

---

# SESSION 6

---

## Objectives:

- To recognize forms of covert communication.
- To experience standing up to false accusation or confrontation.
- To recognize and develop skills for preventing emotional abuse.
- To develop skills for avoiding internalizing emotional abuse.
- To recognize personal responsibility for responses to other people's words and actions.

---

## **Outline:**

- **Updating**
- **Covert Communication**
- **Problem Behavior as a Form of Covert Communication**
  - Exercise: Confrontation
- **Put-downs**
- **Dealing with Put-downs**
  - Exercise: Put-downs
- **Criticism**
- **Dealing with Criticism**
  - Exercise: Criticism
- **Personal Responsibility for Feelings**
  - Exercise: Liking Myself
- **Break Or Split Session Option**
  - Selfwork for Split Session Option
  - Reentry for Split Session Option
- **Crazymaking**
- **Verbal Abuse**
  - Exercise: Dealing with Verbal Abuse
  - Alternate Exercise for Preadolescent Groups
- **Other Forms of Emotional Abuse**
- **Resources**
  - Exercise: Special Objects
- **Relaxation**

---

- **Selfwork**

- **Handouts**

- Letter to Parents
- You Are Being Emotionally Abused If . . .

- **Materials:**

- Flip chart or chalk board
- Paper for participants and can or box.
- Basket of paper wadded to throw.
- Materials to enhance Castle Exercise such as:
  - crown
  - wand
  - cape
  - special objects

---

## Updating

Did any of you have opportunities to practice being assertive?

How did people respond?

How did you feel about it?

## Covert Communication

Sometimes people don't ask for what they want or need directly. They try to manipulate or trick people into doing what they want them to do. This is called covert communication.

---

Depending on the age and sophistication of your group you may want to spend some time discussing ways in which members use the strategies on the flip chart. If they are too young or discussion is not likely to be fruitful, provide a general description of covert communication forms and move on.

### Flip Chart 21

---

#### Covert communication:

- manipulating others
  - controlling others
  - lying
  - acting helpless
  - being tough
  - sacrificing or going without
- 

Who can give an example of each of these types of covert communication?

Can you think of others?

What is the problem with these ways of communicating?

## **Problem Behavior as a Form of Covert Communication**

Many of the ways people behave are really covert communications.

For example, when a young child keeps interrupting a parent who is talking on the telephone, what is that young child really trying to say? (I want attention.)

Think about the following behaviors and see if you can identify what the person really wants:

- making noises while others are talking;
- talking back or being rude;
- refusing to make bed or clean up room;
- hitting people;
- not finishing things; and
- getting angry when frustrated.

What would be a more appropriate way to communicate these things?

Discuss.

People are often surprised to learn that the best way to get what they want is to ask for it.

---

It is worth spending some time discussing this. If group members can gain some insight into the reasons for the various behaviors they manifest which cause problems for them at home or at school, they can begin to have some choice about their behavior. Until they can recognize the relationships, they will have little insight and little choice.

---

This is an extremely powerful and empowering exercise! It is at the heart of prevention of child abuse, dating violence, and interpersonal violence. It is a way of confronting the passive behavior which makes people so vulnerable. Begin with group members who have a particularly strong ego or self-esteem, so you are sure they won't fall apart. Participation in this exercise gives group members the experience of standing up for themselves successfully and can be used during remaining sessions.

## **Exercise: Confrontation**

Out of the blue admonish one of the participants for doing something they didn't do. Wait for the reaction. Most participants will silently do what they are told.

- "Angela, you haven't stopped talking for a minute. I'd like you to leave the group."

**How did that feel? Did all of you have your own reaction to what I said to her?**

**Did she do anything to deserve what just happened?**

**How might she respond assertively to let me know I've made a mistake?**

Do this exercise with several of the participants.

- "Marvin, I've told you to listen and you haven't. Now go to the corner and take a timeout."
- "Sally, you know you're not allowed to wear your coat in this room; now you'll have to stay 15 minutes late."
- "Tina, you simply haven't participated enough in this group so we're going to ask you not to come anymore."

