

At the Heart of Abuse

Misia Julia
Emotional Health Specialist
www.misia.com.au
Adelaide, AUSTRALIA 5000

Paper Presented at the
No More Harm National Conference
Brisbane (QLD), 26 - 27 June 2017

At the Heart of Abuse

ABSTRACT: *From physical abuse to sexual abuse, bullying and hazing rituals to domestic violence and psychological abuse there is agreement that abuse is bad and abusive behaviours must be dealt with. Across the world, some forms of abuse have clear definitions, clearly established legal pathways for taking action, getting compensation and assigning punishment. However, emotional abuse, remains undefined with few if any effective pathways for action.*

There is an urgency to understanding this topic beyond the emotional reactivity, stories and sympathies which this topic generates. Increasing penalties, stirring fear of exposure or targeting people are not effective solutions. Accusing, attacking and diminishing people as a way of dealing with emotional abuse, is in itself abusive and cyclical.

Emotional abuse is one of the most prevalent forms of abuse impacting people on a daily basis. There is a way of understanding what is at the heart of abuse. The incidence of emotional abuse can be decreased, prevented and even eliminated. However, without clarity and understanding, and without an approach for improvement, this problem of abuse is not going to get better.

The 'Heart of Abuse' model helps to understand why emotionally abusive behaviour and interaction still occurs everyday. It can act as a framework for improving confidence and inner strength. Every person from parent to child, teacher to student, manager to employee or simply someone who likes dogs or comic books, can play a part in stopping the problem of abuse. By decreasing the use of the amber abuse alerts in order to hold power, deflect and protect ourselves, new patterns of behaviour and interaction can emerge.

Abuse alerts increase the risk of the occurrence of emotional abuse. These include thoughts or gaining agreement by casting judgment (making people out to be bad), diminishing others (making people small) and pushing people into being wrong, weak and worthless. An emotionally abusive event is occurs when these alerts combine with directed force or imposition of opinion through actions, words or decisions.

The progressive approach for addressing and preventing abuse focuses on the abilities and skills of every individual. Every person regardless is capable of uplifting and diminishing others, being supportive, following or leading the way. For those schools, workplaces and organisations who have been looking to make a positive and sustainable change, the 'Heart of Abuse' offers a scaffold and an inclusive, engaged leadership style called Balanced Leadership to facilitate and support change and improvement within a group.

It is time for awareness about emotional abuse to be combined with a change of perspective from duality to balance, punishment to improvement. In this way, there is hope and real possibility of improving interactions between people, changing relationships and creating strong, sustainable and healthy communities.

Keywords: *emotional abuse, improving relationships, confidence, leadership, healthy environments*

Introduction

There is constant expression of anger, indignation and upset at the frequency and evidence of abuse in our society. From the home to school to the workplace, the word abuse makes an immediate impact on people. Society demands that more attention be paid to the problem of abuse through catching perpetrators and helping victims.

Despite punitive and emotionally aggressive approaches being the expected and normal approach to dealing with abuse over the last half century, the problem is not being resolved and there are frequent reminders that the incidence of emotional abuse is ongoing.

The problem of emotional abuse includes but is not limited to other forms of interaction such as psychological abuse, abuse of power, micromanagement, initiation rites of passage, verbal attack, peer pressure, bullying & harassment and discriminatory behaviour. Excluded from discussion in this paper are behaviours and choices of hurt, harm or abuse by persons with a personality disorder or when abuse is undertaken for the purpose of pleasure or recreation. Physical and sexual abuse is also excluded, as these are already defined in state and national legislation in most countries, and have existing pathways for action

Individuals, families and the broader community will benefit from having a clearer definition of emotional abuse. A definition of emotional abuse provides an opportunity for people to gain a balanced perspective and know whether they are impacted by emotional abuse and whether they impact others.

Secondly, there is an option of stepping away from the traditional perspective of duality and taking up a balanced and inclusive view. By accepting that a person only acts to what they know and can only use what internal and external resources they have, it highlights the importance of providing people with pathways of understanding and action so as to make actual changes within their own lives.

Collecting resources and learning how to interact with others starts in the home, usually without awareness or conscious effort. However, as an individual increases self awareness they gain insight into their ability to contribute to their interactions with others. Whether as an individual or as a group, by being provided with a scaffold for change there is a choice to contribute to broader changes across a group or community. Balanced leadership is a leadership style which can be used to integrate the suggested actions in this paper into real life environments, thereby leaving no room for abuse and creating healthy environments.

The 'Heart of Abuse' model offers an option for contribution. It can be used as a structure which facilitates observation, assessment and discovery about oneself and by expansion, other people and larger groups. An individual who has inner strength and confidence is likely to have three abilities connected to being capable. The ability to hold power, deflect and protect themselves. When a person has these abilities because the underlying skill sets are balanced, emotional abuse and other harmful behaviours are not needed to remain strong and confident.

When environments change and challenges arise, abuse alerts may become evident revealing gaps in an individual's or group's skills set. The 'Heart of Abuse' model helps individuals and groups identify which specific skills need development when feeling weak, wrong or worthless. These discoveries also open up opportunities for further learning and growth and personal development.

Individuals, groups and workplaces can independently and cooperatively build positive interactions and relationships and create healthier communities. It is possible for the incidence of emotional abuse to decrease as people determine their ongoing contribution to balanced, sustainable and healthy environments across the world.

The Traditional Approach to Dealing with Abuse

The traditional approach to dealing with abuse has three parts.

