

The faces of abuse are many, diverse, more complex than any booklet or psychiatrist could tell you in a few short words. Among various abuse tactics used by perpetrators are a few insidious tactics known as “emotional abuse”. Emotional abuse differs from physical or verbal abuse in that if you took a snapshot of the scene, a few words said, or a physical gesture out of context, it might not immediately strike you as abusive. No direct insults were used, nobody was physically hurt, so it seems harmless enough. However, like with all abuse, emotional abuse's sole purpose is to cause hurt to someone else.

Emotional abuse works on five levels.

1. Self-doubt. Here emotional abuse makes the person question their own thoughts and memories, to discredit the value of their lived experiences. A version we are all common with is the psychopath's favourite: gaslighting.
2. Self-loathing. Here the person is directed to focus on aspects of themselves they do not like and encouraged to discard or dislike those aspects of themselves which they do. For example when a child is mocked for liking a certain type of toy.
3. Social alienation. Here the person is threatened with isolation if they do not comply. For example they may be told they will never marry, or a friend may ghost them, over an aspect of themselves.
4. Stress. Here emotional abuse puts the person into fight or flight mode. The abuse is designed to make them leave or lash out, so that the argument cannot continue.
5. Depression and nihilism. Here emotional abuse tells the person that whatever they are fighting for is pointless. The end goal is to get the person to leave the conversation, giving the abuser the last word.

Generally emotional abuse operates on more than one level, possibly on all five, so as to emotionally cripple the person being interacted with. As you may be able to tell from the levels, emotional abuse tactics are silencing tactics, designed to deny the victim a voice. They may be used in conjunction with other forms of abuse, for example to prevent a victim reporting physical or verbal abuse, or on their own, for example to encourage others to make the victim a pariah or to chase the victim away from the abuser's social circle.

Here we will observe some emotional abuse tactics, how they affect the victim, what the perpetrator's main goal is, and some of the forms these tactics may take.

Tactic 1: Withdrawing.

Definition: Withdrawing from a conversation naturally and withdrawing abusively are very different things. When a conversation ends organically we try and get some closure, make our excuses, and part ways comfortably. When withdrawal is used as an abusive tactic, the end goal is to deny the victim this closure. The perpetrator ends an argument on a sour note and cuts off communication without a goodbye.

Example 1: Louise and Sammi.

Louise and Sam have been friends for two years. Recently Sammi has started to show interest in Louise's brother, and Louise is not comfortable with her friend and her brother dating, due to the repercussions.

L: "I just don't think you should date him, if it goes wrong I could lose a friend *and* a brother."

S: "I don't feel it will go wrong, and I think we have enough in common to make it work."

L: "I'm not prepared to take that risk."

S: "But I am, and maybe he is too."

L: "Fine."

Later that day Sammi finds Louise has blocked her on social media and won't answer her calls and leaves her texts on 'read'.

Example 2: Joe and Miriam.

Joe and Miriam have been married five years. Joe has been asking Miriam to help him financially for a few weeks now, but Miriam does not want to merge their finances completely as she feels she lost control over their joint account, and this would mean him dominating her earnings.

J: "I'm your husband, you ought to trust me."

M: "You said that about the joint account, and you're the only one who ever spends out of it."

J: "Because I put more in."

M: "Well, then maybe I should stop putting money in and just spend what I earn?"

J: "It doesn't work like that, we're in this together."

M: "Then maybe we should write a budget up and stick to it?"

Joe doesn't reply. Instead, he blanks Miriam for the rest of the day, even during dinner, and goes to bed early and on his own.

Example 3: Mohammed and Shae.

Mohammed and Shae are both students on the same course at university. In their social responsibility class the topic of African American poverty comes up, and Shae, although she is white, speaks up for AA people.

M: "I appreciate what you were trying to do there, but I think you don't come from a place where you would know what we go through."

S: "I'm just stating the facts. African American poverty can't be fixed without reparations and suitable welfare."

M: "I don't know if those are the facts, though, it doesn't really match up to my experiences as a black guy. We can and do make it on our own. I am. There is more to it than just handouts."

S: "Maybe you're just being affected by internalized racism?"

M: "I don't think so, I think the situation is more complicated than you're assuming. You need to sit back and let us speak about our own experiences."

Shae looks like she's about to reply. Instead she shrugs and walks off. The next time in class, she sits away from Mohammed, won't make eye contact with him, and repeats what she said last time.

