

How to Recognize Verbal Abuse

Revised Oct 8, 2026

Verbal abuse is hard to see from the inside. The words may sound like the way your partner has always talked, or you have heard them so often they stopped registering. This worksheet helps you notice what is said and done, how often, and what it does to you.

First, a few notes:

- Read each type and check the box that fits. Writing is optional; reading and checking is enough. If you do write, see the privacy note near the end.
- The examples say "your partner" and "they" because this happens in every kind of relationship.
- The types come from Patricia Evans, with full credit on the last page.

Group 1. Fear and threats

These behaviors work through fear. Some involve no touching at all. Others remind you of times when someone was hurt or threatened.

Abusive anger

What it is. Anger aimed at you that frightens you. It may include yelling, standing too close, pointing, hitting walls or objects, or blocking your way.

- **Everyday.** You say that you ate dinner before they got home. Your partner steps within inches of your face, jabs a finger toward you, and shouts. They ask, "Did you think about me at all?" and answer for you: "No. You never do."
- **More serious.** You try to leave the room. Your partner stands in the doorway and does not move until you stop talking. They never touch you. Blocking your way is physical control, even when no one is hurt.

- **After the outburst.** They punch a cabinet or hit the wall beside you, then say, "Look what you made me do."
- **On your phone.** You reply to a text about weekend plans. Your partner answers with thirty messages in capital letters, then calls again and again until you pick up.

What it does to you. You learn the sound of their car, their footsteps, and their voice. You start managing the room before anything happens.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Threatening behavior and words

What it is. Words or actions that tell you something bad could happen to you, to someone you love, or to something you care about, especially if you do not do what they want.

- **Everyday.** You say you are going out with friends. Your partner says, "You know what happens when you do that," and keeps looking at you until you stay home.
- **Pets, children, work.** They tell you what will happen to your pet, your job, or your time with the children if you do not do as they say.
- **On your phone.** You get a text with no greeting: "You know what happens when you ignore me." Nothing else.
- **More serious.** Your partner puts their hands around an invisible throat and squeezes while looking at you. They say, "Do you know what I could do to you?" and might kick a chair or punch a cabinet. Then: "Is this what you want? You make me so mad I want to give you what you deserve." A gesture like this carries a threat to strangle you. See "If you are in danger" near the end.

They are not out of control. "You made me lose control" is part of the threat, and it is not accurate. Your partner decides how the anger looks: how loud, how close, what gets hit, and when it stops. Notice where it does not happen, such as at work, in front

of their boss, or when a neighbor knocks. The phone rings and the voice turns calm. It can also turn to hands on you, and even then it is calculated.

What it does to you. You change what you say and where you go so the threat is not carried out. The threat does not have to be repeated for you to keep acting on it.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

How a threat stays with you

A threat does two jobs. First it warns you. Later it reminds you, without being said again.

Here is how that can look. Your partner once held your face near a hot stove, or described in detail what they would do to someone. Months or years later, at a party, they mention that night in a cheerful voice. Or they make the same gesture across the room. Nothing new has happened to your body. The old threat has arrived again.

Reminders can be small: a look, a joke, a story about someone who got hurt, a mention of what they once did. They can keep working for years after the first threat.

Has your partner said or done something that reminded you of a past threat or act of violence? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Your own examples from this group, if you want to write them:

Group 2. Control

These behaviors take away your say over your own choices: who you see, what you wear, how you spend your time and money. They can happen without any anger.

Ordering and demanding

What it is. Instructions and rules about your life that you are expected to follow without discussion.

- **Everyday.** Before you leave for work, your partner tells you what to wear. You change, because the argument would cost more than the shirt.
- **Friends and family.** Your partner tells you who you may talk to and who you may not. You are not to touch anyone's arm or shoulder while you talk. Friends they do not know are not allowed. The list gets shorter each year, until there is no one left to explain yourself to.
- **Your role.** They hold you to a definition of a good parent or a good partner that changes every time you meet it.
- **On your phone.** You are expected to share your location, answer within five minutes, and send a photo of where you are when asked. If you do not, there is an argument.

What it does to you. You stop asking what you want and start asking what will be allowed. In time you do it before they have to say anything.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Withholding or deprivation

What it is. Going silent, pulling away, or refusing to talk, touch, or share money, the car, or information.

- **Everyday.** You ask to talk. Your partner opens a beer, leaves for a friend's house, or says they are busy. When you stop asking, they say you never want to talk.

