

News Release

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IF IT IS HAPPENING TO YOU: RECOGNIZING VERBAL ABUSE

Tampa, Florida. (July, 2012). What thoughts come to mind when you hear the term domestic violence? How often have you heard about domestic violence on the news or in other TV shows or read about it in newspapers, magazines or journals? Usually when one reads about or thinks about domestic violence, one usually imagines some type of physical altercation. And, haven't we all heard at one time or another that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? In fact, however, verbal and/or emotional abuse can be just as devastating to a person and harmful to a relationship as any kind of inappropriate physical interaction.

Specialists in the area of verbal abuse have described an evolving pattern to verbal abuse. The relationship often starts with the abuser placing their partner on a pedestal and consciously or unconsciously seeing the other as a perfect match. The abuser starts showering their partner with compliments and often gifts to the point that they feel like the most important person in the world. The abuser's expectations and demands, however, are so unrealistic and untenable, that the partner cannot continue to meet them. Very gradually, the relationship starts to deteriorate and the abuser's anger and need to control will be projected onto the victim. Rarely, if ever, does the abuser recognize or acknowledge their own limitations or contributions to the deterioration of the relationship. Soon the victim will be blamed for not being good enough or at fault when the abuser's expectations are not met. Often the abuser expects their partner to be a mind reader and know what the abuser wants even when the abuser has not verbalized their needs or wants. There will be the abuse followed by something positive

and so it goes. This pattern becomes confusing to the victim as the abuser alternates between excessive positive verbal and physical expressions followed by negative comments and criticism. All of this tends to happen behind closed doors while presenting a positive front to others. Abusers can and often do come across to others as charming. Soon the victim begins to feel like they are on an emotional roller coaster and begins to question their own ability to understand what reality is in the relationship. The victim begins to believe that if only they changed their behavior the problems in the relationship would cease.

The subtle patterns of manipulation, intimidation, unreasonable demands, sarcasm and angry outbursts will soon take their toll – on the relationship and on the victim. Because some of the patterns are so subtle, others may be able to pick up on the abusive pattern before the victim even realizes what is happening.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your partner present a positive face to the world and negative behaviors at home?
- Does your partner tend to pick a fight when you are just getting closer?
- Does your partner complain about how you treat him or her?
- Does your partner ridicule you and then say they were only joking?
- Does your partner threaten to leave or to throw you out?
- Does your partner manipulate you with lies?
- Does your partner falsely accuse you of having affairs?
- Does your partner pick at you until you get angry and then blames you for what you are feeling?
- Does your partner set you up so that no matter what you do you wind up losing?
- Does your partner alternate the abuse with promises to never hurt you again?
- Does your partner twist your words and blame you for things you never said?
- Does your partner criticize and call you names?

- Does your partner complain about how you talk, act or dress?
- Have you found yourself feeling as if you are walking on pins and needles?
- Do you find yourself questioning if your perceptions of the relationship are grounded in reality?
- Do you feel that you are losing yourself?

Healthy relationships grow through healthy interactions and communications. If you have answered yes to a number of the above questions, you may be in a situation where you are experiencing verbal abuse. It is difficult to reach out for help when you have lost a sense of self esteem or self worth through the slow erosion brought about by such demeaning behavior on the part of someone to whom you have entrusted yourself.

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all contracted organizations' employees and dependents and provides confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don't have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. Above all, keep in mind that relationships are based on respect, trust and love – not abuse. So, if you are the person experiencing the abuse – or the one who is abusing – help is a phone call away.

Call: (813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County), (727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County), or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).