



Absolutes in Communication and Relationships. Are they true?

Another use of language that can influence our relationships is the use of absolutes. These absolutes are the specific words we use to qualify and modify our statements. These words are the adverbs that are *all* encompassing. These include words like:

Always
Never
Forever
Totally

Only
Constantly
Everybody
Every time

All the time
Impossible
None
Purely

How often do we make statements using these words? How often do we use them when we are arguing? Ever notice what your intent is when you use these words? How often do you end up debating these words instead of focusing on the real problem?

The intent behind these words is to make our viewpoint seem stronger and also to make the other person look worse. Are we really fighting to put our needs and feelings first when we make our statements so universal? Are we arguing for acknowledgement?

The use of these words usually makes your statement false. There are very few things in life that *never* deviate or have exceptions. I would guess that your loved one does deviate from the behavior you hate. By telling someone that, “You always treat me that way”, you put them in a sealed box and this results in two possibilities.

One, the person will feel mislabeled and misunderstood. This will lead to further discord and more polarization between you.

Second, you are also saying something untrue. This gives them something else to argue about (the truth of your statement) other than what you are really upset about. This leaves you even further from discussing the actual problem.

So, what is the alternative?

If we say, “*Sometimes* you treat me that way” it softens what we say, leaves openings and exceptions, and doesn’t label the other person with *only* one behavior. This type of statement is maintaining a more realistic perspective. We are telling the person that they do act in ways we like, it isn’t always bad. We are then more likely to address the real conflict.

It is even better to address the specific incident that concerns you. This makes the issue much more relevant and present. This is instead of saying, “You always...” (global) or “You sometimes” (unspecific). “Last night when you said ____, I felt sad” is a much more specific and current statement.

So, you should *always never* use absolutes in your discussions in relationships unless you want to *continually* create added barriers to the intimacy and understanding you want.