prov 8. Write out all the verses pertaining to anger that are relevant to you.

Prov 15:1

Step Six: Come to Christ, seeking His help with a sincere heart.

#1 Confession: “I admit my behavior has been wrong and has hurt others.”

Num 5:6-7

#2 Repentance: “Relying on the strength of God, I will change my behavior because I truly desire to please God.”

Jer 15:19

#3 Forgiveness: “God, I thank You for Your willingness to forgive me in spite of my failure to honor You.”

Acts 13:38
Acceptance: “Jesus, I receive You as my Lord and Savior and give You control of my life. Thank You for being willing to adopt me into Your family.”

*John 1:12*

Substitution: “I am willing to give up control of my life in exchange for a new heart and a new life in Christ.”

*Ezek 18:31*

Restitution: “Lord, reveal the names of those to whom I owe a sincere apology. I will go to them and ask forgiveness for my inappropriate and hurtful behavior.”

*Matt 5:23-24*

Cleansing: “God, I thank You for Your promise to cleanse me and to remove all my sins and unrighteousness.”

*Ps 51:2-3*

**VERBAL & EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Abuse wears many faces—faces as varied as the people who give it and receive it. Abuse can be subtle or blatant, quiet or loud, smooth or abrasive. But with all its differences, abuse is either verbal or nonverbal in delivery, and it deeply impacts your personal and social life.

*Ps 55:21*

**Verbal Abuse**

**Personal**

- Accusing
- “Advising” excessively to manipulate
- Badgering
- Belittling/put-downs
- Blame-shifting
- Bullying
- Complaining chronically about unjust treatment
- Criticizing unjustly
- Demeaning family members
- Denying that abuse ever occurred
- Denying that the abuse is wrong
- Dictating orders
- Insulting friends
- Interrupting constantly
- Laughing at abusive behavior
- Lying/truth twisting
- Making fun of your fear
- Minimizing what is wrong
- Mocking
- Name-calling

**Personal**
- Playing mind games
- Reality switching
- Ridiculing
- Shaming
- Spiritually abusing
- Threatening suicide in order to control
- Teasing about personal appearance or traits
- Terrorizing
- Threatening
- Using profane language or coarse talk
- Violating the context of the conversation
- Wounding with sarcasm
- Yelling/screaming

**Social**
- Backbiting
- Bashing because of gender
- Brainwashing
- Comparing to others negatively
- Degrading publicly
- Destroying credibility
- Gossiping
- Making one family member a scapegoat
- Racial slurring
- Shaming publicly
• Slandering
• Teasing publicly about sensitive areas
• Undermining other relationships

**Nonverbal Abuse**

**Personal**

• Arriving late as a form of control
• Assaulting/damaging property
• Breaking promises/chronic irresponsibility
• Condescending looks
• Driving recklessly
• Failing to validate feelings
• Forcing sex/sexual perversion
• Giving gifts excessively in order to manipulate
• Hiding things (car/house keys)
• Ignoring/using the “silent treatment”
• Insulting gestures
• Interfering with work
• Invading personal space
• Manipulating with unsolicited “help”
• Mentally abusing
• Monitoring phone calls
• Opening personal mail
• Prohibiting private conversations
• Physically intimidating/brandishing weapons
• Prohibiting personal decision making

**Personal**

• Prohibiting sleep
• Refusing to leave when asked
• Refusing to listen
• Slamming doors or drawers to express anger
• Stalking/unwanted visits
• Sulking, brooding, pouting, “pity parties”
• Threatening gestures
• Walking away as a power play
• Withdrawing emotionally
• Withholding affection
• Withholding finances
• Withholding information that should be shared
• Withholding marital sex as a form of control

Social
• Abandoning the family
• Acting overly suspicious
• Being excessively jealous
• Changing the rules continually within the family
• Excluding from the group
• Failing to give deserved credit/compliments
• Favoring others
• Humiliating publicly
• Isolating from family
• Manipulating children
• Ostracizing
• Playing cruel tricks
• Rejecting one’s own child

NOTES

5. Bustanoby and Bustanoby, Just Talk to Me, 159-60.
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