

HURTING WITH WORDS:
Understanding Emotional
Violence and Abuse



Credits

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Teacher's Resource Book

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Pre/Post Test

1. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal abuse destroys your self-esteem. _____

2. **TRUE or FALSE:** If a person is being verbally abused it's his/her fault. _____

3. **TRUE or FALSE:** There is no such thing as verbal abuse. It's just all in good fun. _____

4. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal Abuse can have a long-term impact on the victim's self-image. _____

5. **TRUE or FALSE:** People that verbally abuse others are often looking for power or a sense of control. _____

6. **TRUE or FALSE:** People can heal from verbal abuse. _____

7. **TRUE or FALSE:** If comments are being made that really bother you, you are just being too sensitive. _____

8. **TRUE or FALSE:** Parents can verbally abuse their children. _____

9. **TRUE or FALSE:** It is possible to stop a teacher, coach or another authority figure from being verbally abusive. _____

10. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal abuse is common in our society. It even appears on popular TV sitcoms. _____





Pre/Post Test

ANSWER KEY

1. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal abuse destroys your self-esteem. True
2. **TRUE or FALSE:** If a person is being verbally abused it's his/her fault. False
3. **TRUE or FALSE:** There is no such thing as verbal abuse. It's just all in good fun. False
4. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal Abuse can have a long-term impact on the victim's self-image. True
5. **TRUE or FALSE:** People that verbally abuse others are often looking for power or a sense of control. True
6. **TRUE or FALSE:** People can heal from verbal abuse. True
7. **TRUE or FALSE:** If comments are being made that really bother you, you are just being too sensitive. False
8. **TRUE or FALSE:** Parents can verbally abuse their children. True
9. **TRUE or FALSE:** It is possible to stop a teacher, coach or another authority figure from being verbally abusive. True
10. **TRUE or FALSE:** Verbal abuse is common in our society. It even appears on popular TV sitcoms. True





Introduction

Using words that hurt is not a new phenomenon. However, in our society, the practice of intentionally hurting others' feelings with verbal abuse has become a day-to-day activity. Television programs are one barometer by which we can judge our culture. Many of today's sitcoms and tell-all talk shows have made it acceptable—and even “cool”—to use hurtful words as a means of communicating.

Of course we've all used words that have hurt others. Many times we have apologized when we realized that we have hurt someone's feelings; many times others have apologized to us. Sometimes, though, the intent of the words is to seriously harm others. In these instances, making an apology is like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. The video ***Hurting With Words: Understanding Emotional Violence and Abuse*** explores situations when the words chosen are intended to hurt someone. The video offers a simple solution: we need to consciously make an effort not to use words that hurt.

What is verbal abuse? It is a form of emotional violence. It is anything that hurts another's feelings. Although hurtful words do not leave physical marks on the body, they can leave lasting emotional scars. Hurting someone's feelings is a way of dehumanizing them—treating them as if they were less than human.

We have all heard of people who were made fun of early in life and later developed serious problems with low self-esteem. Such people may behave in a self-destructive manner; in extreme cases, they may even consider suicide. For teens, it is estimated that more than 1000 students in America attempt suicide each day with 18 succeeding (Patros and Shamoo, 1989). Low self-esteem is one of the risk factors that may lead someone to choose suicide as an answer to his or her problems. Furthermore, there is a natural connection between low self-esteem and negative self-judgment. A negative self image can originate from verbal abuse and unwarranted criticism from others; and the acceptance of that abuse or criticism as an accurate description of one's self. (Buie and Maltberger, 1989). Through this, we can see that verbal abuse causes many negative consequences.

Why would people intentionally dehumanize others? This often occurs because one person feels insignificant or inferior, and hopes to gain a sensation of power by taking away power from someone else. Everyone wants to feel powerful and in control of their lives, but life can sometimes spin out of control. When this happens, some people try to make up for this lack of power and control by stealing power from others.





