

BREAKING FREE: I'M NOT A VICTIM...I'M A SURVIVOR!

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Do you often feel hurt and insulted; as though you are not enough for someone; or continuously walking on eggshells? If you answered yes to any of these statements, you might be experiencing emotional abuse. An emotionally abusive relationship includes hurtful, offensive words and bullying behaviour, and affects how you feel about and view yourself. Emotional abuse most commonly occurs in romantic relationships, but can also emerge in other relationships, including friends, family, and colleagues. In comparison to other forms of abuse, emotional abuse is often more challenging to recognise as it can be subtle and deceptive or obvious and manipulative.

The underlying aim of emotional abuse is to control the victim by isolation and suppression, leaving them feeling trapped in the end - often too hurt to endure the relationship any longer, but also too afraid to leave. So the cycle repeats itself until one does something to stop it. Below are a few tips on how to stay safe during the lockdown, especially if you are stuck in the same household with the person who is emotionally abusing you.



Ten ways to cope with emotional abuse



Awareness

1

If you recognise any aspect of emotional abuse within your relationship, it is essential to acknowledge that you can take control of your life by being honest about what you are experiencing. Learn the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship, as this will allow you to notice if you are in a destructive relationship. For instance, emotional abuse can mean that the person dictates whom you speak to and consistently goes through your phone, emails, or social media platforms.



Prioritise your mental and physical health

2

Do not concern yourself with pleasing the person ill-treating you. Ensure that you take care of your needs first. For instance, engage in activities that will help you change your thinking patterns to be more constructive and assist you in your journey of self-discovery. Eat nutritious food, exercise, and get enough sleep. Make time to exercise outside every morning to clear your head. These easy to follow [self-care](#) steps can go a long way in helping you deal with the day-to-day effects of emotional abuse.



"Emotional abuse is the demolition of someone's identity. And it's abuse of their psychological and emotional self."

Dr. Liz Hale





3 Establish boundaries

Firmly communicate to the abusive person that you will no longer tolerate being belittled and mistreated and explain how things will unfold if they continue with this behaviour. For example, inform them that if they blame or swear at you, the conversation will be over, and you will walk away. It is essential to follow through on your boundaries, do not communicate boundaries that you will not be keeping. Boundaries can be useful even during the national lockdown.



4 Don't blame yourself

If you are being exposed to an emotionally abusive person, you may eventually begin to believe that you are the problem. Abuse is a choice (for the abuser), and you are not the problem, so stop blaming yourself. Acknowledge that the abuser makes a conscious decision to treat you the way they do.



5 Don't think that you can "fix" them

Be aware that you cannot change the abusive person, as they choose to behave in a specific manner. Remember that you cannot control another person's actions, and you are not to blame for their choices. The only thing you can control is your response.



Avoid arguments

6

If the abuser attempts to start an argument with you, begins insulting you or demands things from you, do not try to explain, soothe their feelings, or apologise for something you did not do. Instead, walk away from the situation if it is safe to do so. Engaging in an argument with an abuser might only make things worse for you. Regardless of your efforts to explain, you will always be wrong in their perception. Ensure that you have a phone with you at all times and that you have enough airtime or data, especially if you stay with an abusive person. To avoid confrontations, choose to walk away.