1. Growing the group and building an **us vs them** mindset. Actively or passively encouraging people to join one side, join in belief or agreement that there is a problem, and that another person or group is the problem.
2. Casting judgment and applying a **good vs bad** filter. Determining that one side of an opinion, action or belief is deemed good and another is bad
3. Taking action justified in judgment and gaining strength through **hunter vs prey** focus. Connecting with others in order to hunt down, pursue and isolate a single party or group until captured. Taking action includes deciding on and applying punitive or restrictive measures upon another person.

The approach which has been used for dealing with abuse will not prevent the occurrence of abuse. Neither will that approach successfully deal with the ongoing problem of emotional abuse nor decrease the incidence of abuse.

The problems with the traditional approach is that it relies on imbalance and there is little room for change, growth or the possibility of having abusive behaviour reduced or stopped. This is due to the following aspects remaining important and consistent:

- Finding, having or creating enough evidence in order to put blame and accusation onto one side. This ensures that a single party is seen as abusive.
- Remembering and replaying the emotional experience, the perspective of the experience and story of pain, hurt or harm. This preserves a story, keeping it intact.
- Using pain and suffering experienced by a victim as a measure of emotional hurt, harm or abuse. This can lead to a competitive presentation of emotional hurt and harm to create multiple victims.

- An ongoing demand for more and greater punitive measures, compensation, reduction of freedoms or incarceration.

Emotional agreement is readily reached and maintained in the form of fear, anger and hostility towards perpetrators. Sympathetic reactions of shock, horror and sadness are felt for victims. There is often room left for an experience to be described with additional details, drama and stories if the emotional experience is not believed, responded to satisfactorily or deemed to be serious. In some cases, fabrication and creative editing may also be used if an experience cannot be communicated to the satisfaction of the teller or listener.

Social agreement helps fuel judgment, betrayal and indignation in both individuals and the greater population. This in turn cements repetition of socially acceptable and expected responses to discussions about emotional abuse. This communication pattern is not progressive and does not provide a way out. People will continue to be able to be a victim or sympathiser to a victim and avoid or deny any connection with being abusive.

This closes the opportunity for creating pathways for action or growth towards a healthy interactive environment. The social and emotional agreements and communication habits create an illusion of safety with no room for improvement.

In this way abuse is perpetuated rather than relieved, and individuals emotional experience is sustained rather than healed.

The traditional approach is cyclical and offers no hope or pathway for progress, healing and the possibility of growth and change in people.

The traditional approach of dealing with emotional abuse is founded upon categorising people as good or bad. Viewing people who have abused as ‘weak, worthless and wrong’ and further justifying action, decisions and the sharing of opinions in order to diminish that person. This approach in itself is emotionally abusive.

From emotional agreement, social agreement and the habit of communication which has been established around emotional abuse, without a clearer idea of what constitutes emotional hurt, harm and abuse, there is a risk that duality will be perpetuated, punitive measures will continue to dominate and as no pathways for change are known, the incidence of emotional abuse will not reduce.

Defining Emotional Abuse

When it comes to emotional abuse, there is a consensus that “no abuse is good” and “any abuse is bad” however without clarity, there is a reliance and habit to label an experience as abusive because it felt bad, was perceived as abusive or one person became emotionally hurt

or harmed by an interaction. By contrast, without definition, emotionally abusive behaviour and actions can be more easily minimised or ignored and treated with disregard.

Changes to social awareness which have occurred within the last century include mental illness, domestic violence and hate crimes. These examples highlight the importance of definition, greater awareness and shifts of perspective and show that what was once considered normal may not have been right.

When our social definition of madness was limited to "a person of unsound mind", it was usual and expected that people who slurred speech, had strange ideas and perhaps displayed tics or antisocial behaviour like pulling their own hair out, were locked away or disowned by their families. This time of ignorance around mental illness impacted our societies and families as recently as the 1960's since then, there has been information provided, opportunities for learning more about mental illness and new action pathways provided to individuals, families and communities.

Prior to the introduction of the Domestic and Family Violence Acts from the 1970's, keeping family members in check with a belting, a back hand to the head or a slap to the ear, was considered normal and not an unusual way of keeping things under control at home. This normality extended to beatings or crimes against marginalised people and groups. With definitions and awareness coupled with legislation, clearer markers and parameters became available to the community, which made it easier to determine the nature of abuse arising.

Definition is important because it helps people become clearer about a topic, gain understanding and discover more about themselves, their relationships and their environment. It removes emotional bias and the inclination to interpret selective details rather than look at a situation comprehensively. Definition can also help countries and communities identify gaps, challenges, strengths and opportunities for development and action. This in turn can impact community investment, legislative change and government support and funding.

Emotional abuse is currently socially and emotionally defined. The nature of these definitions are unreliable, unstable and lack consistency. It is time for Emotional abuse to be defined and better understood. Table 1 presents a proposed definition..

Additional considerations for defining Emotional Abuse:

- It is not abusive to think, believe or imagine diminishing others.
- Feeling emotional hurt or being emotionally harmed are not measures of abuse.

- Feeling badly, feeling hurt or feeling sad are not measures of abuse. They are feelings which may arise after an interaction with someone but it does not mean that the other person was abusive.
- Evidence of amber alerts of abuse, are not predictive of an incidence of abuse however the risk of emotionally abusive interaction increases when these alerts of abuse are present.
- It is possible to engage in or observe an emotionally abusive event and not have a result of emotional hurt or harm.

Table 1: A definition of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is when the following three things* occur in combination:

1. Action is taken, decisions are made and/or communication (usually words, verbal or written) is directed towards another person or group to make them weak, wrong or worthless.
2. One party is judged to be bad while the other is good.
3. That same person or group is diminished

* Separately, #1, #2 and #3 are amber alerts for emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse can occur in a single event or across multiple events.

