



The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abused and How to Stop Abusing

Beverly Engel

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"Engel doesn't just describe-she shows us the way out."

-Susan Forward, author of Emotional Blackmail Praise for the emotionally abusive relationship

"In this book, Beverly Engel clearly and with caring offers step-by-step strategies to stop emotional abuse. . . helping both victims and abusers to identify the patterns of this painful and traumatic type of abuse. This book is a guide both for individuals and for couples stuck in the tragic patterns of emotional abuse."

-Marti Loring, Ph.D., author of Emotional Abuse
and coeditor of The Journal of Emotional Abuse

"This groundbreaking book succeeds in helping people stop emotional abuse by focusing on both the abuser and the abused and showing each party what emotional abuse is, how it affects the relationship, and how to stop it. Its unique focus on the dynamic relationship makes it more likely that each person will grasp the tools for change and really use them."

-Randi Kreger, author of The Stop Walking on Eggshells Workbook
and owner of BPDCentral.com

The number of people who become involved with partners who abuse them emotionally and/or who are emotionally abusive themselves is phenomenal, and yet emotional abuse is the least understood form of abuse. In this breakthrough book, Beverly Engel, one of the world's leading experts on the subject, shows us what it is and what to do about it.

Whether you suspect you are being emotionally abused, fear that you might be emotionally abusing your partner, or think that both you and your partner are emotionally abusing each other, this book is for you. The Emotionally Abusive Relationship will tell you how to identify emotional abuse and how to find the roots of your behavior. Combining dramatic personal stories with action steps to heal, Engel provides prescriptive strategies that will allow you and your partner to work together to stop bringing out the worst in each other and stop the abuse.

By teaching those who are being emotionally abused how to help themselves and those who are being emotionally abusive how to stop abusing, The Emotionally Abusive Relationship offers the expert guidance and support you need.

The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abused and How to Stop Abusing Details

Date : Published August 8th 2007 by Wiley (first published August 13th 2002)

ISBN :

Author : Beverly Engel

Format : Kindle Edition 272 pages

Genre : Self Help, Psychology, Relationships, Nonfiction, Health, Mental Health, Sociology, Abuse

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From Reader Review The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abused and How to Stop Abusing for online ebook

Mariah Dale says

I personally loved this book and I think everybody should read it. Yes, even those of you that aren't in a relationship. In this book Engel provides many ways to hope with a past abusive relationship, or even abuse you suffered from as a child.

Edina says

I've been able to reference this book in my psychology and nursing classes now. It's a fantastic read.

Douglas Lord says

According to therapist Engel (Partners in Recovery), "even the most loving person" is capable of emotional abuse that is, "any non-physical behavior designed to control, intimidate, subjugate, demean, punish, or isolate." In a reasoned, sensible tone, she encourages readers to become responsible for their behavior and for changing it. Identified are ten "patterns of abuse" (verbal assault, character assassination, etc), different kinds of abusive relationships, action steps for cessation, and suggestions for recovery. Using dense writing and cogent examples, Engel clearly shows how this type of abuse, either intentional or unconscious, leads to low self-esteem and misery for one or both partners. A difficult and draining yet important read for those who suspect that their relationship has entered abusive territory, this book is highly recommended. For books on remedying less severe marital stresses, try Howard Markman and others' hokey but well-intentioned Fighting for Your Marriage.

Find reviews of books for men at Books for Dudes, Books for Dudes, the online reader's advisory column for men from Library Journal. Copyright Library Journal.

Magnus Lidbom says

EDIT: I finally found a non-abusive, insightful and nuanced book on the topic as it relates to my experiences: Susan Forward's Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You

With that I am able to give this book the score I really feel it deserves.

Original review

The most balanced, informative, and reasonable book on the subject I've found so far. Sadly that does not say much. It contains an abundance of quite problematic quotes such as this one:

"The information and exercises in this section will underscore the fact that an abusive childhood lies at the core of your current situation. While some of you may be more resistant to understanding this truth than

others, try to be as open as you can to the possibility."