Build a support network

7

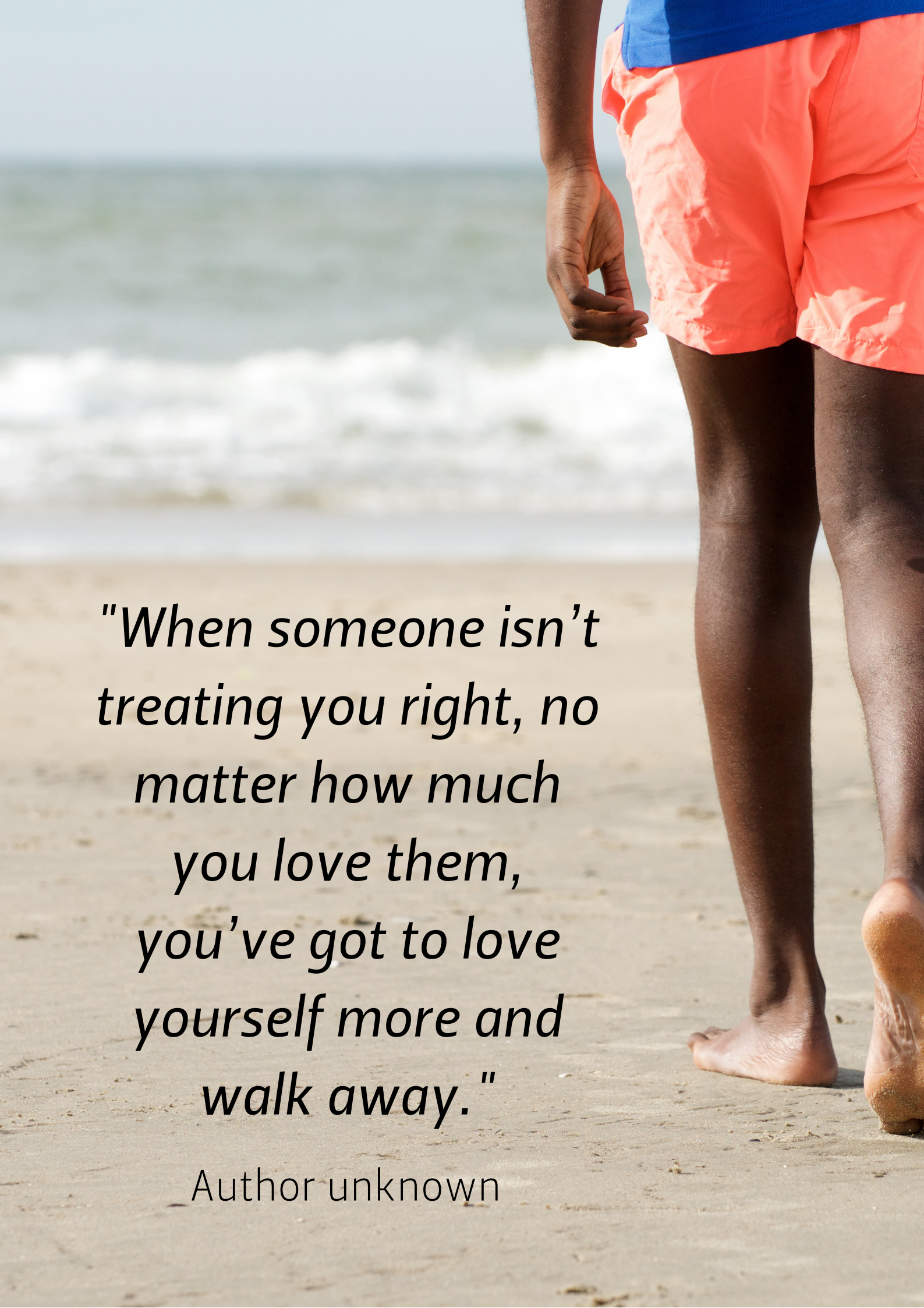
Do not be silent about the abuse you are experiencing. Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional. Try spending as much time away from the abusive person as possible and instead spend your time with people who love and support you. This strong network of people you trust will help you feel less lonely and isolated. Click here for alternative mental health [contacts](#) and [information](#) that you can use during this lockdown.

Work on an exit plan

8

Based on the situation you find yourself in, you may need to consider ending the relationship. If your partner, friend, colleague or a family member does not have intentions of changing their behaviour, you will have to choose to leave the abusive person. It will eventually begin to destroy you both mentally and physically. While you are still with the person during this national lockdown, consider creating a 'safe word/text' to alert your loved ones if you need their help. A simple text about the weather or schoolwork could be a signal of your distress. Each case is different, so discuss your thoughts and ideas with someone you trust.



A person wearing bright orange shorts and a blue top is walking on a sandy beach. The background shows the ocean with white waves. The person's legs and feet are visible, and they are walking away from the camera.

"When someone isn't treating you right, no matter how much you love them, you've got to love yourself more and walk away."

Author unknown

9 Seek shelter with someone else

If possible and safe, find an excuse to get you out of the house so that you can stay with another close family member or friend. Perhaps you can say that a family member needs help with working from home or with their children. Anything that will enable you to get out, even if it is for a while.



10 Cut off all contact

If you manage to get out of the relationship or the house, ensure that you do not have contact with the abuser. This person might try to sweet talk you and manipulate you into believing that they have changed. Keep in mind that it is likely that abusive behaviour will continue as time goes by. Instead, focus on your healing without the influence of the abusive person.



The tips mentioned above can be used (even during the national lockdown) to help you cope with the effects of emotional abuse. Remember that you teach others what treatment you will tolerate and, at some point, you have to ensure that the hostile treatment comes to a stop. The first step you need to take in ensuring that you get out of a destructive relationship is to realise that you are in one. Once you find your escape, you will begin the beautiful journey of self-discovery.

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