



rape and abuse
crisis center
advocacy, counseling, education.

What is Verbal Abuse?

Verbal abuse is a kind of battering which doesn't leave evidence such as bruises or broken bones, but it can be just as painful and healing can take much longer. There is a difference between verbal abuse and conflict. In a conflict, each person wants something different, and in order to resolve the conflict, the two people in the relationship discuss their wants, needs, and reasons for each while seeking a solution.

- *Verbal abuse is an issue of power and control.* One partner seeks power and control over the other partner and the relationship. He or she achieves this power by controlling the communication within the relationship.
 - It is not provoked by the abused partner, and by its very nature, undermines the feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and behavior of the victim.

If you have been called names such as "idiot," "dummy," or "bitch," or if you have been subjected to any other putdown, you have been verbally abused. Name-calling is the most obvious form of verbal abuse and it is not difficult to recognize, but verbal abuse takes on many other forms, some being very subtle.

Recognizing Verbal abuse

- **Verbal abuse disguised as jokes-** although teasing is a favorite activity in family and love relationships, it can be a strong tactic of control. Even at its most innocent, teasing is designed to trigger peoples' shame, or to cause them to blush or feel foolish, especially when the teaser asks "What's the matter? Can't you take a joke?" Verbal abuse disguised as jokes and teasing destroys intimacy.
- **Withholding-** refusing to listen to, or share him/herself with you
- **Countering-** not allowing you to have a different opinion or point of view
- **Discounting-** treating your experiences and feelings as if they are worthless
- **Blocking/Diverting-**controlling communication by establishing what can/cannot be discussed and/or switching the topic
- **Accusing and Blaming-**accusing you of wrongdoing or blaming you for his/her words, feelings, or behavior

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/What is Verbal Abuse

- **Judging and Criticizing**-judging you and then expressing that judgment in a critical way to you or others
- **Trivializing**-indicating, directly or indirectly, that what you have done or said is unimportant
- **Undermining/Sabotaging**-not only withholding emotional support, but making comments that destroy your self confidence, or imply that you are inadequate or "not good enough"
- **Forgetting/Denial**-declaring what occurred didn't occur; denying your reality
- **Ordering**-giving orders instead of asking respectfully for what he/she wants; denying the equality of the partner
- **Abusive anger**-irritable outbursts, sneering, arguing, temper tantrums, shouting, yelling, raging, explosiveness, or sarcasm directed at you or others

Verbal abuse, as with other kinds of abuse, most often occurs in secret. This means there may not be anyone who has seen or heard what has happened to you. You may think you have interpreted everything incorrectly, as you have probably been told, or you may truly believe there is something wrong with you. Recognizing verbal abuse for what it is, the attempt to gain power and control over you and the relationship, is emotionally painful, but will allow you to recognize, understand, and validate your own views and experiences.

If your partner is abusive, *it is not your fault*, nor is it your responsibility. Your efforts to bring reconciliation, mutual understanding, and intimacy will most likely be rejected because your partner will view them as adversarial and undermining of their desire for control.

Be aware there is nothing you can do or say to change another person. *The other person must want to change for the sake of the relationship.* You may ask for the changes you want in your relationship, but remember that change requires a mutual intention to communicate, understand, and to respond appropriately.

References:

Evans, Patricia. The Verbally Abusive Relationship. Holbrook, MA: Bob Adams, Inc., 1992.

Forward, Susan & Torres, Joan. Men Who Hate Women & the Women Who Love Them. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1996.