How it hurts: Withdrawing from a conversation denies closure and denies the other person a voice. This can make them doubt themselves, feel stressed and socially alienated, or even succumb to hopelessness, feeling that their perspective is worthless.

Why you might do it: The usual end goal of withdrawal is to coerce another person into doing what we want. We feel we are not getting our way, and we withdraw hoping that they will “think about what they have done” and give into us. Louise hopes Sammi will back away from her brother, Joe hopes Miriam will let him control her money, and Shae hopes Mohammed will agree with her. None of them want to accept the other person's experiences, emotions, or thoughts as real, and they want the other person to refuse their own experiences, emotions and thoughts as well!

What to do instead: Accept that there are two sides to this argument, consider their side, and reach an open, respectful, vocalized agreement, even if it is “agree to disagree”, so you can find closure.

Tactic 2: Countering.

Definition: Again, countering in a normal, healthy conversation is just part of having a disagreement or a debate. One person offers their perspective, the other counters with another perspective, fact, or opinion. And even aggressive, intentional countering anything someone says is fine when you have *agreed* that you will play Devil's Advocate to each other. But to automatically play Devil's Advocate when debating with someone, or to start a debate when someone just wants to connect emotionally, is just a way of silencing the other person, and is abusive.

Example 1: Annie and Jamal.

Annie and Jamal work together. In a meeting, Jamal has brought up a subject he believes needs more attention.

J: "Well, as far as I'm concerned last year's budget still needs revising."

A: "We know this, Jamal, but we have to focus on our marketing for this year first."

J: "This year's marketing is not going to do well without revising last year's budget."

A: "I'm not sure that's the case, I think we can go ahead with processes we know work."

J: "How can we know they work without revising the budget?"

A: "Last year's campaign was successful, the details don't matter right now."

J: "But perhaps it could have been more successful."

A: "This is getting the meeting nowhere, Jamal, and we can't work on the budget yet. Let's focus on the matter at hand."

J: "I still think we should be having a meeting on the budget."

A: "I agree, we need a meeting on the budget, just not right now."

J: "But to have a *whole* meeting on it would be a waste."

Example 2: Lucía and Mike.

Lucía is Mike's sister in law. Recently Lucía has had a hard time fitting in with her husband and Mike's very traditional Singaporean parents.

L: "I just feel... overwhelmed. My parents were never so strict, or so demanding of me. It's a lot to get used to."

M: "Well, perhaps you're not used to living with high-achievers."

L: "Maybe so, I mean, my family isn't too successful. The pressure is very strong."

M: "Nonsense, don't make us sound uptight, we don't put that much pressure on you. Maybe it's just that your Mexican parents are lazy?"

L: "I can't believe you said that, all I'm saying is I don't come from a traditional family."

M: "Not traditionally Singaporean, probably very normal for Mexico."

L: "Well, actually, my family are very progressive and modern. They just don't put pressure on their children."

M: "Because they are lazy."

Example 3: George and Hans.

George and Hans know each other through a mutual friend. In a conversation, George has brought up that he is unsure of his girlfriend's fidelity.

G: "I know it sounds daft, but it's just that... I just found out she's been with around thirty other guys before me."

H: "Why does that matter? Don't slutshame her."

G: "She explicitly told me she had only dated four other guys, though."

H: "Why does it matter how many guys she's dated?"

G: "Because she lied to me."

H: "Maybe she lied because she knew you would be like this?"

G: "I guess there was an element of social expectations there, yeah."

H: "No, she just knew you are an asshole."

G: "I don't think so, otherwise she wouldn't date me. She respects herself too much to date someone she doesn't like."

H: "I have a hard time believing a girl who's slept with over thirty men respects herself."

How it hurts: It makes the victim feel as though their perspective is flawed, causing self-doubt and nihilistic thoughts. It can also stress them to go round in circles with the abuser, and make them feel socially threatened if the abuser tries to get other people to side with them.

Why you might do it: This is usually done when the perpetrator feels out of control, and has a strong emotional reaction to something the victim says. Jamal is offended that his interest in the budget is dismissed, however rightfully. Mike is offended at the suggestion his parents are strict and wants Lucía to agree her parents as just as, if not more so, stereotypical. Hans is offended that someone might think poorly of a woman for her dating choices, regardless of whether or not that is the motivator.

