

VERBAL ABUSE BREAKS A CHILD'S HEART AND LIFE

Let's talk about abuse. Not physical abuse or sexual abuse, but verbal abuse. As a counselor for 40 years, I can tell you that the most common, the most devastating hurt that my clients have to contend with is verbal abuse. But this is true of everyone. I doubt that we can find anyone on this planet who has not been a victim of verbal abuse at one time or another.

All day long, we hear spoken words from all kinds of people. So often some of these words hurt us. They cut into the heart. There are times that the distress inflicted by these hurtful words is so great that it becomes almost physical. There is a knot in the stomach as the verbal abuse hits home.

It is truly amazing how much damage a cutting word can cause. Friendships have been shattered, love has disintegrated and business relationships have broken up because of verbal abuse, real or perceived.

This is especially true with children. Kids have few defenses. They hurt easily because the ego of the child is so fragile. Children have no defenses. When you tell a child that he is stupid or bad, he believes it. When you tell him that he is the reason why his mother is crying, he will feel guilty even if he has no guilt at all.

When someone tells a child that he "can't do anything right," he believes it. When he is unfavorably compared to others, the hurtful comparison is burned into his mind and his self-esteem takes a big hit. Add a physical beating to verbal abuse and you have a deadly combination. Deadly because such abuse can cut down the fragile child in ways that can kill his spirit and damage him for life.

I have counseled countless persons over the last 40 years who have been badly wounded by verbal attacks on them when they were children. Years later, they still feel the hurt and the resentment it has engendered. There is anger and bitterness and feelings of revenge that remain with them till the day they die. In many cases the wounds are so deep that they refuse to forgive. Tragically, it often happens that the one they cannot forgive is a close family member, a parent or a sibling.

What is more sad is that most of the time the abuser cannot even remember the hurtful happening. Very often the abuser cannot believe the intensity of the anger, the depth of the bitterness his words have caused. The abuser will say that he didn't mean it and that he never thought his words could cause so much damage.

What he forgets is the age gap and the lack of maturity in the child that make it just about impossible for the child to understand the sincere motives that lie buried beneath the avalanche of hurtful words.

Angry words, quick tempers and unthinking statements destroy much of the love and goodwill that is painstakingly built up over the years. The lost love might never be found again and all because of hurtful words.