



onelove

11 Common Patterns of Verbal Abuse



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Verbal abuse happens out of nowhere in a relationship. It's a lot more calculating and insidious, causing people on the receiving end to [question themselves](#), wonder if they are overreacting, or even blame themselves. Verbal abuse usually happens in private where no one else can intervene and eventually becomes a regular form of communication within a relationship. For people experiencing it, verbal abuse is often isolating since it chips away at your self-esteem making it more difficult to reach out to a friend.

Many people who experience it rationalize the abuse in their mind and don't even realize it's an unhealthy form of communication. But that doesn't make it any less distressing or mentally exhausting for people on the receiving end. Ultimately, verbal abuse is a means of maintaining power and control over another in the relationship. And there are many subtle forms verbal abuse can take, making it even harder to recognize. For example, verbal abuse includes being subjected to [name-calling on a regular basis](#), constantly feeling demeaned or belittled, and being subjected to the silent treatment by a partner.

If you can't tell whether your partner is being "funny" or "[belittling](#)," here are a few tell-tale signs you are being diminished in your relationship.

Here are the 11 most common verbal abuse patterns to look out for in a relationship:

1. Name-calling

This type of verbal abuse is probably the easiest one to recognize. This includes being called names and/or being shouted at on a regular basis. Arguments that always resort to yelling and the use of aggressive phrases in a conversation are all signs that your communication with your partner is anything but healthy. In a [healthy relationship](#), partners step away from an argument or try to talk through the issue. In a verbally abusive relationship, the abuser will yell until they get what they want.

Example: "You idiot, now you have made me angry!"

2. Contescension

Light sarcasm and a sarcastic tone of voice should not be a constant part of your interactions with a partner. This can also include being the constant butt of your partner's jokes. It can start off funny, which is why it often goes undetected, but over time contescension becomes belittling.

Example: "No wonder you are always moaning about your weight, look how clean your plate is!"

3. Manipulation

Sometimes it can be easy to spot a controlling personality, especially when someone continuously pushes their partner to do and say things they are not always comfortable with. Manipulation, on the other hand, can be more difficult to detect. It can be subtle, like turning situations around and putting the blame on the abused partner.

Example: "If you really loved me you wouldn't say or do that."

4. Criticism

It's OK to provide constructive criticism when requested on occasion; being honest with your partner is healthy. However, constant criticism and belittling of a significant other are NOT healthy, and over time can lead to a significant loss of self-esteem.

Example: "Why are you so disorganized? I can always count on you to ruin our nights out!"

5. Demeaning Comments

If a partner puts you down using demeaning comments that refer to your race/ethnic background, gender, religion, background in general, it is unhealthy. This doesn't even need to be consistent, if it happens once, it is no doubt going to happen again, and should not be normalized. A partner who loves and respects you will not use something that is an inherent part of you to put you down.

Examples: "I'm not surprised, you are Asian, you all do that" or "You women, always crying stupid tears for nothing."

6. Threats

While this may seem like an easy one to recognize, it isn't always the case. Threats can be dressed up in a way that makes them appear as if they "aren't so bad," or in a way that makes you question if you really heard right. But a threat is a threat and a loving partner does not resort to them to get their way.

Examples: "I will hurt myself if you leave me tonight" or "If you don't do that you might find that your cat spends the night outdoors!"

7. Blame

Blame is one of the most common forms of verbal abuse and involves constantly putting the blame for one's actions onto their partner instead of taking responsibility for them. This can include blaming a partner for something they had nothing to do with, to blaming the partner for the abuser's emotions.

Examples: "You are the reason why we are never on time for anything!" or "Look what you made me do now!"

8. Accusations

Often stemming from severe jealousy, repeated accusations are a form of verbal abuse. Being constantly accused of something often leads a partner to start questioning themselves on whether they are doing something wrong/dressing inappropriately/talking too much, etc.

Examples: "I bet you are cheating on me!" or "I saw you had fun flirting with your boss again, while I was stuck chatting to your boring coworkers."

9. Withholding

Sometimes a partner may walk away from an argument, preferring to let the dust settle to engage in a more constructive conversation without flaring emotions. While this is definitely a sign of a healthy relationship, the silent treatment, often called withholding, is not. Withholding may include your partner refusing to answer your calls when they don't get what they want or downright ignoring you over nothing.

Example: You are discussing restaurant options and don't want to go with your partner's preference. They leave the room and refuse to talk to you until you apologize for being "mean."

10. Gaslighting

Gaslighting includes [discounting a partner's emotions and](#) making them wonder if their feelings are meaningless and/or wrong. This is a very common form of emotional abuse, and often goes undetected, as it can be discreet and severely manipulative. Gaslighting can make one feel isolated and unable to express their feelings. People being gaslighted often find themselves apologizing for behavior that they never committed.

Examples: "Why are you always so sensitive to everything?"

11. Circular Arguments

If your partner constantly disagrees with you, and starts an argument whenever they see an opportunity, or if conversations and arguments seem to go round in circles, leaving you tired and drained, then these are all signs of an unhealthy relationship. People on the receiving end of these types of disagreements tend to feel like they're walking on eggshells in order to avoid going back to the same argument again and again. We do not need to always agree on everything in a relationship, but there should be a mutual acceptance of this, rather than an atmosphere of one-upping the other or engaging in arguments you can never win.

If you feel like you are constantly on edge and walking on eggshells around your partner, or if some of these patterns feel familiar to you, you may be in an unhealthy relationship. Also, if your trusted friends and/or family are telling you that something is wrong, hear them out. They may be seeing, or hearing, something that you cannot. Remember, by setting boundaries and being honest about how something makes you feel, you can learn to [empower yourself in a relationship](#)

If you would like more information on how to leave an unhealthy relationship, please check out the US Department of Health's Office on Women's Health, or call the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-7233 to get advice.