



# VERBAL & EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Victory Over Verbal and Emotional Abuse

June Hunt



HOPE  
*for the Heart*

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JUNE HUNT



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Dear Friend,

When I was a teenager, life at home was painfully turbulent. Unfortunately, I was part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. I remember my mother sensitively saying to me, “June, it’s not *what* you say, it’s the *way* you say it.” Oh, how I hated to hear those words, especially since she needed to say them often.

With full sarcasm, I mentally mocked that phrase a half-octave higher: *It’s not what you say, it’s the way you say it.* Then, one day it “clicked.” For on that day, I actually heard my disrespectful tone and then I understood.

Slowly I admitted to myself, *That’s true—it’s not what I say, it’s the way I say it.* Actually, I didn’t know it at the time, but I was in bondage to bitterness. My seething anger had turned into hatred, yet I felt absolutely justified in my hatred.

The object of my hatred was clearly my father. My teenage heart could not tolerate his verbal and emotional abuse, especially toward my mother. With every harsh word, as she felt more and more devalued, I felt the devastating impact on her heart. She was my Achilles heel—she was my soft spot. Consequently, I became consumed with thinking, *How can I protect her? How can I make him stop?*

My mindset was logical: *Somebody has to let him know how wrong he is!* Since no one else seemed willing to “step up to the plate,” I deduced that it had to be me, by default. Therefore, I used my

indirect tactic called, “If looks could kill!” Of course, all I did was make matters worse. And, horror of horrors, I was becoming like the one I hated!

My only direct confrontation (addressing his adultery) resulted in a severe, painful repercussion—I was sent away to boarding school for two months, and then sent away to camp for the summer. Dad said, “*You are a bad influence on the family.*”

Numerous times my father told me, “*After dinner, you are not to be with your mother. All of you children are bad for her.*” In truth, he was excessively jealous of anyone who would take her away from him for any length of time. Following the dinner meal, we were sent upstairs and forbidden to come back downstairs. Yet, at some point during the course of the evening, Mother would excuse herself with the pretense of going to the restroom. But instead, she would quickly ascend the stairs, making the rounds to all four of us, giving each of us a gentle kiss or a warm embrace, and lightly shower us with soothing words like, “*Everything will be all right. I love you.*”

In the midst of her tender touches, however, I felt the heaviness of her heart and the pain of her isolation. On occasion, Mother’s eyes would fill with tears, “*Honey, I’m so, so sorry. He doesn’t mean to be this way. All we can do is trust the Lord.*”

Years after my father’s death, as we talked about

those earlier years, Mom confided, “*There was nothing I could do. Just nothing I could do.*” I didn’t counter her because I knew she genuinely felt that way. But is that accurate?

When someone is being verbally or emotionally abusive to you, is there anything you can do? More accurately, is there something you can do in a healthy way that leads to healing? I say Yes, because I’ve learned to do it.

You do have *choices*. You can have *boundaries*. You can have *healing*. That is what this book is about. If only I had known the truths within this book years ago, I would have acted in a much healthier way and been saved much heartache.

As you allow Christ to be in control of your mind, your will, and emotions, I pray that by absorbing these truths, you will have healthier relationships and be free and whole within your soul.

Yours in the Lord’s hope,



June Hunt

# VERBAL & EMOTIONAL ABUSE

## Victory Over Verbal and Emotional Abuse

“You’re worthless!” “You’ll never amount to anything!” “I wish you had never been born!” Words like these in childhood can wound the heart for a lifetime.

And further wounding takes place in adulthood when “control” is the name of the game. Threats like, “If you leave me, I’ll hurt the children!” or “I’ve taken the keys—you’re not going anywhere!” are both emotionally and verbally abusive and are ways of maintaining control in relationships.

Abuse can also be perpetrated without a word—whether with degrading looks, obscene gestures, or threatening behaviors. These actions inflict immense pain and impede emotional growth. You don’t have to allow an abuser to make you feel worthless. Jesus says that God not only knows each and every sparrow, but He also knows you intimately and considers you to be of great worth.

