

# Intimidating communication



*Jo Ann  
Volk Lederman*

**FAMILY MATTERS**

Dear Jo Ann:

*My husband of 10 years puts me down every day and I'm getting numb inside. Sometimes he uses a tone of voice that frightens me; sometimes it is the demeaning intent of his words. He does it in front of our children and our friends, and when we are alone. We have two children ages 6 and 8. What can I do?*

*Rosemary P.*

Dear Rosemary:

You are already doing something. You've identified the problem and recognized you need help. How long has this been going on? How have you tried to get him to stop? Have you been too afraid? Have you told your husband that his words and tone are hurting you? Frightening you? Personally, I have zero tolerance for intimidation and abuse. So should you. It is critical that your children not be subjected to watching their role models be either intimidators or victims. You owe it to them to maintain a healthy household. When you allow your partner to emotionally hurt you, it gives him permission to continue. You must get help.

Domestic Violence Update identifies criteria for abuse in ways you may not think about. You are being abused if you are yelled at or put down by others, constantly criticized or called names, being controlled with emotions (threats of suicide), being accused of having affairs,

being kept from seeing family or friends, hearing insults about family or friends, being made to do something degrading, hearing that you are fat, dumb or lazy, having someone make you feel guilty, having someone abuse your pets to hurt you.

In situations such as yours, there is a possibility for escalating intimidation, which could lead to physical violence. Intimidation is a form of emotional abuse. You and your husband need therapy; you, to empower yourself, and your husband, to learn other methods of dealing with how he acts out his pain. A therapist will help you evaluate what is happening, provide meaningful information and help you to create solutions. Often, men who are intimidators are operating from feelings of powerlessness for which they are overcompensating. They may be imitating their own fathers' behavior by repeating the damage inflicted on them. These are lessons they observed as children that we don't want your children to learn.

If you cannot afford continuing therapy for your husband, explore whether he can qualify for a state funded anger management program. If your husband is not able to change and this type of conduct continues, you must seriously consider ending the marriage.

*Jo Ann Volk Lederman is executive director of South Miami Psychology Associates. In private clinical practice for 25 years, she specializes in marriage and family therapy, couples therapy, infertility issues, behavioral medicine and business consulting. To contact Volk Lederman, call 305-666-8833, send mail to 7800 Red Road, Suite 205A, Miami 33143; or address email to [JoAnnVolkLederman1@juno.com](mailto:JoAnnVolkLederman1@juno.com).*