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**DiVenturi, Alicia N. *Words Hurt: A Literature Review on the Impact of Verbal/Emotional Abuse***

**Abstract**

The purpose of this literature review was to discover how verbal and/or emotional abuse can affect a child. More specifically, it examined academic impact, behavioral impact, emotional impact, social impact and impact on adulthood. Verbal abuse affects children in many ways and the impact can be life-long. This literature review also discusses signs and/or symptoms of verbal and/or emotional abuse, what educators should know about verbal abuse and what they can do to help students who have been verbally abused.

*Keywords: child, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, impact, and educators*

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## Chapter I: Introduction

In the United States, approximately 532,200 children a year are mistreated by their parents or other adults (Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004). Child abuse means hurting a child, either physically or mentally. But child abuse is never the child's fault. We have all heard the saying, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." This could not be farther from the truth. Ridicule, distain, shame, teasing, and name calling all cause harm. Verbal and/or emotional abuse causes more than emotional trauma; they inflict lasting effects on a child. They impact a child academically, behaviorally, socially and have ongoing effects into adulthood. The environment that a child is raised in molds not only their mind, but also their brain.

When an environment is hostile, the positive development of a child is threatened. "I have suffered from severe depression at times and have had anxiety issues for as long as I can remember" says Lisa who is a victim of verbal and emotional abuse. "The environment that I grew up in was not okay. My parents would not speak to each other for weeks and during this time, my sister and I suffered tremendously. My father would not speak to us and instead would yell at us and slam things around." She stated that she rarely went to school her junior year of high school because of low self-esteem and self-worth issues. She barely graduated high school and she was positive that she did only because they (the teachers) wanted her out of there. After interviewing Lisa, I could not help but feel a tremendous amount of pain for her. Nobody knew she was suffering throughout her academic career; therefore, nobody was able to help her.

Children spend a significant amount of time in the home as well as in an educational setting. In order to promote student success, educators encourage the academic, behavioral, emotional, and social well-being of students. Educators are advocates for children, and in some

cases, will be the first to notice signs of abuse, in turn, teachers play an important role in getting the child out of the abusive situation. Perhaps, if Lisa's symptoms of verbal and emotional abuse were noticed, her teachers would have been able to help her. The tricky part is that most of the time signs of verbal and/or emotional abuse are not obvious and sometimes never identified. Verbal and/or emotional abuse do not leave bruises on a child's wrist or face consequently identifying when a child has been or is being verbally and/or emotionally abused can seem impossible.

Researchers Rosenzweig and Kaplan stated verbal or emotional abuse on a child is "a pattern of psychically destructive behavior inflicted by an adult on a child" (2004). A popularly read textbook of pediatrics has a definition that is more specific. The definition is as follows; "a repeated pattern of parent or caregiver behavior that conveys to a child that he or she is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value to meet someone else's needs" (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004). After analyzing such a definition, a mandated reporter, such as a teacher, may immediately realize how difficult it could be recognizing an emotionally abused child. It would be difficult to identify an internal state of feeling worthless or unloved that may result from verbal and/or emotional abuse because it is certainly less obvious than the outcome(s) of physical abuse.

Other investigators have provided definitions of emotional abuse that contain more detail and discuss the types of parental behaviors that can make children feel worthless and unloved. For example, Garbarino, Schellenbach, and Sebes emphasized that diverse forms of adult behavior could have the effect of making a child feel worthless. The types of behavior they mentioned included rejection, isolations, terrorizing the child, ignoring the child, and corrupting the child. Of course, each of these types of parental behavior also may range in severity and may

be up for examination whether or not the behavior has caused any damage. For example, the severity of rejecting behavior might range from a particular case when a father comes home from work completely exhausted and tells his child that he just cannot stand to listen to their stories about his/her day to a father continually coming home from and telling his child that he cannot even stand the sight of him/her. The degree of severity in parental behaviors that might be hypothesized as falling into each of these categories of emotional abuse suggest that a mandated reporter would probably find it difficult to make a decision as to whether or not a particular child was actually experiencing verbal and/or emotional abuse of the basis of parental behavior alone, except in extreme cases (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004).

