

Helping Teens Cope with Verbal Abuse

Unit 3 Resource Article

Verbal abuse hurts teens emotionally just as much as physical or sexual abuse. Teens are sensitive. They often judge themselves by the words of others. Verbal abuse damages their sense of worth and may cause long-term emotional problems.

Some teens who are verbally abused do not know that they are being mistreated. They may think that it is normal for family members to yell, curse, or insult each other. Sometimes abusers tell teens that they deserve the abuse or are responsible for it. It is important to help the teens understand that verbal abuse is never the victim's fault.

What Is Verbal Abuse?

Someone is verbally abusive if he or she repeatedly behaves in any of the following ways:

- Using unkind names
- Belittling, insulting, or shaming the teen, such as telling her that she is worthless or a mistake
- Making negative comparisons to others (For example, saying something such as, "He is so much smarter than you. He makes you look stupid.")
- Yelling and swearing at a teen
- Threatening to leave or abandon a teen
- Threatening physical harm to a teen
- Blaming a teen for personal problems or life circumstances (For example, saying, "I would have a better life without you.")
- Physically or verbally abusing other people in front of a teen

How Does Verbal Abuse Hurt Teens?

Teens who are verbally abused may experience emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, guilt, shame, self-blame, and worry. They may have difficulty coping with their emotions. They may have low self-esteem, and they may think they are worthless.

Verbally abused teens may have a hard time trusting people and making friends. They often do not like

or get along with others. They may bully others and may not want to spend time with other teens.

These teens may have problems with schoolwork or abuse drugs and alcohol. They may hurt themselves by hitting, pinching, scratching, or cutting themselves. They may attempt suicide.

Teens who have been verbally abused often become the victims of abuse in their adult relationships.

Why Do People Verbally Abuse Others?

Understanding why some people verbally abuse teens can help in the healing process. This does not excuse their behavior or mean that the behavior did not hurt others. People often become verbal abusers because of the following issues:

- They were abused themselves.
- They do not know how to express their feelings.
- They do not know how to solve problems without becoming angry.
- They use drugs or alcohol, and this makes it hard for them to control their words and emotions.
- They have a mental illness that makes it hard for them to control their behavior.

How Can You Help Teens Who Have Been Verbally Abused?

Reaffirm their value. Remind them often that God loves them. Reassure them that they are totally precious and valuable to Him.

Use a lot of praise and encouragement.

Teach them to understand helpful criticism. Helpful criticism is advice that is meant to improve something. It is truthful, focuses on behavior rather than worth, and helps teens think about things they can change for the better. Helpful criticism should always be shared privately. Being able to hear and process helpful criticism will enable teens to become successful adults.

Allow teens to talk about how verbal abuse makes them feel and how it affects them.

Reassure the teens that they can heal with God's help.

Repeat all the things on this list over and over. Your kind and helpful words will allow the teens to experience the benefits of loving speech, and they will begin to see themselves as you and God do—as unique and valuable individuals.

Article written by Carey Sturgeon.

***Verbal abuse is
never the victim's fault.***