

INCOURAGE 2020
RELIGIOUS ABUSE RECOVERY HANDOUT
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What is religious abuse?

The most fundamental elements of religious abuse are

- 1) Power,
- 2) Control
- 3) Manipulation

By definition, any abuse consists of some type of power differential – where one person has more power than the other and hurts the other person with that power. This is true of spiritual abuse. This power can be perceived or real. This power can be held by one religious person, a small or large group of religious people or the implicit rules of the whole religious organization. The abusive person or institution has some sort of power that the abused person does not have and they use that power (usually leveraging religious ideas or the idea of God) to manipulate, control, hurt, exploit, suppress, silence or weaken the other person.

What is Power Differential?

The following list includes types of power differential:

- Power by position of authority or control
- Power by demographics
- Power by use of physical force, intimidation or weapon
- Power by position of financial, academic or career control
- Power by personal presence
- Power by having been given trust by someone
- Any other number of factors

Domains of religious abuse

Psychological, Physical, Social, Sexual, Financial, Spiritual

What are the contexts in which it happens?

- Churches
- Families
- Marriages
- Church denominations
- Mission agencies
- Small groups
- Religious Organizations
- Places of Employment
- Schools and Colleges
- Friendships
- ANY religious structure

Spectrum

In this discussion, everything is on a spectrum. Every church or religious organization is on a spectrum. Every leader is on a spectrum.

How does spiritual abuse start?

God or religious ideas are leveraged to gain power and control. This control is gained by claim of infallibility or perfection.

What does religious abuse look like?

1. Religious ideas and language are used to gain the compliance of members and people are punished for not complying
2. Being told not to trust yourself or your instinct, trust the leader or the institution because they are the spiritual or wise one
3. Rigid black and white categories and language
4. Emphasis on loyalty and authority
5. Living in confusion, guilt, shame and fear

THERE IS HOPE!

Questions:

1. In light of this discussion, what has been your experience with religious abuse?
2. Who do you know that has gone through significant pain in the church that you could help encourage with this information?

Contact Information and Resources

- connieabaker.com
- Traumatized by Religious Abuse: Courage, Hope and Freedom for Survivors
- Connie A Baker Facebook Page
- Free Group on Facebook – Overcoming Religious Abuse Community