What to do instead: Admit when you get the wrong end of the stick, and accept the other person's search for common ground, so that you can be more united.

Tactic 3: Discounting.

Definition: Discounting is when the abuser uses the victim's emotions, actions, or words against them. They may say that as a person with bipolar they can't rely on their memories, or that they are being too emotional or too naïve. This may look like it's drawing attention to a very real problem, such as a mental illness, but in reality it's drawing attention *away* from a situation which would make the perpetrator look bad.

Example 1: Frank and Teddy.

T: "I wish I could do more to help my parents."

F: "You're naïve about how things work, parents should take care of you."

Example 2: Nicki and Zayne.

Z: "I'm very worried about the amount of hate crime in my neighbourhood."

N: "You gays are always so over sensitive."

Example 3: Amy and Sarah.

S: "I'd love to get that scholarship."

A: "You white people are so entitled!"

How it hurts: Discounting often makes the victim feel as though their concerns are completely irrelevant, and the abuser's concern with the victim's identity matters more than the victim's own thoughts, feelings, or ideas. This creates self doubt, depressive or nihilistic thoughts, and can cause the victim to socially alienate themselves.

Why you might do it: Sometimes an abuser focuses too much on the victim's identity and fails to listen to what the victim is saying. This can start at two fronts: in some cases because the abuser values identity over reality, in other cases because the reality of the situation makes the abuser uncomfortable, and they wish to dismiss the victim's legitimate complaints. In each case above, the abuser is completely ignoring what the victim is saying and dismissing them by focusing on their identity instead.

What to do instead: Acknowledge that who someone is and what they say or do are different things. Listen to what they are actually saying and address the topic at hand, not the identity of the person talking to you.

Tactic 4: Abuse disguised as jokes.

Definition: This is quite nuanced again. When two people share a joke and both are comfortable with it, there is no problem, even if to outsiders the joke seems extreme or offensive. But we all have boundaries and someone who respects you will respect those boundaries. An abuser's "jokes" repeatedly break the victim's boundaries, despite knowing that they make the victim uncomfortable.

Example 1: Jane and Vivian.

V: "I'm totally addicted to coffee."

J: "You know my dad has a drinking problem, please stop saying you're 'addicted' to things."

V: "You're way too sensitive, it's just a joke."

Example 2: Matt and Thomas.

M: "Man, your sister is so cute, I could totally rape her."

T: "I've told you before, that sort of stuff offends me, don't say it."

M: "Calm down, it's just a joke. You're so paranoid."

Example 3: Bart and James.

J: "We should just, like, kill all cishet people."

B: "I'm cishet, that's making me uncomfortable."

J: "I'm just joking, it's not like I *could*."

How it hurts: Joking about something that makes someone genuinely fearful or uncomfortable tells them that their fears and concerns are not valid, that they do not deserve your respect, and that they overreact. It causes self doubt and even self loathing, and the prospect of it happening again can be stressful.

Why you might do it: The abuser enjoys the feeling of power that comes with this, as they can use it both to make the victim feel uncomfortable, as well as to dismiss the victim's concerns about what they're saying. "It's just a joke" after all.

What to do instead: Pay attention when someone tells you their boundaries and do not use their discomfort against them.

Tactic 5: Blocking and diverting.

Definition: This is used alongside withdrawal, or sometimes before it. The abuser blocks the victim from communicating by interrupting them with a sound, a physical action, or some irrelevant conversation. They then divert from the topic by changing the discussion to whatever they want to talk about.

Example 1: Martin and Zara.

Martin and Zara have been going out for a few years, but lately both are spending more time with their friends.

Z: "I was thinking of going out later."

M: *Standing up and pointing out the window.* "Would you look at that?"

Z: "I'm talking to you."

M: "But look over here."

Example 2: Fatuma and Greg.

Fatuma and Greg work in the same office and are trying to get the same promotion.

G: "I don't think a Muslim should be in that role, is all."

F: "Why would that be?"

G: *Coughs.* "Did you see that presentation yesterday?"

Example 3: Laura and Tina.

Laura and Tina attend the same university course, but Tina is speaking at an MRA rally whilst Laura is a staunch feminist. Laura attends and whilst Tina is trying to speak she plays a foghorn and shouts anti-MRA slogans.