She talks about how you as the reader needs to "be open to the possibility" so that you can understand "the fact" and "this truth". The fact and the truth that she knows your reality better than you do. For every single reader without qualification. This in a book that talks about just how emotionally abusive it is to try to define someone else's reality for them. How it is literally crazy-making.

Or how about this doozy? "The simple truth is you would not be in an emotionally abusive relationship if you didn't have a prior history of abuse or neglect."

This book badly needs for the many formulations similar to the two above to be completely eliminated and replaced with non-abusive, non-delusional, statements such as "If X is true for you, then odds are very high that Y is the case for you. Please give serious consideration to the possibility that this may be the case for you".

And to add insult to injury the book follows up with "proofs" that are very similar to horoscope logic. It goes something like this: List the general characteristics of your current abuser. Compare them to the parents in your family of origin. Are they similar to either or both parents if you squint and equate similar characteristics? If yes than you have probably found your original abuser. Are they perhaps not at all similar? Wow, then you are sure to have found your original abuser since this is an even more sure sign!

The abundance of blatant boundary violations, over generalization, and "logic" such as the example above should mean an instant 1 star score. The only reason it stays at 3 stars is that it is, sadly, the best book I've found on the subject so far. The others I've found seem like cartoonish good vs evil stories with boundary violations that make the ones in this one seem like nothing, and logic that makes this book seem like the height of scientific discourse.

Juliana says

As opposed to The Verbally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans, this book was fair, even and dedicated to working toward a solution. It explored in depth (or rather, encouraged the reader to explore in depth) the root causes of abuse. It explored the reasons why people become abusive, and why people become targets of abuse. The reasons are remarkably similar.

This book encouraged introspection, rather than blaming. By the most broad definitions, everybody is abusive at some point in their life to some degree. When you recognize that certain behaviors are abusive--or shall we say, they cross a boundary?--you start to see it everywhere. A lot of people cross boundaries with good intentions and with very light hearts. It's understandable and easy to forgive. (Others do so maliciously to control others--and I find that behavior sickening and demeaning.)

This book accentuated the fact that "abuse" is a term which describes an entire continuum of behaviors, from mildly annoying to severely damaging. From that point of view, I found it very uncomfortable because it made me a tad paranoid about myself and other people. A friend would make a sarcastic joke and I would think, "That was abusive" instead of "Good old so-and-so." Or I would snap in frustration at my kids and think, "Was that just discipline? Or was that verbal abuse? Or both? Or neither--maybe just me feeling frustrated and taking it out on them?!?!" I guess that is the point of self help books--to make us think about our lives and relationships in another light, with the goal of using that information to improve things?

I think that this book could be an interesting read for anybody, not just people who have a history of dishing out or accepting emotional abuse. It has a lot of interesting things to think about.

The book starts with some broad defining chapters, then moves on to discuss the root of abuse. It talks about how our world is defined so much in our childhood that trauma in our youth can take years to overcome. Today at my twins' annual checkup, our pediatrician said that this year will be a defining year for the two of them. Many people think of how "normal" life is (for better or worse, I might add) according to how life was when they were about three years old. This makes sense.

The book then has chapters that are checklists for both "how to stop being abused" and "how to stop abusing." It assumes that people want to change for the better and are capable of doing so. This is a big improvement from The Verbally Abusive Relationship.

I easily give this book an A for its coverage of the subject matter and I recommend it as interesting reading to people who are interested in human psychology, interpersonal communication, or those who recognize that something in their past or current relationships is uncomfortable to them. I learned a lot and I think I made some positive changes in my attitude toward others as a result of this book.

P.S. Thanks to my friend "Q" for the book recommendation. It was fun to talk about it with you!

Priscilla says

when it draws you down.. u find strength with this book. methodically helpful.

