

RESOURCES FOR ABUSE

HELPING YOU MINISTER TO
FAMILIES IN CRISIS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abuse	3
Types of Abuse	5
Warning Signs for Potentially Abusive Relationships	6
Abusive Entitlement Screening Questions	7
Abuse Risk Questions	7
Common Traits of Abusers	9
Appendix	11

ABUSE

Abuse is oppression for selfish gain.

Abuse involves the misuse of God-given power to take advantage of another.

Abuse occurs when one person pursues their own self-interest by seeking to oppress, through control, manipulation, and/ or dominating another through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and/or punishing behaviors. Abuse can be emotional, social, verbal, mental, physical, financial, spiritual, or sexual in nature.

“Oppression is the opposite of God’s design for marriage. Abuse occurs when one spouse seeks to control and dominate the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors. No matter what form oppression takes, its intended outcome is the same: to punish and wound a victim so that an oppressor gets their world the way they want it. An oppressor’s behavior says, “Serve me or suffer the consequences!”

–Darby Strickland

Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims

“Abuse is not a marital problem. When the church addresses abuse this way, we are at risk for causing more harm than good. **Ultimately, abuse is a sin problem.** Some oppressors delight in bringing harm, while some remain unaware of their life-choking entitlements. All oppression is a grave sin – some abusive tactics may be more or less severe than others, but they are all destructive and dishonoring to victims and to God. There is no place for oppression in marriage”

–Darby Strickland

Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims

"Labeling something as abuse when it is not will do damage of a different kind — not only to the people involved but also to the woman we encounter after them who truly are being abused. If I were to mistakenly label a lousy marriage between a couple in a church as an abusive one, the next time I had to help an oppressed woman come forward in that church, it would take more time for others to believe her — time that she might not have. Further, potentially helpers might treat her more suspiciously when she desperately needs their support. Much is at stake, so I urge you to take great care before labeling something as abuse. It is wise to go slow and compile stories and examples of power & control...you will serve both a victim and her church well when you can communicate a clear, full, and accurate picture of her marriage."

-Darby Strickland

Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims

SCRIPTURE

"And he said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a person.'" Mark 7:20-23 (CSB)

"Learn to do what is good. Pursue justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause." Isaiah 1:17 (CSB)

"Rescue me, Lord, from evil men. Keep me safe from violent men" Psalm 140:1 (CSB)

"The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." Psalm 9:9 (ESV)

TYPES OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Hitting, slapping, punching, choking, pushing, or restraining.
- Often escalates over time; may leave marks or injuries.
- Can include “playful” force that crosses boundaries, sexual coercion, or use of objects to intimidate.

EMOTIONAL/VERBAL ABUSE

- Criticism, mocking, name-calling, yelling, belittling accomplishments.
- Gaslighting: making the victim doubt their perception of reality.
- Public humiliation or private insults, creating fear and insecurity.

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

- Misusing faith, scripture, or church authority to control or manipulate.
- For example, demanding submission “for God’s sake” or claiming divine approval for abusive behavior.
- Can leave victims feeling guilt, shame, or confusion about God’s will.

FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Controlling access to money, withholding funds, and/or restricting purchases.
- Forcing dependence by monitoring spending, demanding receipts, or controlling employment.
- Can include using financial leverage to punish or intimidate.

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Coercion, unwanted sexual contact, or assault within marriage or family.
- Includes pressuring, forcing, or manipulating consent, often combined with emotional abuse.

WARNING SIGNS FOR POTENTIALLY ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Often, victims of abuse report that their relationship did not start that way. Over time, warning signs can emerge. If one partner displays a combination of the behaviors below, it is possible he/she may become abusive.

1. Gets too close, too fast.
 - a. Pressures you into a serious relationship
2. Extreme jealousy, possessiveness, or always has to know where you are.
 - a. Calls constantly; visits without warning; checks the mileage on your car; tracks your cell phone
3. Is controlling
 - a. Insists you ask permission to go anywhere or do anything
4. Isolates you
 - a. Stops you from seeing friends or family or from going to work, church or school functions
5. Manipulation, guilt or blames you for his/her feelings
 - a. Says "You make me angry" instead of "I am angry"
6. Is cruel to animals
 - a. Is violent toward pets or other animals; mistreats, abuses, or kills them
7. Displays "playful" use of force or any physical aggression
 - a. Throws or holds you down; forces you to be intimate and doesn't accept no for an answer
8. Verbal/emotional assaults
 - a. Constantly says cruel, hurtful things; curses and calls you names; publicly humiliates you
9. At times, insults, demeaning and degrading comments happen in private. While in public, charming to partner (and others).
10. Displays sudden mood swings
 - a. Quickly switches from sweet and loving to angry and violent
11. Hurts you financially
 - a. Makes demands about how you spend your money; monitors your spending through your receipts or bank account