Introduction continued

There is a different kind of power, one that is positive by nature and cannot be taken away so easily. This is personal power which is based on high self-esteem, or feeling good about oneself. When we build ourselves up through our own accomplishments, we do not need to take away another person’s power. Instead, we can be content with ourselves and also give encouragement to others. Having personal power helps to make us more able to withstand some of the verbal abuse or emotional violence directed our way.

This video is meant to help young people become aware of how verbal abuse may have affected them in the past, or how it may still affect them in the future. It will assist them in examining their own behaviors, and will also reveal the fallacy that verbal abuse is okay because “everybody else is doing it.” The video and worksheets will help students recognize the difference between verbal abuse and constructive criticism. Above all, this program will encourage young people to become more aware of the potential of their words.





Learning Objectives

After watching the video *Hurting with Words: Understanding Emotional Violence and Abuse* and participating in the activities included in this Teacher's Resource Book, your students should be able to:

- define verbal abuse and emotional violence
- know that emotional violence is never excusable
- realize when it is being used on themselves or when they are using it on others
- begin to develop empathic caring for others by realizing what it feels like to have one's feelings hurt
- examine personal habits and identify any unacceptable emotionally violent behaviors
- distinguish between statements which are meant to manipulate and those that are sincere
- realize the harmful effects that verbal abuse and emotional violence can have on the recipient
- learn how to reduce their response to emotional violence
- understand that individuals who are emotionally abusive often feel a lack of power in their lives and try to make up for it by causing harm to others
- learn methods to stop emotional violence from having a negative effect on their self-esteem
- recognize when someone needs assistance in stopping emotional violence
- practice new skills in dealing with emotional violence





Program Summary

Hurting with Words: Understanding Emotional Violence and Abuse opens with the lyrics of the old children’s rhyme: *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.* Next we see the faces of the program’s participants as they repeat the hurtful words that were used on them by a friend, acquaintance, or a family member. Suddenly we hear a different ending to the rhyme: *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will break my heart.*

The narrator, Chris Walker, is introduced at this point. He gives a definition of verbal abuse: “Verbal abuse is an attack on you as a person. It implies not that you’re doing something wrong, but that you *are* something wrong. It takes away your self-esteem.” A sequence of interviews with the program’s speakers emphasizes the emotional devastation that accompanies a destroyed sense of self-esteem. Rick says that while physical abuse is very noticeable, emotional abuse “goes directly to the heart.” Keisha says that the effects of emotional violence last a lot longer than any physical bruise. The repetitive nature of verbal abuse is the thing that made it most difficult for another speaker, Sara.

Chris Walker asks the obvious question: “Why do so many people slip so easily into using abusive language—and why do we let them?” Ruth Austin, MS, an educator with Project PAVE (Promoting Alternatives to Violence through Education) explains that verbal abuse is something that is common in our society, and so it becomes acceptable behavior for many. “It’s so accepted in our society,” she says. “We look at every popular sitcom on television today, and you just hear name calling, put-downs, sarcasm.”

Keisha brings up the problem of a charming, attractive person who hides an abusive nature. For many young people, it is possible to become very attached to someone charismatic, even after the verbal abuse begins. Austin explains that the abusive person often tries to make the victim feel dependent first, before they start abusive behavior. What makes these situations especially dangerous is that they may result in later physical violence. Keisha and Danielle both found themselves in dangerous dating relationships, but they were both able to get out. Keisha describes how she really felt alive after her breakup with an abusive boyfriend. Danielle knows that she would never let a similar situation arise again. “If that happened again today,” she says, “I know that I don’t deserve it, and that I’m worth more than that.”

At this point, Chris Walker opens a discussion on how a group of young people might sometimes pick on another person under the guise of “having fun.” This kind of group verbal abuse is very hurtful to the victim. As Rebecca recounts her story of being taunted for her skin color, it is clear that it is hurtful to feel like an outsider who doesn’t “belong” to a group. Not knowing how to fit in can be so frustrating that some victims may even start taking on the identity of the “outsider.”