How it hurts: This denies the experiences, feelings, and ideas of the victim, causing self doubt, self loathing and stress. It can even stop groups of people from talking to one another, creating social alienation and depression.

Why you might do it: Sometimes a conversation makes the abuser very uncomfortable.

What to do instead: Explain that you are uncomfortable and leave the conversation politely. Accept that it may continue in your absence.

Tactic 6: Accusing and blaming.

Definition: This is another one that takes shape alongside other forms of abuse, especially other forms of emotional abuse. The perpetrator tries to move the focus away from their own words and actions and blame the victim for the situation, the abuser's behaviour, or even the victim's own emotions.

Example 1: Marina and Sue.

Marina and Sue are sisters. Marina has asked for a dress back that Sue borrowed over a month ago. Sue starts feeling angry about returning it.

S: "You never think of how I might feel!"

Example 2: Lou and Zainab.

Lou and Zainab have been dating a few months. Zainab has been out late. Lou began to worry about where she was, for himself and for her own safety. As soon as she steps in the door he slaps her, leaving her crying.

L: "You brought this on yourself, do you know how worried I was?"

Example 3: Joy and Sonny.

Joy and Sonny have also been dating a few months. Joy has found out she is pregnant, and intends to keep the child. Sonny is not ready to be a father yet.

J: "Well, you should have thought about that before having sex with me. I can't believe you want to control my body! You should be happy for us."

How it hurts: By shifting the blame onto the victim, the perpetrator paints themselves as the "real victim" and the victim as the "real abuser". This is a form of gaslighting, where the victim begins to doubt and loathe themselves, and may put aside their own needs to comfort the "real victim" and make it up to them.

Why you might do it: Many times the abuser genuinely feels wronged when their feelings are hurt and wants to be compensated. They do not realize that the victim is suffering more, not that their actions are manipulative and abusive. Sue thinks that her sadness at losing the dress is all that matters, Lou thinks his physical abuse is justified because Zainab left him feeling hurt, and Joy thinks Sonny's fears are unjustified because they offend her.

What to do instead: When you feel as though your feelings are being hurt unnecessarily, ask yourself whether the "abuser" is in any way suffering also. Ask yourself whether you have hurt them in any way, or, if you're not sure, *ask them*.

Tactic 7: Judging and criticizing.

Definition: Again, in a healthy relationship of any sort, we offer constructive criticism, advice, and support when the other party pursues self improvement. However the abusive version is very different. The abuser leaves it clear they cannot accept the victim in any way, they criticize everything the victim does, even when the victim does exactly as they are told, and they will judge aspects of the victim which are unchangeable.

Example 1: Marta and Vivienne.

Marta and Vivienne have lived as flatmates for a few years now. Marta's friends have told her Vivienne's attitude towards make-up is weird.

M: "I just think you should try and wear some, it'd look more normal."

V: "You never cared before, besides it's my body."

M: "Maybe I did care? And it's not about what you do with your body, it's about what you do in my house."

V: "It *is* my body. And why are you changing so much? I thought you were big into health and fitness, what if your friends took you out to eat junk food?"

M: "Well, health isn't everything."

Example 2: Aaron and Clark.

Aaron and Clark work together. They are both reaching for the same promotion, but Aaron doesn't think Clark deserves it at all because he has a mental health problem in his past.

A: "I think it's important for the candidate to be well-suited to a high pressure environment."

C: "I agree, it's good that both of us have experience working under pressure, that way whoever gets the position can cope."

A: "No, you don't get me. You're not the right person for it. Not with your history."

C: "Well, I've had an issue in the past. But it was two years ago, it's behind me now."

A: "But what if it happens again?"

C: "It was once. I don't think it will happen again."

A: "Still, I don't think someone with your history should get the promotion."

C: "What do you expect me to do about it? I can't change the past, just be better in the future."

Example 3: Dot and Stuart.

Dot and Stuart are talking about some plans at the local youth centre. Dot doesn't like Stuart's plans at this point, but has no alternatives.

S: "Look, we need to make arrangements soon, so if you don't have another plan we have to go with my one."

D: "I know that, but I'd rather you listened to me more."

S: "I'm not sure how that's relevant. You either find a solution or go with the solution offered."

D: "Stop mansplaining everything to me. You're always saying simple things like I don't understand them."