As a result, a potential reporter like a school teacher would be unlikely to observe emotionally and/or verbally abusive behavior on the part of a parent with any regularity or frequency. Therefore, in making such a judgment, one suspects that the reporter would be more likely to focus on behaviors of the child that might indicate a feeling of personal worthlessness, rather than on the behaviors of the parents that might lead to the development of such feelings (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem we are faced with is that verbal and/or emotional abuse are real and have a tremendous negative impact on a child's life. Verbal and/or emotional abuse impacts a child's academics, behavior, emotional well-being, social development and also carries into their adulthood. It is important for educators to understand the various impacts of childhood verbal or emotional abuse in order to better identify the signs or symptoms to make accurate reports and to be able to effectively work with students who have been verbally and/or emotionally abused.

This literature review discusses the signs and/or symptoms of verbal and/or emotional abuse, and what they can do to help students who have been verbally or emotionally abused.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this investigation is to present a detailed review of the literature on verbal or emotional abuse and to provide information on the effects it has on a child academically, behaviorally, emotionally, socially and how it impacts their future as an adult. It is hoped that this information will assist mandated reporters to understand the severity of verbal or emotional abuse and be able to identify signs or symptoms of a child who has been verbally or emotionally abused.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this literature review the following terms will hold the sited meanings.

**Child.** A person who is under the age of 18.

**Verbal Abuse.** The use of words to cause harm to the person being spoken to.

(The most commonly understood form of verbal abuse is name-calling. Verbal abuse may consist of shouting, insulting, intimidating, threatening, shaming, demeaning, or derogatory language, among other forms of communication.)

**Emotional Abuse.** A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or self of self-esteem.

**Mandated Reporter.** Individuals who are obligated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. (In general, any person who has contact with children in a professional capacity is a mandated reporter, although laws vary from state to state.)



## **Methodology**

This literature review involved selecting studies that addressed verbal and emotional abuse and how it affects a child academically, behaviorally, emotionally, socially and how it carries into adulthood. The following search engines were used to review literature pertaining to verbal and emotional abuse: EBSCOHost, and the Stout Library Thesis Collection. Variations of the following terms were used in the search: abuse (verbal abuse and emotional abuse), child (children), effects and impacts.

A preliminary review of literature eliminated studies, based on relevance, research outside of the United States, not available in English, etc. revealed 979 studies from 1956 to 2012. These results were further refined to focus on the research question addressing only verbal and/or emotional abuse and the impact it has on children academically, behaviorally, emotionally, socially and the impact on adulthood. This resulted in 21 studies from 1997 to 2012.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Typically when someone thinks about child abuse, they tend to immediately think of physical abuse, but verbal and/or emotional abuse can be equally harmful or sometimes even worse. Believe it or not, but verbal and/or emotional abuse are more common than we want to believe. Just because these forms of abuse do not leave visible physical damage on the outside of the body, does not mean that they are not causing physical damage on the inside of the body. The truth is verbal and/or emotional abuse happen. It is also often thought that verbal and/or emotional abuse tends to happen in households where there is a tremendous amount of stress or problems, but according to Doyle, emotional abuse can occur in families who are free of obvious stress and intrapersonal problems (1997).

Verbal and/or emotional abuse are not damaging because they devalue children and attempt to convince children they are not real or worthy. The abusers do not speak the truth and often times attempt to shape reality to belittle and put down children in order to make the children truly believe the negative words that are thrown at them. For example, imagine 9 year old Jenna sees herself as a beautiful, fun, smart girl and is happy about herself. But her mother continually calls her fat, ugly, boring and stupid. Jenna begins to believe these negative comments because she trusts her mother's judgment. Because Jenna is a fragile child whose development is far from mature, she has no choice but to believe what her mother is constantly telling her and begins to see herself as fat, ugly, boring and stupid. This is only the beginning of Jenna's problems and she is going to be facing a very tough childhood because of her mother's verbal and emotional abuse.

Children who have been verbally and/or emotionally abused often face many challenges, even after the abuse has stopped. According to researchers, Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki

approximately 532,200 children in the United States experience emotional abuse each year and an estimated 204,500 of these emotionally abused children suffered demonstrable harm as a result of the emotional abuse they experienced (2004).