Program Summary continued

Chris, a young man who endured constant teasing about being gay, explains how difficult it was to concentrate on his studies as he tried to get away from the students who were verbally abusive to him. Once a victim is labeled, the harassment often continues ruthlessly. Sometimes, everything that a person does is seen as a reinforcement of the label. In Chris' case, even his thinness became part of the overall label of "gay." He asks, "So how about if I was overweight? Then that would be associated with me being gay."

As Ruth Austin explains, "I think children reflect our society, and our society isn't very tolerant of differences. Children pick up on this, so they're not tolerant of their friends or their classmates who happen to be a little bit different from them."

What happens when a teacher or coach is verbally abusive to students? Because the abuser is in a position of power, students often do not know where to go to get the abusive behavior to stop. A whole group of students who were verbally abused by the same teacher in elementary school are interviewed next. Each one tells his or her own story. This group was able to stop the verbal abuse after they had the courage to tell an adult who believed them, and who took action to get the abuse to stop.

The saddest thing about such situations is the possible long-term impact upon the victims self-images. Sometimes, Austin points out, students begin to obsess on the teasing they have endured. They may begin to believe that they are at fault, and may start blaming themselves for things they cannot control, such as the size of their nose, the color of their skin, their acne or eyeglasses.

Perhaps most disturbing is verbal abuse from a parent—the same person who is supposed to provide emotional support. Not only is this confusing for the child but it can lead to the child blaming himself for the parent's misguided behavior. Verbal abuse is never the fault of the victim. This was a difficult lesson for Rick to learn because his mother often "vented her anger at her children" in abusive ways. Eventually, Rick learned not to blame himself.

Rick recounts one particular incident in which his mother didn't use words, but was emotionally hurtful to him in her actions. She simply poured a glass of milk down his head and sent him to bed dripping with milk. In Rick's words, "I'll never forget it, how humiliating that felt. She didn't raise her voice, there was no yelling, there was no screaming."

Chris Walker reminds viewers that verbal abuse is never the fault of the victim. The abuser has the problem, not the victim. Ruth Austin points out that people who choose to use verbal abuse are often looking for power or a sense of control over their own





Program Summary continued

lives. “They aren’t willing to relinquish that sense of power,” she explains, “regardless of how they get it.” Some people try to gain power by putting others down simply because they know they can get away with it.

How can victims of verbal abuse protect themselves? Chris and Nick both suggest that it is important to tell others about it. It is a mistake to think that it will just go away. Some children are afraid to tell, because they already blame themselves for the abuse. Ruth Austin says, “I don’t think we’ve taught young people enough that when your feelings are in jeopardy or in concern, then it is okay to speak up.” Instead, too often people are told that they are being too sensitive, and so they learn to deny feelings rather than address them.

As the video draws to a close, Chris Walker reminds viewers that there is hope. Individuals can heal from verbal abuse. Austin recommends getting the right support, and staying close to people who are supportive. Rick suggests that all people learn to be alert to any of the signs of verbal abuse in others. The critical thing is for people to realize, as Rick says, “the dramatic impact our words can have on each other.”





Notes to the Teacher

The following suggestions may be helpful in planning your lessons on emotional abuse. The worksheets may be used as homework assignments, or as in-class activities. Please select the appropriate worksheets for your class according to their age and maturity level.

Emotional Triggers

page 11

This assignment will help students understand what kinds of situations “trigger” them emotionally to react in a verbally abusive manner.

Research

page 13

This is an advanced assignment and should be given to a class that is ready to write a two- to three-page research paper. Depending on your class size, the research project can be given as an individual or group assignment.

Oral Report

page 15

This group assignment will work best with a class that is ready to cooperate towards a common goal. The overall intention is to get the entire group participating in the class presentation, so that students can learn about various historical or local figures who have used constructive criticism to their advantage.

Debate

page 17

This activity can be used as an in-class debate, or as a written homework assignment.

Defining a Relationship

page 19

This worksheet allows students to think about what they consider healthy or abusive in their personal relationships.

Glossary of Terms

page 21

This activity allows students to define crucial terms in their own language. Afterwards, allow time for students to compare their definitions in class discussion.