S: "But you *act* like you don't understand them. All I'm trying to do is move on from a conversation, but every time I explain or say anything you call it 'mansplaining'."

D: "Well maybe you should listen to me more and speak less."

S: "Then nobody would get anything done around here."

D: "That's condescending."

S: "Then tell me what your idea is and I'll listen."

D: "That's not the point!"

How it hurts: Constant judging and criticizing, with no acknowledgement of success, no possibility of satisfying the abuser, and no relief, can cause stress, depression, and self-loathing in the victim.

Why you might do it: Some abusers do this for the sheer thrill of feeling in power and making their victims feel like less. Others do it because they disagree with the victim fundamentally, or perceive them as belonging to an outgroup, feel threatened, and wish to “defeat” their “enemy”.

What to do instead: Set your morals and stick to them. Playing “Devil's Advocate” or changing your stance on something because someone else also believes it is not healthy for you or them. And don't criticize someone for something they have no control over: accept it, or leave them alone.

Tactic 8: Trivializing.

Definition: An abuser trivializes a victim's accomplishments unnecessarily. The victim may be over the moon about achieving something they set out to do, but no matter how normal or extraordinary, no matter how great or small of a step it is to the victim, the abuser makes it sound insignificant.

Example 1: Latanya and Suzanne.

Latanya and Suzanne have been dating for five years. Latanya has finally managed to overcome her fear of heights and ride a ferris wheel with Suzanne, something Suzanne had always insisted she should do.

L: "Wow, that was still a bit scary, but I feel so proud of myself for doing it."

S: "Yeah, it was okay, wasn't it. Let's go again?"

L: "I'm not sure I'm ready yet... I'm still a bit shaky!"

S: "Don't be so silly, all you did was go on a ferris wheel. You can do it again."

Example 2: Babe and Trisha.

Babe and Trisha are attending the same university. Trisha applied for a scholarship for music and got it. Babe didn't apply for anything but is short of money.

B: "So you got it then?"

T: "Yes, I'm so happy! It will help me loads when I graduate, not to have as much debt. And the free board is the icing on the cake."

B: "I bet you just got it cause of Affirmative Action. A latina trans woman and all that."

Example 3: Holly and James.

Holly and James share the same foster parents. Now adults, they're job hunting. James has come home with great news: after many hard months he's found and got an entry-level job with a good salary.

J: "It's so great, and now if you or mum and dad need any help I have the money to support you."

H: "It's not fair, cis straight white men get all the good jobs. I'll never get a job like that so long as I live."

J: "I'm sure you can, besides, I was lucky to find a job that fits my interests really well, that's all."

H: "If you were black like me you'd not have got it, fit or no fit, you're just too privileged to see."

How it hurts: When someone's achievements are all viewed as simple, basic, or pointless, and their joy is viewed as immature or grandiose, the victim may feel self-doubt, or even self-loathing, as well as nihilistic. Sometimes they will also feel socially isolated or stressed by the event. They are left with the sensation that their accomplishments mean nothing, that they themselves are being immature, that it's not worth striving for anything and that they will never accomplish enough.

Why you might do it: Abusers trivialize either to take power and happiness away from their victim intentionally, or because they genuinely do not see the accomplishment. In the first case they may be afraid the victim gains too much power from their achievements, or jealous of the victim's position, progress, or happiness. In the second they may have difficulty understanding social situations and be a more demure person naturally, leaving them oblivious to the victim's need to share their achievements.

What to do instead: Try and understand other people's joy and satisfaction. Even if you see the accomplishment as nothing, congratulate them. And if you feel like they did not earn their success, or like you deserve more or better than them, keep it to yourself and focus on self improvement.

Tactic 9: Undermining.

Definition: When an abuser undermines, it is similar to trivializing in that the victim's accomplishments and emotions are painted as childish and meaningless. However with undermining we have the element of mocking their suffering or hardships *on top of* trivializing their success.

Example 1: Latanya and Suzanne.

L: "I seriously don't want to go again. It takes time to get over a phobia. I'm not ready to do that again."

S: "Stop being such a baby! If you won't come with me, I'll go on my own."

Example 2: Babe and Trisha.

T: "That's not right. They probably didn't even know when giving me the scholarship, after all I just submitted a musical piece."

B: "I'm sure they read the applications and pick the 'diversity' crowd."

T: "Seriously, stop bringing my identity up all the time."

