

Warning Signs Spotlight: Put Downs

Among the many obstacles you may face in relationships, determining when your partner crosses the line can be a tricky one. This line may be one that you've talked about, or one that you haven't opened up about yet. Either way, your values and feelings are important.

If a partner uses words to hurt, mock or belittle you, this can be a warning sign of an unhealthy relationship. Often these put downs are masked as jokes, targeted towards insecurities you may have, and said with no regard of the weight and impact these words carry. Sometimes, put downs happen during arguments, especially when they're heated. Even put downs in arguments can be unhealthy and there are ways to argue or fight fairly. When put downs start becoming a pattern in or out of arguments, this type of behavior is abusive.

A put down can happen once and be painful, but when they are constant and used to overpower or control you in a situation, this is another clear warning sign of abuse. Comments like *"You never do anything right," "I don't know why I'm with a loser like you,"* and *"You are such a baby, crying over everything, get over yourself."* are examples of put downs. How does this take away from you as a Healthy Me? Well, these words play over and over in your mind and can affect the way you feel and think about yourself. This is a negative power play that can affect your ability to practice self-love because you really care about your partner and value what they have to say. It's hard to believe that your partner would hurt you this way, but the reality is, even though they may seem like they're just using words and not doing anything really extreme like hitting you, those words are just as painful as physical abuse.

You deserve to be treated in a healthy way: physically, emotionally and verbally. A partner that uses put downs or comments to make you feel bad or less than is not displaying healthy relationship behaviors. In a healthy relationship, your partner will use words to make you feel good, loved, and encouraged. A Healthy We is all about building each other up, being fair, and appreciating the wonderful, unique qualities that each person brings to the relationship.

It's Time to Talk

Here are a few ways for parents and caring adults to start conversations about put downs with the young people in your life:

- In what ways have you heard your friends talk to each other when they're angry?
- Does how they express their anger change if they're in a relationship?
- Do you ever hear couples around you arguing? What does that sound like?
- If you were in a relationship and someone used their words to hurt you, how would that make you feel? Would you ignore it or ask them to stop?
- When you're angry, do you think it's fair to use hurtful words or putdowns? Why?

What if this happens to me?

If your partner is using words as a weapon, and you feel safe enough to address it with them, here are a few things you could say:

- I feel like you don't value me when you say those hurtful words.
- I understand you're upset, but I hope you realize that your put downs hurt.
- I don't like when you say those things, and actually would like us to stop, take a step back and talk to each other when you're not upset.
- You think that what you're saying is funny, but it really hurts and I'd like you to stop saying that.
- We should treat each other with respect, and what you're saying is actually not making me feel loved and respected.

Remember, if someone is putting you down, you have a [right to end the relationship](#). Healthy relationships include trust, respect, and open communication.