12. Threats or punishment

- a. Threatening loss of children, cold treatment, coercion

13. Disrespecting boundaries

- a. Ignoring requests, violating privacy, or disregarding autonomy

ABUSIVE ENTITLEMENT SCREENING QUESTIONS

1. Are you afraid to disagree with your spouse?
2. What happens when you try to share an opinion that differs from your spouse's?
3. Does your spouse ever ignore you? If so, for how long and when?
4. How can you tell when your spouse is angry? Be specific. What does his anger look like? What does he say or do?
5. When you were talking about hard things, what are some ways that your spouse expresses disagreement? (Mocking you, walking away, rolling his eyes, throwing things?)
6. What happens if you let him down?
7. Do you feel that there are two sets of rules - one for you and one for your spouse? If so, what are those?
8. Do you feel pressured to do things you do not want to do?
9. Does your spouse remind you of times when you have sinned against him? When and how?
10. Is there anything else that would be helpful for us to know?

ABUSIVE RISK QUESTIONS

The leader should try to have an initial conversation with the abused without the abuser present.

1. Does your spouse's behavior, without warning, swing between loving, kind, and charming one day to cruel, explosive, and hateful the next?
2. Is he/she extremely critical of your efforts, particularly if you are happy or enthusiastic?
3. Does he/she blame you for their failures?
4. Does he/she react angrily if you cry or express emotional distress or dismay when they are accusing you?
5. Is he/she extremely jealous of your friends and family?

6. Does he/she wrongly accuse you of improper interest in other men or women?
7. Does he/she expect you to account for every minute you are out of their sight, particularly when you leave the home?
8. Does he/she consistently disregard or discredit your views, feelings, interests and preferences?
9. Does he/she shove you around, bully you, or handle you roughly during a disagreement?
10. Does he/she slap or hit you when they are angry?
11. Does he/she grab your arm or neck roughly or painfully?
12. Does he/she verbally attack or shout very loudly at you when angry?
13. Does he/she become remorseful after an abusive incident, and try to be kind after being very angry, then begin to get cold and increasingly irritable as the tension builds, until they explode all over again?
14. Is he/she unreasonable or unapproachable during discussions?
15. Does he/she threaten you with loss of the children, or other “punishments” if you confide in someone else about your problems?
16. Does he/she appear to “punish” you with long periods of cold silence?
17. Does he/she ever state, or imply, that they need to “teach you a lesson”?
18. Is he/she very sarcastic or defensive with you if you try to discuss any of their problems?
19. Does he/she harshly belittle your accomplishments or your physical appearance?
20. Does he/she call you demeaning names such as “stupid,” “fool,” and so on?
21. Does he/she react inappropriately or angrily, or claim to be offended or “hurt” by your errors or faults?
22. Does he/she isolate you from friends and family?
23. Does he/she insist on completely controlling the finances, so you have little or no discretionary funds?
24. Does he/she resent the time you spend talking to friends or family members?
25. Does he/she become angry over trifling infractions of their arbitrary rules?
26. Does he/she require you to get their approval of every purchase, no matter how small?
27. Does he/she change the subject whenever you bring up a concern, or exhibit other kinds of defensive behavior?
28. Does he/she appear baffled and angry when you are not sexually stimulated by their unkind treatment of you?
29. Does he/she rarely, or never, admit they are wrong or at fault?

30. Does he/she resent attention you give to the children?
31. Does he/she tell the children when you have failed to do what you should, or in any other way cause them to disrespect you?
32. Does he/she make rules, and then change them without warning?
33. Does he/she insist that they would not be so angry if you were more godly, submissive, or cooperative?

COMMON TRAITS OF ABUSERS

“Caring for those who have been hurt does not mean leaving the abuser unchecked; it means protecting the vulnerable while helping all people involved move toward God’s redemption.”

-Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson

When Home Hurts

1. They feel entitled.
 - Entitlement is an impulse of a fallen heart. Help the abuser identify where their false gospel of self-comfort come from.
2. They dominate others.
 - Challenge them to give up their way of doing things and to learn to love their closest neighbor (their spouse). How might they consider the opinions of others? Remind them of the example of Jesus – one who leads and loves with humility and servanthood.
3. They use threats.
 - Help them to identify what result they are desiring and to find healthy ways to make their requests known.
4. They punish others to maintain control.
 - Find the roots of the desire for control. Contrast their desire for control with Jesus’s example- entering the world as a child in order to love us well.
5. They are blind to the destructive nature of their behavior.
 - Pray that God gives them eyes to see their issues and the ears to hear constructive feedback. Involve others as is appropriate. Sometimes having others speaking into the behavior makes it harder to ignore.