B: "Why? You keep riding your identity to get all sorts of stuff, can't pretend it's not relevant now."

Example 3: Holly and James.

J: "No, I seriously fit the job well. Every part of it is something I've studied or done as a hobby. It's just lucky."

H: "White guys can't see privilege, how would you know?"

How it hurts: As with trivializing.

Why you might do it: As with trivializing.

What to do instead: As with trivializing.

Tactic 10: Threatening.

Definition: People find it easy to acknowledge direct, overt, clearly intentional, vocalized threats as abusive. When someone shouts “I’m going to kill you!” or says “do that one more time and you’ll never see me again” we understand that this is a threat designed to cause compliance. But threatening behaviour is less obvious. An emotional abuser may make jokes about harming someone (see above), or say something in passing, but through repeating the same threat, or focusing on the victim’s prior experiences or fears, the abuser creates a hostile environment.

Example 1: Dana and Tim.

Dana is Tim’s supervisor.

T: “I don’t feel well enough to do overtime tonight.”

D: “You’re due a performance review next week. You want to keep this job, right?”

Example 2: Farrah and Sade.

Farrah and Sade are room mates.

F: “Sorry, I think I lost the spare keys again.”

S: “I’m gonna have to sell your computer to pay for all the keys you’ve lost!”

Example 3: Kayano and Lauren.

Kayano and Lauren are in a domestic violence support group.

K: “I just feel that false accusations are a sort of domestic violence as well, and we need to prevent them.”

L: “When you get raped you’ll regret blaming other women.”

How it hurts: These threats make the victim feel stressed and upset, both because the threat itself makes the victim fearful, and because the knowledge that these “jokes” can’t be stopped or avoided makes the victim anxious about the next time it will happen. Threats can also be focused on socially alienating the victim, adding another dimension to the abuse.

Why you might do it: Threatening, done like this, only happens for two reasons: either the perpetrator is aware of the victim’s discomfort and is deliberately hurting them, or the perpetrator is not aware of how much the victim is suffering because they cannot put themselves in the victim’s shoes.

What to do instead: Respect when someone says that an expression makes them scared or uncomfortable, do not pressure or question them, and avoid such expressions in the future.

Tactic 11: Name calling.

Definition: Many people only recognize this form of verbal abuse, and still few recognize the emotionally abusive component to it. Name calling takes many forms, from the overt insult thrown openly, but name calling can also take the form of abuse disguised as a joke, of personal slights, and insults which might not be noticed by onlookers. Racial abuse is name calling, but so is using a term that people find uncomfortable or have asked you not to, or using a derogatory tone when referencing someone. Saying “her” with a bitter tone can be just as hurtful as an overt insult.

Example 1: Amber and Ron.

Amber and Ron are twin brother and sister. Ron has refused to help Amber with her car.

A: “Well, I suppose you always were the evil twin.”

Example 2: Darren and Lydia.

Lydia is a little person.

D: “Is life hard, being a midget?”

Example 3: Jess and Yi.

Jess is bisexual, she has come out to Yi, who she had assumed was gay and likes.

Yi: “I'm really flattered, and happy for you, but I'm not actually gay.”

Jess: “Great, one of my friends was cis scum!”

How it hurts: An insult usually hurts on two fronts. On one level, the person insulted may feel like the insult touches on a sensitivity of theirs, a raw nerve. This can cause self doubt and self loathing. On another level, even if the insult misses the mark, the fact they have been insulted may make the victim feel reduced or socially alienated.

Why you might do it: To some perpetrators, they feel that certain insults are not hurtful and don't see why someone would be hurt. This is especially difficult when the insult applies to the perpetrator too, for example when a person of one ethnicity uses a racial epithet on someone of their own ethnicity. Other perpetrators know full well that an insult hurts and feel they are being edgy, or strong, by using it.

What to do instead: As with threats, acknowledge when someone expresses discomfort and accept their boundaries.

Tactic 12: Forgetting.

Definition: A perpetrator may actually forget events and discussions because they dismiss them from their memory, or they may pretend to have forgotten. This is not done because their memory is bad: somehow the abuser always forgets things that are convenient for them to forget. They don't forget where they parked their car, or that you owe them money. But they manage to forget promising to take you somewhere, or that your mother's birthday is that weekend.

Example 1: Tino and Zack.

