

Recognizing Emotional Abuse



Physical violence is not the only form of domestic abuse. Emotional abuse can affect you in serious ways as well. Emotional abuse is when a partner:

- Verbally humiliates you
- Demands all your attention
- Controls your time or who you see
- Blames you for everything that goes wrong
- Threatens to harm you, your children or family, or your pets

Emotional abuse can occur among male-female couples or same-sex couples. It does not require sexual intimacy.

Emotional abuse can be hard to identify at first. It may consist of name-calling, ignoring your feelings, swearing, or cursing at you. Over time, it often increases to repeated put-downs, ordering you to account for every minute of your time, accusing you of doing things that you didn't do, and demanding you stop spending time with your family and friends. Your abuser creates an emotional environment to control you and destroy your self-worth and independence.

You are not alone

In the U.S., over 12 million adults are abused by an intimate partner each year. Emotional abuse was reported more often than either physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse accounts for almost half the violence against women. People of all races, religions, and economic classes are mistreated by this sort of abuser. This is true of all forms of domestic abuse. In many cases, verbal attacks can over time lead to physical and sexual violence.

How to recognize it

There are no physical scars or broken bones with emotional abuse. So it can be harder to recognize. Here are signs that point to abuse:

- Your partner swears or yells at you.
- Your partner repeatedly bullies, cross-examines, or degrades you.
- Your partner uses name-calling, put-downs, and ridicule against you.
- Your partner insults the people you care for, your family, and friends.
- Your partner threatens to harm you or your family.
- Your partner threatens or abuses family pets.
- Your partner controls or limits your behavior by keeping you from using the phone, internet, or seeing friends.
- You are not allowed to leave the room or the house.
- Your access to money is limited. Or you are asked to account for every penny you spend.
- Your partner follows you, and checks or limits your phone conversations.

- Your partner forces you to stay awake or repeatedly wakes you from sleep.
- Your partner blames you for the way they treat you.
- Your partner forces you to do degrading things. These include making you kneel, or making you beg for money.
- Your partner criticizes your thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs, and actions.
- Your partner treats you like a servant in matters of household chores and decisions.
- Your partner is very jealous, constantly accusing you of flirting or cheating.
- Your partner tells you that you are sick or crazy.
- Your partner denies an event happened. Or they describe it very differently from how you remember it. This is called gaslighting. This is a form of emotional abuse that happens slowly. It makes you feel more distrustful of your memory of events. It also makes you feel more dependent on your partner.

If you're in a relationship that includes any of these behaviors, you are being abused.

Steps to take

Recognizing that you are being emotionally abused and controlled is the first step toward healing.

For help, talk with your healthcare provider, call your local shelter, or contact your local women's shelter hotline. Search online for your local social and human services department. Or call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233). There also is a choice for an online chat. You can also text START to 88788.

If you've been threatened with harm or death, or are being stalked, call 911 or the police.

Abuse is never acceptable and no one deserves it. Just like all kinds of abuse, the emotional kind hurts. and can cause a lot of damage. Quickly identifying it and getting help can allow you to live free of fear, bullying, and self-doubt.

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