

## If you're being abused

- **Don't blame yourself.** You don't cause the abuse. It's the other person's fault, not yours.
- **Refuse to be abused.** Imagine saying, "Stop that!" or "I won't let you insult me" until you can say these things aloud when abuse happens. Don't excuse your partner's anger or try to explain yourself. Leave the area if you're being treated badly.
- **Think about leaving.** You may decide it's time to end the relationship for your own well-being.
- **Think about your safety.** If your partner threatens you or you feel afraid, plan ways to be safe. When you're out together, always carry enough money to leave your partner and get to a safe place. Call a crisis helpline or women's shelter for advice.  
If you feel in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.
- **Seek help.**
  - Talk to trusted friends, family or your health care provider.
  - Look in the phone book for resources.
  - Check the self-help section in bookstores or search the Internet.
  - Not everyone understands emotional abuse. Keep looking until you find help that works for you.

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## If someone you care about is being abused

- **Express concern.** Listen and sympathize.
- **Speak the truth.** "What he said was abusive." "She was wrong to treat you that way."
- **Educate yourself** about emotional abuse. It can be hard and scary for a person to leave an abusive relationship. Keep offering support. Don't try to control what happens or make judgments—that's already the problem!
- **Stay in touch.** Abusers try to isolate their partners. Don't give up on the person you care about, no matter how frustrated you get.
- **Offer support for staying safe.** Take the person's fears seriously. Help develop a safety plan. Suggest she or he find out about legal services and shelters.
- **Get support for yourself.** Helping someone who's being abused can be stressful.

**Children who see emotional abuse between adults are at risk to be depressed and become abused or abusive in later life.**

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## Are you abusive?

If the descriptions of an abusive partner might fit you:

- **Take responsibility.** Your partner doesn't make you act this way. Feeling angry or frustrated is not an excuse. Being abusive is wrong, no matter what.
- **Stop the abuse.** Do whatever you need to so you won't act abusive. If you're losing control of what you say, leave the room. "Take a break" from a relationship if you need to until you can stop the abuse.
- **Get help.**
  - Notice when you're being abusive.
  - Talk to your health care provider.
  - Call a crisis line.
  - See a counselor.
  - Learn to act in different ways.

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Big Rapids, MI 49307

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# Emotional Abuse



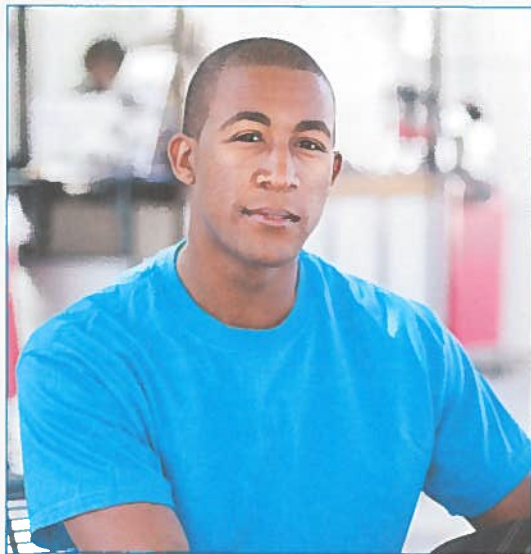
Learn to notice the warning signs.

## Emotional abuse happens when someone insults, humiliates or uses “mind-games” to control another person.

It can happen to people in all income, education and ethnic groups. It can happen in same-sex as well as mixed relationships.

Emotional abuse doesn't always lead to physical violence. But almost all physical or sexual abuse includes emotional abuse. Being emotionally abused puts a person at risk of physical abuse.

Studies have found that emotional abuse may occur in **over 20%** of all relationships.



“Nobody deserves to be abused—physically or emotionally.”

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## What are the signs?

These all are warning signs that a relationship could be abusive.

### The Abuser

#### Wants all the control.

- Makes all the decisions.
- Acts very possessive.
- Needs to win every argument.
- May demand sex after an argument to “make up.”

#### Discounts feelings and views.

- Puts down, makes fun of or embarrasses the abused partner.
- Says the partner's opinions are “stupid.”
- Is jealous or critical of the partner's friends and family.
- Says the partner is “too sensitive” if she or he complains.

#### Confuses and frightens the partner.

- Blames the partner or others for his or her anger.
- May be tender one moment and mad the next.
- Uses threats or physical force.
- May be reckless with alcohol, other drugs or driving.

### The Abused

#### Often can't admit there's a problem.

- Makes excuses for the abusive partner's behavior.
- Blames herself or himself.
- Believes the partner's actions are signs of love.

#### May lose confidence or feel afraid.

- Questions her or his own perceptions or feelings.
- Often tries to explain what she or he meant.
- Feels depressed.
- Spends less and less time with other people or doing activities.
- Changes how she or he acts to avoid making the partner angry.

### Isn't it OK to disagree?

Every couple disagrees at times, but there's a big difference between that and abuse.

- **Is it mutual?** In healthy relationships, both partners have power and want to resolve the conflict. Neither is afraid to say, “I don't see it that way,” or state his or her feelings or opinions.
- **Abuse isn't equal.** An abusive partner blames or puts down the other person. The abused partner winds up backing down or tries to “fix” the abuser's feelings.

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## How harmful is it?

Emotional abuse is hard to recognize.

- The abused person may not even realize it's happening.
- This can make it hard to take steps to stop it.
- The longer the abuse goes on, the more harmful it can be.

Emotional abuse is a strong risk factor for physical or sexual abuse. It can also:

- Cause stress, depression and loss of self-esteem.
- Lead to chronic headaches, fatigue, eating disorders and alcohol or other drug abuse.
- Create isolation. A person may give up school, a job or other life goals.



“At first I made excuses for my partner. Now I know he was abusive.”

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