What is Empathy?

pages 23 - 25

This assignment is meant to help students feel connected—not only to their classmates, but also to their community. Learning to disagree peacefully is one goal that will assist the students in achieving this sense. Exploring the life skill of empathy will guide young people to understand what another person may be feeling. With this skill, they may learn to stop some of their own verbally abusive behaviors by realizing how it can hurt others.

Before beginning this activity, copy and distribute to each student five copies of the ***What is Empathy?*** sheet on page 25. This is the sheet that should be brought with them to the interviews and filled out afterwards.





Notes to the Teacher continued

Experiment 1: “I am bad/I am good” Arm Push pages 27 - 29

This experiment demonstrates the power of words and self talk in a memorable manner. In class, be sure students understand the instructions before they begin. Although some students might try to alter the result of the experiment, most students will be curious about how the words we speak often have very real results in our actions. Depending on your teaching style, you may want to participate as the “Arm Pusher” and ask volunteers from the class to serve as “Talkers.” Encourage students to see the connection between the words they hear and how it affects their own personal strength or power.

Experiment 2: Dehumanizing Behaviors page 31

This experiment is designed to allow students to take a personal inventory of their verbally abusive behaviors. We recommend that the students do not mark down how many times they dehumanized another person; in some cases, students may try to out-do one another and defeat the point of the experiment. Instead, instruct students to keep a mental note on how many times they had to start over again. The real benefit of this experiment is the follow-up classroom discussion. Be sure to bring up ideas concerning how we want to treat others and how we want them to treat us.

Experiment 3: Emotional Violence page 33

In class, ask students to read over the instructions on the ***Emotional Violence*** sheet on page 33. Answer any questions students may have. Students are instructed to watch television and keep a tally of anything they consider emotional violence. At the end of their television watching session, they must add up all the acts of emotional violence and provide examples of what they saw. In class, conduct a follow-up discussion on the amount of emotional violence they see on television.

Think About This... Scenarios pages 35 - 37

Two different scenarios on verbally abusive behaviors are provided. These scenarios should be copied and distributed to your students. Depending upon your schedule and your class’s maturity level, you may decide to use these scenarios as in-class discussion tools, or as at-home writing essays. If used in classroom discussion, be sure to assure students that they need not feel pressured to speak if they are uncomfortable.

Tell the Truth page 39

This worksheet requires students to recall an incident in their own lives in which they witnessed verbal abuse against someone else. By detailing the event, students will have an opportunity to analyze what happened, and how they might have helped.





Notes to the Teacher continued

Self-Assessment

page 41

This self-assessment requires students to reflect on whether they are tolerant or intolerant of certain behaviors. This may be the first time they have considered this type of reflection, so it may be a difficult task. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers, and that it is safe and okay to answer honestly. For all of us, making a change means that we must begin by recognizing our own behaviors and then make a conscious effort to stop those behaviors.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

page 43

This activity gives students a way to understand what a self-fulfilling prophecy is, and to examine how they can begin to avoid such negative verbal abuse.

Compliments

page 45

This assignment encourages students to exchange verbal compliments for at least a week. The intent of this assignment is not to focus on any of the material things that a person may possess, but rather on the inner qualities that help us get along in our lives. Sometimes, your students will not be able to come up with a compliment about an inner quality. Be sure to give examples to help them understand what an “inner quality” is—for example, being generous, attentive, caring, gregarious, witty, thoughtful, considerate, etc.

Know Your Rights

page 47

This activity allows students to itemize the personal rights which they feel that they, and others, should be granted. By considering how they wish to be treated, they will think further about how they should treat others.

Personal Worksheet

page 49

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage students to think about their personal patterns of emotional behavior. Although this worksheet should be completed by each student, it should only be shared with the class if everyone feels comfortable and if class confidentiality is assured.

Write a Letter

page 51

For this writing assignment, students are instructed to write a letter to a fictitious character in order to give advice about avoiding self-fulfilling prophecies, emotionally abusive relationships, and using words that hurt.





