

The silent treatment is a deliberate refusal to communicate, typically used to punish, control, or manipulate. Depending on the intent and context, psychologists and researchers use several clinical and conceptual terms to describe this behavior, ranging from social exclusion to emotional abuse. Psychological terms referring to the silent treatment include:

- **Stonewalling:** A clinical term popularized by the Gottman Institute, describing a complete refusal to interact or respond during a conflict. It acts as an emotional barrier that shuts down communication.
- **Ostracism:** A sociopsychological term used by researchers, like Dr. Kipling Williams, to describe the broader act of social exclusion and rejection.
- **Passive-Aggressive Behavior:** A personality and behavioral descriptor referring to the expression of negative feelings (like anger or disapproval) indirectly through silence or non-verbal gestures rather than direct confrontation.
- **Emotional Withholding:** A relational dynamic where a person purposefully blocks emotional intimacy, communication, and affection to exhibit disapproval or control.
- **Shunning:** Often associated with group dynamics, cults, or strict social circles, this refers to the deliberate social banishment or freezing out of an individual.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Clinicians frequently classify the repeated, malevolent use of the silent treatment as a form of psychological and Emotional Abuse when it is used as a weapon to assert dominance and cause mental distress.