

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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Do you often feel that something is terribly wrong with your relationship, but you are unable to describe it? Are you made to feel that whatever you do never seems to be right enough or that when something goes wrong it's always your fault? Stranger still you are not even able to discuss with your partner what is bothering you because your partner railroads such discussions! What is even worse is that your partner constantly criticizes you and does not hesitate to humiliate you publicly. You are not even allowed to express yourself. He/she seems to control everything you do – even the way you should dress, behave or communicate with others. He/she may find devious ways to isolate you from your family and friends and may limit your access to finances or even work. You may be obliged to have sex or at times even coerced, much against your inclination. In extreme cases such persons may even destroy your belongings that you deeply value. In short, are you afraid of your partner and feel trapped in the relationship?

If any of these are happening to you, be warned, you may be a silent victim of Emotional Abuse, which can be equally traumatic if not more so than physical abuse. While in case of physical abuse there are visible signs or evidence of abuse such as cuts, bruises or broken bones, emotional or psychological abuse is so subtle that the abused doesn't even recognize the abuse.

A partner who is emotionally abusive often plays games with the victim's mind. You are led to believe that you are no good, have no value and can never be right – that eventually you wonder if, you are losing your mental balance or turning 'crazy'. The emotional abuser can become violent and resort to physical or sexual abuse too. This becomes an extremely dangerous situation for the abused that calls for urgent immediate action for safeguarding oneself from the relentless, multifarious onslaught.

Emotional abuse is like mind control through brain washing that it methodically and systematically wears away the victims' self-confidence, sense of self worth and self esteem and belief in their own perceptions. The abuser under the guise of 'suggesting', 'guiding' or 'teaching' the partner constantly berates, belittles, threatens or intimidates that cuts deep into the core of their self leaving scars more permanent than that left by physical abuse. While the abuser in a couple relationship can either be the

man or the woman, in overwhelming majority of situations it is most likely to be the male partner.

The Abuse Cycle

Typically, the abuse takes place in phases. During the first phase of ***Tension Building*** an ambience of tension is created in the environment by the abuser that gradually builds towards a breakdown of communication. This may be achieved by withdrawal, isolation, disapproval and lack of opportunity for expression by the victim. The victim feels confused, frustrated and is compelled to placate the abuser.

In the second phase, the abuse takes on more overt forms and there are incidents of verbal, emotional abuse typically with anger outbursts, blaming, arguing, threats and intimidation directed at the victim.

In the next phase of ***Reconciliation***, the abuser suddenly reverts back his/her position, seemingly softer towards the partner. He/she apologizes or offers excuses or denies that the abuse has occurred, or that it is not as bad as the victim claims it to be.

In the fourth phase, there is a period of apparent '***Calm***', as there is a brief let up in the abusiveness. The incidents are 'forgotten' and there is a temporary peace and no abuse takes place, but alas, it is a short-lived dream! The tension mounts up again slowly and steadily and eventually there is a return to the phase I of the cycle – the wheel turns a full circle and continues.

Patterns of Abuse

Various researchers in the field of Family Violence and Abuse have attempted to identify certain typical patterns of emotional abuse that the perpetrators of abuse resort to. Here are some common patterns observed:

- * **Overt Abuse**
- * **Covert Abuse**
- * **In Private**
- * **Apathy**
- * **Unpredictability**
- * **Emotional Blackmail**
- * **Isolation**
- * **Rejection**

- * **Invalidation**
- * **Abusive Expectations**

Impact of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse hurts a lot and for a long time. It can cause irreparable damage to the victim's sense of selfhood and self esteem. It can make the person so confused and unsure of them self including one's perceptions, beliefs, values and opinions. Fear and uncertainty stalks them, anxious not to be caught off guard they live life on the razor's edge. They may suffer bouts of depression and intense suicidal thoughts. Increasing isolation and devaluation of self can make them retreat into imaginary or virtual reality through Internet. Worse still they can resort to increased alcohol or drug use to numb them or give them false courage to face the incessant abuse.

Every time the abuse begins, the stress level mounts in the victim as the body gears up for fight or flight, the long term consequences of which can lead to psychosomatic problems like high blood pressure, hyper acidity, panic attacks, irritable bowels or asthma. Over a period of time there can also be personality changes, with the victim become an irritable, fearful and hostile person.

Seeking Help

The first thing as an abused person what you need to realize is that you do not deserve to be treated this way. You DO have a right to lead a life free of emotional or physical abuse of any kind. You need to acknowledge the fact that the problem is not with you, but your partner. It is not YOUR fault. You are not alone. Help is available, in form of support groups on the Net, friends and family who understand your plight and most importantly professional mental health therapists who can intervene. Here are a few tips for dealing with an abusive spouse.

- Refuse to accept unreasonably demanding behavior.
- Insist on respect for your space, boundaries, preferences and choices.
- Demand just and proportional treatment and set limits of acceptability.
- Don't succumb to blackmail and show that you are not afraid of him/her.

- Do not hide the abuse; let other close people know about it. Secrecy is the abuser's weapon.
- Be firm and resolute and don't go back on your word and don't give a second chance.
- Do not get carried away by his/her all knowing stance. Don't be gullible and suggestible.
- Give yourself positive, empowering messages.
- Don't postpone seeking professional help.