

Recognizing The Effects Of Abuse

By Cheri DeMoss

Abuse is such an ominous word. It's so emotion packed that most shy away from understanding exactly what it is.

Abuse is when we make another person feel bad about who they are or what they do. There are four main types of abuse: verbal, emotional, physical and sexual. Verbal and emotional abuse are the two most common forms. So common, in fact, that for the majority of us—it goes unnoticed

You're in a store looking at roller blades. As you're browsing, you observe a father and daughter walk in. The father says gently, "Okay, which kind do you want?" The little 8 year old girl says she isn't sure and wants to try on a few pair. Her father tells her that is a great idea.

The little girl becomes completely engrossed in the shopping process. You can tell, as she tries on a few sets of roller blades & shows them to her father, how excited she is. When she tries the third pair on you can hear her say to her father, "I like these." Her father tells her to skate a little bit to make sure they are comfortable. The little girl starts to skate around the isle and calls to her father a few feet away to look at her. She is looking over her shoulder at her father, smiling. And suddenly she plows into an elderly woman



A lot of abuse seems so normal to us that it is hard to recognize. We're not used to seeing abusive behavior for what it is—a way to control someone by making them feel bad about themselves.

shopper.

The father, obviously embarrassed by his daughter's "clumsiness", moves quickly to the shopper & angrily says to his daughter, "What's the matter with you? Why don't you watch where you're going?!"

The little girl says, with panic in her voice, that she didn't mean to do it, that she was

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only doing what he told her to do. The father, still angry and embarrassed, says, "So now it's my fault?! If this is the way you skate, you're not getting skates. Take those off, we're going home!"

We have all witness scenes like this and usually don't give it a whole lot of thought, let alone think of it as abuse. **But it is!**

Anything that is done to makes someone else (especially a child) feel bad about who they are or what they do is abuse. The above is an example of both verbal and emotional abuse. The little girl was verbally abused by being shamed and blamed. She was made to feel bad for following her father's instructions. She was emotionally abused by being falsely accused of being a poor skater and then punished unfairly. (page 3)

Moving Beyond Abuse Recovery Classes

Abuse causes us to hide ourselves. Hiding our feelings, our past, our wants and needs means that we are scared most of the time. Being so scared is what makes having loving, healthy relationships such a challenge. Hiding ourselves guarantees love & caring is temporary.

In these groups we learn how to change the effects of abuse. We focus on:

- relearning that intimacy equals closeness & safety;
- choosing safe people;
- saying what we feel & who we are;

- not letting fear control our lives;
- life is safe and fun.

Abuse creates unconscious, frightened belief systems that run our lives. The lesson abuse teaches us is that simply being close to others is dangerous.

These classes help you choose new behaviors over old fears. With new information and a non-shaming, gentle structure you will learn to move beyond fear & abuse.

**For Information Call:
773- 338-2889**

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Never Let Them Get It Right

By Cheri DeMoss

The key to understanding & recognizing abuse is to notice the behaviors. The more you can see them clearly the more ineffective abusive behaviors become.

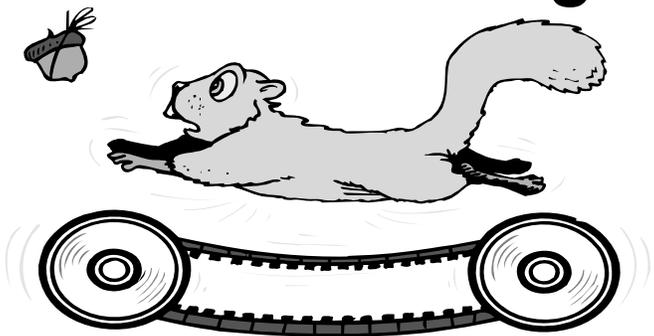
Abusive people convey the message, both overtly and covertly, that if you make them comfortable by doing what they want you to do - ***you will get it right.*** They will like you; they will think you're a good person; they lead you to believe that when you "get it right" they will stop being abusive.

But watching their behaviors tells you all the things they do to make it ***impossible for anyone to get it right.***

They change the rules and give double messages. For example: They yell at you for letting the alarm wake them in the morning. They tell you that if you woke them softly and gently instead, they wouldn't yell at you. The next morning, when you try to wake them as per their request; they yell at you for being too gentle..

They don't say what they mean or mean what they say. Your mother tells you to go put on a blue shirt. You go upstairs, pick out your favorite blue shirt & put it on. You come downstairs with every expectation that you're going to be praised. But instead she disapproves, saying, "I meant the powder blue shirt! What is the matter with you? Don't you have any fashion sense?"

The goal of abusive behavior is to make you feel about yourself; about who you are, what you feel or what you do. For the abuser, it is intolerable for them to see you feeling good about yourself.



