

## Divorce Magazine

# You're a Victim of Emotional Abuse. How Do You Fortify Your Reputation With Your Children?

By Daniel Pollack and Michelle Halle | April 29, 2022



The advertisements are familiar. In an effort to rebuild your credit score, you can pay a credit repair service to assist in correcting false, outdated, or disputed information. Yes, the company assures you, it will take some time and money, but it can be done.

If only it was that easy for a victim of emotional abuse. Your reputation has been subtly degraded and sullied by your spouse or partner. Indeed, for the sake of the children, you have been covering for the abuser. Not wanting to appear vindictive or defensive, you continuously, silently, and purposely absorbed the abuse. Carefully refraining from casting the abuser in a poor light, from the children's perspective, you have suffered no abuse. If anything, ironically, the abuser's reputation in the eyes of the children, is stellar.

Leaving a relationship where children are present is rarely done impetuously. Assuming there is no physical abuse, leaving an emotionally abusive relationship can and should be done in a planned manner. The reality is, when the day comes that you can no longer stay in the relationship, the children will have

difficulty questioning the wonderful picture and narrative of the abuser that you inadvertently helped to paint.

[Telling children bad news](#) is something no parent wants to do. So, how much information do the children need to be told? Where is the line between being direct and honest and yet not disclosing every detail of abuse that ever occurred? In other words, how much is it proper to “bend the truth?” How do you now talk with your children so that you are not seen as the cause of the ensuing and inevitable anger, trauma, and stigma that the children may suffer? Here are some suggestions.

## **How to Talk to Your Children if You’re a Victim of Emotional Abuse**

- If possible, a professional who has experience in dealing with emotionally abusive relationships should be consulted beforehand.
- Try to talk with all the children at the same time. They may interpret your words differently, but at least they will have all heard the same words and seen the same facial expressions and body language. As well as imparting information, the purpose of meeting with your children is not to instruct them how they should feel, but to give them an opportunity to ask questions.
- Open displays of such raw emotions may be new for your children to experience. Appreciate that they may need time to process the emotions that go along with such disclosures.

Expect and accept that your children may be confused and resentful. Previously, you tolerated the abuse. After you leave, you make a tradeoff – tolerating the abuse for tolerating your children’s confusion and resentment towards you.

While staying in the marriage, you sacrificed your own well-being for theirs. Now you understand they are one and the same. Your children’s long-term well-being is contingent on yours. Ostensibly, your motive for staying in the [abusive relationship](#) was to provide your children with a loving, stable home where they would receive the nurturing they needed to grow into emotionally healthy adults. However, the emotional strain of the abuse and the energy you need to conceal it prevents you from being that nurturing parent.

Your goal of being an exemplary parent has not changed, but the environment must. Your inner strength has not changed, and after leaving your abuser, it will take a different form. You will redirect the inner strength which guided you to

protect your children from knowing about the abuse. You will call upon it to make the move and face the challenges you expect, as well as to overcome those hurdles you do not foresee.

Can you face this conflict all on your own – something you view as necessary but also a failure? Likely, while remaining in the abusive marriage, you felt very alone. Either you kept your own counsel or followed the misguided counsel of others to “stay in the marriage for the sake of the children.” This is not to say that divorce is always the only option, but once you leave, finding emotional and sometimes material support is essential. A person’s nature varies from individual to individual, but the human need for connection with others is universal.

You do not have to be alone and cut off from others anymore. Relying on others for support at a time like this is not an indulgence. It is a necessity. You can learn new ways of shielding, protecting, and communicating with your children – ways that are viable and sustainable.

Being alone while in pain is not viable and sustainable. You must find resources that will give you the validation and support you need to face the challenges that await you and your children.

As a victim of emotional abuse, you understand the power of emotions and must provide [emotional support](#) to your children and to yourself. You can achieve this through validating the children’s feelings and by having realistic expectations of them. The expression “time heals all wounds” is true only when we use the time to actively promote healing.

Facing adversity is never fun, but with inner strength and help from others, you can find your way through it. As Winston Churchill said: “When you’re going through hell, keep going.”

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