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THE CLINICIAN'S TOOLBOX



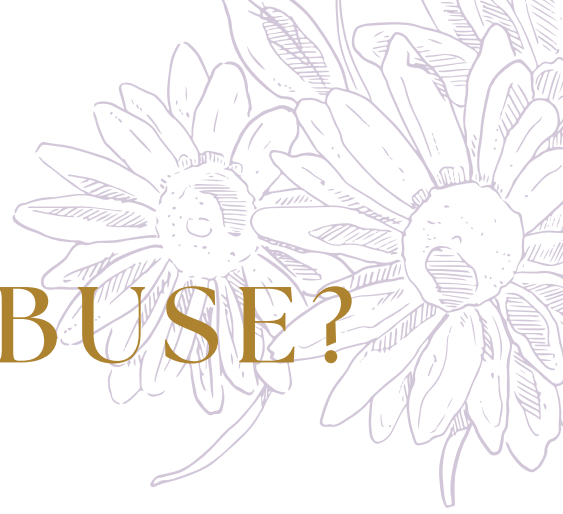
HELLO



Narcissistic and emotional abuse is a national and global epidemic that is destroying marriages and tearing families apart. Yet sadly there are few people, even in our profession, that are adequately equipped to recognize, confront and treat this rampant problem. That is why we call it the silent epidemic, because it goes largely undetected and untreated.

We at the Marriage Recovery Center have helped thousands of couples find their way out of the complex and murky waters of narcissistic and emotional abuse, and want to share our insights and lessons learned with those who are also in a people helper's role. We developed this resource to provide you with a few basic tools to help you identify emotional abuse and recognize its overt and covert patterns within the context of marriage.

1. WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?



Before we get into how to recognize emotional abuse and what to watch for, let's start by defining what emotional abuse is.

Here at the Marriage Recovery Center,
we define emotional abuse as:

an ongoing pattern of destructive behavior characterized by one person powering over another person for their own benefit, at the expense of the other.

Another way to think about emotional abuse is a comprehensive assault on the identity, worth and value of a person. It is an assault on their perception of reality. It is an assault on their identity and worth. It is an assault that uses anger as weaponry to silence another person into obedience and submission. It is an assault on the freedom and autonomy of another person.

The bottom-line is this: emotional abuse is about control. It is one person denying the autonomy of another to think, feel and behave from their own free will. This creates a very unhealthy dynamic in a marriage, and that is what brings couples to you for help, because when free will is taken out of the picture, love ceases to be love.



2. LISTEN, DON'T SPEAK

Emotionally abused women frequently come to us asking, “What can I change to fix our marriage?” while their partners come to counseling focused on how he can get her to behave differently. **If only SHE wouldn't be so _____, there wouldn't be a problem!** Notice the difference, and who is taking the brunt of the responsibility for the troubles in the relationship. Even when talking about her husband's behavior, she speaks within the context of what SHE can do to be better, to meet his demands, to make him happy, to communicate her needs, etc.

The emotional abuser, on the other hand, is all about fixing (a.k.a controlling) his spouse. He minimizes his own actions and highlights HER behavior. He talks about HIS feelings and HER behavior. When he does talk about her feelings, it's in the context of his perception of them—that is, he tells her what her motives are, what she is thinking and feeling based on his perception, not out of an attempt to understand her. Very often, this is used relentlessly for power and control, and it leaves the softer-spoken spouse off-kilter and unable to speak.

Recognizing this imbalance of power is the first step to stopping the crazy-making pattern of emotional abuse. The wife has a right to say, “I'd like to speak for myself please.” When you stop and really listen to her, it begins to break the power her spouse thinks he has to define her. It exposes the ways he overpowers her with his words and empowers her to speak up.

3. UNTANGLE THE TRAUMA BOND

Notice Who's Talking About Whom

When a narcissist comes to you for counseling, he is expecting you to take his side. He is used to that kind of power and he rarely sees anything wrong in his own behavior. In contrast, the victim senses that the change starts with her. She comes to the counseling sessions looking at herself—how depressed, anxious, numb, or crazy she feels. She watches helplessly as her abuser talks about their relationship—blame shifting, manipulating the details, minimizing the chaos he creates, and making himself look like the victim. It may be very subtle, but if you are aware of that dynamic, it can tell you a lot.

Affirm Her Experiences

The victim of narcissistic and emotional abuse has probably spent years being told she is stupid, her memory is faulty, she is oversensitive, over-reactive, over-emotional, etc. She now feels that nothing about her core personhood is worth listening to or caring about. You must seek every opportunity to help her begin placing value on her own experiences. She needs validation and to begin trusting her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. This is where she begins to find healing through the therapeutic process, and release from the narcissist's control over her.

Untangle the Trauma Bond

There comes a point when it is less frightening for the victim to go along with what the narcissist says than it is for her to try to fight or defend herself. She no longer trusts her own judgment; she is emotionally dependent upon him to control the relationship. This bond is cemented by moments of intermittent reward the narcissist throws at her, keeping her hooked. It is critical to understand that an abuse victim does not simply have trouble communicating, holding to boundaries, dealing with stress, depression, or loss. There is an entire layer of devaluing, trauma, biochemistry, and brokenness that must be considered.

4. BREAKING THE BLAME CYCLE



"I am so ashamed of letting myself stay in this abuse for so long!" "I should have seen it...I should have stopped it." "I should have been a better wife, more fun, more submissive, more respectful..." "If I had just done this one thing differently, I could have stopped it."

These statements I hear from my clients come from a place of shame. When a woman has been taught that being a Godly woman means being quiet and submitting completely to her husband's authority, she may have a hard time speaking up about her husband's abusive behavior because she feels that she is disrespecting or dishonoring him. When she finally breaks her silence, she feels shame for having endured the abuse for so long, and for the ways that she has responded to the abuse. She feels embarrassed because she thinks she should have done more to stop it, or was in some way partly responsible.

But the thing is, you can't cause someone to abuse you, nor can you stop someone from abusing you. Her husband is 100% responsible for his behavior. What the woman needs in this moment is for someone to break the blame and shame cycle by reminding and grounding her in what God says about her, who He says she is, and who He is calling her to be.

Be very wary of causing secondary abuse which happens when a victim of emotional abuse goes to a counselor for help, only to be given advice on how to be a better wife, how to communicate better, or how to spark their love life. By doing so, you are perpetuating the blame and shame cycle and causing further harm by placing the weight of responsibility to fix the marriage on to the victim.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



As the leading authority in the treatment of narcissistic and emotional abuse, we at the Marriage Recovery Center have spent over a decade helping thousands of couples navigate the complex dynamics of narcissistic and emotional abuse.

[The Comprehensive Core](#) is an intensive online program for men who want to embark on a life-changing journey of personal growth and transformation as they seek to overcome patterns of narcissistic and emotional abuse. With four progressive phases, participants gain a new understanding of how their thinking errors and destructive behavior have impacted them and their relationships. Through a rigorous curriculum and structured accountability, participants will develop skills for healthy relating, as well as ongoing support to sustain lasting, long-term change.

[Redeemed](#) is an empowering, transformative experience for women who want to break free from emotional abuse and reclaim their identity. Participants will gain a sense of clarity and hope for their future as they develop practical skills to move forward in their personal healing alongside a group of other women who are on the same journey.

For more information about our programs, assessments and in-service training opportunities, and to find out how we can work together to help individuals and couples heal and experience transformation, please reach out or visit www.marriagerecoverycenter.com/partner We'd love to hear from you!

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