In each case, they should resolve this by an assertive response, setting straight the injustice, in a clear voice with good eye contact. Remind them to use the response format: "I feel \_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_ and I want \_\_\_\_."

## Put-Downs

With these things in mind let's look at some of the things other people say and do that have an effect on us and our self-esteem. We'll talk about some things you can do to deal with that and to minimize the negative impact on you.

It isn't always easy to recognize the things that affect the way we feel about ourselves. One reason is because those things often come disguised as something else like:

- "You're a real pinhead."
- "If you had a brain, you'd be dangerous."
- "You were absent when smarts were handed out."
- "You ought to know better."
- "You're a spoiled brat."
- "You're just trying to be somebody you're not."
- "Don't you have any manners?"

Have people ever said things like that to you?

Have you ever said things like this to someone else?

What are these called?

These are called "put-downs."

A "put-down" is a statement that is intended to make you feel badly.

---

Places where people often focus their put-downs include:

**Flip Chart 22**

---

**Put-downs:**

- |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ✓ ethnic background      | ✓ physical appearance  |
| ✓ intelligence/education | ✓ sexuality            |
| ✓ social position        | ✓ family relationships |
| ✓ age                    | ✓ where you live       |
| ✓ popularity             | ✓ behavior             |
- 

If someone puts you down, you can ask yourself some questions about what the person said:

1. Is this meant to hurt me?
2. Did I do something to upset the other person; was I unkind first?
3. Even if what they say is true, could I or would I change it? (age, ethnicity, personal traits)
4. Is there something I could do or learn from what they said, even if the way they said it wasn't very nice?

Usually put-downs are about someone else's feelings, not about you, and it is helpful to look at why it happened.



## Dealing with Put-downs

Often when another person is putting us down, the first response is to strike back. For example, if someone says to you, "You are so stupid." and you respond, "Not as stupid as you are, idiot," this results in both of you being angry and may even lead to further fighting and put-downs.

Another way of dealing with a put-down is to ignore it.

What this means is we can take something mean or inconsiderate someone says to us personally and let it hurt our feelings, OR we can choose to let it go by knowing that what the person said is not true, that they were just saying it to hurt our feelings.

Remember what we said about why people use put-downs?

Who can tell me what you might say to someone if you wanted to let them know you were not going to let their put-down make you feel bad?

Discuss specific examples of group members.

### Exercise: Put-downs

Put statements such as the following on pieces of paper. One at a time, let group members pick one and read it to another person. The other person should respond assertively.

1. You won't make the team so you might as well not even try out.

---

Possible response: You are only saying that because you know there aren't spots on the team for everyone. We'll just all go out and do our best.

**2. You are the ugliest person I know.**

Possible response: What you are saying is not true. We're all different; I just don't look like you.

**3. Why do you always dress so funny?**

Possible response: I dress the way I want to. It's just different from the way you choose to dress.

**4. You're so fat.**

Possible response: I feel that it's unkind for you to say that.

**5. We don't want you around because you're a jerk.**

Possible response: That's very clear, thank you for letting me know how you feel.

**6. You're such a baby.**

Possible response: That's not a very nice thing for you to say, and I like myself the way I am.

**7. Nobody's coming to your party, so you'll have plenty of cake to feed your face.**

Possible response: I know the only people at my party will be the ones who want to be there, and we'll have plenty of food for everyone.

## Criticism

Criticism is different from a put-down in that it is intended to be helpful.

That doesn't mean it's always helpful, and some criticism can really hurt.

It is worth listening and considering criticisms because sometimes we can learn something about ourselves from what other people tell us.

Discuss the distinction between a put-down and criticism.

Criticism: can be useful or constructive.

Put-Down: a dig, kidding, insult, jab, sarcasm, bantering, teasing, or a cutting remark.

Criticism is more about your behavior or your actions than about you as a person:

- "I don't like it when you behave that way."
- "I would like for you to think about your brother's feelings before you say things like that to him."
- "I would feel badly if you said something like that to me."
- "I don't appreciate your fighting with your sister while I'm trying to get dinner."

