

Categories of Verbal Abuse

Withholding

The intimacy of the relationship cannot be achieved if one part is unwilling to share him/herself and is unable to support their partner with empathy. Simply put, withholding is a choice to keep virtually all or a significant portion of one's thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams to oneself and to remain silent and aloof towards one's partner.

"There's nothing to talk about."

"You wouldn't be interested."

"What do you want me to say?"

"You don't need to know."

Countering

The abuser sees their partner as an adversary. If the other person sees things differently, the abuser may feel they are losing control and dominance. Consequently, the abuser may choose to argue against the other's thoughts, perceptions, or experience. As a category of verbal abuse, countering is one of the most destructive to a relationship because it prevents all possibility of discussion; it consistently denies the victim's reality.

Discounting

Discounting denies the reality and experience of the partner and is extremely destructive. Discounting denies and distorts the partner's actual perception of the abuse and is, therefore, one of the most insidious forms of verbal abuse.

"You're too sensitive."

"Your imagination is working overtime."

"You can't take a joke."

"You take everything wrong."

"You're making a big deal out of nothing."

Verbal Abuse Disguised as Jokes

Disparaging comments disguised as jokes often refer to the feminine or masculine nature of the partner, to their intellectual abilities, physical attributes, or competency.

"What else would you expect from a woman/man?"

"You couldn't find your head if it wasn't attached."

Blocking and Diverting

The verbal abuser refuses to communicate, establishes what can be discussed, or withholds information. The abuser can prevent all possibility of resolving conflicts by blocking and diverting. Blocking may be by direct demand or by switching the topic.

"You know what I meant."

"Will you get off my back."

"You heard me. I'm not going to repeat myself."

"Just drop it."

Accusing and Blaming

The verbal abuser may accuse their partner of some wrongdoing, or of some breach of the basic agreement of the relationship, blaming the partner for their anger, irritation, or insecurity.

Judging and Criticizing

The verbal abuser may judge their partner and express their judgment in a critical way. If the partner objects, the abuser may state that they are just pointing out something to be helpful, but in reality the abuser is expressing lack of acceptance for the partner.

"Wouldn't it have been better to..."

"Next time you should ..."

"I wouldn't do it that way if I were you."

"You should have ..."

Trivializing

Trivializing says, in so many words, that what you have done or expressed is insignificant. When trivializing is done in a frank and sincere tone of voice, it can be difficult to detect.

Undermining

Undermining not only withholds emotional support, but also erodes confidence and determination. The abuser who undermines their partner has usually verbally abused the partner in many other ways. Consequently the partner's self-esteem and confidence are already low, making them much more vulnerable to the abuse.

"Who asked you?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Nobody asked your opinion."

"You'll never make it."

"You always have to put in your two cents."

"Whom are you trying to impress?"

Threatening

Threatening manipulates the partner by bringing up their greatest fears. Verbally abusive threats usually involve the threat of loss or pain.

"Do what I want or I'll leave."

"I'll get angry."

"I'll get a divorce."

"Do what I want or I'll hit you."

Name Calling

Name calling is one of the most overt categories of verbal abuse. All name calling is verbally abusive. Forms of endearment such as "sweetheart" are, of course, excepted, unless said with real sarcasm.

Forgetting

Forgetting involves both denial and covert manipulation. The declaration by the abuser that what occurred didn't occur is abusive. Everyone forgets what happened now and then. However, consistently forgetting interactions which have great impact on another person is verbally abusive denial.

Ordering

Ordering denies the equality and autonomy of the partner. When the abuser gives orders instead of asking respectfully for what they want, the partner feels diminished.

"Get in here and clean this up."

"You're not wearing that."

"You're not going out now."

"We're doing this now."

"Get this out of here."

Denial

Although all verbal abuse has serious consequences, denial is one of the most insidious categories of verbal abuse because it denies the reality of the partner.

"I never said that."

"I don't know where you got that."

"You're making that all up."

"You've got to be crazy."

"You're getting upset about nothing."

Abusive Anger

Anger underlies, motivates, and perpetuates verbally abusive behavior. In order to recognize abusive anger, it is essential that the partner fully realize that she is in no way responsible for being yelled at, snapped at, raged at or even glared at – no matter how demanding, accusing, or blaming the abuser is.