6. They feel justified in how they treat others.
 - This is often born out of a self-centered attitude. Help them see that what they need is to grow in empathy for others.
7. They view themselves as blameless and even sometimes as the victim.
 - They will often be quick to defend their own behavior and to blame their spouse. Be aware and on guard against their lies and deception.

Other traits can include: Limiting personal freedom, inducing fear, exploiting, terrorizing, humiliating, withholding resources, isolating, threatening, demanding obedience, and physically harming their spouse.

APPENDIX

Victim Care		
<p>Safety of the victims(s) is paramount</p> <p>Listen to her and take her concerns seriously</p> <p>Recognize the signs and ask questions.</p> <p>Report if you suspect harm to children, elderly, or disabled persons.</p> <p>Assure her of your support.</p> <p>Assist in practical ways as desired by the victim.</p> <p>Safety planning with the victim.</p> <p>Individual counseling as desired by the victim.</p>	Perpetrator Correction	
	<p>Engagement/Confrontation of the abuser only after safety is established and with victim's advice and consent</p> <p>Provide discipleship & accountability if the abuser is open</p> <p>Group Intervention Program, if open to it</p> <p>Individual counseling if open to it</p> <p>Repentance is the goal</p> <p>Move more quickly with care and slower with correction</p>	Marriage Reconciliation
		<p>Reconciliation to God precedes reconciliation of the marriage.</p> <p>Reconciliation of the marriage is only recommended when both parties as counselors agree.</p>

From *When Home Hurts* by Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

ONLINE ARTICLES

- “A Biblical Definition of Abuse” by Greg Gifford
- “When Your Counselee Confides Abuse” by Julie Ganschow
- “A Hidden Epidemic God Hates” by Steve Hoppe (An Article on Spiritual Abuse)

BOOKS

For The Abused:

- *A Biblical Perspective of What to Do When You Are Abused by Your Husband: Handing an Olive Branch of Hope to Women Who Are Facing a Difficult Situation* by Debi Pryde and Robert Needham
- *Verbal and Emotional Abuse: Victory Over Verbal and Emotional Abuse* by June Hunt
- *Navigating Destructive Relationships: 9 Steps Toward Healing* by Brad Hambrick
- *Called to Peace: A Survivors Guide to Finding Peace and Healing After Domestic Abuse* by Joy Forrest
- *Abuse: Finding Hope in Christ* by John Henderson
- *Is it My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb
- *Domestic Abuse: Help for the Sufferer* by Darby Strickland

Caring for the Abused:

- *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland
- *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* by Jeremy Pierre
- *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* by Steven and Celestia Tracy
- *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* by Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva
- *When the Church Harms's God's People* by Diane Langberg
- *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused Handbook* by Brad Hambrick
- *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse* by Chris Moles
- *Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook* by June Hunt (Pages 131-138)
- *Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, and Rescue* by Darby Strickland
- *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* by Edward Welch

- *Uncovering Domestic Abuse: Knowing What to Look for* by Tim St. John
- *Domestic Abuse: How to Help* by David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Ed Welch

Caring for the Abuser:

- *The Heart of Domestic Abuse* by Chris Moles
- *Loving the Way Jesus Loves* by Phil Ryken
- *The Shepherd Leader at Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family* by Timothy Z. Witmer

Sexual Abuse:

- *After Sexual Trauma: Finding Renewal in Christ* by Camille Cates
- *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb
- *Sexual Assault: Healing Steps for Victims* by David A. Powlison
- *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* by Dan Allender

Spiritual Abuse:

- *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* by Michael J. Kruger
- *Understanding Spiritual Abuse: What it is and How to Respond* by Karen Roudkovski

Suffering:

- *When Pain Seems Real and God Seems Silent: Finding Hope in the Psalms* by Ligon Duncan
- *God's Grace in your Suffering* by David Powlison
- *Healing and Moving Forward: 31 Day Devotionals for Life* by Lauren Whitman
- *Suffering and the Heart of God* by Diane Langberg
- *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop

Trauma:

- *I Have PTSD: Reorienting After Trauma* by Curtis Solomon
- *Trauma Aware: A Christian's Guide to Providing Help and Care* by Eliza Huie
- *When It's Trauma: A Biblical Guide to Understanding Trauma and Walking Faithfully with Sufferers* by Darby A. Strickland
- *Restoring the Shattered Self* by Heather Davediuk Gingrich