Kara says

This is the first book I read when I began to suspect my former relationship might have been abusive. It immediately confirmed my fears, but also gave me lots of hope moving forward. It offered a ton of insight on being a child of an abusive parent, and how I was more vulnerable to abuse even though I thought I would never let anyone treat me that way. Engel also offers advice for abusers--she really presents both sides well, and does not cast this evil light on abusers. It certainly helped me realize abusers aren't always intentionally abusive or abusive in a malicious way--which makes it easier to forgive them for their behavior. I appreciate her warnings and advice about how to be aware that you might switch roles from victim to abuser, kind of as a way to prevent yourself from being a victim again. This is certainly a concern of mine, but the book presents lots of exercises that help along the healing process as either a victim of abuse or an abuser.

Cindy says

This was an occasionally difficult book to read, but it was also informative and approachable, making it very easy to agree with and accept. Sometimes, it got a bit too obvious and explained things a little too verbosely, but it was overall excellent. I hope to add it to my personal collection soon.

Katie Rose Sorensen says

Full of helpful information for any relationship. I think emotional abuse is a lot more common than we think and can be difficult to identify unless you know what to look for. This book is an excellent resource.

Melissa says

I had hoped that by reading this book to gain a little more clarity on everything that has happened. While it helped reinforce what an abusive relationship looked like, it wasn't as proficient at helping figure out what they next steps were except for a few cases with specific qualifications. This book would probably be most useful for intimate relationships rather than any other kind of abusive dynamic.

The Emotionally Abusive Relationship takes a look at both the abuser and the victim. It offers techniques and help for both on improving the relationship. Each chapter is set into two parts, one for the victim figuring out if they are being abused, and the other for the abuser figuring out if they are abusing someone. The first part deals with actually putting a label on the abuse. The next tries to show why someone might abuse/allow themselves to be abused. Next is how to prevent the abuse from happening on both sides. The last part is where to go from here after reading this book.

I found the book very helpful in the first part when it outlines whether or not you are in an abusive relationship or not or if you are abusing something. The checklists are easy to follow and spell out why something is or isn't abuse. It was the next part that I had some trouble with. The author insists that abusers/victims all have some original abuser in the past and you have to come to terms with that abuse before healing this abuse. The problem with that is, what about those people who didn't have abusive childhoods but still find themselves victims of abuse? There are no other alternatives in this book so those in this situation find themselves floundering trying to figure out why they "let" themselves be abused. And that is another problem, no one purposely seeks out an abusive relationship but this author seems to think they do. Often abusers are on their best behavior for the first few weeks, months, years and then escalate when major life changes like buying a house or marriage come into the picture.

Stopping the Abuse is also a very dangerous part as it suggests confronting your abuser head on with this knowledge. This can be both physically and mentally endangering as often times abusers don't care or want to admit their behavior and will take out their anger at the accusal on the victim. This chapter may be more helpful for abusers looking to improve themselves rather than victims looking to stop the abuse. This part does have a nice section on personality disorders though and identifying if the abuser or victim may have Narcissistic Personality Disorder or Borderline Personality Disorder.

Not the best book since it seems to blame the victim for entering the relationship and then advises several unsafe things for them to do. May be good as an identifier for an abusive relationship but not as a cure all. It also has some handy resources for books, websites, etc. in the back although some of the websites are no longer in service.

The Emotionally Abusive Relationship

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255 pages

Gary Castaldo says

So the person that has Emotionally Abused my wife makes it hard for me to read this. Seeing I had to face what I've done. We have been married for 19 years, we have been together for 22 years and we are looking at getting divorced. We are looking at the end of our relationship. I'm trying to correct my ways of interacting with her. I'm trying to get treatment. I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if she's going to just walk away one day. I hope one day to show her I can and have changed. Thank you to Beverly Engel for something me how I can do it.

Amy Christensen says

I began this book with the hope of learning strategies to deal with my former husband who quite clearly is an emotional abuser. I was already aware that he had suffered emotional, verbal and some physical abuse in his childhood. I found it enlightening that I have also started to use some emotionally abusive attitudes. Particularly in the two past relationships I had after my divorce, I chose partners I felt were beneath me quite possibly so that I would feel in control of the relationship. As I would like to begin a new relationship with someone that I do admire, I would like to control these tendencies that I have developed. I also do not under any circumstances want to use this behavior with my son. That was also another reason I wanted to learn about coping with emotional abuse, because it is clear my son is already a victim of his father's pattern.