Emotional abuse cannot occur in isolation or independent of an intended party, however it is possible for action to be taken across a interactive or communication platform connected to that person eg. Social media, newspaper article.

Emotional abuse towards oneself is possible.

Emotional abuse can occur simultaneously, between two or more people.

Emotional abuse may be

- Accidental: happens without intention and may or may not have become known,
- inadvertent: occurring by mimicry or habit without awareness or
- intentional: occurring with conscious purpose of harming and diminishing another person or group.

The ‘Heart of Abuse’ – a model

The ‘Heart of Abuse’ model provides a framework which shows how at the heart of abuse is a person. Every person is able to call on their skills, their perspective of risk or failure and

their abilities in order to interact with other people, form relationships and act to what they know.

The first ring in the ‘Heart of Abuse’ model (*Figure 1*) represents the three statements which are at the core of any person feeling capable. They are “I am of value”, “I am strong” and “I am right”.

FIGURE 1: Expressions of Strength & Confidence.



The second ring (*Figure 2*) shows the breakdown of core abilities which make up having inner strength and confidence. The colour green is used to show that this space is healthy, necessary and a natural part of being yourself. Power, protection and deflection are defined in *Table 2*.

FIGURE 2: The Core Abilities of Inner Strength & Confidence

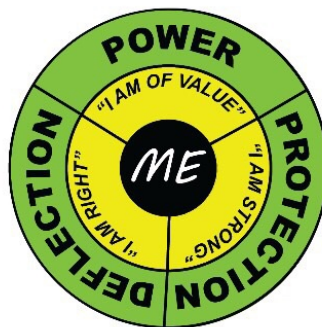
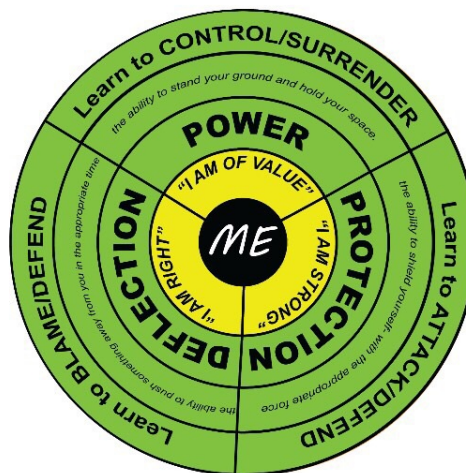


TABLE 2: Definition of Abilities Needed for Inner Strength & Confidence

POWER	To be able to hold your ground, be valued and be significant within your space.
PROTECTION	The ability to shield something from you, with an appropriate level of force
DEFLECTION	The ability to push something away, at the appropriate time.

The green ring 4 (*Figure 3*) shows the two skills which make up the abilities required for building confidence and inner strength.

FIGURE 3: Circle of Lessons Needed for Holding Power, Protection & Deflection



Abilities can be affected by events, people and circumstances, in this way there are times a person has it all come together, and other times things just collapse. With repetition, skills can be strengthened and built upon however they are not finite nor easy to measure. By acknowledging gaps and problems, space is left for growth and learning.

In order to show capability or progress to a more challenging level of interaction, an individual may need to choose between the skill sets. The choice may not feel conscious or even existent however even if not decided, it will happen through familiarity, habit and our neuronal reflexes. *Table 3* shows the split of the actions and lessons ring, surrender or control, defence or attack and blame or acceptance of responsibility.

TABLE 3: Breakdown of Skills sets Needed when Challenged

Quality	POWER	PROTECTION	DEFLECTION
Statement	“I am of value”	“I am strong”	“I am right”
Ability	To be able to hold your ground, be valued and be significant within your space	The ability to shield something from you, with the appropriate amount of force.	The ability to push something away from you, within the appropriate time.
Skill needed when challenged	Control To show strengths and abilities	Attack To show strength	Blame To show your presence and you can represent yourself.
Skill needed to strengthen your inner self	Surrender To step back, observe and allow new concepts and information in.	Defence To protect, shield and calibrate your strength	Accept Responsibility To acknowledge gaps and problems and leave space for growth and learning.

By adulthood a person will have a dominant pathway which becomes their default approach to dealing with challenges. How this is expressed is likely to vary between environments such as classroom learning, the workplace or in relationships. Often dependant on the level of investment, risk as well as fear of loss.

Physically, many skills must be learnt to become capable of looking after oneself. When a skill is not developed, there is a gap. In this situation people will either compensate and find a way of working with the skills and resources they already have. Alternatively, they will look for the gap to be met within their community and among their available resources and connections.

Amber Abuse Alerts

There is a reality, that emotional challenges arise, impact people and place people at risk of being abused or abusive every day. When amber abuse alerts are evident, there is a higher risk that abusive behaviour will occur (*Table 4*).