---

## **Flip Chart 23**

---

### **Criticism can reflect:**

- what other people don't like in us;
  - what other people think we should be doing;
  - what is getting us into trouble; and/or
  - why things aren't working out the way we want them to.
- 

## **Dealing with Criticism**

It is important to listen to criticism, to think about it, and then to decide for yourself if what has been said is true about you, if it might be helpful to you in the future, and if it is something you want to change.

**Flip Chart 24**

**When listening to criticism, remember to:**

1. breathe;
2. listen to what is being said;
3. ask questions about anything you don't understand;
4. acknowledge that you will think about it;
5. think about it; then
6. decide for yourself what to do with the criticism.

The most important thing is that you decide for yourself what you want to do with other people's opinions and ideas about you.

**Exercise: Criticism**

Have each person write down one thing they feel they could legitimately be criticized for, such as being late all the time, forgetting to bring their journal to the group, teasing a sibling, etc.

Working in pairs or as a whole group, have each person give their self-criticism to another. That person should read the criticism aloud. The person who is being criticized should respond with acceptance and acknowledgement, such as:

- 
- "Thank you for calling that to my attention. I will think about how I might deal with that problem."
  - "Thank you for mentioning that. I hadn't thought about that before, but I will now."
  - "Thank you for pointing that out. I know I do that. Do you have any ideas that might help me deal with that more effectively?"

## **Personal Responsibility for Feelings**

How many of you have ever said, or heard other people say things like, "You make me . . . (angry, sad, upset)?"

Is that possible? Let's try it.

Call out names of group members demanding that they be a certain way:

- (Marty), be upset!
- (Annie), be sad!
- (Tony), be happy!

Can I make you feel those things?

Only you can do that. So, when someone does something that irritates you, are they actually irritating you or are you allowing yourself to be irritated?

Discuss.

This is a really important question, because your answer determines whether you are in control or whether the rest of the world is controlling you.

If I say: "Molly, your hair looks awful," can I make you feel awful? Whose choice is it?

Other examples:

- "Sandy, I hate your dress," or
- "Thomas, that was a stupid answer."

So, who's in charge?

### **Exercise: Liking Myself**

End with each person telling one thing they feel really good about having accomplished or changed since the beginning of the group. Other members should acknowledge each person's statement with applause or clicking fingers or waving hands, or whatever you have established as a form of acknowledgment.

## **Break or Split Session Option**

### **Selfwork for Split Session**

Use Selfwork numbers 1 and 2 found at the end of Session 6.

If you will be using the "Special Objects" Exercise in the next session, ask each participant to bring a

---

special stuffed animal, doll, or other special object to the next session.

## **Reentry for Split Sessions**

What did you notice since last time about put-downs and criticism?

Discuss.

Did you find yourself being more careful about the effect you have on other people?

Discuss.

## **Crazymaking**

One of the hardest types of people to deal with are the ones who seem to switch around all the time. One day they're nice, another they're not. One day they say things that are supportive and the next you feel they're really stabbing you in the back.

This is called crazymaking. It's called that because being around people who do this make you begin to feel you're crazy.

Some people do this as a way to keep other people off balance.

Other people do it because they simply don't know who they are or what they want.

This is very difficult, especially when the crazymaker is a grownup who is responsible for you.



**What are some ways you think you could respond to a crazymaker?**

Discuss.

**One thing you may be able to do is let the person know when you are confused or upset by their changing all the time.**

**Another thing to do is talk to another adult about the difficulty.**

**Sometimes you just have to learn to live with it.**

**Kids can be crazymakers, too. In fact, one of the ways parents learn not to let kids make choices is by experience.**

**Crazymaking is when you do things that you know make grownups crazy and then smile as if you didn't know any better or act as if it was an accident.**

**What are some things that make parents and teachers crazy?**

Write down their ideas. They all know, so pursue this until you get some good responses.