Student Worksheets





Emotional Triggers

An emotional trigger is something that gets you upset very quickly. It can be a rude name, a look on someone’s face, a sarcastic remark, or anything else to which you react emotionally with hurt feelings. Sometimes you may not even realize that your feelings have been hurt until you reflect back on it. Please read the following list of common emotional triggers and give yourself a score of 1-5 depending on how you usually react.

Give yourself a:

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| If the situation doesn’t upset you at all. | If the situation bothers you a little. | If you get mad when this situation happens. | If you get furious when this situation happens. | If you lose control when this situation happens. |

Behavior

Score

Someone yells at me.	
I can’t find something that I need to have this minute.	
I realize I made a mistake on a test after I’ve handed it in.	
Someone blames me for something.	
I can’t do a fun activity with a friend because I didn’t do my chores.	
It feels like no one is listening to what I’m saying.	
My brother/sister/friend keeps doing something that annoys me.	
I didn’t win the contest that I thought I should have won.	
I lose some money or some possession that I really liked.	
I can’t figure out the math problem the teacher said was a “simple” one.	
I get punished for my behavior.	
I lend something to a friend and they return it broken.	
I don’t have enough money to buy something that I really wanted.	
Someone pushes me and then laughs when I bump into something.	
Your total points:	

ANALYSIS: A high total score (above 50) should make you think about a plan for how to deal with your emotions during these times. If your score was low (14-30), you probably react well to many situations, but it’s also likely that some of your emotional triggers may not have been listed above. Try to think of some other things that may get you upset. If you can’t think of anything, maybe you have mastered the ability to deal with your emotions in a constructive manner—congratulations!





Research

For this research project, you will need to learn more about a group of people who have suffered dehumanization—treated as less than human—at some time in history (including recent events). You may select your own group, as long as they have something in common. For example, they could share a race, religion, lifestyle, physical characteristic, economic level, etc.

Once you have decided on which group you wish to research, you will need to find literature explaining what has happened to these people over a period of time. Look for references that explain the situation in which this group of people found themselves, and identify any controversial issues surrounding them.

After conducting your research, write a 2-3 page paper in which you address some of the following questions:

- What type of dehumanizing actions did this group of people experience?
- Was it emotional violence? If so, give examples—such as name calling, stigmatizing opinions, or inferior treatment.
- Did the emotional violence lead to physical violence? If so, provide examples.
- How did this dehumanizing treatment ultimately affect this group of people?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you do that might have significantly changed the situation that you’ve just learned about? How would the outcome have been different?





Oral Report

Please read the following instructions and make a choice on the person you would like to research. Your goal should be a 10 minute presentation to the class—including a question and answer period at the end of your presentation. Use any available pictures or other illustrations to make your presentation more interesting. If you need a definition of verbal abuse and how it differs from constructive criticism, please consult the **Verbal Abuse versus Constructive Criticism** fact sheet on page 39.

Step 1

Your job is to find a leader who used constructive criticism instead of verbal abuse. In your oral presentation, you will discuss the successes and short comings of this leader. This person can be someone in your community, your church, your family, your school, your neighborhood, or a national leader. These are the criteria for your choice:

- they must have been very angry about an unfair situation
- they must have chosen peaceful means to try to change the situation

Possible national and international leaders you might consider researching are:

Cesar Chavez

United Farm Workers

The Dali Lama

Spiritual Leader from Tibet

Mother Theresa

Children’s Advocate

Dolores Huerta

United Farm Workers

Ralph Nader

Consumer Rights Advocate

Mahatma Gandhi

Spiritual Leader from India

Once you have selected the person you wish to write about, go to the library and check books out about that person or interview them (if they are available for an interview).

Step 2

Now you are ready to write about your findings. Please state:

- The person you have researched
- Discuss what may have angered them and what was unfair about the situation
- Describe how they used constructive criticism
- Evaluate whether they were successful or not

Knowing what you do about verbal abuse and constructive criticism, would you have done anything different if you were in their shoes? If so, discuss your idea(s). To make your class presentation more interesting, you may want to find some pictures or other artifacts for display that relate to the person you have chosen to research.





