



## **Characteristics of a Verbally and Emotionally Abusive Relationship**

An abusive relationship usually has cycles where the abuse is less frequent and then times when it intensifies. There may or may not be a predictable pattern. There may even be relatively calm times when it feels like things are getting better. When things get bad, it is common to wonder what happened and to try to figure out what you did wrong. It is critical that you recognize that it isn't about you at all.

The abuse originates from within the abuser. It is the abuser's inaccurate perceptions, demands, expectations, and insecurities that drive the need to control and abuse. These perceptions, thoughts and feelings shape the reality of the abuser. When abusers feel that control is slipping, they will react abusively to gain it back. When abusers believe the abused didn't do what should have been done, they punish to teach a lesson. When abusers can't handle their emotions, they dump their emotional garbage onto someone else.

This causes confusion in the mind of the abused. There is an assumption that the abuse was triggered by something that happened, often the event that the abuser used as a reason to act abusively. As a result, they spend time rehashing events to figure out what happened.

Because the abuse isn't really about what happened in that moment, the same event, comment, or interaction may trigger an abusive outburst one time and no response the next time. In fact, even doing exactly what the abusive person wants can trigger abuse. This leaves the abused feeling uneasy, walking on eggshells, confused, and in a search to understand what was done to trigger the abuse.

## **Characteristics of the Emotional and Verbal Abuse**

Verbal and emotional abuse hurts. It is painful to have someone you care about and who should care about you treat you so badly.

Emotional and verbal abuse includes the following things:

- Non-verbal body language, including sneers, stares, and contemptuous looks and gestures that register disapproval, disdain, or threats.
- Continual blame for relationship problems, the abuser's actions, and outside events.
- Manipulation including the deliberate use of mind-games and strategies to control or get one's way.
- Withholding of affection, approval, money, information, resources, attention, and participation.
- Name-calling.

- Silent treatments.
- Denial which includes lying about actions, motives, thoughts, events, and feelings or pretending one doesn't remember something that happened when one actually does.
- Threats of physical violence toward animals, children, the abused, and the abused's relatives, friends and property. Threats to take the children away from the spouse. Threats that involve withholding of resources and affection or any type of emotional blackmail.
- Ordering someone to do things like a child including using an authoritarian voice inappropriate for an adult relationship.
- Minimizing which involves making light of the abused's emotions, concerns, needs, thoughts, accomplishments, and interests.
- Intimidation to control or frighten accomplished through threats, looks, stares, sneers, use of an authoritarian voice, and demands that the abused do what is demanded "or else."
- Yelling, raging, hostile anger, and passive aggressive anger when done repeatedly without taking responsibility and when used to control.
- Interrogation which is demanding an answer to questions the way the abuser requires and not allowing the abused to answer with their own words.
- Humiliation through purposeful degradation in front of others by criticism, comments, punishment, or cruel jokes.
- Accusations including attributing feelings, motives, and intentions to the abused and accusing the person of doing things without proof.
- Devaluing and disrespect using put downs, undermining achievements, sarcasm, interrupting, harsh criticism, rudeness, belittling, and anything else that communicates contempt and disregard.
- Ridicule including mocking, telling jokes, belittling remarks, insults, and making fun of a person's efforts and individuality.
- Purposeful ignoring of a person's requests and needs.

Verbal abuse is destructive because it denies the perceptions and reality of the one being abused. The abuser typically tells the abused that what he/she thinks, feels, believes, sees, perceives, and experiences is not true. The abuser offers a different perception of reality and denies that his/hers exists.

As you can see, the abuser uses a variety of techniques to control the abused all of which are painful to endure and make the relationship extremely difficult, as well as confusing.