When we're dealing with abusive behaviors, most of us don't realize we will never "get it right".

Your feeling good underlines how bad they feel about themselves.

By trying to get you to feel bad, the abuser feels powerful - feels a temporary raise in their self-esteem.

Abusive people walk around feeling bad and wrong. If they can make you feel bad and wrong about yourself then they feel a false sense of elevation in their self-esteem.

Because this raised esteem is artificial and temporary,

they need to keep repeating the abusive behavior in order to not feel bad about themselves. Much the same way an alcoholic needs more alcoholic to numb how bad they feel.

Once we stop trying & realize we will never "get it right" the double messages; crazy-making behaviors and intimidation slowly starts to lose its hold on us.

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Did You Know

By Cheri DeMoss

That abuser have no stable connection between themselves & the child/adult they abuse. They only react. Their reactions are based solely on what they feel at the moment.

There is little to no thought involved. The inconsistent connection between the abuser & the child/adult is fed by the abuser's belief that this is normal & they are right.

When the abuser feels scared, threatened or sad they become angry. Striking out at anyone, in any way they can; especially those most powerless - like a child.

The unconscious goal is to make everyone else more frightened than they are. They will make themselves feel powerful at the expense of a child...or adult.

Are Your Relationships Abusive?

Below is a list of abusive behaviors that will help you evaluate your relationships.

Emotional Abuse

- Flies into unexpected anger or rage.
- Give double messages & blames you for being confused.
- Tries to control you by restricting your social life, money, work or access to your friends or family.
- Does or says things to make you feel bad about yourself.
- Threatens to hurt you, themselves or your family if you don't do what they ask.
- Minimizes your feelings.
- Criticizes you whenever you're feeling good about something.
- Not allowing you to express or have your own feelings.
- Manipulates you with lies & contradictions.
- Talks in vague, unclear ways & get mad at you for not understanding.

Physical Abuse

- Pushes or shoves you.
- Bites, scratches, kicks or chokes you.
- Hits or punches you.
- Throws things at you.
- Refuses to help you when you are sick or injured.
- Leaves you in unsafe situations.
- Keeps you from leaving when you want to leave.

Sexual Abuse

- Minimizes the importance of your feelings about sex.
- Criticizes you sexually.
- Insists on unwanted touching.
- Withholds sex and affection as punishment.
- Forces you to have sex.
- Insists you do sexual things you are not comfortable with.

Recognizing The Effects Of Abuse

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She was shamed and punished because the father was having a reaction of embarrassment. And like most of us do when we have a reaction—we blame the person closest to us.

The father did “crazy-making” behaviors by giving the little girl the message that he was being fair and reasonable because she was a bad skater because she knocked down the elderly women.

Emotional abuse is when we, especially as children, are exposed to double messages and crazy-making behaviors that are negative & confusing. These are no win situations. They don't make sense but we are told they do make

Childhood is often another name for abuse. Whether it's verbal, emotional, physical or sexual.

sense. These behaviors are emotionally abusive because no matter how hard we try we cannot make sense of them. Then we end up believing there is something wrong with us.

Sexual and physical abuse is usually kept as family secrets and up until recent years there has not been much thought given to the impact this kind of abuse has on us as adults. Research shows, that without exception, those who hit children, commit violent crimes, rape, murder, or sexually abuse a child have, themselves, been the victim of sexual or physical abuse a child.

For many for us childhood is often another word for abuse.

Whether it's physical, sexual, emotional and/or verbal abuse. Research shows that 83% of a child's day, everyday of their lives from age two on up is filled with negative comments about what they do, say, think or feel.

Some of us find it threatening to think of childhood as abusive. Our minds go to the good times; happy times. And there were fun times; times with laughter and a sense of belonging. There were times of praise, surprise and curiosity. No one's childhood was 100% abusive, just like no one's childhood was 100% non-abusive.

Yet abuse, in any amount, has an effect on us. It creates, causes and perpetuates shame, fear and a deep seated belief that there is something wrong with us. When we're abused we learn to believe:

- Intimacy equal pain
- We are “bad”

- To trust those who can't be trusted
- Those who love us will hurt us
- We must live in constant fear and shame
- Life is scary

The effect of abuse is like the background music in a mall. Sometimes we notice the music - most of the time we tune it out. We pay little attention to the continuous beat even though we are walking and moving to it. Abuse creates beliefs that cause us to behave in way we may not be aware of or understand.

We may not understand or be aware that we push good people away; are drawn to untrustworthy people; or that we make it hard for people to get and stay close to us.

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It's not possible to negotiate with an abusive person to get them to stop being abusive. The need to get their self-esteem at other people's expense and the shame they have at looking at their own behavior makes it virtually impossible for them to negotiate with those they abuse.