Verbal and/or emotional abuse affect the way a child feels; instead of showing physical signs, everything is on the inside. This is a very subtle form of child abuse and it usually takes a significant amount of time for someone to identify a child who has been or is being verbally and/or emotionally abused. According to Hamarman and Bernet, some forms of verbal and/or emotional abuse include: rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, ignoring, corrupting, verbally assaulting and over-pressuring a child (2000). Loue states that “emotional abuse has been called the most elusive and damaging of all types of maltreatment for a child and represents the core issue and most destructive factors across all types of child abuse and neglect” (2005). The major areas impacted by verbally and/or emotionally abused children include academics, behavior, emotional well-being, social development, and adulthood.

### **Academic Impact**

A child who has been verbally and/or emotionally abused will most likely struggle in school because of their low self-esteem and self-worth. In Lisa’s case, she had only negative memories thinking back on her academic career and waited until she was 37 to return to school and earn a degree. She did not think she was worth anything or ever amount to anything. “I do not even know how I graduated high school. I did not want anything to do with school and I felt that school did not want anything to do with me.”

According to Brendgen, Bukowski, Wanner, Viatro and Tremblay, the potential negative impact of verbal and/or emotional abuse on children’s’ self-perceptions may not only promote future academic failure and behavior problems, but also emotional problems (2007). Their

research states that emotional maltreatment during childhood, including verbal and/or emotional abuse, is especially likely to lead to the development of negative self-perceptions and consequently emotional problems because the negative cognitions are directly given to the child by the abuser. For example, if a child is repeatedly told that his or her D's and F's on assignments are due to his or her stupidity, over time, he or she may come to believe that they are stupid. Eventually, it becomes a snowball effect. The child may begin making these types of attributions for poor performance on any academic task and then generalize to non-school performance situations, thus contributing to affective helplessness and feeling of depression (2007).

A recent study demonstrated that verbally abused children develop interpersonal problems, physical aggression, and delinquency at a higher rate when compared to others. Due to this aggression, they may hit other children or may quarrel with classmates. Interpersonal problems, physical aggression, delinquency and all other negative behaviors hinder a child's education and ability to succeed in the classroom. Sometimes this may even be a result of their poor behavior in the classroom. Occasionally, a child is sent to the principal's office due to their behavior in the classroom therefore, they are not focused on their learning when these repercussions occur.

### **Behavioral Impact**

A child who has been verbally or emotionally abused will most likely act out. According to Moore & Pepler, psychological maltreatment, including verbal aggression, has been implicated as an important contributor to children's behavioral problems (2006). Carleton adds the consequences of emotional abuse are primarily psychological and behavioral (2006).

Romeo states, that the behavioral indicators of emotional abuse can be more difficult to identify, stop and/or prosecute. Physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect are visible injuries, while emotional abuse leaves hidden scars that manifest themselves in many different ways. This psychological abuse is internal and affects the child's self-esteem and self-image. However, an informed educator can identify behavioral indicators of a child with profoundly low self-esteem and negative self-image by observing the child's behavior. Some children respond to emotional abuse in a passive way, while others respond in an aggressive way (2000). Romeo lists the following as some passive symptoms of emotional abuse in children as:

difficulty forming relationships, inability to relate and bond to other children, lack of self-confidence and emotion, extreme shyness, being victimized and exploited by other children, fatigue and listlessness, helplessness and hopelessness, feelings of inadequacy, pessimism and preoccupation, difficulty concentrating on school activities, self-denial, inability to engage and enjoy pleasurable activities, self-injury, and self-deprecating remarks. (2000, p.184)

Romeo also lists the following as some aggressive symptoms of emotional abuse in children as: "bullying and hostile to others, intimidating and threatening, bully and defiant, ridiculing to others, cruelty to other children and animals, destruction of property and fire setting, repeated truancy or tardiness, reluctant to go home, and constant attention seeking and hyperactive behavior" (2000, p. 184).

Lisa states, "I acted out a lot as a teenager and started drinking at age 15. I drank quite heavily by the time I was 16. I would run away from home often and I actually moved out of my parents' house when I was 17." According to Romeo, adolescent children who have been emotionally abused engage in self-abusive activities such as: alcohol and substance abuse,

gambling, prostitution, running away, and criminal activities (2000). It is said that the problems of adolescence are often direct symptoms of the earlier childhood as well as the current emotional abuse that they are enduring from their parents. Not only could a child's academics and behavior be impacted as a result of being verbally and/or emotionally abused, but their emotional well-being is severely impacted as well.

