

## **Emotional Abuse and Internal Beliefs**

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Domestic violence is present today in many ways, shapes, and forms. The image that comes to mind often involves physical violence, but emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse are also frequently involved in these kinds of toxic relationships. In many cases, these are the lasting scars that require the most attention and work to resolve. The things that people say, however untrue, stay with a person much longer than bruises and fractures ever do.

The term “gas lighting” has been used frequently in media, and is a prime example of psychological abuse and how it can change patterns of thinking. The term came from a play turned film in the early 1940’s in which the abuser manipulated objects of his victim’s common world to create confusion and self-sabotage. The wife noticed that the gas lights around the home dimmed when her husband went into the attic, and brought this to his attention. As part of his strategy, he told his wife that this was a figment of her imagination, and that she must have made it up. Eventually, the wife became completely and utterly unsure of her own perception of reality and sanity. In the same way, the longer a person endures negative language, labels, and names, the more they may question their own judgment, and not the judgment of their abuser. These messages become deep, internal scripts that shape the decisions people make and the things people believe about themselves.

Guilt, shame, and low self-esteem are common manifestations of emotional abuse. These emotions are often involved with areas of mental health such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, addictions, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, unhealthy relationships, and so many others. This does not mean that people who experience these emotions will suffer mental health diagnoses, but that the internal messages that people believe about themselves go hand-in-hand with internal suffering.

The most encouraging thing about these internal messages is that they can be changed. Just as somebody may have been able to turn high self-esteem into negative beliefs, people are also capable of turning those negative beliefs into self-love and appreciation. Though this process may take time, words that may have once deteriorated a person’s entire sense of self and worth can also be used in other capacities to build and empower. Human beings are incredibly resilient. Eventually, the strength that they feel about themselves can combat the lies and manipulations that were meant to break them.