Emotional Abuse

If someone you care about is being abused, or if you suspect someone you care about is being abused, you can help by:

1. Express your concern and take the issue seriously.
2. Support the victim by offering encouragement and reassurance.
3. Help the victim seek legal and emotional support.
4. Offer to be a witness.
5. Help the victim feel safe and supported.
6. Advocate for the victim's rights.
7. Help the victim to access resources and support services.
8. Help the victim to access legal help.
9. Help the victim to access counseling and therapy.
10. Help the victim to access medical care.

If you suspect that someone you care about is being abused, you can help by:

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2. Support the victim by offering encouragement and reassurance.
3. Help the victim seek legal and emotional support.
4. Offer to be a witness.
5. Help the victim feel safe and supported.
6. Advocate for the victim's rights.
7. Help the victim to access resources and support services.
8. Help the victim to access legal help.
9. Help the victim to access counseling and therapy.
10. Help the victim to access medical care.
Emotional abuse happens when someone insults, humiliates or uses "mind-games" to control another person.

It can happen to people in all income, education and ethnic groups. It can happen in same-sex as well as mixed relationships.

Emotional abuse doesn’t always lead to physical violence. But almost all physical or sexual abuse includes emotional abuse. Being emotionally abused puts a person at risk of physical abuse.

Studies have found that emotional abuse may occur in over 20% of all relationships.

What are the signs?

These all are warning signs that a relationship could be abusive.

The Abuser

Wants all the control.
- Makes all the decisions.
- Acts very possessive.
- Needs to win every argument.
- May demand sex after an argument to "make up."

Discounts feelings and views.
- Puts down, makes fun of or embarrasses the abused partner.
- Says the partner’s opinions are "stupid."
- Is jealous or critical of the partner’s friends and family.
- Says the partner is "too sensitive" if she or he complains.

Confuses and frightens the partner.
- Blames the partner or others for his or her anger.
- May be tender one moment and mad the next.
- Uses threats or physical force.
- May be reckless with alcohol, other drugs or driving.

The Abused

Often can’t admit there’s a problem.
- Makes excuses for the abusive partner’s behavior.
- Blames herself or himself.
- Believes the partner’s actions are signs of love.

May lose confidence or feel afraid.
- Questions her or his own perceptions or feelings.
- Often tries to explain what she or he meant.
- Feels depressed.
- Spends less and less time with other people doing activities.
- Changes how she or he acts to avoid making the partner angry.

Isn’t it OK to disagree?

Every couple disagrees at times, but there’s a big difference between that and abuse.
- Is it mutual? In healthy relationships, both partners have power and want to resolve the conflict. Neither is afraid to say, "I don’t see it that way," or state his or her feelings or opinions.
- Abuse isn’t equal. An abusive partner Namery or puts down the other person. The abused partner winds up backing down or tries to "fix" the abuser’s feelings.

How harmful is it?

Emotional abuse is hard to recognize.
- The abused person may not even realize it’s happening.
- This can make it hard to take steps to stop it.
- The longer the abuse goes on, the more harmful it can be.

Emotional abuse is a strong risk factor for physical or sexual abuse. It can also:
- Cause stress, depression and loss of self-esteem.
- Lead to chronic headaches, fatigue, eating disorders and alcohol or other drug abuse.
- Create isolation. A person may give up school, a job or other life goals.

"Nobody deserves to be abused—physically or emotionally.”

"At first I made excuses for my partner. Now I know he was abusive.”