### **Emotional Impact**

Moore and Pepler reported that verbal abuse was more likely than other kinds of abuse to affect children's view of themselves (2006). Additionally, Iwaniec, Larkin and McSherry's research indicates that emotional maltreatment such as verbal and/or emotional abuse is particularly damaging to a child's self-esteem (2007). This is typically a result of the constant belittling and targeting a child's worth due to verbal and/or emotional abuse.

According to Romeo, "the emotional environment of the family is critical to the child's development of self-esteem and self-image" (2000, p. 183). For example, in a stable and emotionally healthy family environment, a child senses and feels love and accepted or wanted. Because of this and the parents' loving and positive interactions with the child, they express to their child that he/she is a "good" and "valued" member of the family. As a result, the child develops positive self-esteem and self-worth and overall, has a positive self-image, as one who is "good." However, in a verbally and/or emotionally abusive family, a child feels unloved and unwanted. The parents constantly reject the child and have negative and abusive interactions with the child. The emotional family environment is unstable, unhealthy and cold as the parents do not express nor show any affection, support or guidance toward the child. As a result, the child is deprived of the psychological nurturing necessary for a child's psychological growth and development. Furthermore, emotional abuse does not happen just once, instead it is a continuous

behavior by the abuser that breaks down a child's self-concept to the point where the child feels unworthy of respect, friendship, love and affection (Romeo, 2000).

Romeo also states that other forms of verbal and/or emotional abuse include: unrealistic expectations of the child's behavior, and deliberate humiliation in front of others. She continues by stating that "all children inherently trust and love their parents and seldom complain directly about emotional abuse. They lack the reasoning ability to realistically challenge their parents' attacks upon their self-esteem. They may think that this is the normal way of life" (2000, p. 184). Unfortunately, the child accepts belittling statements of the parents as "true" and "accurate" reflections of their own self-worth. As a result of this abuse, the child develops overwhelmingly low self-esteem and a negative self-image as one who is no-good.

Lisa states, "I have suffered from depression and have had anxiety issues for as long as I can remember. I also have always had the fear that I am never good enough for anyone. I believe that this is a result of the insults that were constantly thrown at me as a child."

A report from Moore and Pepler concluded that children from violent families were three times more likely to have serious clinical problems if their mothers reported frequent use of insults, compared to mothers who never used insults (2006). Gibb and Abela's growing body of research adds that experiences such as teasing, rejecting, humiliating, and demeaning may contribute to the development of depressive cognitions and symptoms in children (2008). Typically when a child's emotional well-being is unstable, they tend to struggle in social situations.

## **Social Impact**

Lisa states, “I have always been shy and reserved (unless alcohol is involved). I have felt my opinion does not matter or no one is listening.” According to researchers Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki, children who are constantly put down by their parents tend to feel shame. They are unable to acknowledge their own value or to accept the possibility that any other person might see them as worthy. For this reason, they tend to withdraw from others. They may isolate themselves physically, avoiding participation in normal social activities. They may also isolate themselves emotionally, allowing peers to see only limited aspects of their personalities. Emotionally abused children tend to be guarded and to lack spontaneity. These tendencies constitute major impediments to appropriate function in social situations, including school (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki, 2004).

Verbally and/or emotionally abused children are more inclined to be violent and cruel toward their friends as a result of the viciousness and cruelty they have experienced throughout their life. These abused children tend to treat their friends or peers poorly and become verbally and/or emotionally abusive toward them because they were raised thinking that it is “normal”. Imagine trying to be friends with someone who is constantly putting you down, belittling you and making you think that you are not good enough. Children who are victims of verbal and/or emotional abuse struggle keeping friendships and maintaining a healthy social life in general. During a child’s early years this may not be an obvious observation, but closer to adolescence and adulthood, it could be a serious problem.



## **Impact on Adulthood**

While words do not leave a traditional permanent mark that is visible on the body, they do leave an emotional, psychic scar, one that follows children into their adolescent years and adulthood. If a child who has been verbally and/or emotionally abused does not receive any help for the mistreatment they endured during childhood, it is likely that they will experience many difficulties as an adult, even after the abuse has stopped. Lisa states, "I have never truly trusted anyone and turn to alcohol to deal with stressful and social situations. I have severe social anxiety and I am not sure I ever fully learned how to communicate effectively with others." According to Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki, children who are emotionally abused not only experience intense social anxiety as children, but also experience similar social difficulties and problems in adult relationships. They are unable to trust others; therefore they are unable to allow themselves to become close to others (2004). Researchers McCullough, Miller and Johnson add, "childhood maltreatment has been found to be associated with negative outcomes such as depression, antisocial personality disorder, anxiety, and substance abuse" (2010, p. 224).

