

## HOW HARSH WORDS AFFECT HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

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**Abstract:** *Rude words can have a significant impact on a person's psychological state. This article examines physiological and emotional reactions to rudeness, its impact on self-esteem and behavior, as well as social and cultural aspects of the problem. The mechanisms of perception of aggressive speech and its consequences, including stress, decreased self-confidence and deterioration of interpersonal relationships, are analyzed. In conclusion, recommendations are offered to reduce the negative impact of rudeness and create a more favorable speech environment.*

**Keywords:** *Rude words, psychology, stress, emotions, self-esteem, aggression, behavior, interpersonal relationships, communication culture, conscious speech.*

Speech is a powerful tool for influencing a person's consciousness and emotions. Words can inspire, support, motivate, but they can also hurt, cause stress, and lower self-esteem. Rude and aggressive speech is a common occurrence in everyday life. We encounter it at work, in the family, in public places, and even in the digital space. However, not everyone thinks about the consequences that frequent use of rude words and insults can have.

Research in psychology and neuroscience shows that words, especially those with negative emotional connotations, can affect a person's physiological state, causing a stress reaction, increased anxiety, and even behavioral changes. Rudeness in speech can destroy trust, worsen interpersonal relationships, and even contribute to the development of depressive states.

### **Physiological and emotional reactions to rude words**

Speech has a direct impact on a person's emotional state, and rude words can trigger stress reactions in the body. This is due to the fact that our brain perceives negatively colored information as a potential threat, activating defense mechanisms.

### **How the brain reacts to rudeness**

When a person hears rude or offensive words, the amygdala is activated - the area of the brain responsible for processing emotions and forming reactions to stress. In response to aggressive speech, the body releases the stress hormone cortisol, which increases the heart rate, raises blood pressure and increases anxiety.

A study conducted by scientists from the University of McGill showed that offensive and aggressive speech can cause similar reactions as a physical threat. During the experiment, subjects were asked to listen to recordings with different types of

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speech: neutral, positive and rude. When listening to rude language, participants showed increased activity in the amygdala and increased levels of cortisol in the blood, indicating that a stress response had been triggered (Smith, 2018).

### **Impact on mood and emotional state**

Rude words cause an immediate emotional reaction: a person may feel offended, irritated, anxious, or even afraid. If the insults come from a significant person (a parent, partner, boss), the emotional pain can be especially strong. This is due to the fact that the brain perceives social rejection in the same way as physical pain.

Example: Imagine a child who constantly hears phrases like “You can’t do anything” or “You’re stupid” from his parents. Such words cause anxiety and low self-esteem, which in the future can lead to self-doubt and difficulties in socialization.

### **Long-Term Effects of Frequent Exposure to Harsh Words**

If a person is regularly exposed to verbal aggression, it can lead to:

- Chronic stress. Constant exposure to negative language maintains high cortisol levels, which over time exhausts the nervous system.
- Depression and anxiety disorders. Research shows that people who are regularly exposed to verbal abuse are more likely to suffer from depression and panic attacks.
- Changes in brain structure. A study from Harvard Medical School found that people who were verbally abused as children had a decrease in gray matter in the areas of the brain responsible for processing emotions and stress control (Teicher, 2006).

### **Impact on self-esteem and behavior**

Harsh words, especially if they come from significant people (parents, teachers, bosses, partners), can have a long-term impact on a person’s self-esteem and behavior. Verbal aggression shapes a person’s beliefs about themselves, the world, and their abilities.

### **How Harsh Words Shape Self-Concept**

The words a person hears about themselves eventually become part of their internal dialogue. If people around them constantly tell them that they are a “loser,” “stupid,” or “will never amount to anything,” they begin to believe it. This phenomenon in psychology is called internalization — when external assessments are taken as personal beliefs.

Example: A study by the University of Florida (Fite, 2016) found that children who were regularly verbally abused by their parents showed lower self-esteem and had difficulty making decisions as adolescents.

### **Impact on self-confidence, anxiety and depression**

Regular exposure to harsh words leads to decreased self-confidence, increased anxiety and, in some cases, depression. Constant criticism and humiliation create a feeling of incompetence and worthlessness in a person.

A study from the University of California (Hamilton, 2019) showed that people who were verbally abused as children were more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders and depression as adults than those who grew up in a supportive environment.

Example: Imagine a young professional who, at the beginning of his career, hears only harsh criticism from his boss: “You can’t handle it,” “You’ll never amount to anything.” Over time, he begins to doubt his professional qualities, becomes insecure and may even refuse career advancement, believing himself incapable of success.

### **Behavioral changes: aggression or isolation**

Reactions to harsh words can vary from person to person. In psychology, there are two main types of behavior in response to verbal aggression:

1. Aggressive reaction. Some people, when exposed to rudeness, begin to use aggressive speech themselves. This happens because of the desire to protect themselves or compensate for their vulnerability.
2. Isolation and social isolation. Others, on the contrary, become more withdrawn, avoid communication and lose trust in people.

Example: A study by the University of Michigan (Coyne, 2017) showed that adolescents who were verbally humiliated by their peers were more likely to show aggression in relationships with others or became withdrawn and anxious.

### **Social and cultural aspects**

The role of upbringing and environment in the perception of rudeness

Attitudes to rudeness are largely formed in childhood. In families where verbal aggression is the norm, children grow up with the belief that the use of rude words is an acceptable way of communication. They either start saying it themselves or experience increased sensitivity to rudeness.

Example: A Harvard University study (Teicher, 2006) found that children raised in families with high levels of verbal aggression were more likely to experience stress and anxiety as adults.

### **How Rude Speech Affects Relationships**

Rude words can destroy relationships by reducing trust and creating tension in communication. In romantic and family relationships, constant verbal aggression leads to emotional alienation and conflict.

Example: According to a study by the University of Denver (Rogge, 2014), couples in which one partner frequently uses rude words toward the other are 60% more likely to experience divorce or breakups.

### **Ways to Protect Yourself from the Negative Impact of Rude Words**

1. A Conscious Attitude to Words. It is important to understand that harsh words say more about the person saying them than about the person they are addressed to.
2. Emotional regulation. Mindfulness practices, meditation, and psychological work on self-esteem help reduce the impact of negative words.

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3. Limiting contact with toxic people. If possible, it is worth minimizing communication with people who regularly use harsh words.
4. Forming a healthy speech environment. Creating a culture of respectful communication in the family, at work, and in society helps reduce the level of aggression in communication.

**Example:** A study by Yale University (Brody, 2020) showed that people working in a supportive and respectful environment are less likely to experience stress and anxiety, even if there are external stressors in their lives.

**Conclusion.** Rude words are not just an element of communication, but a powerful psychological factor that affects a person's emotional state, self-esteem, and behavior. They can cause stress, anxiety, reduce self-confidence, and even change the structure of the brain with prolonged exposure. It is especially dangerous when verbal aggression becomes part of upbringing or everyday communication, as this forms a person's negative perception of themselves and the world around them.

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