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Mental Abuse - The 7 Most Important Things To Know

By Annie Kaszina

1. Sticks and stones won't break my bones" – and words won't leave any measurable physical damage, but they will cause progressive, long-term harm. Never underestimate the power of words: words are used to brainwash.

Being told you are "stupid", "ugly", "lazy" or "worthless" is never acceptable. The first times you hear it, it will hurt, naturally. In time you "may get used to" hearing it from a partner. That's when you start to internalise and believe it. When that happens you are doing the other person's work of putting you down for them. This is why your feelings of self-worth suffer increasingly over time.

The good news is that just as words have been used to bring you down, you can learn to harness the power of words to build you up and restore your confidence and belief in yourself.

2. You are always told that it's your fault. Somehow, whatever happens, however it starts, the ultimate blame is always yours. Notice that we are talking ultimate blame here. The blaming partner will always tell you that their behaviour was caused by what you said or did. In fact, their argument runs along the lines that you can't possibly blame them for anything, because if you hadn't said what you said, or done what you did it would never have happened.

3. You're more inclined to believe your partner than you are to believe yourself. Have you ever reeled with a sense of hurt and injustice, or seethed with anger at the way you've been treated? Have you found yourself asking: "Is it reasonable to feel like this?" "Am I misinterpreting things?" "Have I got it wrong?"

If this is you, what it means is that you have become so brainwashed you've stopped trusting in your own judgement. Your mind keeps throwing up the observations and questions because, deep down, you know that what is happening is utterly wrong. But right now you can't feel the strength of your own convictions.

4. You need your partner to acknowledge your feelings. Have you ever felt desperate to make your partner hear what you are saying and apologise for the hurtful things they've said? Have you ever felt that only they can heal the pain they've caused?

Does your need for them to validate your feelings keep you hooked into the relationship?

When a partner constantly denies or refuses to listen to your feelings, that is, unquestionably, mental abuse.

5. Your partner blows hot and cold. He can be very loving but is often highly critical of you. He may tell you how much he loves you, yet he is short on care or consideration towards you. In fact, some of the time, maybe even a lot of the time, he treats you as if you were someone he truly dislikes.

You do everything you can to make him happy, but it's never good enough. You're more like the pet dog in the relationship than you are the equal partner. Your constant efforts to get his attention and please him meet with limited success. Sometimes he'll be charmed, often he's dismissive.

If you find yourself puzzling about how your partner can treat you that way, it is because you are trying to live in a love-based relationship, when in reality you are living in a control-based relationship. The mental abuser struggles with his own feelings of worthlessness and uses his relationship to create a feeling of personal power, at his partner's expense.

6. You feel as if you are constantly walking on eggshells. There is a real degree of fear in the relationship. You have come to dread his outbursts, the hurtful things that he will find to say to you. (Maybe the same anxiety and need to please spill over into your other relationships also.)

Fear is not part of a loving relationship, but it is a vital part of a mentally abusive relationship. It enables the abuser to maintain control over you.

7. You can heal. Mentally abusive relationships cause enormous emotional damage to the loving partner who tries, against all odds, to hold the relationship together and, ultimately, can't do it, because her partner is working against her.

Whether you are currently in a mentally abusive relationship, have left one recently, or years later are still struggling with the anxieties and low self-worth and lack of confidence caused by mental abuse, it is never too late to heal.

But you do need to work with a person or a programme specifically geared to mental abuse recovery.

Women who have suffered mental abuse expect radical change of themselves, and they expect it right away. This is why they often struggle and, not uncommonly, take up with another abusive partner.

Mental abuse recovery is a gradual process. Low self-worth and limiting beliefs about what kind of future the abuse sufferer can ever hope for are the blocks that can stop women from moving on. But they are blocks that you can clear very effectively. Just as language was once used to harm you, you can now learn how language can heal you. You can overcome past mental abuse and keep yourself safe from it in the future. You can also learn to feel strong, believe in yourself and create the life and the relationships you truly want.

"The Woman You Want To Be" is a unique workbook designed to accompany you on a year long journey into emotional health and happiness.

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