Tino and Zack are close friends. Tino asked Zack to give him a ride to the mall, which he promised, but Zack forgot and went on his own. Zack never does this to anyone else, and Tino is left stranded. Tino wonders what he did to deserve this, and questions his place in the social circle.

Example 2: Barry and Olga.

Barry and Olga are married. Barry knows their anniversary is next week, but he dreads it and feels she just wants 'more girly rubbish'. He plans a night away with his friends and only tells her in the last minute. When she cries he turns it on her, saying she never told him and that she has known about his night out for weeks. Olga feels lost and confused.

Example 3: Morgan and Pat.

Morgan and Pat are close friends. Pat has repeatedly told Morgan to stop calling him “a cracker”, “paddy pat”, or “cis scum”, even as a joke, but Morgan doesn't see what the big deal is. He pretends to keep forgetting and figures Pat's thick skin can handle it.

How it hurts: Forgetting sends a message that the victim's concerns are unimportant, causing self loathing, stress, and nihilistic thoughts.

Why you might do it: Either the victim genuinely means nothing to the perpetrator, or the perpetrator is actively trying to hurt them and mess with their head.

What to do instead: If you find yourself doing this to someone, then you should probably just leave them alone, because nothing beneficial for either can be resulting from this relationship.

Tactic 13: Ordering.

Definition: Ordering is when a perpetrator attempts to control a victim's behaviour for the sake of it. For example, someone asking you to stop using a certain word around them may stem from them feeling genuinely uncomfortable or threatened by it. However sometimes people will request that a word is not used on other people, or even used in their absence. Here they are speaking for another person, in an effort to change their victim's behaviour.

Example 1: Anastasia and George.

Anastasia and George are friends at school. Anastasia is practising the flute in class during break. George walks in.

G: "Could you stop doing that?"

A: "Why?"

G: "It's bothering me."

A: "Well, I was here first."

G: "And I'm here now. Go somewhere else."

A: "I'm here cause it's quiet, and I wasn't bothering anyone."

G: "You're bothering me, if you can't find somewhere else to play, don't play."

Example 2: Santiago and Terrence.

Santiago and Terrence are playing cards at a bar. Terrence, after a couple of drinks, starts trying to pet Santiago's curly hair.

S: "Please don't do that, it's embarrassing."

T: "I just wanna know what it feels like."

S: "Seriously, dude, it makes me uncomfortable."

T: "Oh, shut up and let me touch your hair."

S: "Dude, just stop."

T: "I said shut up and stay still."

Example 3: Julia and Mia.

Julia and Mia are cousins. Julia is friends with a few black people from her community which Mia, due to her social activism, is fascinated by.

J: "And then I told Jason 'you need to stop dying your hair, nigga, or you'll need to change your driving license to white'."

M: "Uh, white people can't say that."

J: "Say what?"

M: "The n-word, it's really problematic."

J: "Nah, it's cool with Jason. I'd never call someone it if they didn't tell me it was OK with them."

M: "Even if he *says* it's OK, it's not OK. Never. That's their word."

J: "Seriously? Jason says it's fine for me to use that word about him, why are you talking over him?"

M: "Because he doesn't understand the struggles other black people go through with racism and doesn't respect himself. You can't say that word."

How it hurts: Ordering people, especially concerning things that don't mean anything to you or them directly, makes them feel like they don't matter, their choices are wrong, and your choices are right. This leads to the victim feeling out of control, self doubt, self loathing, stress, depression, and all can sum up to a form of social alienation where they do not deserve to be around other people and they cannot get anything right.

Why you might do it: Ordering stems from control, often disguised as kindness or a need. Ordering is the primary way that an abuser paints themselves as either a "victim" being constantly

hurt by their victim's actions, or even as a hero, saving other “real victims” from the victim's actions.

What to do instead: If you feel that someone is hurting you, feel free to tell them so and ask them to modify their behaviour. On the other hand, if you feel like someone is not meeting your standards, and you want to be seen by outsiders as a victim or a hero: don't try and control other people to make yourself look and feel better.

Tactic 14: Denial.

Definition: Denial is related to forgetting and blaming. When an abuser forgets about something, or pretends to, sometimes they will not settle for that. And when they want to blame their victim for a situation, they will lie about it to twist it into being the victim's fault. Sometimes they will actively lie to their victim about events and incidents to make them question themselves. This is what is known as “gaslighting”: trying to make the victim doubt themselves, their feelings, even their sanity, to make the abuser look and feel good.