**What do you get out of being a crazymaker?**

**Is it worth it?**

**What other choices do you have?**

---

## **Verbal Abuse**

**Can people hurt you with their words?**

**If someone says to you, "You're stupid," does that hurt?**

**How does it feel, how would you describe it?**

**Write these down.**

**Where do you feel it in your body? What does it feel like?**

**Write these down.**

**What happens to your posture when you hear things like this?**

**What about if they say to you, "You can't do anything right," or "You're a rotten kid." Does that hurt?**

**Use several examples to give them a clear sense of the physical and emotional impact of verbal abuse.**

**If someone hurts you with their words, particularly if it happens so much that you're really starting to think it's all true, you should tell someone.**

**Who would you tell?**

**Some young people live in families where this kind of thing happens a lot. You may be able to ask for and get help, but there are also some things you can do for yourself.**

**But first, let me ask you, when someone says something like this to you, do you believe it is true about you? Or**

does it reflect the feelings and problems of the person saying it?

When other people take their problems out on you, it doesn't make it true about you. And, while it is not pleasant or right that you should be in a situation where people say things like this to you, you don't have to believe what they say.

### **Exercise: Dealing with Verbal Abuse**

I have a whole basket full of paperwads. I want you to pretend that each of them is a hateful or hurtful phrase or sentence.

When someone says something hateful or hurtful to you, they are really throwing words at you. For example:

Pick up a wad of paper. Throw it at someone as you look directly at them and say "I hate you."

Now you can let the words hit you and hurt you, which is really what you do when you take the words inside of you. Or you can turn to the side and let them go right on by.

Move your body to illustrate what you mean.

I'm going to throw some words and wads of paper at each of you. Let them hit you and see how it feels.

- You're the most stupid kid in my class.
- You can't do anything right.
- You're never going to amount to anything.

---

This is the most effective tool for keeping other people's words from hurting you.

---

**This time, turn away and let the paper sail right on by and see how that feels.**

- **You're worthless; no wonder no one likes you.**
- **You're a mean, lazy, good for nothing.**
- **I hate you, and I wish you'd never been born.**

Throw words and paper randomly so all are alert and have a chance to let the paper and words hit them, and all have a chance to successfully turn so the paper flies past them.

**Now, if you were in a real situation, do you think it would be a good idea to physically turn when someone throws hurtful words at you?**

**Probably not. It could make the person very angry.**

**So, instead, I want you to see the words going by without moving your body.**

This time, just say the phrases, do not throw the paper. After each one, ask the person if they were able to see the words going by, and how it felt to let the words by.

**To make this technique even more powerful for yourself, at the same time that you're seeing the words go by, let's try saying aloud something such as:**

- **"That's not true about me."**
- **"I'm not stupid."**
- **"My mother is the one who is unhappy here and taking it out on me."**

- "What she is saying is not true about me. I am . . ."

The last step is to say this to yourself rather than aloud.

Have the participants pair up. Have one person say negative phrases while the other person lets them go by and negates it with internal messages, such as "I'm not awful." After about thirty seconds, switch. Have group members discuss: 1. how it felt to say those things and 2. how they felt being on the receiving end.

### **Alternate Exercise for Preadolescent Groups: Dealing with Verbal Abuse**

One way to deal with the unkind things that people say to you is to use images or pictures in your mind. To get us started, let's actually play a game.

You are the king or queen of your kingdom. You live in a castle high up on top of the mountain. There is a river that completely surrounds your mountain and a drawbridge that allows people to come in. As hateful or hurtful words come riding across the hill, you can see them coming and decide if you're going to let them in to hurt you and your people. If you decide not to let them in, pull up the drawbridge so they are forced to stop when they get to the edge of the water.

If you see criticism coming, you can ask them to stop at the edge of the water and talk with you about what they have to say. If you feel the criticism is worth thinking about, you can ask them in for awhile. After they have

Group leader's have reported that having props really works here. They actually acted out putting on a crown and cape, having the participant stand on a chair or box, while others rode over the hill on their horses reading abusive statements, compliments, or criticisms.

