

How to Identify an Emotionally Abusive Patient

written by CPH Insurance | June 15, 2016

All mental and allied health care providers seek to recognize the root of their patients distress, as a means to help them maintain functional, healthy lifestyles. Often this is easier said than done, since the degree and root of emotional issues can vary greatly, and patients are often hesitant to admit when their problems are causing them to be emotionally abuse to a loved one.

Emotional abuse can occur in children and adults, and can often be described as “bullying” when juveniles are evaluated. Sometimes exhibited by those who also suffer from a psychological disorder, the indicators of emotional abuse can be present in a patient who exhibits a number of different signs. With the use of specific, proven criteria, mental health professionals can identify when emotional abuse is ongoing, even if the patient is reluctant to volunteer the information, or unaware of the wrongfulness of their actions.

Emotional abuse is defined as “any act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth,” and is also commonly referred to as Psychological Abuse and/or Chronic Verbal Aggression. Emotional abuse, short or long term, can lead to depression, low self-esteem, personality changes, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts and actions. Unlike other forms of abuse, emotional abuse develops a cyclical pattern, starting with one partner who exhibits abusive behavior, many times to show dominance, but then develops internal guilt about their reprehensible actions.

The Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Yelling and Swearing
- Demeaning someone based on their language, race, religion, sexuality, or other trait
- Excessive criticism
- Threats of violence, abandonment, starvation, medical care
- Name Calling, Insults, lies, withholding important information
- Intimidation, blackmail, slander
- Isolation of self or loved one
- Humiliation, mocking
- Denial of the abuse/blaming the victim

Abusers of this kind will almost never voluntarily recognize their degree of aggression, and often make excuses or blame their victim for their own behaviors. Once an episode of abuse is over, the abuser resumes his or her “normal” behavior and may even be generously apologetic to their victim. The

abuser then resumes fantasizing about emotionally abusing their partner again, and the cycle repeats when an opportunity arises. If you recognize your patient is emotionally abusive, or the victim of emotional abuse, the situation must be immediately addressed to avoid escalation of the abuse. Recommending separation, therapy, and anger management classes can effectively help to combat your patients abuse traits, allowing them to remain in control of their actions and prevent future episodes of emotional abuse.