Example 1: Faye and Grant.

Faye is Grant's daughter. Grant has eaten some of her Halloween chocolates, and did not expect her to notice, but now she is questioning where they went and very distressed.

F: “But I had them!”

G: “Maybe you ate them.”

F: “I don't think I did.”

G: “Who else would have?”

Example 2: Ben and Javier.

Ben and Javier are a couple. Javier has a few issues with bipolar disorder, whereas Ben is mentally healthy. They are getting ready to go out to a drag show, but Javier feels uncomfortable about something Ben did last time.

J: “Just please don't embarrass me.”

B: “Why would I do that?”

J: “Last time you said something really offensive to the act.”

B: “Did I? What was it?”

J: “I can't remember, but it... I just remember feeling ashamed.”

B: “You probably just imagined it, you know how crazy your head is.”

Example 3: Talia and Zafina.

Talia and Zafina are friends. Talia likes to think of herself as progressive, but Zafina finds Talia to be over the top. Zafina has decided to stop going out with Talia until the constant efforts to “protect” her end.

T: “I just don't see why you don't wanna hang out with me any more!”

Z: “I just... I feel smothered by you. It's too much.”

T: “I'm just doing it for your own good, you should appreciate it.”

Z: “Talia, it's way too much. I need some space. You make me feel so ashamed.”

T: “Well... you shouldn't. All I do is for your good.”

How it hurts: Denial primarily makes the victim doubt themselves, which then leads on into the remaining four avenues for abuse. The victim loathes themselves for their errors, alienates themselves because social interactions are painful, and gets stressed and depressed over their perceived poor mental health and social skills. Denial is one of the most insidious forms of emotional abuse as it is so hard to prove it is happening, and easily written off as “I forgot”, “my bad”, or “well, that's not how I remember it” when the abuser is caught out.

Why you might do it: Many abusers actually come to believe their own stories. It starts out as a way of shifting blame, or getting out of consequences to their own actions, but over time they repeat the lie so much that they believe it. Some abusers, like Talia, are in denial about their abuse, in rare cases, in denial about their denial.

What to do instead: Don't lie to others to make yourself feel or look good, be honest even if it makes you look bad, or feel like a rubbish person. That way you don't have to keep a lie going

indefinitely.

Tactic 15: Abusive anger.

Definition: Anger is a very natural, healthy emotion to feel. However, like all emotions, the *expression* of anger can be faked and used as a manipulative tool. Abusive anger works on two fronts. Firstly, the raw, animal emotion inspires fear, making the victim go into fight or flight mode and panic. Secondly, seeing the abuser go into a full rage makes the victim feel like they are in the wrong, because emotional responses tend to imply genuineness.

Example 1: Jaiden and Nina.

Jaiden and Nina are brother and sister. Jaiden wishes Nina would be a bit gentler with him, but the more he asks her to control her anger and be nicer, the more she seems to get angrier and more unpredictable with him. She even gets angry about him mentioning her anger, and it's reaching a point where he just does whatever she wants him to so as to prevent an outburst.

Example 2: Lola and Stan.

Lola and Stan have been going out for three years. Although Lola loves Stan, she finds he gets very aggressive very fast. And it's only been getting worse for the past few years. She finds herself having to calm him literally every time they have a disagreement, and from time to time she has feared for her life.

Example 3: Stanley and Violet.

Stanley and Violet have worked together at the same company for nearly a decade. Stanley finds that Violet responds to everything with outrage and anger. Whatever he says or does she labels as offensive in some way: misogynistic, homophobic, racist... He can't even ask what's being served in the canteen without expecting a rant. Yet he's starting to feel that if she's so sensitive to it, perhaps he really is so offensive? But she won't tell him what to fix, leaving him with the impression she just wants him to never talk again.

How it hurts: By making the victim afraid the abuser inspires stress, and by making the victim feel like the bad guy the abuser causes self doubt and self loathing.

Why you might do it: The abuser's anger is intentional, not just a healthy vent of emotion, but intended to exploit the victim's discomfort and desire to calm the abuser's anger.

What to do instead: When you feel genuine anger, try and calm yourself as much as possible and express yourself openly and honestly to reach a resolution. Do not use your anger to try and get what you want out of the other party in a fit of righteousness.