

## **RECOGNIZING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

### **Verbal Abuse**

Verbal abuse is the use of words to attack, hurt or injure someone, or to gain power and control over them, or to persuade someone to believe something that is untrue and harmful.

- Withholding Information and not listening empathetically prevents the proper level of intimacy in the relationship from developing.
- Countering contradicts what the other person says; the abuser refuses to accept that the victim's point of view may be valid.
- Discounting the victim's feelings of hurt at the abuse implies that there is something wrong with the victim if he feels that way.
- Disguising verbal abuse as a joke again invalidates the victim's perceptions.
- Blocking and diverting allows the abuser to avoid discussing things that the victim believes are important.
- Accusing and blaming the victim unfairly can make the victim believe that she has caused the abuse.
- Trivializing the victim's thoughts, ideas and achievements can make the victim feel worthless.
- Undermining of the victim by the abuser erodes the patient's self confidence.
- Every threat made by the abuser is a form of control. The abuser plays on the victim's deepest fears.
- Forgetting promises, agreements or previous discussions prevents the victim from talking to the abuser about his behavior.
- Denial is a stronger form of forgetting: the abuser denies that any abuse has ever taken place, invalidating the victim's reality and perceptions.
- Abusive Anger allows the abuser to release tension and feel power over his victim but increases the victim's anxiety and feelings of failure.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse has much in common with verbal abuse in that it is an attempt to hurt, attack or control the victim. The emotional abuser often uses verbal abuse to hurt the victim, but can use other means as well. Some of these are described below.

- Domination by the abuser, who sets up the environment so that she is always in control.
- Intimidation which plays on the victim's guilt, fear, compassion and values to get him to behave in ways that are contrary to his wishes and desires.
- Abusive expectations in which unreasonable demands are placed upon the victim. No matter how much he gives it is never enough. The victim is made to feel guilty because he never fulfils the abuser's needs perfectly.
- Unpredictable responses which are drastic mood changes or sudden emotional outbursts.

### **Book Recommendations**

- 📖 Evans, P. (1996). *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize it and How to Respond*. Adams Media Corporation.
- 📖 Forward, S. & Frazier, D. (1988). *Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation and Guilt to Manipulate You*. HarperCollins.