TABLE 4: Amber Abuse Alerts of Emotional Abuse

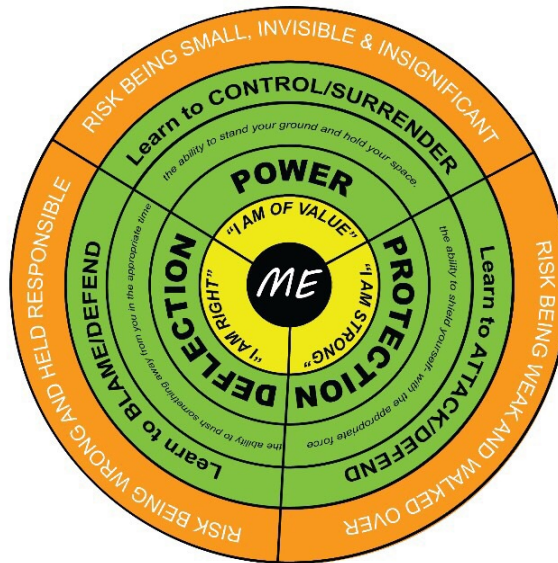
Quality	POWER	PROTECTION	DEFLECTION
Risk	Risk being small, invisible and insignificant	Risk being weak and walked over	Risk being wrong and held responsible
To recover people will find ways of compensating	I will make myself IMPORTANT “I am better”	I will make myself STRONG “I will win”	I will make myself PERFECT “It is not my fault”
I will ensure others cannot challenge me.	“You are worthless”	“You are weak”	“You are wrong”
RING OF JUDGMENT	“I am good, You are bad”		

The amber abuse alerts are:

- The other party expresses or feels that “They are better, They will win, It’s not their fault”
- Being made ‘bad’ when the other party is ‘good’
- Being made to feel weak, wrong and/or worthless**

**When we have an experience which creates the feeling that “You are worthless. You are weak. You are wrong” we can be left feeling unstable and ‘W-obly’. At these times, a sense of self, our confidence and ability to be independent is challenged.

FIGURE 4: Amber Abuse Alert #1 Risks which challenge Holding Power, Deflection & Protection



The sixth ring (Figure 5) shows three feelings which start with the letter ‘W’.

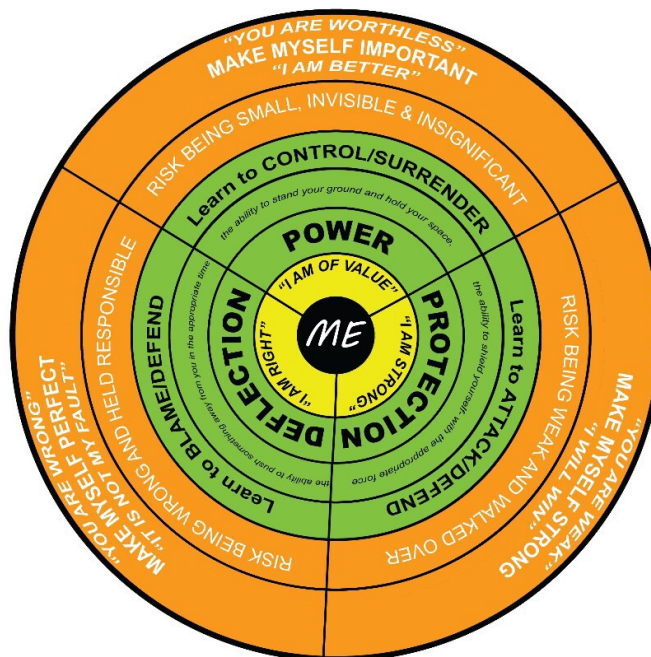
WORTHLESS People want to be valued, not be made to be less and of low worth.

WEAK People wish to exist, not be made smaller, less significant or invisible

WRONG People will resist being a scapegoat when they are not responsible.

Wrong, weak and worthless fall into amber abuse alert #2 and increase the likelihood of emotional abuse.

FIGURE 5: Amber Abuse Alerts #1 and #2 Present a risk of Emotional Abuse (orange)



It may be challenging to separate the feeling of being wrong, weak or worthless as something you started to feel within a certain event or while having an interaction with a certain person. It is important to identify whether it is a feeling that another person is imposing upon you or the result of an event or occurrence.

When challenged or feeling aware of a gap, the following may occur:

1. A person may flip their focus from themselves onto another person (*Table 4*) in which case there is a likelihood of taking up behaviours, gaining agreement or misusing, fabricating information or applying out of context to ensure it is believed or taken up by others.
2. Applying the 'line of judgement' and bringing "I am good" and "They are bad" into the course of action, decision or words (verbal or written).

This is achieved through implication, increasing social investment or obtaining social agreement and selectively pursuing facts to ensure this judgement sticks.

The complete "Heart of Abuse" (*Figure 6*) shows every layer related to emotionally abusive behaviour is connected to the individual. Every person has a capacity to act in strength (internal) and confidence (external) by practicing the skills of holding power, deflection and protection (*Table 5*). Points to note about the "Heart of Abuse":

- There is no segregation between 'us or them'.
- Making people 'bad' or 'good' is part of a ring of judgment which is simplistic and primarily defensive. It indicates an approach to dealing with challenges which show a lack of emotional maturity as well as a gap in one or more of the skills of control/surrender, acceptance of responsibility/blame and attack/defence.
- The skills which make up holding power, deflection and protection are in balance. One is focused on external management and the other on gaining inner strength.

