

Verbal abuse stops when spouse leaves

DEAR ABBY: You printed a letter from "Beaten Down in Oklahoma," who said that although she had a history of severe depression, her verbally abusive husband refused to allow her to get medication "because he didn't believe in it." He told her she was "worthless" and said he only kept her around so he could be near the kids. That letter could have been written by me five years ago.

I was nine years into a physically and emotionally abusive marriage. I heard the same things from my husband. And afterward, when he was trying to make up, he too always said he "didn't mean it."

Well, it turned out he did mean it. Once he found his next victim — a younger woman — he walked out. As he left, he announced it was because everything he'd said had been the truth. I was ugly, fat, worthless, lousy in bed, and he'd only stayed because he wanted to be around the kids.

You should have advised "Beaten Down" to see a lawyer in addition to a counselor, while she still has a shred of self-esteem. Following my divorce, I got counseling. Once I felt better about myself, I met a wonderful man. We're married now. I wish I could give "Beaten Down" a hug, because she's not alone. She's in my prayers.

— FULL OF HOPE
DEAR FULL OF HOPE: I heard from many readers who identified with that letter and felt it was important for her to break away. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: A husband who tells his wife she's worthless and stupid is using verbal abuse to wear her down and control her. Marriage counseling and psychiatrists won't help. The man has low self-esteem and tries to make himself appear powerful and intelligent by making his wife feel inadequate. Every day she stays with him is far more harmful to the children than taking them and leaving. Abuse is not always physical. She needs to get out BEFORE it becomes physical.

— DIANE IN PENNSYLVANIA
DEAR DIANE: It's true; chil-



Abigail Van Buren

• Dear Abby

dren model their behavior on what they're exposed to.

DEAR ABBY: As a clinical social worker and therapist with a strong background in the field of domestic violence, I must comment on your response to "Beaten Down in Oklahoma." Your suggestion of marital counseling is not recommended in such situations. It can render the victims more vulnerable to abuse and manipulation after they leave the counselor's office.

Your suggestion of going alone and building her own strength is helpful. Contacting her local domestic violence organization for support is also recommended.

— LSCW IN MAINE
DEAR LSCW: Thank you for the input. The toll-free number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline is (800) 799-7233.

DEAR ABBY: Too many times during my 24 years as a paramedic I have seen the end result on a spouse or a child by someone who crossed the line from verbal to physical abuse. "Beaten Down" should indeed get counseling, but first it is imperative that she secure a safe place for herself and her children. More than her mental health could be at stake.

— EMT IN CINCINNATI
DEAR EMT: I've got the message — and I'm sure my readers will, too.

DEAR ABBY: Have you ever wondered where your readers come up with aliases they give to the people in their questions? I have. I have always suspected they were names they wanted to give their kids, but didn't. How do you think they come up with them?

— PONDERING IN CALIFORNIA
DEAR PONDERING: I come up with them!



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