When we accept even a basic level of abusive behavior, the abuser interprets this as permission to continue to act abusive. When we put our energies into getting the abusive person to understand that they should stop, instead of simply not accepting their abuse, they will continue.

Once we no longer accept emotional, verbal, sexual or physical abuse as normal. Once we recognize that “Crazy-making” behavior is still abuse. The abuser stops the abuse because it is no longer allowed or moves on to someone who will allow it.

About Cheri DeMoss - Empowering Options

Cheri DeMoss is Founder and Director of **EMPOWERING OPTIONS**[®], an organization specializing in personal empowerment. For the past 17 years Cheri has been teaching others how to turn obstacles into options. Cheri's warm, innovative approach focuses on how learned shame and dysfunctional beliefs from childhood dictates our behaviors as adults. She creates a shame-free, completely supportive and positive environment where you can easily understand, and explore the behavior patterns and ideas that no longer serve you.

In addition to working with individuals, groups and couples **EMPOWERING OPTIONS**[®] offers seminars, workshops, CD's, newsletters, and uniquely effective classes for couples. She provides a safe, encouraging environment for clients to look at how these patterns greatly shape how we experience relationships, work situations, and our own self-esteem; providing information, validation, and ideas that make it easier to create the changes you are looking for.

In addition to maintaining a private practice, Cheri designs, produces and presents **EMPOWERING OPTIONS**[®] **Empower By Example** seminar series. Cheri also provides in-service training for school districts; customizes workshops, classes & training seminars for mental health professionals, businesses and communities.; consultation for a wide variety of businesses, and presents at national and state conferences. Cheri and her associates conduct a full time private practice in Chicago.

The more information, the easier it is to be in charge of our lives. Raising our esteem helps us reach our goals. There is more information about relationships, parenting, new ideas, behaviors and options at www.EmpoweringOptions.com

The Trick Is Recognizing It

By Cheri DeMoss

Most of us are inexperienced at recognizing abusive behaviors simply because they are so common. Emotional and verbal abuse are considered normal conversation. Some, if not all, of these were done in our families of origin. Some of these we might even do

Abusers are like emotional vampires. They need to suck the self-esteem right out of us the way vampires need to suck their victim's life blood.

ourselves. These behaviors seem normal because we are exposed to them from our earliest family interactions, in movies & TV, at school and with our friends. Keep in mind, it's not just one behavior happening occasionally, but most all of them happening frequently.

Blaming & Shaming:

The most common abusive behaviors is being blamed or shamed. The other person blames or shames us for what we feel, do, say or for things that are going wrong in their lives. When most of those things are just part of normal living.

This type of abuse is hard to recognize because it is presented in the form of common verbiage like: "You make me mad." "You make me happy." In either case we are being held responsible for the other person's emotional comfort.



We don't recognize abusive behaviors because they are so common, feel familiar to us and are shown as normal by our friends, family and the media.

"I had to hit you because you didn't listen." "I ignored you because you weren't saying anything interesting." are examples of being held responsible for the other person's actions.

Hypersensitivity:

Abusive people are easily

Abusers raise their self-esteem at the expense of our own.

insulted. They claim their feelings are "hurt" when they're actually angry. And they're angry, not because you said something hurtful, as much as because you said something true that they feel shame about.

Unrealistic Expectation:

By using abusive behaviors, the person using them hide the fact that they are extremely dependent on you for their self-esteem. They have the expectation that you will make them emotionally comfortable and take care of their practical and emo-

tional needs most, if not all, of the time. This dynamic is much the same as a vampire is dependent on their victim's life blood.

Jealousy is NOT about love. It's about the abuser trying to control their fears by controlling you.

Verbal Abuse:

Abuser, as a matter of course, say things that are shaming, hurtful and cruel. When called on these behaviors the abuser will tell you, you are too "sensitive" or that you misunderstood what was said.

Quick & Abrupt Change in Mood:

Feeling confused or frightened by the sudden mood swings of the abuser is another red flag sign that you are in a no-win "vampire" situation.

Jealousy:

Abusers tell you they are

jealous because they love you. When, in fact, it has nothing to do with love and everything to do with their EXTREME insecurity & possessiveness. They act in a controlling manner about your friends, family, co-workers and frequently, even their own children. Jealousy is always about them trying to control their fear by controlling you.

These are some of the most obvious and most socially prevalent abusive behaviors. We see them depicted in the media, in restaurants, coffee-houses and by our family and friends as normal, common and accepted.

In reality they do nothing but make us, **and especially children**, feel bad about ourselves, what we do, how we feel and who we are. They distort who we are and temporarily raise the abuser's self-esteem at the expense of our own.

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