

Verbal & Emotional Abuse

QUICK REFERENCE COUNSELING KEYS Excerpt

Words that Wound . . .

“You’re worthless!” . . . “You’ll never amount to anything!” . . . “I wish you had never been born!” Words like these in childhood can wound the heart for a lifetime.

And further wounding takes place in adulthood when “control” is the name of the game. Threats like . . . “If you leave me, I’ll hurt the children!” or “I’ve taken the keys—you’re not going anywhere!” . . . are both emotionally and verbally abusive and are ways of maintaining control in relationships.

Abuse can also be perpetrated without a word—whether with degrading looks, obscene gestures, or threatening behaviors. These actions inflict immense pain and impede emotional growth. You don’t have to allow an abuser to make you feel worthless. Jesus says that God not only knows each and every sparrow, but He also knows you intimately and gives you worth.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”
(Luke 12:6–7)

Q: “What hope is there for someone broken by abuse?”

For the one who has been broken by abuse, God offers great hope. That hope is in Himself. Begin to deepen your dependence on the Lord and seek His comfort and healing.

“Blessed is he . . . whose hope is in the LORD his God . . . who keeps faith forever.”
(Psalm 146:5–6)

“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”
(Psalm 34:18)

Q: “Why do people who are being abused continue to stay in abusive relationships?”

One major reason is fear. Isaiah 21:4 (NIV) says, “My heart falters, fear makes me tremble.” Instilling fear is a powerful weapon used to control another person. One effective strategy that instills fear is the use of demeaning messages, such as verbal threats, to inflict physical harm. Another fear tactic is to leave or to withdraw emotional support. The basic underlying fear, however, is the fear of not having three basic needs met—the needs for love, for significance, and for security. Yet the Lord wants us to turn from fear to faith and to trust Him to meet our deepest needs.

“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.”
(Proverbs 29:25)

Seven Essential Steps to Victory

1. **Face the Problem.**
(Psalm 139:23–24)
Decide that you are no longer going to tolerate the abusive behavior.
2. **Understand the Source of the Problem.**
(Proverbs 18:15)
Know that you are not the cause of the abuse (although you will be blamed).
3. **Confront the Problem.**
(Proverbs 16:21)
Make it clear that you will no longer tolerate verbal attacks.
4. **Take Responsibility for Yourself.**
(Romans 12:17–18)
Resist retaliation.
5. **View the Abusive Person from God's Perspective.**
(Philippians 4:19)
See the person as someone for whom Christ died.
6. **Love Unconditionally.**
(Proverbs 10:12)
Love is not a feeling, but a commitment to do what is right.
7. **Practice a Powerful Prayer Life.**
(1 Thessalonians 5:17–18)
Remember that prayer is the surest path to healing and wholeness.

*"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."
(Hebrews 12:15)*

Key Verse to Memorize

*"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."
(Romans 13:10)*

Key Passage to Read and Reread

Matthew 12:34–37

Build Personal Boundaries

1. **Place boundaries around your heart.**
Be careful where and on whom you spend your emotions. (Proverbs 4:23)
2. **Learn that it's okay to say no.**
Do not listen to lies about being selfish or uncaring when you refuse to comply with someone's wishes. (Matthew 5:37)
3. **Start being assertive.** The typical reason people continue to be nonassertive is to avoid any kind of conflict. (Matthew 18:15)
4. **Draw the line!** To help identify your boundaries, pay attention when your emotions are intense, dark, shaming, or guilt-ridden in response to something someone has said or done to you. (Proverbs 27:6)
5. **Appropriate God's will for your life.**
Begin to redefine your own, separate identity by daily choosing to live according to God's will. (Romans 8:15)

Steps to Recovery for Victims

1. "I recognize that I am powerless to heal the damaged emotions resulting from abuse, and I look to God for the power to make me whole."
2. "I acknowledge that God's plan for my life includes victory over the experience of abuse."
3. "The person who abused me is responsible for the acts committed against me and for the words spoken to me."
4. "I am looking to God and His Word to find my identity as a human being."
5. "I am honestly sharing my feelings with God and with at least one other person."
6. "I am accepting responsibility for my responses to being abused."
7. "I am willing to accept God's help in the decision to forgive myself and those who have offended me and to trust Him in the process of doing so."
8. "I am willing to mature in my relationship with God and with others."
9. "I am willing to be used by God as an instrument of His healing and restoration in the lives of others."

Changing the Course of Abusive Relationships

Change is always both the by-product and the goal of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a believer.

- **Change your mind. . . . That's *repentance*.**
(2 Corinthians 4:2)
- **Change your actions. . . . That's *obedience*.**
(2 John 6)
- **Change your attitude. . . . That's *compliance*.**
(Colossians 3:16–17)
- **Change your feelings. . . . That's *forgiveness*.**
(Matthew 6:14–15)
- **Change your words. . . . That's *confession*.**
(1 Peter 3:10–11)
- **Change your thoughts. . . . That's *renewal*.**
(Romans 12:2)

*“He heals the brokenhearted and
binds up their wounds.”
(Psalm 147:3)*

Related Topics . . .

- Alcohol & Drug Abuse:
Breaking Free and Staying Free
- Anger:
Controlling the Fire Within
- Forgiveness:
*How to Forgive . . . When You Don't
Feel Like It*
- Manipulation:
Severing the Strings of Control
- Reconciliation:
Restoring Broken Relationships

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Verbal & Emotional Abuse:
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