Verbal abuse can be a weapon used by either girls or boys, men or women. Learn how verbal abuse is defined, what the signs are, how to intervene, and how to get help if needed.

Did you know that most physical abuse or battering begins with some kind of verbal abuse? Physical abuse is easy to identify because you can see a black eye or bruise. But verbal abuse is hard to see and define. Laws usually don’t define verbal abuse or require it to be reported. Verbal abuse might be misinterpreted as a bad habit, a bad temper, or “just the way the person talks.”

Verbal abuse can be a weapon used by either girls or boys, men or women. Research indicates that females are becoming more verbally aggressive than males, while males are more physically aggressive. However, both males and females are verbally abusive in thousands of relationships and must learn preventative behaviors. Verbal abuse is sometimes found in significant partner relationships where there is sex, intimacy, and commitment. It also can be found in families, work or school situations, among students, and even among friends. Unfortunately, it may even start when boys and girls begin to date. You can help prevent verbal abuse by learning more about what it means.

People may learn about verbal abuse by finding out how it is defined, what the signs are, how to prevent it, how to intervene in verbal abuse, and how to get help if needed.

Verbal abuse is behavior that is hurtful, intimidating, fearful, unacceptable and should be stopped.

What Is Verbal Abuse?

Verbal abuse is persistent behavior using words and/or “mind games” to instill self-doubt in the victim and to build the abuser’s sense of dominance and control.

Verbal conflict is an open verbal argument that comes from anger or rage, and seeks to control a situation, not an individual.

Verbal abuse is sometimes disguised as “good natured” humor or “pet names.”

Eg. “You take everything too seriously; can’t you take a joke?”

“Hey, little fatso, come over here!”

People who are verbally assaulted know the insults are abusive. By the tone of voice and the words used, the assaulted person feels hurt, confused, and embarrassed. Assaulted persons usually try harder to explain their behavior and understand what was said or meant to be said. They try to be understood and to figure out what they did wrong in the conversation. Attempts at trying to communicate with their partner are useless because the assailant works at keeping the assaulted person confused, upset, and “unbalanced.”

Have you ever said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?” Do you believe that statement is true? The statement is false. Words can indeed be very hurtful. Let’s take a look at how words can hurt others and yourself.