

Verbal Abuse Defined

Other people do not annoy us, we are annoyed. If we are annoyed, chances are we either just committed verbal abuse or we are about to. Our "annoyance" is a wonderful tool to be used to look within and see what hurts. If we can get in touch with this, we can choose vulnerability rather than attack as a choice to establish connection. If we do this, we might just be pleasantly surprised to find out that the person we were just about to attack is actually someone who loves us very much and wants us to be happy. Most of us are really waiting for the chance to love and support each other in making life more wonderful.

No one can cause us to feel in any way. All of our feelings arise from within based on our own attitudes, thoughts, internal rules, and training. Even though this is true, we can stimulate certain feelings in others. So, if we are willing to pay attention to how another is responding, we can notice what we've just stimulated and then we have a responsibility to stop what we are doing not because what we did was wrong, but because it is not helpful at this moment. Then we can wait patiently while "the other," who has agreed to take responsibility for their own feelings, to get in touch with themselves.

In order to gain true and deep intimacy with another - both must agree to the rules of being responsible for their own feelings and behavior. Without this agreement, the best we can do is be compassionate towards the one who is unable to hold up their part of the interaction. If we can be patient and compassionate long enough, God will often produce a miracle to bring "the other" into "the fold." Until that happens, loving detachment is the best course of action.

Here are some (not all) definitions of verbal abuse:

Withholding - not sharing thoughts, feelings, needs, wants, and ideas. Not responding to comments, questions, or solicitations for connection.

Countering - responding to a comment, question, or solicitation for connection with anything other than mirroring.

Discounting or minimizing - same as countering only with added tone of contempt

Blocking or diverting - same as countering only with a change of subject

Disguising negative feelings into a joke (this is usually followed by "I was only kidding")

Accusing or blaming - blaming is at the level of thought, accusing is when the thought comes out of the mouth. The thought is detectible through body language and tone.

Judging and criticizing - judging is at the level of thought, criticizing is when the thought comes out of the mouth. The thought is detectible through body language and tone.

Trivializing - same as countering with the added dimension of condescension

Diminishing - same as countering with the attitude that "the other" is unimportant or "the other's" request, question, or comment is "unimportant"

Undermining - behaving contrary to agreed upon behavior (sample: We agree that we won't give the kids candy, but when "the other" is not looking I give the kids candy.)

Complaining - using "the other" as a wastebasket for your own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes

Objectifying - this person is for my own gratification or I'm using this person for my own gratification (this often occurs in the bedroom)

"Bafflegabbing" - talking in ways intended to mislead and baffle "the other"

"Babble-on-ying" - talking on and on

"Eloquenting" - using high-flown words and phrases to appear superior

"Exiting" - getting distracted either in one's own head or through a "substance" (ie. "Losing presence")

Unilaterally making a decision that affects "the other"

Yelling

Threatening

Name calling

Forgetting

Ordering

Demanding

Denying

Making "the other" responsible for one's own feelings (even the "good" ones)

Requesting "the other" do for you what you can do for yourself

Advice-giving

Belittling

Laughing, smirking, or joking

Mimicking

Infantilizing

Repeating

Ignoring

Patronizing

Edifying

"Knowing it all"

"Last wording"

"So-ing" or "So-what-ing"

Running on

Insulting

Ignoring

Interrupting

Making inappropriate sounds or faces

"Cheap-shotting"

Using sarcasm

Sentence hanging or dropping off

Eye-rolling

Grimacing

Glaring

Having "a tone"

Finger pointing

Shaking a fist

Crossing the arms

Whispering or muttering

Swearing

"Ending" the conversation or connection

Many of these behaviors must be "self-assessed," but it is up to each of us to say, "I think that's abuse" or something reasonable if they think they are hearing abuse. This is a case where interrupting is a good idea and not abuse.