As more research has been conducted on emotional maltreatment in recent years, findings are suggesting that there are associations between emotional abuse and later forms of adolescent and young adult maladjustment including depression, eating disorders, suicide, aggression, social problems and dating violence (McCullough, Miller, Johnson, 2010).

According to Romeo, a child who is victimized by emotional abuse enters adolescence burdened with extremely low self-esteem and a negative self-image. Also, if the parents continue their emotionally abusive behaviors during the adolescent stage of the child's development, this further consolidates the adolescent's destructive self-belief, as one who is "bad" and "worthless." All of the adolescent's decisions are shaped by the emotional abuse

(2000). Romeo also states that childhood emotional abuse not only affects adolescence, but it also takes a substantial toll upon the individual's adult life. Many victims of emotional child abuse continue to be victimized by emotional abuse during adulthood. They may continuously enter into abusive relationships and are used, abused, and exploited by others. Their lack of self-worth confirms to them that they are deserving of abuse from others. Some victims of emotional child abuse develop into hostile and angry adults. They are consumed with rage, and they perpetuate the violence that they received from the parents upon their own children. Thus, the emotional abuse of children is passed on from one generation to the next (2000).

Spillane-Grieco (2000) raises important questions: Are children born with an inherent propensity to act in violent ways? Is violent behavior transmitted from one generation to the next? Is it learned? Lisa states,

I never wanted to have children; I did not want another child to feel like I have about myself. I catch myself too often screaming at them and saying things I am sure make them feel inadequate. I feel that this is a result of how I was treated as a child.

Sometimes I do not even realize what I am saying to my children and how bad I could be hurting them with my words and it comes out unconsciously. Not only does this happen with my children, but sometimes I feel that I am rude and mean to my husband without even realizing it.

After hearing Lisa's statement, I could not help but believe that her behavior toward her children and husband has been unintentionally passed down from her verbally and emotionally abusive father. It is not as if Lisa's father deliberately taught her how to be emotionally and/or verbally abusive, but it is because of the years of abuse that Lisa endured that she began to think

that this was “normal.” It may be too easy for Lisa to fly off the handle and say things that she does not truly mean because that is how it was for her as she grew up.

Just as in Lisa’s case, not only does a victim of verbal and/or emotional abuse struggle with their relationship(s) with their child(ren), it may also affect their relationship with their significant other(s). Lassri and Shahar’s research concluded that whether self-criticism evolves as a result of internalizing negative self-cognitions, directly supplied by the abuser, or due to the child’s attempt of understanding the abusive behavior, their childhood emotional maltreatment promotes the tendency for internalizing critical thinking toward the self. Over time, this tendency might be consolidated, becoming a defining part of a person’s personality; and ultimately derailing relationships in general and romantic relationships in particular (2012). It is obvious that a victim of verbal and or/emotional abuse may struggle with relationships as an adult; especially if they were not only a direct victim of verbal and/or emotional abuse, but if they were witness to constant verbal and/or emotional abuse taking place between their parents. If they witnessed their parents being verbally and/or emotionally abusive to each other, then they may begin to think that this is “normal” and treat their significant others the same way intentionally or even unintentionally.

### **Signs of Verbal and/or Emotional Abuse**

After discussing the impact of verbal and/or emotional abuse, it is crucial to recognize the signs and/or symptoms of verbal and/or emotional abuse. Emotional and/or verbal abuse remain to be the most difficult type of abuse to define or isolate. Some child development experts argue that almost all parents are guilty of verbal and/or emotional abuse of children at some time or another (Twaite & Rodriguez-Srednicki). So what are the signs that one can look for when identifying a child who may be a victim to verbal and/or emotional abuse? What should we be

looking for in order to be able to correctly identify if a child has been or is being verbally and/or emotionally abused? It is critical to understand the signs of verbal and/or emotional abuse in order to help the victim. Early intervention is the best chance for a child to live a healthy life. According to Twiate and Rodriguez-Srednicki (2004), the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information suggests that a mandated reporter should suspect emotional abuse when a child

(1) shows extremes of behavior, such as being overly compliant or overly demanding, extremely passive, or inappropriately aggressive; (2) is either inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (e.g., rocking, thumb-sucking, or head banging); (3) manifests delays in physical and/or emotional development; (4) has attempted suicide; and/or (5) reports the lack of attachment to the parent.

Twiate and Rodriguez-Srednicki continue by stating that the presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring in a family; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse. The National Clearinghouse also suggests that potential reporters also factor in any data they may have relevant to parental behavior, including (1) regularly blaming, belittling, or berating the child; (2) being unconcerned about the child or refusing to consider offers of help for the difficulties the child is experiencing; and/or (3) overly rejecting the child (2004, p. 456).

Signs or symptoms of verbal and/or emotional abuse vary by age and sometimes even gender. The signs or symptoms also vary in severity and can manifest from one extreme to another. The earlier a verbally and/or emotionally abused child gets help, the greater the chance that they have to heal and break the cycle.

### **Chapter III: Discussion**

Not only do verbal and/or emotional abuse impact a child's academics, behavior, emotional well-being, social skills and carry into their adult life, but if one of these areas are impacted then there is a greater chance that all of them will be impacted as well. For example, if a child is emotionally unstable because of their low self-esteem and self-worth, then they will most likely struggle with relationships with other's throughout their life. If a child's behavior is out of control as a result of being verbally and/or emotionally abused then they will most likely struggle in the classroom because they may spend more time in the principal's office than the classroom or even become suspended due to their behavior. Verbal and/or emotional abuse may cause a serious snow ball effect and a child will suffer tremendously in all of these areas of their life. Children who have been verbally and/or emotionally abused need help and it is important to understand the severity of the abuse in order to help these children. Research shows that verbal and/or emotional abuse can be passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, not only do these children need help to live an emotionally happy and healthy life, but the tragic cycle needs to end.

#### **What Children Need**

When a child's mental and emotional needs are met, it allows them to grow and develop in an appropriate and healthy way. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially, learn new skills, build self-esteem, develop a positive mental outlook and mature into an emotionally healthy adult. Of course there are times in everyone's lives where there is added stress and we all reach a breaking point, but it is unacceptable to take anger and aggression out on children. Children are like sponges, just waiting to be filled with love, knowledge and tools that will help them grow and learn. Be sure to give children unconditional love, nurture their

confidence and self-esteem, provide a safe and secure environment, give appropriate guidance and discipline when necessary, communicate and be a positive role model. Everything you do around children is observed whether it is intentional or unintentional; a child will pick up on your behaviors.

A child's overall well-being is not something to take lightly. When a baby cries because it needs a diaper change, the parents gently change the diaper while talking to the baby all the while, they are teaching their baby that the world is a safe place and what they need matters. On the other hand, if a baby cries because it needs a diaper change and the parents ignore or yell at the baby, they are teaching them that the world is a "cold" and unsafe place and what they need does not matter. When a Kindergarten child comes home from school and tells mom and dad what they learned at school and his or her parents share in the excitement, they are teaching the child that they care. On the other hand, if a Kindergarten child comes home from school and tells mom and dad what they learned at school and the parents ignore the child or tell them that they do not have time to listen, they are teaching the child that they do not matter. When a teenage child comes home from school and tells his or her parents that she is not getting along with his or her friends and the parents listen to the teenagers concerns. Together, they find a solution and teach the child how to handle certain situations appropriately. On the other hand, if a teenager comes home from school and tells his or her parents that she is not getting along with his or her friends and the parents ignore the teenager or yell and tell him or her that it is their own fault, they are teaching the teenager that their concerns do not matter.

It is critical to foster the development of a child in each stage of their life in order to promote an emotionally healthy human being. It is important to show children that they do matter and that their needs are important to us. When parent's and other adults show how much

they love and care for the needs of their children, they are teaching them how to learn and grow into a strong, healthy person.

### **Limitations of the Review**

There has been extensive research done related to child abuse and neglect, but a limited amount of research has been to specifically address the impact of verbal and/or emotional abuse. This project did not include new research. It was limited to a summary of available research publications. Furthermore, this investigation was limited to reviewing of research conducted during 1997 to 2012. Research prior to 1997 was not taken into consideration for this investigation. The studies were selected from limited databases and journals found electronically only.