Debate

Verbal abuse is, essentially, using words to attack another person. Although there are laws against stalking—in which even a threatening phone message may be a punishable offense—there are currently no laws protecting individuals from verbal abuse. Should a man or woman be able to press charges against someone who is verbally abusive? Why or why not?

YES

Although cursing and using abrasive language is nothing new, it's about time that we begin to realize that speaking abusively does leave its own emotional scars.

✓ Add your own reasons here:

✓ Add your own reasons here:

✓ Add your own reasons here:

NO

How can we create a law to criminalize verbal abuse? Not only would such a law be impossible to uphold, but it would restrict each individual's right to free speech.

x Add your own reasons here:

x Add your own reasons here:

x Add your own reasons here:





Defining a Relationship

Look up the word “relationship” in a dictionary. You will probably find a definition similar to this one:

re•la•tion•ship (ri la’ shun ship), n.
1. A connection, association, or involvement. 2. Connection by blood or marriage. 3. An emotional or other connection between people.

How does your dictionary define a relationship? Write the definition here.

Do you think this definition is adequate? What else would you include? In the space below, write your own definition of a relationship.

Now write your own definition of a respectful, healthy relationship.

Now write your own definition of a verbally-abusive relationship.





Glossary of Terms

After watching the video, create a definition for the list of terms below. Although some terms may not have been defined in the video, you can look up the definition in the dictionary. Please use your own words to describe each term.

Dehumanization:

Self-fulfilling prophecy:

Constructive anger:

Verbal abuse:

Destructive anger:

Harassment:

Self-esteem:

Threatening behaviors:

Empathy:

Personal power:





Experiment 1

“I am bad / I am good” Arm Push

Select one person from your small group who will serve as the Arm Pusher and five individuals in your group who will serve as the Talkers. Repeat the following step by step instructions on each of the Talkers.

1. Instruct the Talker to hold his/her strongest arm out to one side and repeat the following phrase ten times: *“I am bad.”*
2. As the Talker repeats the phrase, have the Arm Pusher attempt to push the Talker’s arm down.

	I am bad	Arm push successful?	I am good	Arm push successful?
Talker #1 name:				
Talker #2 name:				
Talker #3 name:				
Talker #4 name:				
Talker #5 name:				

3. Again instruct the Talker to hold his/her strongest arm out to one side and to repeat the following phrase ten times: *“I am good.”*
4. As the Talker repeats the phrase, have the “Arm Pusher” attempt to push the Talker’s arm down.
5. Repeat steps 1-3 on the remaining Talkers.

When you have completed the experiment on all the Talkers, you are ready to report on your findings. Go on to the next page of this assignment.





Experiment 2

Checking Your Dehumanizing Behaviors

Some young people think that it is okay to call their friends names. However, name calling is a dehumanizing behavior because it is a method of making fun of other people at their own expense. Can you remember a time when name-calling was taken seriously by you or by a friend?

This experiment is a challenge to you: for the next 24 hours, you must check your own behavior by attempting not to dehumanize anyone. (And yes, your siblings count because they, too, are human beings.) If you absent-mindedly dehumanize someone, all you need to do is start over again. Keep a mental note as to how many times you had to start over again.

Once you've completed the experiment, you are ready to answer these questions:

Was this experiment difficult or easy? Why?

Did you deal with people in any different manner than you ordinarily do? Explain.

Imagine that a person was constantly dehumanized through name-calling—maybe because of their appearance, their religion, or because of a particular lifestyle choice that they have made. How do you think this person would start interpreting their worth?





Experiment 3

Emotional Violence

This assignment requires that you watch television. (Yes, you read correctly: TV for homework!) Your job will be to record examples of emotional violence as you watch television programs. You will need to have this worksheet with you. Emotional violence is anything that intentionally hurts another's feelings. Any time you see an emotionally-violent action on television, keep score by making a mark on the chart below. When you complete your television watching, you will be asked to make a comment on what you saw.

	Emotional Violence on Television
Score	
Example 1	
Example 2	
Example 3	
Example 4	
Example 5	

Which character was most likely to hurt someone's feelings?

Who was the most likely target of someone's emotionally violent comments?

What was a typical response from the person who had their feelings hurt?

Did anyone come to their rescue in the program?

Can you think of a recommendation to give to the producers of this program that would make it less emotionally violent? What would it be?





Think About This 1

Please read the following scenario (either out loud or silently) and then respond to the questions below.

Billy was a guy who lived in my neighborhood. The rumor was that his father was actually his Grandfather's brother. As a child, other kids would tease him about being slow. In middle school, the kids started calling him retard, inbred, mutant, and worse. Billy was verbally abused constantly. Because no one else seemed to believe in him, Billy decided that he really was slow and wouldn't try anything new—especially in a group setting where he might be ridiculed. As he got older, Billy never interacted with other people. Eventually, he decided that his life was not worth living anymore. He committed suicide at the age of 17.

1. Besides Billy, is there anyone else in this scenario who is responsible for Billy's self-destructive action against himself?

2. Can you think of anything the neighborhood kids could have done to improve the situation for Billy?

3. What moral lesson can we learn from this scenario?





Think About This 2

Please read the following scenario (either out loud or silently) and then respond to the questions below.

Everyone at school called Misty a “slut” or “tramp,” or any other word that has a sexual connotation of promiscuity in it. She received this reputation at the age of 15 because she liked to talk to boys more than girls. One day, Misty overheard some girls calling her names. This really hurt her feelings. She didn’t know what to do. She asked one of her friends why this was happening to her and no one else. Her friend said, “Well what do you expect, Misty? You’re always talking to everyone else’s boyfriend.” Even her old friends seemed to believe the rumors. From that day forward, Misty decided she wasn’t going to talk to anyone—in fact, she wasn’t even going to go to school where, it seemed, that everyone was talking about her. Eventually, she dropped out of school and no one heard from her for a long time. One day, one of her old classmates saw her on the street corner where all the prostitutes hang out looking for “tricks.” At that point, the rumors started spreading once again. “See, we were right, Misty was a prostitute,” one person said.

1. Let’s assume that Misty really is a prostitute. Which of the following statements do you think is true and why?

Misty was a prostitute. That is why the students were calling her those names.

Misty started believing the names that she was being called and so began to act like a prostitute.

2. Why do you think Misty dropped out of school? Do you think her decision had anything to do with her response to emotional violence?

3. What do you think might be a better way for the girls to handle their anger towards Misty instead of talking behind her back and spreading rumors?

5. Do you think that spreading rumors should be considered as verbal abuse?





Self Assessment

As you read the following behaviors, use this scale of 1-5 to rate how you would *usually* respond to the situations described. Be honest in your answers.

1 tolerant	<i>You don't care when it happens and you think that it's okay.</i>	➔	5 intolerant	<i>You don't like when it happens and you think that it is wrong.</i>
---------------	---	---	-----------------	---

Behavior	Rating
My best friends calling me names within some limits.	
My best friends call me names without any limitation.	
I call my best friends names within some limits.	
I call my best friends names without any limitation.	
When my friends are making fun of someone else, I remain silent even though I know it would hurt the other person's feelings if they knew.	
When my friends are making fun of someone else, I laugh right along with them even though I know that it would hurt that person's feelings if they knew what we were laughing about.	
When someone else does better than me, I try to find fault somewhere in their life instead of enjoying their success with them.	
I judge others before talking to them.	
I don't talk about my anger, I get revenge and it feels good.	
I've considered having a physical fight with someone after they were verbally abusive towards me.	

ANALYSIS: Use this assessment as a way to be honest with yourself about your reactions to certain situations. Please look at the behaviors that you rated the highest. If you thought you were extremely tolerant of a certain behavior, ask yourself what it would mean to be intolerant of that same behavior. Would our society or your community be a better or worse place to live if you paid more attention to verbal abuse? Were there any responses in yourself that you would like to change? Maybe you have been tolerant of something that you would like to develop an intolerance for (or vice versa).





Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

A self-fulfilling prophecy is just what it sounds like: a prediction that you make about yourself which comes true. Self-fulfilling prophecies are typically negative. For instance, when you tell yourself *“I’ll never finish my history paper by Thursday,”* the chances are good that you won’t.

Someone else can contribute to our self-fulfilling prophecies by branding us with negative labels—such as stupid, lazy, good for nothing. When others insist that *“You’ll never be a success,”* it may cause the person to act in ways that confirm this prediction.

Have you ever been the target of someone else’s negative prophecy? Explain.

To what extent do you think you were affected by the negative prophecy? Did the negative prediction come true? Why or why not?

In the future, how will you handle any negative predictions that others might make about you?

In the future, how will you handle any negative predictions that you might make about yourself?





Know Your Rights

We all have rights concerning how others treat us—whether the treatment is verbal or physical. Among the first steps in becoming more assertive is knowing your rights. Assertiveness means that each of us has a personal right to:

- ⊙ have our own feelings and opinions
- ⊙ be treated with respect
- ⊙ be taken seriously
- ⊙ be offered constructive criticism that is not intentionally hurtful
- ⊙ be shown fair consideration when we make a request
- ⊙ be dealt with in a fair and honest manner

What other rights do you think one should expect from other people?

In your relationships with others, do you assume you have these rights? Why or why not?

In your relationships with others, do you behave as if you recognize that others have these rights, too? Why or why not?

Do you feel you need to be more assertive in any of the areas listed above? Which ones? Describe at least three ways in which you could learn to be more assertive and defend yourself against verbal abuse.





Personal Worksheet

While the following topic promises to provide a valuable learning experience, please be aware that it will be necessary to be incredibly honest when reflecting on a past event that may not be so pleasant to remember. You will need to choose a time when you completely lost control and used verbal abuse instead of constructive criticism. Please write down what actually happened and why you think you did what you did. For the learning part, you get to change the outcome of the experience. In other words, you get to describe how you could have resolved the situation using constructive criticism rather than verbal abuse. Although this exercise cannot possibly change what happened, it will help you explore other ideas on how to express your anger constructively. After all, no one will ever be able to promise never to get angry again. We all have an option, though, on how we choose to express our feelings of anger.

What really happened . . .

A different ending to that story . . .





Verbal Abuse

versus

Constructive Criticism

Fact Sheet

We all are familiar with verbal abuse. It is the language people use when they are angry and have lost control. Verbal abuse is when people say things that may destroy relationships and emotionally hurt others. Sometimes we might feel remorseful after we have used verbal abuse, other times we think we've succeeded at getting back at someone with revenge. Verbal abuse allows the situation to escalate and, as a result, nothing is peacefully resolved.

Constructive criticism, on the other hand, is language that allows us to talk about—and maybe even work to change—a situation that we don't like or are angry about. Since it isn't anger we need to run from, because we all get angry from time to time, we need to learn how to constructively and positively deal with the anger that we feel on occasion. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was very angry about discrimination and the unfair treatment of people due to their race. Instead of using verbal abuse to perform acts of physical or emotional violence, he chose to organize others and speak against the situation that he thought was unfair. He used constructive criticism and passive resistance.





What You Should Know

Fact Sheet

As you've seen in the video, people who have suffered from verbal abuse and emotional violence often wish that they had known how to respond earlier.

Here are the facts that you should know:

- Someone else's negative or cruel words are not your fault.
- Trust your feelings: if you feel hurt, you probably are being hurt.
- People who rely on verbal abuse are usually not very strong or sure of themselves.
- You have a right to be treated with respect.
- You can get help and remove yourself from an abusive situation.
- You have a right to set limits, as long as they are reasonable. For instance, you can say "Keep your comments to yourself, " or "Don't call me names anymore."
- You can discuss your problem with supportive people (adults, teachers, parents, friends).
- No one can take away your own self-respect or dignity with words, even though they may try.





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