

Educational Brief

Union of Saints

Verbal Harassment, Psychological Aggression, and Boundary Violations

Understanding the Statement: “You are ugly.” “I am sore looking at you.” “I do not like xyz on you.”

1. Overview

The statement “you are ugly” constitutes a form of verbal and psychological abuse. Although phrased casually, it carries harmful implications that can undermine dignity, safety, and emotional wellbeing. This document explains the nature of this behavior, why it is abusive, and how individuals may respond in a healthy, self-protective manner.

2. Classification of the Behavior

This statement may fall into multiple overlapping categories of abuse:

2.1 Verbal Abuse

- Uses language intended to demean, shame, or belittle.
- Frames the listener as a source of discomfort or harm simply by existing.

2.2 Psychological Aggression

- Attempts to unsettle or destabilize the listener emotionally.
- Creates self-consciousness, fear, or confusion without physical contact.

2.3 Objectification

- Reduces a person to an object or stimulus rather than recognizing them as a whole human being.
- Removes personal agency and mutual respect from the interaction.

2.4 Boundary Violation

- Introduces unsolicited commentary about another person’s body or presence.

- Forces the listener to absorb responsibility for the speaker's internal state.

3. Harmful Mechanism of the Statement

The core psychological mechanism at work is projection.

- The speaker attributes their own discomfort, reactions, or impulses to the listener.
- Responsibility is shifted away from self-regulation and placed onto another person.
- This creates an implicit demand that the listener change, shrink, or feel ashamed.

This dynamic is common in harassment, coercive speech, and dominance-seeking behaviors.

4. Impact on the Recipient

Exposure to this type of language may result in:

- Emotional distress or confusion
- Heightened self-monitoring or shame
- Anxiety in shared spaces
- Erosion of personal boundaries
- Reduced sense of safety or belonging

Importantly, these effects occur regardless of the speaker's intent.

5. Appropriate and Healthy Responses

The most effective responses are brief, calm, and boundary-focused. Engagement beyond this is optional, not required.

5.1 Direct Boundary Statements

- “That comment is inappropriate.”
- “Do not speak to me that way.”
- “That’s unacceptable.”

5.2 Boundary With Disengagement

- “I’m not available for comments like that.”

- “Please keep your thoughts to yourself.”
(Then disengage.)

5.3 Responsibility Reframing

- “That’s something for you to manage.”
- “Your reaction is not my responsibility.”

5.4 Minimal or Protective Response

- Silence and withdrawal
- Neutral acknowledgment followed by disengagement

This approach is especially appropriate when safety, power imbalance, or escalation is a concern.

6. Professional and Institutional Contexts

In workplaces, schools, medical settings, or public institutions, this language may qualify as:

- Harassment
- Unprofessional conduct
- A reportable incident

Appropriate responses may include:

- “That comment is unprofessional.”
- “I am documenting this interaction.”
- Reporting through established channels if the behavior persists.

7. What Is Not Required of the Recipient

The recipient is not obligated to:

- Explain or justify their appearance
- Manage the speaker’s feelings
- Offer reassurance or education
- Respond politely to abusive speech

Silence and disengagement are valid responses.

8. Key Educational Principle

A person is never responsible for another individual's unmanaged reactions to their presence.

Respectful societies and healthy institutions depend on self-regulation, mutual dignity, and clear boundaries.

9. Conclusion

Statements such as “they are sore looking at you” are not neutral observations. They are acts of verbal and psychological aggression that shift responsibility, violate boundaries, and undermine personal dignity. Recognizing this behavior and responding with clarity and restraint is an act of self-protection and social responsibility.

Responses: