

Verbal abuse by parent must end

DEAR ABBY: After reading the letter from the 23-year-old mother of three whose husband is verbally abusive to her and the children, I had to write. She said she's ambivalent about divorcing him; she "just wants him to change." She signed her letter "Crazy in Tennessee."

You urged her to leave. I absolutely agree. That letter could have been written about my own family.

I have been married 14 years. My husband was verbally abusive for many of those years. He said horrible things to me (including wishing I was dead, etc.) in front of our three children. He also instigated arguments with the children — ages 6, 9 and 11 — seemingly just to make them cry. I finally filed for divorce, which will be final in a few months.

Our 9-year-old has become nervous and sick to her stomach recently. She gets particularly upset when her father and I are in the same room. I asked what the problem is. She said: "It scares me when you and Daddy are together. He has been mad at you for so long, and yelled so much. I'm afraid that now that you're getting the divorce, when you start fighting he might have a gun or something." Imagine how heartbreaking it was to hear that!

Please tell "Crazy in Tennessee" her best bet is to get out while the children are still too young to have sustained much damage from the verbal abuse they've been exposed to. I only wish I had done it sooner. — **ALMOST TOO LATE IN OHIO**

DEAR ALMOST TOO LATE: I'm pleased you had the courage to take that important step. Now, I hope you will waste no time in taking another one. Your children will stand a better chance of healing if you'll get them into therapy right away, although I am sad to say there are no guarantees. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: My dad was just like her husband. For more than 20 years, literally hours on end, day in and day

out, I'd hear, "You're ugly! No girl in her right mind would ever want you!" As a result, I am painfully shy around females. Counseling has helped some, but there's always that little voice in the back of your mind that you hear over and over for as long as you live.

When I looked for work, Dad told me I was stupid and would never be hired or amount to anything. Because of it, I gave up looking for a job. I'm working now, but only because my mother encouraged me.

I hope for her children's sake that "Crazy in Tennessee" will find someone who will treat them all better. If she doesn't, I have no doubt that her children will wind up like me.

— **BEEN THERE IN ONTARIO, CANADA**

DEAR BEEN THERE: Thank you for writing. Don't sell yourself short. That you are functioning at all is a tribute to your inner strength. I'll repeat part of what I said in my original answer: Cruel words erode self-esteem like the ocean eats away the shore. I hope "Crazy in Tennessee" takes to heart your hard-earned wisdom, because even children who aren't picked on by the abuser can emerge from that lifestyle with "survivor guilt" for not being able to intervene.

I'll quote from a letter that arrived from another survivor, a woman in Wisconsin: "Abby, the one who will receive the most damage from that relationship is the daughter. She will grow up craving the one and only thing her father will never give her — his approval. And she'll continue to try to get it from other men who are as cruel and withholding as he is, because she thinks their behavior is normal."

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



By Dear
ABBY