- **The silent treatment.** Your partner does not speak to you for days. You keep the house quiet and do everything right to earn your way back. When they speak again, nothing is said about it.
- **Affection.** You reach for them and they move away. Later they say you never show that you want them.
- **On your phone.** Your message sits on read for a full day. Then they reply as if nothing happened.
- **Money and keys.** They hold back the car keys or access to an account until you do what they asked.

What it does to you. You begin working to earn attention. You measure your day by whether they speak to you.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Undermining

What it is. Making other people, including your children, doubt you, so that what you say counts for less.

- **In front of the children.** They tell your children you are not a good parent and not to listen to you. Later the children ignore your instructions.
- **With your family.** Your partner tells your family, with concern in their voice, that your mental health is slipping. When you tell your sister what is happening, she is polite and does not believe you.
- **With your friends.** They quote part of a conversation to "prove" a friend agrees you are wrong. You cannot check what the friend said.
- **On your phone.** They show a friend a screenshot of one of your texts, without the earlier messages that explain it.
- **In a caring voice.** All of it comes out sounding like concern: "I'm only trying to help you."

What it does to you. You hesitate to tell anyone, because you expect not to be believed. Some of the people who hear it begin to doubt you.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Your own examples from this group, if you want to write them:

Group 3. Put-downs

These behaviors make you smaller, in your own eyes, in front of other people, or both.

Name calling

What it is. Insults and labels aimed at you, or refusing to use your name.

- **Everyday.** Your partner calls you crazy, selfish, a bad parent, or disloyal, whichever hurts most that day. They pick the insult that is the opposite of what you are trying to be. If you work at being a good parent, you are a bad one.
- **Sexual insults.** Your partner uses a sexual insult about your body or your past.
- **Your name.** Your partner does not use your name at all. To your children you are "your mother" or "your father." To your parents you are "your daughter" or "your son." To everyone else you are "the wife," "the husband," or just "you." You matter to other people, and they make sure you know you do not matter to them.
- **On your phone.** At 2 a.m. they send a string of insults. In the morning they say they do not remember.

What it does to you. The names stay with you. You start saying them to yourself.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Verbal abuse disguised as a joke

What it is. Insults or threats said as humor, so that objecting makes you the problem.

- **Everyday.** At dinner with friends, your partner tells a story about your worst mistake. Everyone laughs. You go quiet. "Relax. It's a joke. You can't take a joke."
- **Online.** They post a joke about you that people you know can see. If you ask for it to come down, you are told you are being sensitive.
- **More serious.** At a party, your partner jokes to the guests about making you disappear. Everyone laughs. At home, the same "joke" comes back, this time with details of how they would do it. A "joke" that describes hurting or killing you in detail is also a threat. See "If you are in danger" near the end.

What it does to you. You learn to laugh along. If you object, the objection becomes the problem.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Discounting

What it is. Treating your ideas, feelings, and experience as unimportant or wrong.

- **Everyday.** You describe an idea for a small business. Your partner lists every reason it will fail, then says, "I'm only trying to help."
- **The real world.** You offer an opinion. They say, "You don't understand how the real world works." The real world is whatever they say it is.
- **A compliment that turns.** Your partner offers to tell people about your work, then adds, "Your honesty is going to get me in trouble." Something they say they admire in you becomes a flaw.
- **On your phone.** You share good news in the family chat. They reply with a laughing emoji and "Good luck with that."

What it does to you. You stop bringing things up. You look for the flaw in your idea before anyone else can.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Trivializing

What it is. Treating what you do and what you achieve as small or worthless.

- **Everyday.** You get a promotion. Your partner says, "That's nice," goes back to their phone, and spends dinner talking about their own day.
- **Money.** While your partner is away for work, you pay off three high-interest credit cards and take on one lower-interest car payment so the family has a second car. When they return, they ignore the solution and complain about what is still missing: "I earned all that extra money and we have nothing to show for it."
- **On your phone.** You post a result you worked hard for. They say nothing, then tell a friend, "It's not a real job."

What it does to you. You start to believe your work does not count, and you stop mentioning it.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Judging and criticizing

What it is. Finding fault with you, your choices, and your judgment, so that you are always the one who is wrong.

- **Everyday.**
 - You: "Some bills change month to month. If we stream more, the bill is higher."
 - Your partner: "You're avoiding my question. Are you hiding money? When I paid the bills, the amounts never changed. Do I have to take over?"

- **Money control.** Your partner decides you cannot be trusted with money and takes over the accounts. Your card stops working.
- **On your phone.** They check the bank app after every purchase and text you the amount with one word: "Why?"

What it does to you. You hesitate before every decision, because you expect to be criticized.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Your own examples from this group, if you want to write them:

Group 4. Twisting what happened

These behaviors change the story of what was said, what was meant, and what happened, until you stop trusting your own memory and judgment. You may have heard the word gaslighting used for some of them. This worksheet describes what is said and done instead of using a label.

Countering

What it is. Disagreeing with whatever you say, including things you both agree on.

- **Everyday.**

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- You: "I'll rely on word of mouth until I can afford ads. Will you help?"
- Your partner: "Word of mouth is overrated. You need to advertise."
- You: "Then maybe a small newspaper ad."
- Your partner: "Nobody reads the newspaper. I'll tell some people I know about you."
- Their last suggestion is the plan you started with.
- **A small thing.** You call a color peach. They call it red, and keep calling it red until you stop talking.
- **On your phone.** You text, "I think Friday works better." They reply, "No, Friday is bad." You suggest Thursday. "Thursday is worse." Then they propose Friday.

What it does to you. You begin to doubt your own opinion and start asking them what to think.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Blocking and diverting

What it is. Changing the subject or refusing to discuss what you raised.

- **Everyday.**
 - You: "I'd like us to have dinner with my sister and her husband tomorrow."
 - Your partner: "Will you feed the kids? Did you even think about them? I can go hungry, but you shouldn't let the kids starve."
 - You came in with a plan for dinner and left defending yourself as a parent. The dinner never gets discussed. When you bring it up again, they say you already talked about it, or that you are forgetful for not remembering their answer.
- **More serious.** You raise the night they shoved you. "We are not doing this again." They leave the house and do not speak to you for two days.
- **On your phone.** You text about an unpaid bill. They reply with a photo of a dish you left in the sink.

What it does to you. You forget what you meant to say. You leave with the problem unsolved and something new to defend.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Accusing and blaming

What it is. Making your reaction, or something you supposedly did, the reason for how they treated you.

- **Everyday.** Your partner stays out until 2 a.m. without a call. You say you were frightened. They say, "I'd be upset if you did that, but I had a good reason." By the end of the conversation you are the one apologizing.
- **After an outburst.** "If you had not brought it up again, I wouldn't have lost it."
- **Turned around.** You say, "You hurt me." They answer, "You're the abusive one."
- **On your phone.** They send a long text listing everything you did wrong that day and end with, "This is why I get angry."

What it does to you. You apologize for things you did not do, and for being upset about what was done to you.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Denial

What it is. Refusing to admit that something was said or done, or that it caused harm.

- **Everyday.** You tell your partner their yelling frightens you and the children. They look at you blankly. "I don't know what you're talking about."
- **The printout.** They print an article on trauma symptoms and hand it to you. "Here. This is you. This is your problem." Then they walk out.
- **On your phone.** They delete a message, then say it was never sent. You cannot show them.
- **More serious.** The morning after a night of violence: "Nothing happened. You're making this up."

What it does to you. You start to wonder whether it happened the way you remember, and you stop saying it out loud.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Forgetting

What it is. Repeatedly "forgetting" what matters to you: appointments, plans, promises, and things they said or did.

- **Everyday.** Your partner misses an appointment or event you asked them to attend, then asks why you are making such a big deal of it. They schedule routine car maintenance for your birthday.
- **The calendar.** You put the plans on the shared calendar. Your partner says, "It's not my job to read the calendar."
- **Your plans.** They forget plans you made with your friends or family, then get angry when you leave to keep them.
- **On your phone.** You text the plan twice. They say they never saw it.
- **More serious.** A week after they shoved you into a wall, they say, "I don't remember that." The way they say it makes you doubt your own memory.

What it does to you. You stop telling them what matters to you. You begin to believe your needs are not worth remembering.

How often has this happened? ☐ Never ☐ Once ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Your own examples from this group, if you want to write them:

Putting it together

This page does not score anything. It helps you see how the pieces connect.

1. Look at the types you checked Sometimes or Often. Which of the four groups do most of them fall in: fear and threats, control, put-downs, or twisting what happened?
2. Do any of them show up together in one event? For example, a put-down followed by a denial, or a threat followed by a joke at a party.
3. Do they come in an order? For example, silence first, then anger, then a denial afterward. What usually comes before the anger?
4. What do you do differently afterward: speak less, change your plans, stay quiet, apologize? Those changes show what the behavior is doing to you.
5. If you checked anything in Group 1, has something reminded you of a past threat or act of violence? A reminder counts even when nothing new happened.

Write your answers here if it is safe to do so:

What these answers can and cannot tell you. A check mark records that something happened. It does not prove anything about your partner, and couples can have a

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cruel moment. What matters is whether the behavior repeats, whether you feel afraid or smaller afterward, and whether you are losing a say in your own choices. Your checks cannot tell you what to call your relationship, whether it will change, or what you should do. They can show you a pattern in what happens and what it costs you.

An advocate, counselor, or attorney can help you decide what the pattern means for your situation and your safety.

If you are in danger, and keeping this private

Verbal abuse and physical violence. Verbal abuse can come before physical violence. It does not always lead there, but you do not need to have been hurt physically to take it seriously. The threatening behaviors in Group 1 are here because a threat tells you what is possible, and it can keep working long after it was made. If your partner has threatened to kill you, treat that as serious.

If you are in danger. Call 911 if you are in immediate danger. Outside the United States, call your local emergency number.

Treat these as urgent: your partner has put their hands or an object around your neck, has threatened to kill you, or has threatened you with a gun or another weapon. A worksheet cannot help you sort these out. An advocate can.

National Domestic Violence Hotline (United States). Free, confidential, 24 hours a day.

- Call 1-800-799-7233 (800-799-SAFE)
- Text START to 88788 (message and data rates may apply)
- Chat at thehotline.org
- Deaf and hard of hearing: The Deaf Hotline, video phone 855-812-1001

Outside the United States, contact a domestic violence service in your country.

The Hotline says internet use can be monitored and cannot be erased completely. If you worry your online activity is being watched, call instead of using the website.

Privacy. Your partner may react badly if they find this page, especially a filled-in one. No way of storing it is completely secure. Think about these points before you decide how to use the worksheet:

- You can read it and check boxes in your head. Nothing has to be written down.
- Printed pages, shared printers, shared folders, cloud accounts that sync to other devices, email, and downloads that show in your browser history can all be found.

- Your partner may know your passwords or see file previews and notifications on your phone.
- A page with only check marks shows less than a page with examples written on it. If you write details, use a notebook you keep somewhere else, or a private shorthand only you understand.
- You can close or delete this page at any point.

An advocate can help you work out what is safest in your situation.

What to do with this

You have looked at what is said and done, how often, and what it does to you.

Free pages on this site

- [Safety Planning for Domestic Violence and Abuse](#)
- [First Steps for Abuse Victims](#)
- [Pages on the types of verbal abuse](#)
- [Gaslighting](#), [Crazy-making](#)

If you want to record what happens. The [Verbal Abuse Incident and Pattern Log](#) is a private workbook for recording dates, details, and patterns over time. It is a paid digital PDF (\$9), and a [discreet version](#) is available.

Where the types come from. The fifteen types come from Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond*. The groups and examples were written for this worksheet. The examples show patterns. They are not accounts of real people. Kellie Jo Holly also wrote [My Abusive Marriage...and what i'm doing in it](#), an account of her own marriage.

About this worksheet. Written by Kellie Jo Holly Close, who has run VerbalAbuseJournals.com since 2008. It does not diagnose anyone, and it is not legal, medical, or safety advice. Laws and professional requirements vary, so talk to a qualified professional where you live.

Sources

- Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize It and How to Respond* (Adams Media, February 2003, ISBN 1558503048). The source of the fifteen types.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline, thehotline.org. Phone, text, chat, and Deaf Hotline details, and the caution about online monitoring.

More tools at VerbalAbuseJournals.com: the [Incident and Pattern Log](#), the [Domestic Violence Safety Plan Workbook](#), and [free safety planning pages](#).

- The Hotline, [Warning Signs of Relationship Abuse: Escalation](#). How abuse can move from one type to another, and why a threat to kill should be taken seriously.
- The Hotline, [The Dangers of Strangulation](#). Why hands or an object around the neck are treated as urgent.

Hotline details were checked on October 8, 2026. Phone numbers and web addresses can change, so check them if one does not work.