



Work Smart Live Smart

Words Hurt – Emotional Abuse

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“You can’t do anything right”. “This is your fault – It’s always your fault”.

Emotional abuse is the tearing down of another human being and it can be the result of inappropriately handling one’s emotions, the excessive need to control others and the situations around them, or it can be learned from those who have had influence on the person such as their parents, coaches or supervisors.

Various types of emotional abuse:

1. Rejecting – worthlessness and undermining self-esteem, criticizing, humiliating, blaming, ridiculing
2. Ignoring – detachment, withholds affection, indifferent
3. Terrorizing – threatening to punish or take away possessions, pets, or other family members
4. Isolating – jealousy, restricting access to people or money, secluding from outside world
5. Corrupting – exposes or puts into inappropriate situations

Emotional abuse is a very serious problem and the scares, though not visible, can run very deep.

Effects on the abused:

- Low self-esteem and confidence
- Unable to make decisions
- Lack of interest in life
- Isolation
- Sleep problems
- Illness
- Substance use
- Depression

In children, emotional abuse can be seen as a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child’s emotional development and sense of self-worth. (National committee for the Prevention of

Child Abuse) In children you may specifically notice signs such as the development of rocking, sucking or biting one's self, being inappropriately aggressive, speech problems, tantrums, excessive anxiety and fears and an inability to relate to others. The child may make self-hate statements and/or be shy and overly compliant. The existence of one of these signs may not indicate emotional abuse, however, several of these over a period of time should not be ignored.

What can be done?

People who are the target of emotional abuse are made to feel insignificant and incapable. They may actually begin to feel that they have brought this on themselves and that it really is their fault.

As the recipient:

1. Take precautions – look for the signs of excessive jealousy and control
2. Don't blame yourself for the way other person is treating you
3. Believe in yourself – believe that you deserve to be treated with respect
4. Trust your instincts – if you feel uncomfortable than this is probably not a healthy relationship
5. Talk to someone – find someone you can trust – a family member, friend, co-worker, EAP, supervisor, spiritual leader, community advisor or health professional. Call the Distress Centre and they can help make the appropriate referral. These resources can help you to examine all of your options so that you can decide what is best for you.

As the abuser:

1. Recognize the types and strength of the various feelings related to numerous situations
2. Develop a realistic attitude about what you and those around you can achieve
3. Be respectful of other's ideas, opinions and talents
4. Find alternative ways to express difficult emotions
5. Get help – find a counselor, therapist or a doctor that can assist you in examining why you attack and tear the other person down and help you to take personal responsibility for the steps needed to change your reactions.

The childhood rhyme of "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" may have some truth to it. But continual emotional abuse does hurt. It can affect the development and the self-esteem of the individual and it may ripple out to affect those around the person who is being attacked. Emotional abuse is serious but help is available – both to the one being abused and to the person doing the abuser. Recognition is the key.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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