



## Silent Treatments

When someone refuses to talk to you for hours, days, or weeks whether it is initiating conversation or responding to your comments, it is extremely uncomfortable. The silence screams anger at you even if the person is in the other room. But does a silent treatment qualify as abuse?

**Here are three reasons why silent treatments are abusive:**

- **They are punitive.** Abuse has to do with punishment that is designed to teach you a lesson so you will make a different choice the next time. The choice you are supposed to make is whatever the abuser wants you to do rather than what you think is right for you. Abuse always involves punishment.
- **They are controlling.** All abusers seek to control their victims. When someone controls you it means they use manipulation that is designed to override your free will. The pressure is purposeful and targeted. Silent treatments do affect your choices because they are really unpleasant especially when they go on for days or weeks.
- **They are disrespectful.** Respect has to do with valuing you as a person and an individual regardless of whether or not you please someone. You have the right to be noticed and to be validated. When someone refuses to acknowledge you, respond to you, or speak to you, the message that is being sent is that you are not valuable enough to even be noticed. Abuse always devalues its victims.

**What is the purpose of the silent treatment and what does it tell you about your partner?**

- **It tells you that your partner does not want to talk about issues and resolve them.** If your partner could or would talk about issues, then there would have been a discussion about what you did that caused the upset and the issue could be explored. Both of you would have been able to express your opinions and possibly come to agreement on what your partner expected and what you are willing to do in the future. You would have been able to acknowledge your part, if you felt you had one, and the rift could have been repaired. There is no opportunity to repair the relationship when the silent treatment is used, because there isn't any healthy communication. Your partner doesn't want resolution.
- **It tells you that your partner uses manipulation.** The silent treatment is manipulative because it is used as pressure to get you to behave a certain way. It isn't comfortable to have someone ignore you especially when you live in the same home and it is painfully obvious that you aren't being spoken to, answered, or acknowledged. It is abusive in the

sense that it tries to control and manipulate you. Abuse is about control and making you into the person the abuser wants you to be without acknowledging your right to be respected for who you are and to be who you are without retribution.

- **It tells you that your partner uses punishment.** The silent treatment is punishment. It is meted out in response to something that you did or did not do. It is meant to make you fear your partner's response to you so you will be more careful in the future. Your partner didn't like your behavior and is refusing to interact with you in order to teach you to not do it again. Your partner believes that he/she has the right to punish you. This implies a parent-child relationship and that your partner feels he/she has the right to discipline you as your superior. It also tells you that your partner is willing to hurt you. Healthy people don't purposely hurt each other; instead they seek out ways to avoid it.

The silent treatment is not a mature loving way to treat your partner. It produces fear in you when you are around your partner. 1 John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (NIV). Husbands are to love their wives and care for them; wives are to respect their husbands. The silent treatment is not loving or respectful. It is a sure sign that your relationship is unhealthy.