This author was limited to the available published literature and to the most recent data available to the public. While comprehensive, the information obtained was limited to the searches this researcher completed.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Very little research has been done on how to help verbally and/or emotionally abused children and abusive parents. Iwaniec and Herbert state, “apart from a few exceptions little has been written on how to help emotionally abused children and abusive parents” (1999, p.365). This would be important to know and give parents and children a second chance. If there were interventions and help for emotionally and/or verbally abused victims as well as interventions and help for the abusers, maybe the cycle would end. Research in this area could benefit the victims of emotional and/or verbal abuse as well as the abusers.

Also, it might be beneficial to research the impacts of verbal and/or emotional abuse by different abusers. For example, children are not only verbally and/or emotionally abused by their

parents. They may be verbally and/or emotionally abused by peers, teachers, siblings, other relatives, caretakers etc. This type of research could provide additional insights in the area of verbal and/or emotional abuse.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the verbal and/or emotional abuse of children are problems in our society and have tremendous consequences. The damage suffered by verbally and/or emotionally abused children is both compelling and tragic because these victims are likely to repeat the abusive pattern with their own children.

It is clear that making a determination as to whether or not a child may be the victim of verbal and/or emotional abuse is a difficult task but as Carleton states, “the decision of whether or not to report a suspected case of child abuse to authorities is a particularly difficult, but important one” (2006). Carleton is exactly correct, it is an extremely important decision; it could make the difference between keeping a child safe or allowing them to be in harm’s way. It is also clear that one must be particularly careful in making such determinations. Researchers, Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki urge mandated reporters such as educators to “make reports of verbal and/or emotional abuse with extra caution, emphasizing the special need for concrete proof in such cases and stressing that psychological abuse cases must have evidence of persistent patterns of severe maltreatment” (2004, p. 457). However, Underwood states that if you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, then report your concerns to the proper authorities no matter what, even if you are uncertain; it is better to be safe than sorry (2011). Underwood also stresses the fact that you may not be the first person to report these concerns and that your report could assist authorities in identifying a pattern of behavior (2011). Just over half (53.6%) of reports to child protective services concerning abuse come from mandated reporters. The rest



come from non-mandated, concerned citizens and anonymous reports (Carleton, 2006). It is similar to being a witness to an accident. It is extremely important to make that call, even if you think that someone has already made a report.

If you suspect a child is being verbally and/or emotionally abused it is important to report your suspicions. Underwood states that all states have statutes that require teachers to report suspected child abuse and neglect (2011). Teachers are not required to be absolutely 100% certain that abuse or neglect is actually taking place. Underwood continues by stating, “if you have reasonable cause to believe that a child is being abused or neglected, you have an obligation to report it” (2011, p. 28). Some teachers may be scared about legal consequences that may take place because of their reports but all states protect teachers from legal liability. In fact, there are consequences for teachers who do not report the abuse when they should have. For example, if a teacher suspects that a child is being abused or neglected and does not report it, serious consequences may take place especially if it turns out that the child was in fact, being abused or neglected. Penalties, fines and possible jail time may occur if a report is not made when abuse was suspected.

Twaite and Rodriguez-Srednicki (2004) continue by stating, “in any case, the need to accept responsibility for undertaking the difficult task of determining the existence of verbal and/or emotional abuse is paramount among those who work with children. It has become increasingly clear in recent decades that verbal and/or emotional abuse is a serious problem that may have a significant negative impact on children’s development and on their immediate and longer-term adjustment. Therefore potential reporters should not shrink from their responsibility to be vigilant with respect to possible verbal and/or emotional abuse. They should not minimize the potential impact of such abuse in order to justify inaction. Instead, they should sensitize

themselves to the indicators of possible emotional abuse, and they should be willing to gather additional data to refute or confirm any suspicions they may have” (p. 458).

Emotional and/or verbal abuse can be more dangerous to a child’s well-being as it affects the child’s academics, behavior, emotions, social-life and carries into their adulthood, thus having devastating and life-long consequences. Emotional and/or verbal abuse hurt deep within, causing pain and is detrimental to our children who should be loved and nurtured on a day to day basis. Do your part and love a child who may be hurting today. Children need love and affection in order to grow into emotionally healthy adults. If you notice that a child is not receiving the appropriate attention that they deserve, please do not hesitate to make a report. You could mean the difference between giving a child a second chance.

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