



SERVE & SAVE

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE INITIATIVE

What to know about
EMOTIONAL
ABUSE



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WHAT IS IT?

Emotional abuse is a way to control another person by using emotions to criticize, embarrass, shame, blame, or otherwise manipulate another person. It is one of the hardest forms of abuse to recognize. It can be subtle, deceitful and manipulative. Either way, it chips away at the victim's self-esteem and they begin to doubt their perceptions and reality.

The underlying goal of emotional abuse is to control the victim by discrediting, isolating, and silencing. When emotional abuse is severe and ongoing, a victim may lose their entire sense of self, sometimes without a single mark or bruise. Instead, the wounds are invisible to others, hidden in the self-doubt, worthlessness, and self-loathing the victim feels.

HOW TO IDENTIFY IT?

Name calling - An abuser will blatantly call you "stupid," ["**usilima**"] "a loser," ["**usehluleki**"] or use other insults. Maybe they use terms of "endearment" that actually highlight things you're sensitive about – "my little nail biter" or "my chubby pumpkin" ["**sdludla sami**"] – and ignore your requests to stop.

Character assassination - This usually involves the word "always." You're always late, wrong, screwing up, disagreeable, and so on. They might say these things to you, or use them to describe your behavior to others.

Patronizing - They belittle you by saying things like, "I know you try, but this is just beyond the scope of your brain."

"Joking" - When you express discomfort with something they've said, they snap back and say things like, "Can't you take a joke? Grow up."

This may leave you feeling foolish and wondering whether you are, in fact, too sensitive.

Dismissiveness - You share something important to you and they reply with, *"What? Who cares about that?"* Body language like eye rolling, smirking, head shaking.

Insulting your appearance - As you head out, they stop you at the door. *"You're wearing that ridiculous outfit?"* Or they constantly say you're lucky they chose you, since they could find someone so much more attractive.

Belittling your accomplishments - They brush off your achievements, saying they don't matter, or claim responsibility for your successes.

Putting down your interests - They suggest your hobby is a waste of time. *"You'll never be any good at the piano, so why do you keep trying?"*

Abusive behavior relates to the desire to maintain power and control. Someone abusing you might attempt to manipulate you into doing what they want you to do, often by making you feel ashamed of your inadequacies.

Monitoring your whereabouts - They want to know where you are, always, and insist you respond to calls or texts immediately. They might show up at your work or school, just to check you did actually go there.

Gaslighting - Someone abusing you may deny that specific events, arguments, or agreements ever happened. This can leave you questioning your own memory, not to mention your mental health and well-being.

Emotional blackmailing - They will attempt to get you to do things by manipulating your feelings. Punishing you by withholding affection or giving you the silent treatment. Exaggerating your flaws or pointing them out in order to deflect attention or to avoid taking responsibility for their poor choices or mistakes

Lecturing you constantly - After you make a mistake, no matter how minor, they catalog all of your errors with a long monologue. They describe all the ways you've fallen short and make it clear they consider you beneath them.

People who abuse others often try to create a hierarchy that puts them at the top and you at the bottom.

Jealousy & Guilt - tripping - They accuse you of flirting or cheating, or say you'd spend all your time with them if you truly loved them or guilt-trip you into doing something by saying things like, "You owe me this. Look at all I've done for you," in an attempt to get their way.

Unrealistic expectations - They expect you to do what they want, when they want you to do it. They think you should always prioritize their needs, do things according to their standards.

Trivializing - When you explain how much something they said or did upset you and hurt your feelings, they accuse you of overreacting or misunderstanding the situation.

HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

The first step in dealing with an emotionally abusive relationship is to recognize the abuse. By being honest about what you are experiencing, you can begin to take control of your life again.

Make Yourself a Priority - When it comes to your mental and physical health, you need to make yourself a priority. Stop worrying about pleasing the person abusing you. Take care of your needs. Do something that will help you think positively and affirm who you are. Also, be sure to get an appropriate amount of rest and eat healthy meals. These simple self-care steps can go a long way in helping you deal with the day-to-day stresses of

emotional abuse.

Establish Boundaries - Firmly tell the abusive person that they may no longer yell at you, call you names, insult you, be rude to you, and so on. Then, tell them what will happen if they choose to engage in this behavior. For instance, tell them that if they call you names or insult you, the conversation will be over and you will leave the room. The key is to follow through on your boundaries. Do not communicate boundaries that you have no intention of keeping.

Stop Blaming Yourself - If you have been in an emotionally abusive relationship for any amount of time, you may believe that there is something severely wrong with you. But you are not the problem. To abuse is to make a choice. So stop blaming yourself for something you have no control over.

Realize You Can't Fix Them - Despite your best efforts, you will never be able to change an emotionally abusive person by doing something different or by being different. An abusive person makes a choice to behave abusively. Remind yourself that you cannot control their actions and that you are not to blame for their choices. The only thing you can fix or control is your response.

Avoid Engaging - Do not engage with an abusive person. In other words, if an abuser tries to start an argument with you, begins insulting you, demands things from you or rages with jealousy, do not try to make explanations, soothe their feelings, or make apologies for things you did not do. Simply walk away from the situation if you can. Engaging with an abuser only sets you up for more abuse and heartache. No matter how hard you try, you will not be able to make things right in their eyes.

Build a Support Network - Although it can be tough to tell someone what you are going through, speaking up can help. Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or even a counselor about what you

are experiencing.

Take time away from the abusive person as much as possible and spend time with people who love and support you. This network of healthy friends and confidantes will help you feel less lonely and isolated. They also can speak truth into your life and help you put things into perspective.

Work on an Exit Plan - If they have no intention of changing or working on their poor choices, you will not be able to remain in the abusive relationship forever. It will eventually take a toll on you both mentally and physically. Depending on your situation, you may need to take steps to end the relationship. Each situation is different. So, discuss your thoughts and ideas with a trusted friend, family member, or counselor. Emotional abuse can have serious long-term effects, but it can also be a precursor to physical abuse and violence.³ Remember too, that abuse often escalates when the person being abused makes a decision to leave. So, be sure you have a safety plan in place should the abuse get worse. Healing from emotional abuse takes time. Taking care of yourself, reaching out to your supportive loved ones, and talking to a professional can help.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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