

Verbal Abuse Hurts

Quarter 11 • Lesson 10

Focus on Life Skills

1. *Connecting:* Do an activity with leaves to understand the power of words.
2. *Teaching:* Learn about verbal abuse and its harmful effects (Proverbs 12:18; Zephaniah 3:17).
3. *Responding:* Do an activity to show the effects of verbal abuse and learn new words of truth.

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- Large, undamaged leaves (1 per child)

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse Poster
- Pencils
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 12:18

The tongue is powerful. One abusive word can leave a mark on a person's heart that lasts a lifetime. While the bruises are not visible, verbal abuse can hurt as much as, or more than, physical abuse.

As you prepare to teach this important lesson about verbal abuse, take time to do the Responding activity yourself. If you have paper and pencil, draw a heart, or use a leaf instead. Think about damaging words others have spoken to you throughout your life: name-calling, put-downs, negative comparisons, words expressing hatred or worthlessness. For each damaging word, make a mark on the heart or tear it.

Jesus knows how it feels to be verbally abused. He was mocked and hated. But His love is greater than the hurtfulness of others. Ask Him to heal your wounds. If you struggle to forgive those who have hurt you with their words, ask God to help you let go of bitterness and to replace the wounds on your heart with His expressions of love.

Family Connection: Let your children's families know that this week the children will learn about the hurt caused by verbal abuse. Many families may not even realize their homes are filled with verbal abuse. If possible, provide the families of your students with copies of the Resource Article "Verbal Abuse." You can find this Resource Article just before this lesson.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Do an activity with leaves to understand the power of words.

Welcome the children as they arrive. Ask them if they spoke encouraging words to anyone this week. Give children a chance to share briefly.

Divide the class into groups of 5 and have each group sit in a circle. Give each child 1 leaf. Ask the children to look closely at their leaves and memorize what they look like.

Tell the children to pass their leaves to the right. Tell the children to damage the leaves by making small tears in them or by folding them. They should not destroy the leaves, just damage them. Tell the children to pass the leaves to the right. Again, the children will damage the leaves but not destroy them. Repeat the process until the children have their original leaves back.

- How did each rip or fold affect your leaf?

Encourage the children to try to repair the leaves.

- Were you able you repair your leaf completely?

Your leaf represents your heart. Each rip or fold on your leaf represents unkind words that have been said to you.

- How do you think that unkind words affect your heart?
- Can you repair the damage done to your heart?

Last week we learned that our words can encourage or build others up. This week we will learn that our words can also discourage and tear others down.

2. Teaching: Learn about verbal abuse and its harmful effects (Proverbs 12:18; Zephaniah 3:17).

The words you say can help or hurt others. Last week we learned about encouraging words. Encouraging words lift up a person and fill him with confidence. But not all words are encouraging. Some are hurtful and damaging.

Listen to what the Bible says about our words:

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
Proverbs 12:18

Stand up and pretend that you are holding a long, sharp sword. Now stab the air with it a few times. Imagine how it would feel to be stabbed by a sword. The Bible says that abusive words hurt like being stabbed with a sword.

When someone says something unkind or thoughtless to us, it hurts. We may feel the pain for a long time. But when a person uses words to hurt us over and over again, that is verbal abuse. Just as physical and sexual abuse cause deep pain and hurt, verbal abuse also creates wounds and scars on the heart that are difficult to heal.

- **What do you think verbal abuse is?**

Allow the children to offer their ideas. They may mention things such as name-calling, swearing at someone, and insulting them.

Teacher Tip: As you read the following list of examples, be sensitive to how the children respond. Many of them may have experienced verbal abuse. This lesson may make them uncomfortable. If you need to stop at any point and allow a child to share, do so. The Holy Spirit will help you comfort that child. It is okay to stop and pray for that child before going on with the lesson.

Verbal abuse is very common. It is possible that you or someone you know has been verbally abused. You may not realize you are being verbally abused, especially if it is your normal experience in life. You may think it is normal for family members to talk to each other in hurtful and unkind ways. But when a person often uses words that are meant to cause pain, it is verbal abuse.

Verbal abuse includes things such as:

Calling someone bad names, such as “stupid”

Insulting someone, such as calling her “ugly”

Putting someone down by calling him “worthless” or “a mistake”

Making negative comparisons to others, such as “You will never be as smart as your brother”

Yelling or cursing at someone

Using bad language around someone all the time

Threatening to leave or abandon someone, especially a child

Threatening to harm someone, even if the harm never happens

Blaming someone for problems or circumstances, such as “My life would have been better if you had not been born”

Verbally abusing anyone in front of another person

Ask your children if they can think of other examples of verbal abuse.