Emotionally abusive behaviour arises for two reasons –

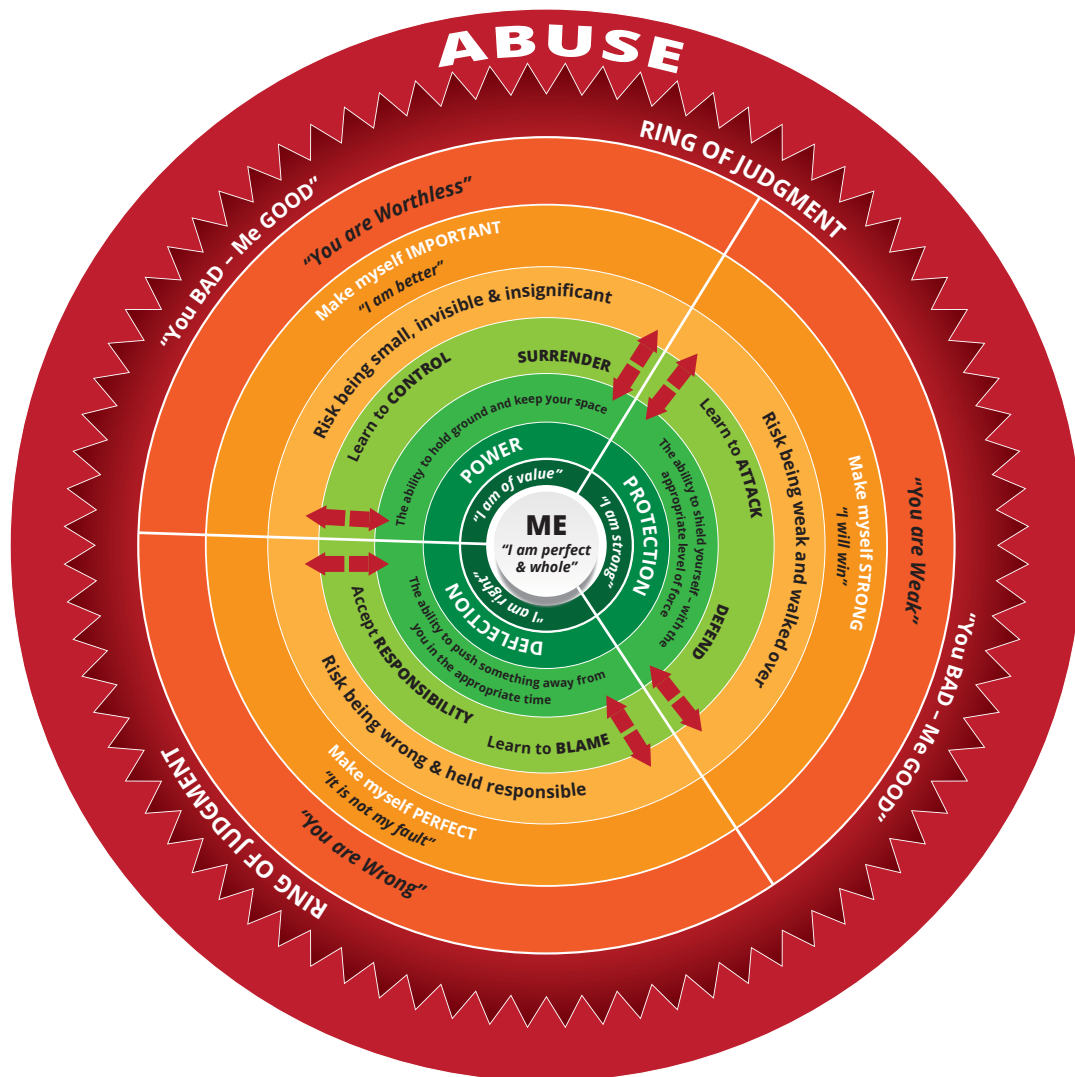
1. a person is needing to hold power, deflect or protect themselves and
2. it is an interaction that a person knows how to do. Including habits, it can be chosen, inadvertent or accidental.

There is no need to make people 'bad' or 'good' when you know how to express yourself and be yourself there is no need to weaken or diminish others. In times of feeling weak, worthless or wrong there is not always a need to push outwards, topple others or make others wrong.

Every person can be seen to be doing their best. This leaves room for good and bad to be repositioned and not used as weapons which assist abuse. In different environments and

activities, such as in sport or in a workplace, good and bad may become more simply a reflection of what is right or wrong, or being able to follow a rule or condition. In other situations, such as in an examination or assessment, good or bad may be a generalised way of communicating how something has been for someone. Where it was bad for them and unfortunate that someone failed and good for them that they passed.

FIGURE 6: The Heart of Abuse



In order to minimise the risk of abusive behaviour it becomes appropriate to call on behaviours and interactions which integrate one or more of the six skillsets. Each ability has two skill sets which are in balance. One helps strengthen our inner environment and the other helps manage our external environment (*Table 5*)

TABLE 5: Capability skill sets which require internal or external focus.

INTERNAL/SELF FOCUS	ABILITY	EXTERNAL/OTHER FOCUS
Surrender	“I am of value”	Control
step back, observe and allow new concepts and information in.	To HOLD POWER...	show the range and flexibility of your ability
Defend	“I am strong”	Attack
so you can protect, shield and calibrate your strength	To PROTECT oneself...	show your strength and ability to respond
Accept Responsibility	“I am right”	Blame
Be reflective and see your contribution	To DEFLECT and maintain self...	show you are present and can represent yourself

It is possible to act in an emotionally abusive way without an intention to do so. When emotionally harmful behaviour plays out without intention of diminishing the other party, it is likely that a person is interacting in a way they have learnt (in habit) or there may be an intention to hurt the other party.

The ‘Heart of Abuse’ helps show what skills are essential to ensuring that abuse does not occur. As every person develops and faces changes, interactions with others and challenges in life they will be called on to demonstrate their ability to hold power, deflect in the appropriate time and protect themselves with appropriate force. In order to do this, there are a set of skills which need to have been developed. If there is a gap in the skills, abuse may be relied upon to get through.

Emotional abuse happens due to a natural and human need to be safe and ok. A person will call on what they have been exposed to themselves. Through observation, abuse alerts and abusive behaviour and interaction will be most likely occur as a result of –

- mimicry,
- action/practice which after repetition and strengthening may become a habit (acting without question) or
- manipulation, when skills and resources are used beyond their initial purpose, combined or used creatively in order to address a need or explore further.

Power, Deflection & Protection

When the ability to protect, deflect and hold power appropriately is developed, there is no need for verbal, emotional, psychological or other forms of abuse. The Figures presented (Figures 6, 7 and 8) separate each of the abilities, into healthy (green) and necessary components and abuse alerts (orange) which increase the chance of emotional abuse.

FIGURE 6: Cross section of the Heart of Abuse: PROTECTION

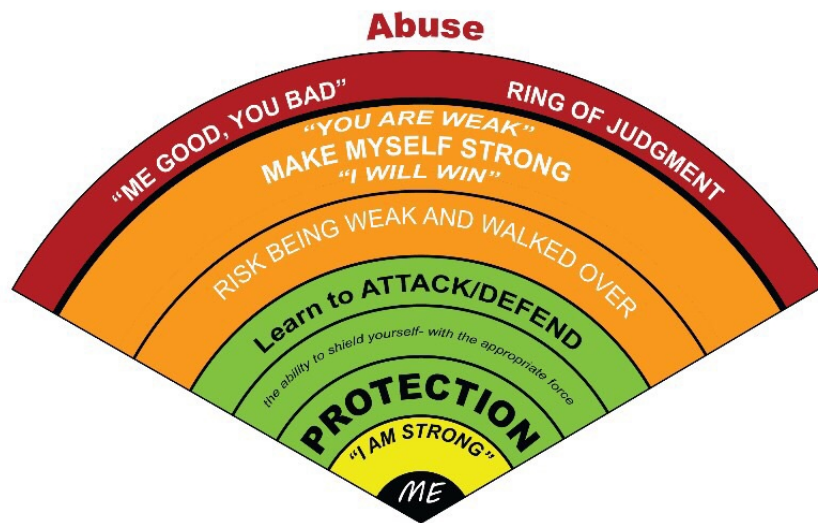


FIGURE 7: Cross section of the Heart of Abuse: HOLD POWER.

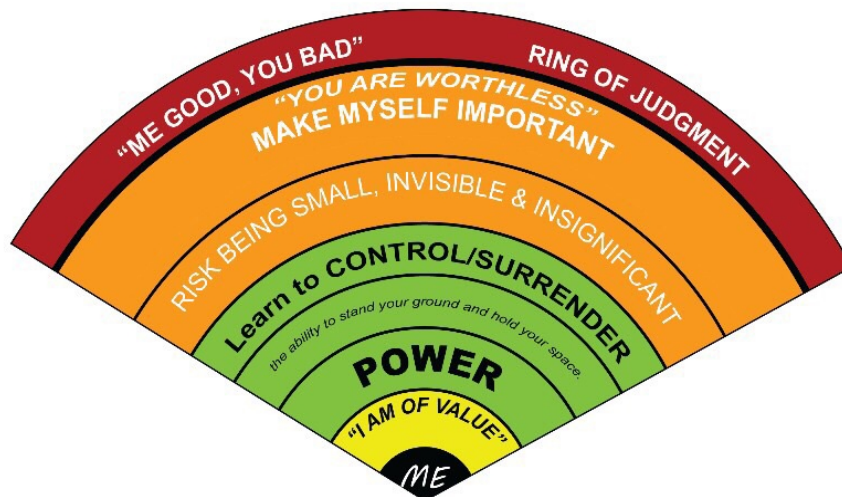
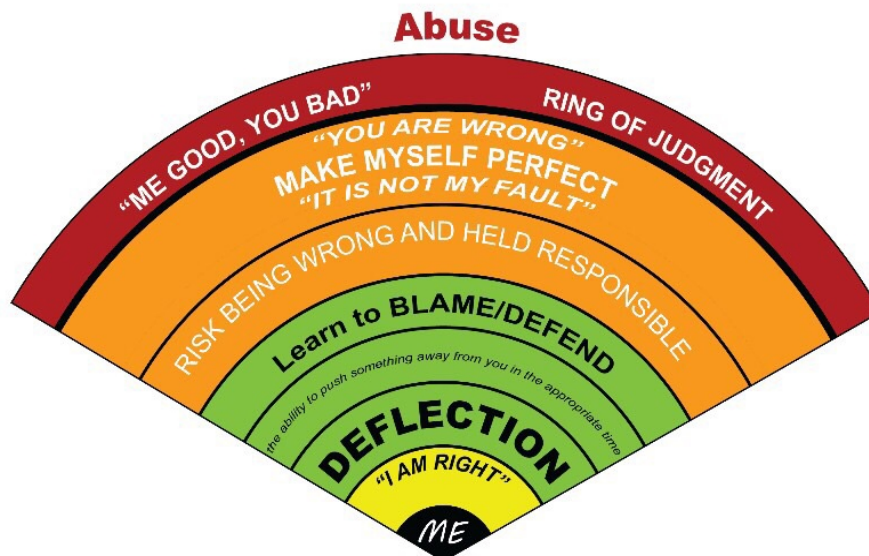


FIGURE 8: Cross section of Heart of Abuse: DEFLECTION



Holding Power, Deflection and Protection in different environments

Emotionally abusive interaction can occur in the workplace, a classroom, sports field as well as at the dinner table however where it occurs is not always where it starts. Learning how to interact with people starts at home, in our primary care environments and among the people who we love, care for and respect.

When we learn to talk, beyond the words and the sentences, it takes time to learn to communicate effectively across a variety of environments. So too, becoming capable and holding power, deflecting and protecting oneself within the home may look different to being capable in a school environment or as an employee.

Primary care spaces, such as home and among family members, relatives or foster carers are where we learn the patterns of interaction with others. For some people, secondary carers such as day care providers, nannies or au pairs as well as friends or people who step in and out of our lives may be just as significant. These spaces have the greatest influence to the acceptance or tolerance of emotional abusive communication and behaviour.

This is where our desire to connect starts. By looking to the people around us we can determine who to connect with in order to ensure survival, obtain our resources and vital needs and further, to expand our circle of reliance beyond one or two people. Building friendship and making alliances helps us gain strength through community and call on skills which you may not personally have, but have access to instead. This is also the time when gaining a sense of independence will allow you to move beyond your family or community of birth into new or adjoining groups in order to further develop or discover yourself. Having a stability of inner strength and confidence can help an individual gain value in the community they are part of, while providing the strength required to live away and discover more beyond what is already known.

A Progressive Approach - Leaving No Room for Abuse

A progressive approach to an issue is way of describing a way of collecting information, sorting and understanding information and finally, making decisions and taking action around that information, all with a forward focus and the commitment to working with a future in mind, rather than the past. Taking a progressive approach with emotional abuse means that people have an opportunity to learn how life experiences of emotional hurt, harm or abuse occurred and being able to form a plan of action or pathway for exploration for the benefit of life improvement.

A progressive approach is an inclusive approach, which is inclusive of all members of society, regardless of age, position in society and other delineating features.

This approach encourages awareness, recognition and discovery. Much room is made for individuals to recognise their own personalities, behaviours and potential for growth. In turn, with practice it is the individual who may become reliable and committed and proactive in their decisions and contribution to, in this case, emotional abuse.

With progression in mind, below listed are suggestions and activities which can help an individual (*Table 6*), group (*Table 7*), workplace or school (*Table 8*) or counsellor/support person (*Table 9*) to make changes in line with the perspective proposed in this paper. The activities listed are able to be applied immediately and help in forming new pathways for action towards improving communication, building better relationships and decreasing the incidence of emotional abuse.

Table 6: Activities for Individuals & Families to reduce the incidence of abuse.

1. Identify the dominant skill set within your home and any other environments	2. Look for the times when you Hold power, Deflect and Protect.	3. Check for instances when you or those around you are diminishing another person.
- list the skills highest to lowest use. defence/attack, surrender/control, blame/accept responsibility	- make a note of the times you feel strong, right and of value - by contrast, note the times you feel weak, wrong & worthless	Use every day as an opportunity to observe yourself and your own inclination to diminish others and choose not to.

Table 7: Activities for groups and communities to reduce the incidence of abuse.

NO MORE Good vs Bad	NO MORE Us vs Them	NO MORE Hunter vs Prey
Recognise the times when you feel someone else is bad and you are good. Question or discuss how these situations could change to reflect greater awareness about emotional abuse	Focus on the/an individual, their skills and the way that their skills help them fit into and contribute to the group. Find who you hold common strengths and challenges with. Does your group directly diminish others? In these situations, what are the alternatives?	Focus on staying still and observing the situation. Keep your emotional experience to the side at these times, and work out if there is a pattern or habit in play.

Table 8: Activities which help workplaces, schools and structured environments to decrease the incidence of abuse.

Learn about Balanced Leadership style of	Identify the skill sets called upon in the various	Review dispute & resolution processes
--	--	---------------------------------------

leadership	environments in the business.	
Identify the abilities of your staff, students and other involved persons to lead, follow, support, uplift and diminish (<i>Figure 9</i>)	Identify the skill sets of your employees and/or other persons. Discuss or provide real life examples of ways of improving common gaps and weaknesses	Introduce a single action pathway for dealing with abuse or abuse alert behaviour when it is raised, mentioned or accused. Create supports and guidelines which move the issue forward, not hide it.

FIGURE 9: Balanced Leadership works in with progressive approaches.

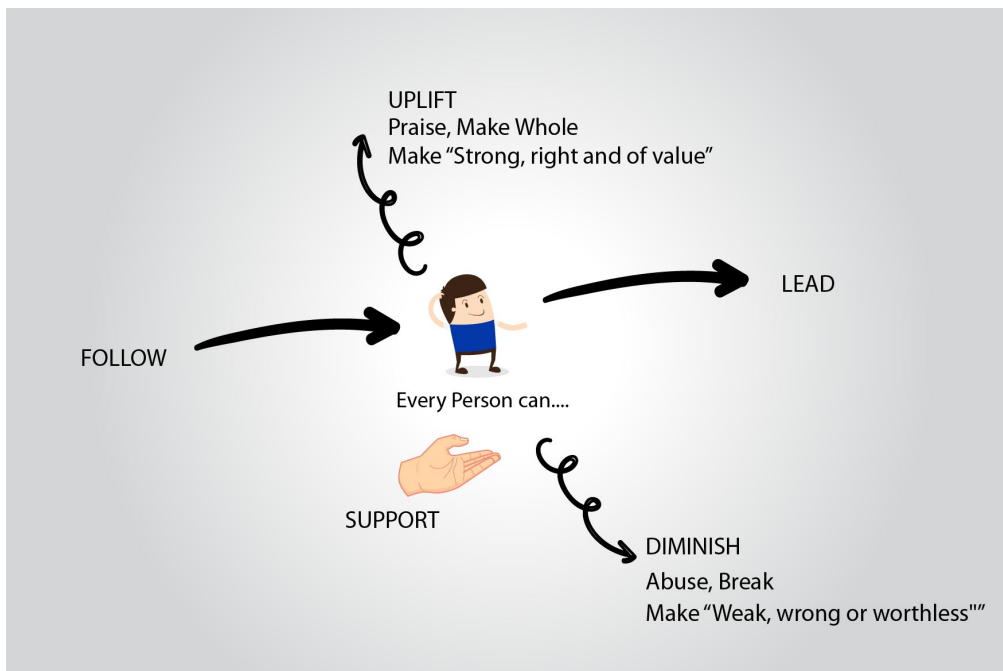


Table 9: Activities which help therapists, counsellors or family, support those talking about emotional abuse

Differentiate between the experience of hurt being imposed by another person and the hurt which came from within.	Discuss the experience, the story alongside the definition of emotional abuse.**	Identify the challenge or compromise which arose. Explore which ‘W-obbly’ feelings arose and what responses or reactions were generated.
There may have been emotional harm ie. damage which takes time to heal or resolve As opposed to emotional hurt ie. the emotions which caused emotional pain eg. Shock, betrayal or confusion.	What action, decision or communication made the experience abusive? How were you diminished? Was this in feeling or in knowing it was happening?	- What was compromised? Holding power, Protection or Deflection? - Which feelings were most significant? Feeling weak, wrong or worthless?

** The progressive approach to listening does not ignore the experience, nor the story. There is an opportunity to tell the story and share an experience from the tellers perspective. However, the aim is to move beyond the story and move beyond the story cycle. A story cycle is when the telling of an event or experience is repeated or adjusted in order to convey a certain emotion, message or generate specific action, rather than be told to communicate information or facts.

It is important to remember that there is currently no way to measure the extent of a persons hurt, suffering and pain during and after an experience of emotional hurt, harm or abuse. For this reason, it is important to identify and recognise specific emotionally harmful situations as they occur and focus on the discussion.

Three factors can often be explored which provide an opportunity to collect information to connect to the emotional experience.

- Frequency – single/multiple; consistent/irregular; predictable/spontaneous
- Intention – deliberate; accidental; inadvertent
- Reasoning – known & clear; known but unclear; unknown but extrapolated; unknown but relationship is known; unknown and relationship is unknown.

A person experiencing or observing emotional abuse will be learning through exposure. Learning is achieved through repetition and consistent exposure regardless of the subject. This applies across all ages, races, genders, identities and other variations of individual.

A person experiencing or observing emotional abuse will be having an independent emotional experience. This experience may remain unidentified however, despite not being expressed, may impact that persons future physical health, mental health, behaviour, communication and relationships.

A person who uses the abuse alerts or becomes emotionally abusive will also be having an independent emotional experience. This experience may remain unidentified however despite a lack of awareness or understanding, is likely to continue to impact the individual and their health and relationships.

Conclusion

At the heart of abuse is a person.

A person who is fundamentally good and doing their best with the tools, knowledge and skills available to them. The traditional approach to thinking about abuse has been one of duality. Seeing people as good until they become bad. Acting to make people weak, wrong and worthless when a person wants to be seen as strong, right and of value.

The traditional approach to dealing with abuse is in itself a cycle with no exit. Punitive action, restricting freedoms, ongoing social denigration and directing action towards people to ensure they are diminished, perpetuates the problem of abuse. For as long as an approach is founded on fear, relying on emotional and social reaction to generate outcomes and exposing abusers as lesser people, it cannot contribute to better health, positive change or progressive environments.

The model, 'The Heart of Abuse' portrays the connection between every person and their natural and human need to hold power, protect and deflect. Holding power provides a sense of value. Knowing how to deflect in good time helps with clarity and knowing what is right. Being able to protect oneself with appropriate force will contribute to standing tall and knowing personal strength. At its core every person is "perfect and whole" and will do their best to gain strength, importance and an inner sense of being right.

The expanding circle which makes up 'the Heart of Abuse', shows six skills which must be learnt to hold power, deflect and protect. The skills of control and surrender are needed to hold power effectively. To deflect a person must be able to accept responsibility as well as blame and in order to protect oneself, the skills of attack and defence must be able to be called on when required.

These skills are in balance and present an opportunity for internal strengthening and external management. Both skills are essential to maintain a sense of capability and knowing how to deal with challenges which arise in life and through interactions with others. When a skill set is out of balance and one skill dominates there is a risk of any person resorting to abusive behaviour and interaction. If a person, group or community acts within a dominant skill set and lacks the counter skill, the risk of becoming abusive remains. When abuse alerts present, this is an opportunity for further learning, growth and practice. The incidence of emotional abuse will decrease when these skills sets are practiced and strengthened across different communication platforms and within different environments.

Primary care environments such as primary care relationships and families are the first points of exposure of all behaviours, communication patterns and skill sets connected to abuse. As people develop and move into secondary environments such as schools and workplaces, there is an opportunity for additional exposure, observation and learning.

A balanced perspective must be taken up by people, organisations and communities in order to decrease the incidence and impact of emotional abuse. A perspective which shows that at the heart of abuse is a person doing the best with what they have. A perspective which sees every person as having strengths and weaknesses, which if challenged may reveal gaps

which can be addressed and strengthened. To know that it is possible to remain strong, right and of value without diminishing another person. As more people focus on strengthening their ability to hold power, protect and deflect they will be leaving no room for abuse and contributing to healthier relationships and healthier environments.

REFERENCES:

Original work

No included references

Additional related materials can be found at www.misia.com.au