

## what can I do?

### **Know that abuse is not your fault.**

No one deserves to be abused emotionally or in any other way.

Find support by talking to others whom you think will listen, understand, and support you. If it is safe to do so, talk to family, friends, religious leaders, counselors, or other members of your community.

You can also contact your local Domestic Violence Program. They can offer help and support.

## you are not alone

There is help available for you or someone you know who suffers in an emotionally abusive relationship.

For more information, please contact the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.838.8238 v/tty or one of the other resources listed on the back of this brochure.

## a few facts

- The intent of emotional abuse is to destroy the victim's self-respect and feeling of self-worth.
- Emotional abuse is often disguised as a way of "teaching you to be a better person."
- Many experts believe that emotional abuse may have longer-lasting effects than physical abuse.
- Emotional abuse often leads to poor health, especially sleep disturbances.
- Emotional abuse affects children too.
- Abusers may try to make excuses by saying, "I lost control," but emotional abuse is really a way for them to gain control.

## Local resources:

or you can call:



*But I  
haven't  
been hit...*



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTION ALLIANCE**  
[emotional abuse brochure]

# *Emotional abuse is domestic violence.*

**Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors used by one person intended to exert power and control over another.**

It happens in family or intimate relationships, such as:

- dating relationships
- significant others
- married couples
- parent(s) & child(ren)
- caregiver relationships

**so...is domestic violence just hitting?**

**No.** Emotional abuse is part of domestic violence.

**emotional abuse can include:**

criticism . . . humiliation . . . threats . . . name-calling . . . isolation . . . mind games . . . making you feel crazy . . . threatening to “out” you . . . cutting off family, friends, and community . . . controlling the money . . . holding you hostage . . . calling you a “sell out” . . . using your disability against you . . . brainwashing . . . using your children against you . . . making you feel ashamed . . . the silent treatment . . . threatening to harm your pet(s) . . .

**how does emotional abuse affect me?**

Abusers will use many tactics to wear you down. As a result, you may feel:

- Fearful
- Tired
- Distant from other people
- Bad about yourself
- Dependent
- Crazy
- Loss of appetite
- Tense or anxious
- Emotionally drained
- Physically drained
- Alone

Some of the above symptoms can also affect you physically. It is important to be aware of physical symptoms and consider seeking help.

Someone who abuses you emotionally is trying to keep control over you. They are trying to keep you from having power or control in your own life.

Once an emotional abuser can no longer maintain control with words, it is a possibility that person will escalate to using physical abuse to keep power over you.

**why is this happening?**

A person abuses in order to gain power and control. Stress does not cause the abuse. Alcohol does not cause the abuse.

**You do not cause the abuse.**

- You cannot change the abuser. He/she must want to change.
- You might try to change your actions to keep from being abused, but that may not always work.
- You cannot always predict the abuser’s behavior.
- The abuse may only get worse with time.

**why am I confused?**

You may be facing pressure from family, friends, or your culture to either stay with an abusive partner or to leave.

We know it can be a very difficult decision to make, especially considering:

- conflict with religious beliefs;
- financial difficulties;
- concern for children or pets;
- difficulties due to disabilities you may have, particularly if your caretaker is abusing you;
- isolation and feeling like you have nowhere to go.

You know what’s best for you and your family. Whatever decision you make is okay.