

Counseling in Cases of Abuse

I. Introduction: Defining abuse.

A. A dictionary definition. *Abuse is an improper treatment towards another when one abuses his natural powers, privileges, or advantages.*

B. Government definitions of abuse.

1. Government categories of child abuse. (San Diego Sheriff's Guide to Abuse)

- a. **Physical abuse.** *Physical abuse is defined as behavior that results in the non-accidental injury of a child.*
- b. **Physical neglect.** *Neglect is the failure to provide the basic necessities of life to the extent that a child's well-being is endangered.*
- c. **Sexual abuse and exploitation.** *Sexual abuse is any use of a child by an adult for the purpose of providing sexual gratification to the adult or the child.*
- d. **Emotional abuse.**

2. Spouse abuse.

- a. **Physical assault**
- b. **Threats.**
- c. **Emotional abuse.**

3. Problems with secular definitions of abuse.

C. A Biblical understanding of abuse. Mt. 5:21f 18:6 Js. 4:1-2 Pr. 15:32-33 16:32 25:28

D. Understand the difference between child abuse and legitimate discipline.

- 1. The Bible authorizes disciplinary spanking: inflicting physical pain as part of training. Prov. 22:15 13:24 23:13-14 29:15**
- 2. The Bible does not authorize personal revenge, including a parent to a child. Rom. 12:19**
- 3. Parental discipline is to be loving correction on God's behalf.**
- 4. When an angry parent takes revenge on a child:**
 - a. **He is guilty of serious sin. Mt. 5:21f**
 - b. **He is likely going to provoke the child to anger. Col. 3:21**
 - c. **He is in danger of becoming guilty of a crime punishable by the government.**

E. The Bible never authorizes the use of force against a spouse.

F. When should abuse be reported?

- 1. Some cases of abuse are crimes and must immediately be reported to the authorities.**
- 2. Some counselors and pastors are mandated reporters of child abuse. Ro. 13:1-7**
- 3. It is desirable to use the biblical means of confronting sin through the church. Matt. 18:15f I Co. 5**
- 4. If the abuser will not submit to the authority of the church, it is appropriate to involve the civil authorities.**
- 5. How much discretion may you use?**

G. Churches, schools, and families should take precautions to prevent abuse. Pr. 27:12

II. Counseling the abused.

- A. You have a duty to protect victims of abuse. Ps. 82:3-4 Pr. 31:8-9 22:22-23**
- 1. Do whatever is necessary to ensure the victims are safe.**
 - 2. Is violent abuse grounds for separation or divorce? I Co. 7:12-16 I Ti. 5:8**
- B. How can you know someone has been abused? Prov. 18:17**
- 1. All claims of abuse have to be taken seriously.**
 - 2. It is also important to protect people from being falsely accused.**
 - 3. Do extensive data gathering.**
 - 4. Abuse is often hard to prove because it usually takes place without third party witnesses. Deut. 19:15**
 - 5. Some “victims” have used false claims of abuse to seek revenge or control.**
 - 6. Some counseling appears to have created false memories of abuse (False Memory Syndrome).**
 - 7. Many victims refuse to report their abusers.**
 - a. False guilt.**
 - b. Fear.**
 - c. Wrong views of submission.**
 - d. Confusion.**
- C. Help the victim of abuse to biblically understand what has happened to her.**
- 1. She needs to honestly face personal sinfulness. Mt. 7:3-5 I Jo. 1:9 Dt. 22:23-24**
 - 2. She needs to honestly face the sinfulness of others. Dt. 22:25-27**
 - 3. Help her to confront the abuser when appropriate and feasible. Mt. 18:15f Lu. 17:3**
 - 4. Is it sinfully vengeful and unforgiving to report abuse? Rom. 12:19 13:4**
- D. Victims of abuse can become overcomers, by God’s grace. Rom. 12:21 I Co. 10:13**
- 1. Offer biblical hope and comfort. Ro. 15:4 II Co. 1:3f 4:7-10 Re. 7:17 21:4 He. 4:15**
 - 2. Build a biblical view of suffering. II Co. 4:16-17**
 - a. Recognize that God is sovereign over suffering. Eph. 1:11 Job 1-2**
 - b. Why does God allow abuse? (From Elyse Fitzpatrick).**
 - (1) To bring deliverance to others. Gen. 50:20**
 - (2) To build character in us.. Rom. 5:3-5 James 1:2-5 I Pet. 1:6-9**
 - (3) To equip us to comfort others. II Co. 1:3-11**
 - (4) To display the works of God. John 9:1-3**
 - (5) To help us to appreciate the hope we have in Christ. Rom. 8:18,28-29**
 - 3. Teach her how to forgive biblically. Mt. 6:12 18:21f Eph. 4:32**
 - a. When should a victim forgive an abuser?**
 - b. She needs to recognize the characteristics of true repentance. II Co. 7:10-11**
 - c. Does forgiveness require that charges not be pressed?**
 - d. Forgiveness is only possible because Christ has forgiven us. Eph. 4:32**
 - e. Forgiveness is freeing.**
 - f. Can she forgive if the abuser is not repentant?**
 - 4. Believers have resources to gain victory over the effects of abuse. Rom. 6:1f II Co. 5:17 II Pe. 1:3 Phil. 1:6**