**“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”**  
(Luke 12:6–7)



## DEFINITIONS

### WHAT IS Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is the unseen fallout of all other forms of abuse: physical, mental, verbal, sexual, and even spiritual abuse. People often minimize the importance of emotions. Yet with deeply wounded people, their feelings can be the driving force behind their choices, the life-sustaining element of their very beings. Emotional abuse strikes at the very core of who we are, crushing our confidence, wearing away our sense of worth, crushing our spirit. The Bible says,

**“A cheerful heart is good medicine,  
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”**  
(Proverbs 17:22)

► **Emotional abuse** is any ongoing, negative behavior used to control or hurt another person. Emotional abuse ranges from consistent indifference to continual belittling of character.

All forms of abuse—emotional, verbal, mental, physical, spiritual, and sexual—damage a person’s sense of dignity and God-given worth.

All forms of abuse wound the spirit of a person and, therefore, are emotionally abusive. Proverbs, the book of wisdom, says, “*A crushed spirit who can bear?*” (Proverbs 18:14)



► **Emotional abuse** or “psychological mistreatment” scars the spirit of the one abused.

The damage from emotional abuse lasts far longer than damage from any other kind of abuse. A broken arm will soon heal; a broken heart takes much longer.

After extended periods of emotional abuse, many victims lose hope, feeling that life is not worth living.

“*Hope deferred makes the heart sick.*”  
(Proverbs 13:12)

► **Emotional abuse** can be passive-aggressive.

Passive-aggressive abuse is a means of indirect, underhanded control; hence, the term is *passive-aggressive*.

Passive-aggressive abusers express their anger through nonassertive, covert behavior. In an attempt to gain covert control, they often use manipulation as a means of placing themselves in a position of dependence. Then, with underlying anger, they become faultfinders of the people on whom they depend.<sup>1</sup>

Victims of passive-aggressive people feel perplexed and dismayed at being the target of punitive and manipulative behaviors.

Friends of passive-aggressive abusers often become enmeshed in trying to comfort or console them in response to their claims of unjust treatment and their inability to handle life on their own.

Passive-aggressive abusers need to recognize and resolve their very real anger and take to heart God’s warning:

“*Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.*”(Ecclesiastes 7:9)

► **Emotional abuse** can be either overt or covert rejection.<sup>2</sup>

*Overt rejection* conveys the message that a person is unwanted or unloved (as when one is belittled as a child).

*Covert rejection* takes place in subtle ways that may or may not be intended to cause harm by the perpetrator (as when one is ignored as a child).

## Biblical Example

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### Both Overt and Covert Rejection: Tamar

(Read 2 Samuel chapter 13.)

#### ► OVERT REJECTION:

Tamar, daughter of King David, was raped by her half brother Amnon and then was openly and blatantly despised and shunned by him.

#### ► COVERT REJECTION:

Their father, King David, indirectly rejected Tamar by failing to execute justice on her behalf when he refused to hold Amnon accountable for his sin against Tamar. David, in essence, let his son off the hook by totally ignoring the sexual violation of his daughter.

**QUESTION: “What does the Bible say about emotional abuse?”**

**ANSWER:** The Bible doesn’t use the term “emotional abuse,” but it does instruct us as to how we are to treat one another. The Bible details numerous attitudes and actions we should have toward each other. If we follow these guidelines, we will never be abusive toward anyone:

**“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”**  
(Philippians 2:3–4)

## WHAT IS Verbal Abuse?

Verbal abuse is a form of overt, emotional abuse. A skilled woodsman wields his weapon carefully, chopping repeatedly on a precise spot until the targeted tree falls. This lumberjack takes pride in controlling himself and his weapon, never striking a careless blow. Likewise, a verbal abuser uses his tongue as a weapon to hack away at another person. This abuser is skilled in his ability to strike a blow—wielding words that caustically cut heart and soul.

**“You love every harmful word,  
O you deceitful tongue!”**  
(Psalm 52:4)

► **Verbal abuse** is the systematic, ongoing use of harmful words or a sharp tone in an attempt to control or dominate another person.

*Abuse* means mistreatment: the destructive misuse of something or someone.

Verbal abuse is always destructive.

*“Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit.”*  
(Psalm 52:2)

► **Verbal abuse** injures the feelings of others with reviling, insulting, or contemptuous words.

The Hebrew word for revile is *gadaph*, from a root word that means “cut” or “wound.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus said, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”* (Matthew 5:11)

► **Verbal abuse** often seeks to injure the reputation of others, using tactics such as backbiting, barbs, or belittling talk, and strategies such as slander, slurs, and lies.

*“You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth.”* (Psalm 52:3)