

Dealing with a Person Who Belittles You

Objective

To identify ways to deal with a person who belittles you.

What to Know

Belittling occurs when another person attempts to make you feel insignificant. They might be condescending, insulting, or dismissive, and they may try to undermine you to make you feel inferior. You might feel small, humiliated, invalidated, or criticized. This is a verbally and emotionally abusive pattern that can start with small, trivial digs and occasional put-downs. Over time, it can become habitual and might even feel normal. It is confusing and upsetting when the person belittling you is a friend.

Over time the cumulative effect of belittling causes harm by wearing you down and slowly eroding your self-esteem. If the belittler accuses you of being too sensitive you might begin to question your own memory of what happened, wonder if your feelings are justified, and accept the judgment of others over your own.

You may have tried to talk to your friend, but you were dismissed or made to question whether you just made it up in your head. It might be time for you to accept what is happening, understand your feelings are valid, and set some boundaries.

If you want to continue the friendship, how can you deal with belittling?

- 1. Shut it down.** When your friend starts to belittle you, speak up and say something like, “I don’t agree,” “Don’t talk to me that way,” or “I don’t like it when you behave this way.” Express yourself by letting them know they have upset you. Send a clear message that you will not tolerate their behavior, and leave.
- 2. Be firm and patient.** If the behavior has developed over time, it might not end immediately. It may take some time for your friend to understand the true implications of their behavior, and you may need to point out inappropriate comments and behavior. Note whether they are making the effort to change.
- 3. Openly and honestly communicate.** Express how their behavior makes you feel. The more you remind them how you feel when they belittle you, the more they will be reminded to stop. Remind your friend how you feel and work on solutions together. Instead of yelling or getting upset, you might say, “I feel uncomfortable when you insult me in public,” or “Please don’t trivialize things I’m upset about.”
- 4. Use humor.** Make a joke out of their inappropriate comments. This gives you more control and turns the conversation from negative to neutral. If you push back in a positive, funny way, they will realize they are not affecting you and may back off.

5. Talk to loved ones. Confiding in loved ones can help with many problems, and belittling in a relationship is no different. It can be helpful to speak to someone you trust and get their feedback. Sometimes you just need to hear someone tell you that your feelings are valid.

6. Take a break. Avoiding someone you care about is not easy but taking time away might be what is best for you. Accept feelings of sadness and loss and allow yourself to experience these emotions so you can move on.

This worksheet will help you deal with a friend that belittles you.

What to Do

Recognizing belittling behavior is the first step to breaking the cycle. Answer the following questions.

Write down one or two examples of your friend's belittling comments or behaviors.

How did you respond?

How do you generally respond to belittling?

Do you mentally replay belittling, defeating comments your friend has said to you? Explain.

Are the remarks or behaviors affecting your self-esteem, confidence, or self-image? Describe.

Are they making you doubt or second-guess yourself? Describe.

Who can you talk to about this situation? _____

What are some statements you can say to your friend when they belittle you?

Over the next month, use the following chart to record how you deal with belittling. Your focus is to break this pattern, and you can use the six suggestions described above. If the belittling does not stop, you might consider ending the friendship. Note the date and the belittling comment or behavior. Describe what you did in response, and the outcome.

Date	What happened?	Your response	Outcome

Date	What happened?	Your response	Outcome

Did this activity help you effectively deal with belittling? Why or why not?

Did your friend stop belittling you? If not, what are your next steps?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was most challenging about this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