---

**finished talking with you and you have thought about it, you can decide to ask them to stay, or tell them goodbye and let them go on their way.**

**When you see compliments coming across the hills, you let your drawbridge down and welcome them in to share your castle.**

**Do this exercise as long as time allows.**

**Now, I want each of you to be the king or queen in your imagination. I will throw statements at you, and I want you to see yourself letting them in or keeping them out just using your imagination.**

**Use a series of hurtful phrases, criticisms and compliments.**

**Check with them as you go to see how successful they are being with this image.**

**In your life, you are like the king or queen in that you decide what words and thoughts and ideas are true about you. You can decide which ones to let in and keep. Even if you make mistakes sometimes and let in words or thoughts that aren't friends, you can send them on their way, letting them know that they are no longer welcome.**

**The most important thing is that you decide for yourself what you want to do with other people's opinions and ideas about you.**

## Other Forms of Emotional Abuse

There are some other ways people can emotionally abuse you. They are all things that can be part of a pattern. Most people experience some of these from time to time, but a pattern is important to be aware of so you can take care of yourself and perhaps even get help for the other person.

Other forms of emotional abuse include:

### Flip Chart 25

Use age appropriately.

#### OTHER FORMS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE:

- ignores your feelings;
- withholds love and affection;
- constantly criticizes, belittles, yells, or name-calls;
- wants to control all your actions;
- humiliates you in public or private;
- constantly manipulates you with lies and contradictions;
- ridicules your sex, race, physical characteristics; and/or
- makes all your decisions for you.

What do you think about this list?

Discussion.

Are these things that have happened to you at varying levels?

---

Discussion.

**How did you feel?**

**Have you ever done any of these things to someone else?**

Discussion.

**How did you feel?**

**Are they a form of interpersonal violence?**

Discuss each one in turn, identifying why this is an abusive way to treat someone and strategies they can develop to deal with them.

## **Resources**

**Who are some of the people who can help you if you are being treated this way?**

**Who loves you and cares about you?**

Have each participant make a list.

**Who else could you talk to if you were having a problem?**

List community resources.

**Can the school help with problems at home?**

Often young people think school problems are for school and home problems are for home. They rarely think of overlapping their resources.

---

If you are working with an older group, actually get resource lists or telephone books and have members go through all the various resources available in their community. Have them make their own directory of resources that they might find useful presently or in the future.



Can your mom or dad help with problems at school or out in the community?

Do your teachers care about what happens to you at home?

Do your parents care about what happens to you away from home?

No one can answer these questions but you. For some, the answer will be "yes," for others the answers will be "no."

But everyone has someone who cares about them, that they could talk to about a problem.

And remember, if the first person you tell doesn't help you, you need to keep telling until someone does.

One other thing to keep in mind is that you can also be an advocate for other people in your family. Grownups who take their problems out on their children need help.

Telling about what is happening to you is one way to get help for the people in your family.

If you don't tell, no one will know or help.

## **Exercise: Special Objects**

It's important to look at how we treat people and how it feels to be taken care of or not be taken care of. But it is also important to recognize how it feels to really care for someone else.

---

This is a particularly valuable exercise for children who have been neglected or maltreated.

---

I'd like you to take a minute to look at your special object, to decide if you care about it and are willing to really take care of it, as if it is as special as you are, as if it is dependent on you for its needs — just as a baby would be — between now and the next session. What would that mean?

- Keeping it safe.
- Keeping it warm.
- Always knowing where it is.

Elicit their additional ideas and write them down.

Are you willing to do that?

It's perfectly acceptable for them to choose not to!

Make an agreement with yourself now. State exactly what you agree to do.

Make a note of what they agree to do for next time.

Particularly notice if it feels like this is a lot of work, if there are times that you don't want to keep your agreement, if there are feelings you have about your special object, that it is a burden, anger, etc.

These feelings are part of all relationships from time to time and don't mean you don't also love and want to be with someone.

Make notes in your journal about your experience.

## Relaxation

Now let's take just a minute to let everything we've learned settle in.

Close your eyes, sit up in your chair, but be comfortable. Take a slow deep breath.

Now, pay attention to your feet. Tighten the muscles in your feet. . . . , hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now let them relax. . . . , let them go.

Now, leaving your feet relaxed, pay attention to your legs. Tighten all the muscles in your legs. . . . , hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , and then let them go. . . . , relax.