Ms. Engel then goes on to describe patterns of verbal abuse with examples from her practice. I noticed that I was physically stressed reading this chapter as I recognized most of the patterns from my own experience; particularly the part about sexual harassment. My former husband demanded sexual acts and practices from me that I found humiliating, to the point that I wept with shame when he decided to divorce me. I thought that my acts were so disgusting that no other person could ever possibly want to be with me.

The following chapter discussed different types of emotional abuse. I was particularly enlightened by her identifying a "set-up" tactic where one partner creates situation to upset the other. Now that my former husband no longer lives with me, this is the predominant manner that he devises against me. He refuses to take my phone calls and does not respond when I leave urgent messages concerning our son. He does not respond when I call to speak to our son during his visitation. On more than one occasion I have left rather ominous messages, though the one I can think of off the top of my head is "I guess I will show up at every orthopedic practice in Arlington Heights since you are refusing to give me the doctor's name." I am glad to identify this, now I can make attempts not to play my former husband's demeaning games. I do however find that this book is increasing my disrespect and loathing for my former husband. While I am aware that he is a product of his own upbringing, to learn of these tactics and behaviors show me the true depths and lengths my former husband is willing to engage in his attempt to continue to control me. I am truly worried for my son.

In order to understand why the reader keeps repeating patterns, Ms. Engel provides exercises which analyze abuse history in childhood. I listed my mother, father and my brother Andy as abusers, but in order to establish a primary or original abuser, the author asks you to compare characteristics. I used my former husband as the comparison as it is my current engagements with him that sought me to seek out this book. I

was very surprised that the person my former husbands shares the most commonalities with is my brother! Ms. Engel explains people have a tendency to seek out people like their original abuser in order to re-work the relationship with a more positive outcome, though the outcome is more often than not, a re-hashing of the same type of abuse. After reflection, my brother as my original abuser makes sense. It is no secret that I am drawn to "Peter Pan" personalities; people who are fun playmates but who are irresponsible. It is clear to me now that I seem to want to re-capture the innocence of childhood. My beloved confidante using me as a sexual object was for me, the ultimate betrayal. It does explain why I allow myself to be used for sex so easily. I seem to believe that sexual degradation is normal and to be expected.

The next chapter begins with strategies to stop the abuse. The tactic I particularly liked was identifying boundaries. It is quite empowering to outline behaviors you will no longer tolerate. Knowing that chronic abusers will challenge boundaries, Ms. Engel suggests firmly stating, "You have the right to your point of view, but I'm going to stand by what I said. I don't like to be treated this way." I felt so strongly about this positive statement that I am trying to commit it to memory to use with my former husband.

Ms. Engel acknowledges the abuser as a victim of abuse themselves. While I have been guilty of some abusive behaviors, it is clear to me I that I am so afraid of becoming like my mother, that I prefer to be the recipient of abuse. However, the exercises for abusers did engage my empathy. I know my former husband's past, he too clearly was abused, and he just made different choices than me. Neither one of us had any knowledge of a healthier way to be.

The chapter for couples really requires both parties to participate. That will never be the situation with my former husband. Divorce is truly worse than death, because unlike death which is an ending, with divorce with children, there will never be an end. Marriage with children truly is until death do you part. The advice of walking away from a partner's blowup is good advice. I will no longer passively take Tim's abuse.

Next, Ms. Engel discusses personality disorders. My former husband has often been referred to as a Narcissist, but I learned he has many of the symptoms associated with Borderline Personality Disorder as well. Whether he suffers from one or both of these disorders the behaviors he constantly displays makes him extremely difficult to handle. I have found this book enlightening; however it seems to be geared towards couples who wish to stay together. Applying some of her suggestions will be beneficial, but I want to create more space and boundaries, not intimacy.

