

RECOGNIZE VERBAL ABUSE

Too often, abuse victims hide in denial. After all, if you can't name the abuse you're experiencing then it is easy to pretend it doesn't happen. Recognizing verbal abuse as it happens is one of the first things you can do to regain your mental and emotional health.

It's important to validate your emotional experience with the thinking side of yourself in order to stop using emotional denial as a shield. To help you begin the process, I've included space for you to write down your personal experiences.

TYPES OF VERBAL ABUSE

ABUSIVE ANGER

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusive anger is an attempt to threaten you emotionally and physically, hoping you will back down so he can have his way.

MY EXAMPLES: When my abuser is abusively angry, he is loud, obscene, and gets in my face with either his face or his finger. He hears nothing I say when he's in this rage, OR he picks up two or three key words and twists them into something I did not mean to say.

Sometimes all he wants if for me to silently listen to his abusive statements. Similarly, he'll ask questions OF me and then answer them FOR me - as if he knows the answers and I don't. Of course, the answers he provides are insulting to me.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

THREATENING BEHAVIOR & WORDS

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers uses threatening behavior to let you know that he is in control and to tell you to shut up or do as he says OR ELSE he MAY hurt you physically.

MY EXAMPLES: My abuser backs me into a corner, gets right up in my face while yelling and red faced, acts like he's wringing my neck at a distance, or kicks a chair, punches cabinets, etc. while I am in his presence. He has also verbally threatened my pets in order to coerce me to do what he wanted.

Many times when he's in this state, he'll say, "Is this what you want?! Do you want me to lose control like this?! You must want me to be pissed off - why else would you do this to me?!" He wants me to *think* he's out of control and therefore more threatening - but asking that question of me tells me that he is very much in control of himself. He knows what he's doing. He's acting like this ON PURPOSE.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

NAME CALLING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers call you names for two reasons. One reason is to humiliate you. The other is to deny your existence. In his mind, the best way to stay in complete control is to annihilate the one questioning him - you. Patricia Evans says it best. She explains that when abusers engage in name-calling, they're saying, "You do not exist. You are annihilated.... Now that you are wiped out, I'm in control, just like in a war."

MY EXAMPLES: Of course, I've heard that I am a whore and cunt, but he also tells me that I'm irrational, a bad mother and wife, disloyal, etc. My abuser goes after whatever I WANT to be (a great mother and wife, a critical thinker, loyal, etc.). If there isn't an obscene name for it, he simply tells me I'm the opposite of what I want to be.

I'd like to add that when we are going through a string of arguments or abusive conversations (aka, "bad days"), he doesn't use my name at all. He doesn't call me "Kellie" for days. He'll refer to me as "your daughter-in-law," "your mother," "you," or any other way he can EXCEPT by saying my name. I may be something to someone else, but I am NOTHING to him.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

ORDERING & DEMANDING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: When an abuser orders you around and demands certain behaviors, it is his way of directly controlling you. So long as you do exactly what he says, then his control over you is validated.

MY EXAMPLES: In the past, ordering and demanding worked well for my abuser because his other threatening and scary behaviors had accomplished his goal of scaring the resistance out of me. I was in "shell-shock" much of the time, and it was easier to do as he said than to expose myself to another round of abusive anger, threatening behavior, and all the rest.

He loved to take me to parties when he knew I was in this state of fear. While there, I felt compelled to laugh at the jokes he made about me while fetching his beer and fixing his plate before my own. He would brag, saying things like, "This is how home-training works!" as I brought him another drink.

When the fear effect wore off a little, he wouldn't have to do or say too much to put me right back in the state of being his willing sheep.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

VERBAL ABUSE DISGUISED AS A JOKE

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: When abusers disguise their abuse as a joke, he's telling you that he loves putting you down because it makes him feel good. He can joke about you however he wants because he is in control of your reaction and everyone else's too.

MY EXAMPLES: It's funny that he wants to run me through a wood chipper and feed pieces of me to the fish. It must be funny - he tells everyone about it when we're together.

He can say whatever he wants because he is "just being funny" when he says it and I don't know how to take a joke. He is in control. Everyone else laughs, don't they? He couldn't really mean it, could he? Why am I so damn sensitive?

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

DISCOUNTING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers discount (take away from, make small) your ideas and perceptions so he doesn't have to listen to them. If he perpetuates the idea that whatever you say is worthless, then he is able to dismiss or make fun of anything you do, believe, or say. Discounting is another way of annihilating you so he can raise himself up.

MY EXAMPLES: My husband loves to tell me that I don't understand how the world works. If he's the only one who knows about the "real world" then anything I say can be cast aside as naive or worthless.

When I have had a business idea or pursued my own business, he's found every way to make me believe my ideas couldn't work. He says that by being critical he is only trying to help me avoid problems.

Or, "I'll tell my friends about your web design thing, but your integrity is going to get me in trouble at work!" It's a long convoluted story about how that could happen, but here he's telling me that something he "admires" in me is going to be my downfall. I guess I need to rethink my integrity...

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

ACCUSING & BLAMING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers constantly turn your pain around on you by accusing and blaming you when they have behaved in a hurtful way. If you hadn't (done, felt, said) X, then he wouldn't be forced to do Y.

MY EXAMPLES: I can't remember the last time he took my pain seriously or validated any feeling I claimed. I'm consistently told that I over-react and therefore cause the pain any "normal" person would not experience.

In short, my every reaction, my every sad or angry emotion, is irrational and a result of my imagination. For example, he said, "I'd be pissed too if you were late for no reason, but I have a good reason! I'm leaving for Fort Lee tomorrow and I had to go to the farewell party. It's part of my job!"

Evidently, it's also part of his job to stay out until 2am without so much as a phone call letting me know he would be late for dinner. That was my complaint – it had nothing to do about having a reason to be late, but with his lack of respect for me.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

COUNTERING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: If your abuser can make you consistently doubt yourself, you are easier to control. You are unsure of yourself, so you naturally look to him for answers.

MY EXAMPLES: It doesn't really matter what I say. I could call a color peach and he'd insist it was red. I could agree with him that the light was too bright, and suddenly he wouldn't be bothered by it anymore.

Me: I think I'll work by word of mouth until I earn some money doing this.

Him: No, word of mouth is overrated. You're going to have to put money into some sort of advertising.

Me: Okay, then I'll start with an ad in the paper.

Him: No, no one reads the newspaper for that. Maybe I could talk to some guys at work, see if they need any design services. *(Isn't that what I initially said?!)*

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

BLOCKING AND DIVERTING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Blocking and diverting is a way to change a conversation to gain control of it. When abusers switch topics, he is saying that he doesn't see you as a rational person, so he can converse with you as he pleases. He doesn't have to answer your question; he doesn't have to acknowledge your statement. He pretends that you are not rational enough to notice that the conversation had changed.

MY EXAMPLES: Sometimes, my husband succeeds with the blocking/diverting tactic. He changes the conversation so artfully that I'll be shocked into following his diversion and forget to stay on topic!

Me: "I'd really like for us to go to dinner with my sister and her husband tomorrow."

Him: "Did you feed the kids? Are you even thinking about them? I can go hungry, but you shouldn't let the kids starve."

I think: WHAT? When in the hell did I ever let my children starve? When did I neglect them like that? How dare you say I'm a horrible mother! [...and this tactic was successful because I've forgotten all about dinner with my sister]

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

JUDGING AND CRITICIZING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: When abusers judge and criticize, it's a power play to put him in control of the situation or conversation. You must submit to his opinion because yours comes from faulty reasoning, lack of morals, etc., or at least that's what he tells you.

MY EXAMPLES: Evidently, I should think he knows everything and I know nothing. Evidently, I should think I don't have a clue about how to do much of anything and I should think that he always knows better.

Me: "Will, some bills do change from month to month. If we rent movies on cable, the cable bill changes. Sometimes the electric bill isn't what we expect, and - "

Him: "You're just trying to avoid answering my questions. You're hiding money or something. When I did the bills, they never changed. Those people are taking advantage of you because you don't stay on their ass about stuff like this. Do I have to take over? You just don't know how the real world works!"

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

TRIVIALIZING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: The smaller your abuser makes you think you are, the smaller you become. The smaller you are, the more control he has over you.

MY EXAMPLES: My husband likes to pretend that my accomplishments are worthless. For quite some time, I believed he was right. I felt very insignificant and diminished - very trivial in comparison to all the "important" people around me. He had a lot of control over me at that time - I thought I was worthless and he was king.

One time my husband trivialized me after returning home from a deployment. You see, when he was deployed, my son took the van and totaled it. I had to find a way for us to afford another car payment because he wanted us to have two vehicles.

So I paid off three credit cards with the extra money he was earning while he was deployed. I was able to use what money we had been putting toward minimum payments toward the new car payment instead.

When he got home, we could afford the new car and had no credit card debt, but we didn't have as much money saved as he thought we should, and our spending budget was still tight. All he could talk about was how I wasted all the money he had earned.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

UNDERMINING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers undermine your authority with your children, your earned respect with your friends, and every role you hold in hope that the people you care for will mirror what he says to you. If your children, friends, family and community doubt your abilities or authority, then you will start believing what your abuser tells you, and you are easier to control.

MY EXAMPLES: My husband can dash my self-confidence while sounding like he really truly cares. He uses snippets of conversations he overhears to profess that a friend secretly agrees with him about something bad in me. He tells me in front of my children that my discipline is ineffective (so why should the children do what I ask?). These sneaky tactics are what he calls "having my back." But I now know that they are only attempts to make me feel smaller than I am.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

FORGETTING

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: Abusers purposely and regularly forget things that are important to you so you will know that your time, energy and health are unimportant and he cannot be held accountable for wasting it.

MY EXAMPLES: My husband used to forget when we were supposed to go out with friends of "mine" or get together with my family for dinner. He'd forget we had family evenings planned at the Y, and he would forget that I had doctor appointments when I was pregnant. He never heard the heartbeat of our first baby.

He also "forgets" entire conversations. Important ones! He'll forget that I have plans and writing our schedules on the family calendar doesn't help because it isn't his job to read the calendar.

Only his schedule is important, so that means he is in control of mine, too. Period.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

DENIAL

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: By denying the issues, the abuser can pretend that nothing changes. You don't change, the situation doesn't change, and nothing changes unless HE changes it. There are no surprises for him, just for you. He is in control.

When I told my husband that he was verbally abusive and was able to list the ways in which he abused me, he went to the computer and printed out a list of the effects of rape. He said, "Here. This is YOU. *This* is your problem."

MY EXAMPLES:

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____

WITHHOLDING OR DEPRIVATION

WHY ABUSERS USE IT: By withholding and depriving, abusers can say, "Nyah nyah! I've got something you want and you can't have it! I'm in control! I can keep things exactly how they are, and you can't do anything about it!"

MY EXAMPLES: My abuser won't talk to me for hours and sometimes days. He pushes me away when I make a sexual advance and then complains that I don't act like I want him. He'll come home drunk if he suspects I want to "talk". He goes to his friend's house instead of spending time with his family. He will work on projects that could wait for a couple of hours (or months!) when I want to do something together.

I'm not talking about occasionally.

EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAPPENS TO YOU: _____