Now bring your attention to your hands. Tighten them into a fist. . . . , hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now, let them go, relax.

Keeping your hands and legs relaxed, tighten the muscles in your arms, hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now let them relax. . . . , feel all the tension letting go.

Now the muscles in your stomach. Tighten them. . . . , hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now let them relax completely.

Now your shoulders and neck. Tighten them, hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now relax. Feel all the tightness and tension flow away with every breath you take.

Finally, all the muscles in your face. Squinch them up, tight, hold it. . . . , hold it. . . . , now let them all go, relax.

Now just pay attention to your breathing, feel how relaxed your body is.

---

Pause for 15 seconds.

You can do this for yourself anytime you feel tense and want to feel more relaxed.

Remember when you're upset with someone or something that has happened, you can find a private place, take a few minutes to do this for yourself and then decide how you want to deal with what happened.

Now, slowly begin to bring your attention into the room, move around a little bit and, when you are ready, open your eyes.

## Selfwork

1. Practice dealing with putdowns and criticism, Notice how you feel when someone says something about you. Practice not taking what is said personally and really choosing if you will ignore what is said or respond assertively.
2. Begin to notice changes in your thinking since participating in this program. Some starters might be:
  1. I used to believe that ...  
but now I believe ...
  2. I used to believe that I would never ...  
but now I know that I can ...
  3. I used to believe that I wasn't ...

---

but now I know that I am . . .

4. I used to think . . .

but now I realize that . . .

3. Be aware of things people say that have been emotionally hurtful to you in the past. Consider the techniques we have learned and begin to apply them. Write down in your notebook what happened and how you feel about it.

4. If someone is hurting you emotionally, make a plan for asking for help and do it.

---

Dear Parents,

This week our focus is on recognizing and understanding the various ways self-esteem can be threatened by such things as put-downs and criticism and looking at how these relate to emotional abuse.

Children have a number of choices with put-downs and hurtful statements. For example, they can evaluate the statement as it comes in by asking:

- "Is this something meant to hurt me?"
- Did I do something to upset this person; was I unkind first?
- Even if what they say is true, could I or would I change it (age, ethnicity, personal traits)?
- Is there something I could do or learn from what they said, even if it wasn't very nice?

Criticism is different from a put-down in that it is designed to be more helpful. We want children to learn to listen to criticism, to think about it, and then to decide for themselves if what has been said could be true about them, whether it might be helpful to them in the future and if it is something they want to change. Many times compliments can be as difficult to accept as criticism. They can lead to feelings of embarrassment, confusion, and anxiety. Compliments are gifts that someone else gives us that we often don't know how to receive. Help your children learn to simply accept them and say, "Thank you."

Sincerely,

---

## **Covert Communication**

- manipulating others
- controlling others
- lying
- acting helpless
- being tough
- sacrificing or going without

---

## **Put-downs:**

ethnic background

physical appearance

intelligence/education

sexuality

social position

family relationships

age

where you live

popularity

behavior



---

## **Criticism can reflect:**

- what other people don't like in us;
- what other people think we should be doing;
- what is getting us into trouble; and/or
- why things aren't working out the way we want them to.

---

**When listening to criticism, remember to:**

1. breathe;
2. listen to what is being said;
3. ask questions about anything you don't understand;
4. acknowledge that you will think about it;
5. think about it; then
6. decide for yourself what to do with the criticism.

---

## **Other Forms of Emotional Abuse:**

- ignores your feelings;
- withholds love and affection;
- constantly criticizes, belittles, yells, or name-calls;
- wants to control all your actions;
- humiliates you in public or private;
- constantly manipulates you with lies and contradictions;
- ridicules your sex, race, physical characteristics; and/or
- makes all your decisions for you.

1. The first step is to identify the problem.

2. The second step is to analyze the problem.

3. The third step is to develop a solution.

4. The fourth step is to implement the solution.

5. The fifth step is to evaluate the results.

6. The sixth step is to document the process.

7. The seventh step is to review the process.

8. The eighth step is to improve the process.

9. The ninth step is to repeat the process.