I decided to skip the chapters on living with people with personality disorders and the chapter on deciding to stay. Instead I proceeded to learning how not to continue this in the future, as that was a goal of mine. I particularly liked the exercise that gets you to think about what behaviors you will no longer tolerate. Ms. Engel also advises not jumping into relationships too quickly and to take them very slow so that you can better determine whether or not the personality you are seeing on a date is merely a front for the abuser underneath. It certainly helps one feel empowered.

The final chapter reminds both victim and abuser of the secret needs not being met. She suggests discovering what is missing and providing these things for yourself, rather than trying to find them in someone else.

Sabra says

I can have close healthy relationships as an emotionally stable and mature person myself and with another emotionally stable and mature adult. I was pretty near giving up before picking up his book.
I now aware that every serious relationship I've ever been a part of was emotionally abusive.

I'm also aware that I began practicing emotionally abusive habits myself as well. Now I have pretty much every tool I need to choose healthy people, act/relate in a healthy way myself, recognize the warning signs when I'm first beginning to know someone, recognize and do my personal work (which is part of what will allow me to see those early warning signs, not engage, work through and eliminate those abusive habits and tactics I have developed myself and see emotionally abusive relating as a part of my past, no longer current or future relational life).

Christine says

This book has the some of the best systematic approach to addressing how one may have developed inconsistent boundaries and negative messages from an incomplete upbringing. The author's compassion and empathy for people whether they're "survivors" or "abusers" is refreshing. She recognizes that people are only able to cause great pain because they've experienced pain.

I would recommend reading through the book with an open mind regardless of whether you're approaching it as someone who feels abused, is the abuser or just curious about what makes those kinds of interactions. We all can be emotionally abusive when pressed just right, and Engel's matter-of-fact and nurturing explanations really guides you to gain understanding and responsibility for things you hadn't considered before.

She uses questionnaires, lists and example interactions to guide you through various concepts and action steps for building your own sense of self-esteem, self-awareness, and boundaries. She also breaks down some helpful descriptions for Borderline Personality Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (or tendencies) and has approaches for recognizing those traits in yourself, in someone else and what either person can do about it to enact change.

Overall, it's a great book for learning about how to navigate expressing yourself in areas you feel vulnerable, whether you're in an emotionally abusive relationship or not. As a bonus, it teaches you how to notice, prevent, and manage potentially abusive behavior in yourself and others, too.

Warning note -- this book should be primarily used for those who find themselves in frustrating and confusing situations, not one where you are in physical danger or turned irrevocably toxic. If you read the chapter on whether you should leave or not, they emphasize that physical abuse is a sign to end the relationship and seek counseling. The book is geared more towards understanding the abuser rather than bolstering the "survivors" self-esteem into leaving a dangerous situation. It takes a good sober look at all the factors involved in a relationship becoming abusive, so it may have more discussion over why the "survivor" could be seeking out relationships such as these than some people are comfortable dealing with in their recovery stages.

Randall Wallace says

Emotional abusers use only three weapons: fear, obligation and guilt (so watch for those three critical red flags). These abusers are lazy; they will quickly want to affect how you perceive yourself so you will also partly be doing their work for them. It's like getting to be your own prison guard, only without the free health insurance. When these people deliberately try to ruin your life in a sustained way, that is called Malevolent Abuse. They all have one big shining thing that defines them; they are ALWAYS the "victim"

and they won't be shy about lying about who is causing them their pain. Think Dick Cheney – He is ALWAYS the victim. Note that someone is always keeping his idea of a perfect world from happening and NEVER that he might simply be projecting like a common sociopath by actually keeping our perfect world from happening. The poor baby! ?

Most of us have found ourselves at some point as a victim of emotional blackmail, emotional abuse, or verbal abuse, and so it's a lot more fun to turn the tables instead and for us to identify all the kinds of emotionally abusing people and show what to do with them as Beverly Engel does in this great book.
