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Beneficial Bugs

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Healing Beyond Emotional Abuse

Topics on abuse and domestic violence have become increasingly popular in the news and social media, triggering discussions about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in relationships.



▲ Judith Fisher

Sexual and physical abuse can be easily detected while emotional abuse leaves no visible scars to mark its impact, but its wounds destroy the core self and often take decades to surface.

Emotional abuse, which includes verbal aggression and cyber abuse, is the systematic use of malicious manipulation through nonphysical acts, intended to directly or indirectly control someone else, manipulate, and maintain power differential. It can occur alone or with other abuses.

Data from the National Coalition against Domestic Violence suggests that men and women experience emotional violence at about the same rate. This type of abuse also is prevalent among children and teens, inflicting life-altering consequences. Forms of emotional abuse include:

Rejecting — Using harsh criticism, demeaning jokes; teasing about appearance or ability; withholding affection or attention; refusing to communicate, using the “silent treatment”

Undermining — Finishing your sentences or speaking on your behalf without your permission

Ignoring — Failing to connect or engage emotionally; consistently not acknowledging you

Threatening, Blaming and Shaming — Cursing; using verbal threats to harm, or to reveal personal and embarrassing information; making the person do things s/he doesn't want to do in order to prove his/her love

Isolating — Restricting or forcing seclusion; keeping you from friends or family support; being excessively possessive

Denying/“Gaslighting” — Making the abused second-guess his or her own reality; abuser makes you feel like you are losing your mind or memory

As with other forms of abuse, the cycle of emotional abuse includes the honeymoon phase and the

tension-building phase, followed by the acute explosive phase when the abuse is most evident. This destructive cycle produces PTSD and depressive symptoms, and the abused are significantly more likely to report poor physical and mental health. Regardless of whether you've been emotionally abused as a child, teen or adult, you can experience healing. The journey to healing includes:

- Understanding what abusive relationships look and feel like
- Accepting the life story into which you were born, believing that it does not define you, and having the courage to rewrite your story
- Cultivating the courage to RESPOND to the abuse assertively and intentionally, not merely react
- Establishing healthy boundaries that could include disengaging from abusive interchanges, and limited or no contact with the abuser
- Accepting that you cannot change the abuser but you can change your response
- Accessing counseling resources and supportive friends and family

Healing statement: God created me with a purpose and with love, as a unique individual with *everything* I need to fully function. I have immense worth as a *Child of God* and NO ONE has the right to treat me with disrespect or disdain. Regardless of the family or circumstances into which I was born, I was fearfully and wonderfully created to live fully and with dignity. ■

Judith Fisher, PhD, is a clinical psychologist, who serves as director of Psychological Services at Andrews University. She lives in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Beneficial Bugs

The community of microbes that lives within our gut numbers in the trillions, and the health of that community determines our health. The gut microflora (microbiome) is vital for maintaining the integrity of the intestinal lining.

The microbiome plays a vital role in energy metabolism, anti-inflammatory mechanisms and immunity. Intestinal bacteria serve as a central line of resistance to colonization by foreign microbes.

The intestinal microflora also makes important contributions to our Vitamin K, biotin and folate status. New research shows that the microbiome protects the person against chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

What we eat has a big impact on the composition and behavior of our gut microflora. The type of bacteria living there and the number of each variety plays a significant role in our health. Apart from our dietary intake, the gut microbiota is impacted by a variety of genetic and environmental factors, including stress and medications. The interaction between all these factors is complex.

Our gut microbiota thrive on fiber-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes. The fiber encourages the growth and proliferation of healthy microbes. Fiber is degraded by the microflora into short-chain fatty acids, which nourish the cells of the intestinal lining. Animal foods are devoid of fiber so those consuming a largely meat-based diet will have anaerobic bacteria as the predominant type in their gut. These bacteria are associated with an increased risk of colon cancer. Processed foods often contain added inulin, a fiber from chicory root, as a prebiotic food component to facilitate the growth of a healthy microflora.

Gut microbiome play a role in the development of obesity and diabetes. The type and diversity of microorganisms living in the gut of persons with obesity and diabetes is different from that of healthy individuals. In studies with mice, scientists have been able to reverse these health conditions by transplanting microflora from the gut of the healthy mice into the gut of mice with obesity or diabetes.

Scientists are looking at ways to alter our microbiome by dietary changes. Patients with type 2 diabetes who were given oligofructose (a sugar that stimulates the growth of certain healthy bacteria) for two years showed improved glucose control and experienced an increased weight loss compared to the control group.

Trimethylamine-N-oxide (TMAO) is a metabolite synthesized by certain gut bacteria from compounds in meat, fish, milk and eggs. TMAO is associated with speeding up the rate of atherosclerosis. By eating less animal products, TMAO levels could be decreased, thereby decreasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Scientists are looking into the possibility of screening one's microbiome to identify people at high risk of cancer and then to make dietary changes that would nurture bacteria that would reduce the risk of cancer.

People often take probiotics (supplements) to restore their colonic microflora after taking antibiotics. The evidence suggests that the probiotics may actually delay the restoration of a person's microbiome. ■

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▲ Winston Craig