- **How might verbal abuse hurt someone?**

Remind the children that Proverbs 12:18 says that abusive words are like swords.

The wounds caused by verbal abuse are mostly to a person’s heart. The hurt is hidden inside. But there are signs you can see that tell you if someone has been verbally abused.

Someone who has been verbally abused may have many negative emotions at the same time and experience them more often than other people. These include anger, fear, sadness, guilt, shame, self-blame, and worry.

Someone who has been verbally abused may not like herself and may think she is worthless.

Someone who has been verbally abused may have a hard time trusting others or making friends. He may have a hard time getting along with others and may not want to spend time with others.

Someone who has been verbally abused may have problems with schoolwork, may abuse drugs or alcohol, or may hurt herself by hitting, pinching, scratching, or cutting herself.

Someone who has been verbally abused may bully or verbally abuse others.

If you are being verbally abused or bullied, or if you know someone who is, talk to an adult you trust.

If you are being verbally abused, you cannot do anything to change the other person who is abusing you. But you can do some things to protect yourself.

First, know that it is not your fault. People who verbally abuse others often blame the person who is being abused or tell that person that she deserves to be abused. But if someone verbally abuses you, it is never your fault.

Teacher Tip: Many of your children have experienced verbal abuse from family members, teachers, and others. Throughout the lesson, reassure your children that verbal abuse is never their fault. They can learn to heal from verbal abuse through prayer and by forgiving their abusers.

Second, try to stay calm and respond wisely. Verbal abusers are often expressing anger, so responding in anger only makes the situation worse. Try to keep your feelings under control and respond calmly and respectfully.

Third, try not to let the abuser know how much she has hurt you. People who feel bad about themselves often try to make others feel bad. The person who is verbally abusing you may be trying to cause you pain because it makes her feel more powerful. If you do not let her know that her words have hurt you, she will not have the same feelings of power.

Finally, do not do or say anything that could put you in danger. Telling a verbal abuser to stop or yelling at him usually does not stop the abuse. These kinds of responses usually make the person more angry and may cause him to try to hurt you in other ways. If possible, try to calmly leave the situation.

Verbal abuse causes deep pain. You may begin to believe the unkind and hurtful things other say to you. But the abusive words of others do not change who you are. No matter what others say, you are a special and valuable person. I care about you, and your friends in this class care about you.

God cares about you too! He created you, and He loves you completely! Listen to this verse. It tells you what God says about you.

For the LORD your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.

Zephaniah 3:17, NLT

• **How does this verse tell us that God talks to us?**

The children may answer that He delights in us, loves us, and rejoices over us with joyful songs.

God delights in you! He sings joyfully about how much He loves you! And His words are always truthful and always good! So even if others use their angry words to hurt you, God is telling you with His joyful songs that He loves you very much! He can help you to heal from the pain others have caused. And He can help you to forgive those who have hurt you.

Teacher Tip: Emphasize that forgiving abusers does not mean that the abuse was okay—what happened was wrong and it caused pain. Forgiveness means releasing the anger and trusting God to heal the hurt.

3. Responding: Do an activity to show the effects of verbal abuse and learn new words of truth.

Have the children get back into their groups from the beginning of class. Tell them to hold their leaves.

Look at your leaf. It is not as beautiful as it was when you first received it. It has been damaged. This is like your heart. It has been damaged by the hurtful words people have said to you.

Have each child exchange leaves with someone else.

The leaf that you are holding represents the hurts of the person who gave it to you. Each of those marks represents some pain that words have caused him. Now turn to that person and say something kind and thoughtful to him.

Try to let the kind and encouraging words you have just heard replace the unkind and hurtful words in your heart. When you hear something hurtful, remember these kind words and say them over and over in your mind. And always remember the loving words God says to you and about you. He loves you! And He can help you to heal!

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

*Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth
and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

Psalm 25:4–5

Teacher Tip: An important part of healing is for the children to have someone they trust and feel they can confide in. Make yourself available to talk with your children after the lesson.

Optional: If you are using Student Pages, the children can draw things that have hurt their hearts on them.

Close class by speaking this blessing from Proverbs 12:18 over the children.

Blessing: Jesus loves you very much. When others cut you with their words like a sword, Jesus knows. May God heal your wounds. May He give you words that bring healing to yourself and others.

Lead the children in singing this quarter's song, if possible. "Holy Forever" by Chris Tomlin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkHgxKemCRk>