



**FNN HARBOUR FOUNDATION**

**Communication That Harms**



## **Communication That Harms**

### **When Words Diminish Disabled and Vulnerable People**

#### **Introduction**

Words can comfort, encourage, and support people through difficult moments. But words can also wound, especially when someone is already vulnerable, dependent, isolated, exhausted, or unwell.

Disabled, homebound, chronically ill, neurodivergent, and emotionally vulnerable people are sometimes exposed to communication that makes them feel:

- burdensome,
- powerless,
- invisible,
- childish,
- unwanted,
- incapable,
- dependent,
- ashamed.

Harmful communication does not always involve shouting or threats. Sometimes it appears in repeated comments, dismissive language, humiliation, sarcasm, or reminders of dependency.

Over time, these experiences can deeply affect confidence, well-being, identity, and emotional safety.

#### **Harmful Communication Can Happen In Many Spaces**

People may experience emotionally harmful communication:

- in relationships;
- within families;
- from carers;



- from professionals;
- in healthcare settings;
- during benefit assessments;
- through official letters or systems;
- online;
- in housing or support services.

Sometimes people are made to feel as though needing support means they have less value as human beings.

That is not true.

### **Examples Of Harmful Communication**

Some examples may include:

- “What would you do without me?”
- “You need me.”
- “You should just be grateful.”
- “You’re too sensitive.”
- “Other people cope better.”
- “At least you’re alive.”
- “You can’t manage on your own.”
- speaking over someone rather than to them;
- dismissing pain or distress;
- treating adults like children;
- making people feel guilty for needing help.

Even when spoken casually or during arguments, repeated comments like these can leave emotional scars.



## **Dependency Should Never Remove Dignity**

Needing support does not remove a person's humanity, intelligence, voice, or right to respect.

A person may need:

- financial support,
- physical assistance,
- emotional care,
- transport,
- mobility support,
- help with daily tasks.

But needing help does not make someone “less than.”

Support should not become a tool for humiliation, control, or emotional dominance.

## **Institutional Communication Can Harm Too**

Some disabled and vulnerable people experience distress through:

- Harsh assessment systems;
- Repeated disbelief;
- threatening letters;
- inaccessible communication;
- dehumanising processes;
- constant pressure to “prove” illness or need.

This kind of communication can increase fear, shame, hopelessness, and emotional exhaustion.

People deserve communication that is respectful, clear, and humane.

## **Protecting Emotional Well-being**

Some gentle ways people may protect themselves emotionally include:



- recognising harmful language patterns;
- speaking with trusted people;
- keeping copies of distressing communications;
- seeking advocacy or support;
- setting boundaries where possible;
- reminding themselves that needing support is not failure;
- limiting conversations that repeatedly cause harm.

### **You Are Still Worthy Of Respect**

No illness, disability, diagnosis, financial situation, or dependency removes a person's worth.

People deserve:

- dignity,
- respect,
- emotional safety,
- kindness,
- patience,
- humane communication.

Words matter.

### **Support & Signposting**

If you are experiencing emotional harm, coercive control, abuse, or overwhelming distress, please consider reaching out to a trusted professional or one of the organisations listed on our Useful Contacts & Emergency Support page.

### **Disclaimer**

This resource is intended for general wellbeing and educational purposes only and does not replace professional, legal, or therapeutic advice.