5. She does not have to fall into sins of:
 - a. Being angry and abusive themselves. Rom. 12:17-21
 - b. Having a “dysfunctional” family.
 - c. Lifelong bitterness. Heb. 12:15
 - d. Being angry with God.
 - e. Fear and worry. Mt. 6:25f Phil. 4:6-9
 - f. Self pity.
 - g. Self-righteousness.
6. Help her to rid her life of idols common to victims of abuse.
 - a. Desire for safety/security
 - b. Desire for control.
 - c. Man pleasing/fear of man. Pr. 29:25
 - d. Self indulgence. Ga. 5:19-22
7. Teach her to give thanks for God’s blessings in her life. I Th. 5:18
8. Teach her to live by faith, not feelings. II Co. 5:7

E. Homework for victims of abuse.

1. Learn from Joseph. Gen. 50:17-21
 - a. He was horribly abused by family members. Gen. 37
 - b. He was able to thrive for many years before his abusers sought his forgiveness.
 - c. He recognized the sovereignty and goodness of God, even in what happened to him. Gen. 50:20 41:51
 - d. He refused to take revenge, trusting God to deal with those who wronged him. Gen. 50:19 Rom. 12:19 I Pet. 2:23
 - e. He was able to forgive and bless his abusers. Gen. 50:21 Rom. 12:20-21
2. Women Helping Women, by Elyse Fitzpatrick, chapter 14: *Counseling Women Abused as Children*.
3. What To Do When You’re Abused by Your Husband, Needham and Pryde.
4. Abused? How You Can Find God’s Help, by Richard and Lois Klempel
5. Confront/report the abuser.
6. Emergency phone numbers, safe houses, etc.

III. Counseling the abuser.

A. Understand why people abuse.

1. It is important to address not merely the behavior, but the attitude of the heart behind the behavior. Mark 7:20-23
2. People abuse because they want something (badly enough to kill). Js. 4:1-2
Even legitimate desires can become idols.
3. When they don’t get what they want, they become angry and abusive.
4. Expressions of anger (verbal tirades, threats, physical violence) are often very effective means of controlling and manipulating people. Js. 1:19-20
5. Characteristics of abusers.
 - a. Controlling and manipulative.
 - b. Blames others and minimizes own sin.
 - c. Impulsive and aggressive. Prov. 25:28
 - d. Low tolerance for stress.
 - e. Self-centered.
 - f. Deceitful.
 - g. Charming.

6. Abusers tend to follow a cycle:
 - a. Build up stage. Tension building
 - b. Blow up stage. Battering verbal or physical.
 - c. Remorse stage. Apologizing.
 - d. Build up stage...

B. The abuser must repent. Pr. 28:13

1. Don't let him excuse or minimize what he has done.
2. First he must repent before God not only for his sinful actions, but for the evil attitudes and beliefs behind the actions. Ps. 51 Rom. 12:19
3. How can you know he is repentant? II Co. 7:10-11
 - a. Worldly sorrow is common among abusers.
 - b. What are the characteristics of godly sorrow?
4. He must seek forgiveness from those whom he has wronged. Mt. 5:23-24
5. He should willingly submit to accountability and safeguards.
6. What punishment is appropriate for an abuser? Deut. 25:1-3 Mt. 18:6

C. Teach the abuser how to change.

1. Go over patterns of abuse in great detail.
2. Teach him how to deal with anger. Eph. 4:26-27,32 Js. 1:19-20 Pr. 25:28 Ge. 4:6-7
 - a. Allowing anger to continue in the heart is to give the devil an opportunity.
 - b. Human anger cannot achieve God's righteousness.
 - c. Remember God's anger has been turned away from you. Eph. 4:32 Mt. 18:21f
3. Make a specific plan to deal with temptation.
 - a. Never spank in anger.
 - b. Stage 1 anger: put children in room: go alone & pray.
 - c. Stage 2: call friend: pray over phone.
 - d. Stage 3: someone come over immediately.
4. Teach the abuser to become a servant. Mark 10:42-45 John 13:1f
5. Can an abuser be rehabilitated?
 - a. Christ transforms sinners into saints. II Co. 5:17
 - b. This does not mean that the consequences of sin are removed or that you should put potential victims at risk.

D. Homework for abusers.

1. Confession.
 - a. Seeking forgiveness from all those affected.
 - b. Turning himself in to the authorities, if appropriate.
2. Have him/her keep an anger journal (Priolo).
3. Reading.
 - a. Anger pamphlet, Adams
 - b. War of Words, Tripp
 - c. The Heart of Anger, Priolo
 - d. Introduction to Biblical Counseling: Anger, Scipione
4. Exercises: *Anger*, Homework Manual for Biblical Living, by Wayne Mack

IV. Conclusion: Advice for counselors (from Needham and Pryde).

- A. Count the cost of getting involved.
- B. Be cautious in assessing those caught in abusive situations
- C. Don't let the abuser shift blame. There is never an excuse for violence.
- D. Be extremely careful about the advice you give a woman with regard to submission.

Dealing with Abusers and Their Victims: Discussion Questions

1. What are some legal definitions of abuse?
2. What biblical terminology should be used to describe abuse?
3. What is the difference between child abuse and legitimate spanking?
4. When should abuse be reported to the authorities?
5. What steps can churches and Christian schools take to prevent abuse?
6. What can you do to protect victims of abuse?
7. Is physical abuse a biblical ground for separation or divorce?
8. How should a claim of abuse be investigated?
9. Why do many victims fail to report that they have been abused?
10. How can you help a victim to biblically understand what has happened to him or her?
11. How can victims of abuse become overcomers?
12. What sins become particular temptations for victims of abuse?
13. What biblical homework can be given to victims of abuse?
14. Why do people abuse?
15. What is a typical cycle of abuse?
16. How can you help an abuser come to full repentance?
17. How can an abuser learn to change?
18. What homework can be given to an abuser?