



I'M A PASTOR/SPIRITUAL ADVISOR AND NEED TOOLS TO COUNSEL VICTIMS OF ABUSE.

Thank you for your interest in The MEND Project. We affirm you for seeking help. We encourage every spiritual leader to read the pages on this website, especially so that you understand both the concept and the ramifications of Double Abuse. The information on this website will help you impact each individual within a couple in healthy ways without causing harm. We understand that domestic violence, physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse, may be a challenging topic for you. Even if you don't have the time right now to learn about this complex problem in a deeper way, you can follow the protocol below for a solid place to begin.

OUR HEALING MODEL OF COMPASSION

Below you will find our approach of handling trauma.

The **Harmful Position** paralyzes progress and escalates trauma. The **Healing Model** supports clarity, resolution and restoration.

LISTEN: WITH CLOSED MOUTH OVER AND OVER

Don't assume you know better or place expectations

EMPATHIZE: PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Don't reject or criticize personal choice

IDENTIFY: FIND YOUR PARALLEL EXPERIENCE WITHOUT SHIFTING THE FOCUS

Don't deny voice or personhood

ACCEPT: BELIEVE THE EXPERIENCE TO BE TRUE

Don't instruct or interrogate

VALIDATE: MIRROR BACK WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND

Don't undermine or oppose

ENCOURAGE: OFFER SUPPORT ON THEIR PATH

Don't shun, place conditions or ask others to join in Double Abuse

Persons in positions of authority, or those who presume authority, have the greatest impact either to harm or help the victim. Simultaneously, the power of these same personal and community relationships can have the greatest impact on the perpetrator.

You are in a pivotal position to escalate trauma or bring about healing. To do so, let us first look at some important facts:

- Only 3% of women lie about abuse.
- Yet most perpetrators have a habit of lying. Even if they are unaware, this acts as a self-serving form of denial. Some lie outright, some lie to themselves, but whatever form lies take, these individuals need facts, truth, and understanding brought to light.

- There is nothing to be gained by a woman claiming her husband is abusive. Most victims have been protecting their significant other for years or have been deeply confused and unable to name the crazy making experiences within their relationship. More than likely, she is coming to you during the worst of times, when emotional or physical abuse has become unbearable to her health and well-being.
- Listening to the victim is essential as is not breaching confidentiality to the perpetrator.
- Even if you have doubt as to someone's truthfulness, adhering to this protocol is your secure path to ensure that you do not commit Double Abuse, because you will make room for the victim's voice while also holding the perpetrator accountable.

GUIDELINES

Addressing Hierarchy

Within the abuse experience, a distorted view of hierarchy is prominent. Every couple chooses to have an egalitarian or complementarian position in certain areas of their relationship. In the theological world, within the complementarian style of relationship, there is a greater risk to use scripture to justify harmful hierarchy within the couple. Usually there is not as great a risk in an egalitarian framework, however, that view can mask abuse that does occur in the shadows. What is essential to understand is that in abuse situations patriarchy or hierarchy is used for coercive control and as a repetitive power play, eliminating any possibility of mutual respect. This skewed and harmful use of hierarchy is a complex problem that may need serious and experienced professional help beyond your personal belief systems, your scope of training, or your pastoral experience. We encourage you to invest in reading materials that will illuminate your knowledge base, so that your pulpit etiquette will not inadvertently encourage further harm to victims who are already suffering.

Couple's Therapy

If you do not have trauma and domestic violence training and working experience, you must disqualify yourself. *This does not mean that your next step is to direct the couple to couple's therapy, because to do so would set in motion further harm to the victim. Couple's therapy is strictly contraindicated until such time as clarity of the issues has been achieved for the victim through reading, a domestic violence support group, or expert therapeutic work. For the perpetrator, his active engagement in a full batterer's program needs to be required because it serves a dual purpose: the victim is protected while the perpetrator is held accountable.

The Role of Voice

Embedded in working with victims and perpetrators is the crucial matter of VOICE. The perpetrator is used to speaking and hearing the sound of only his voice: demanding,

demeaning, suppressing the other's. For the victim, she is used to NOT having her voice: it is buried, unworthy, and dangerous. One of the most significant shifts that must occur for both the victim and perpetrator is for the victim to find and use her voice. She must be able to define herself and express her needs and wants. This new achievement will feel foreign and maybe frightening both to her and the perpetrator. She may feel too forceful, too masculine, or too powerful. The perpetrator will have a difficult time adjusting to his partner having her voice, and hearing what she is saying. But without this achievement, there can be no shift in the hierarchy that exists and no healing for the trauma that has occurred.

What you can do to help

Teach the difference between abusive submission and mutual and beneficial surrender. You can inform the perpetrator that traditional thoughts of male dominance and superiority are harmful, and that anytime one partner invades or overrides the other person's self efficacy in opinions, voice, or needs, that constitutes abuse. The highest rates of religious divorce occurs in marriages where there is not mutual equality. A dominant style of marriage may appear to work well for some relationships, but far too often this appearance hides the reality that the hierarchy enforced fosters an abusive relationship.

Necessary Confidentiality

Expert training for clinicians and pastors underscores that you must guard the confidentiality of the victim and thus avoid falling into a pattern of listening to the perpetrator only. Male pastors are particularly vulnerable in breaching this necessary protocol and protection when mentoring or counseling the male partner of a couple. This breach of protocol harms the victim exponentially, emboldens the perpetrator, and establishes your liability of being an accomplice to the abuse. This secondary form of abuse is called Double Abuse and for the victim exacerbates PTSD into Complex PTSD, making healing an even greater challenge.

FOUNDATIONAL GUIDELINES IN WORKING WITH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Churches and universities worldwide are beginning to be held accountable for their previous denials of abuse that have occurred in their congregations or on their campuses. There are rich resources available in working with both victims and perpetrators. In working with victims, our Bible offers an invaluable caution: James 1:19: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." This caution is not simply a warning but a teaching. Abuse protocol identifies how essential it is to listen to the victim first, to witness and validate her story. The most important activity for a victim of trauma is to be able to talk about her experience again and again. This repetition is not for the purpose of mere indulgence, but for the important purposes of helping the victim actually process her experience, gain clarity, find new and healing perspectives, and ultimately find ways either to leave the traumatic situation or develop a pathway that brings healing to self as well as strengthen her ability to cope with the traumatic process that will ultimately support the restoration or necessary dissolution of the relationship.

When working with perpetrators Lundy Bancroft offers these essential tools: "When you are concerned that a man might have an abuse problem, ask him to talk in detail about his partner's perspective and feelings about various aspects of her life, including her view of conflicts with him. The Alleged Perpetrator will typically have difficulty looking through her eyes with sympathy and detail, especially with respect to her grievances against him. The more he ridicules and trivializes her point of view, the greater reason you have to believe that the problem lies with him. At the same time, if you keep asking what she would say, you will find that you often get critical clues to what his behavior and attitude problems are" (Why Does He Do That, p. 379).

The perpetrator has both a personal history and culturally supported faulty belief systems. The responsibility of the therapist or pastor is to unconditionally support the victim as she acquires the counter-intuitive ability to create and uphold boundaries, while, at the same time, requiring the perpetrator's growing capacity for self-examination, developing empathy for the victim, and embracing a demanding change process.

Turning the ship around

Understanding the problem and behaviors of perpetrators is a critical element in overcoming abuse. But how is the change process accomplished? One of the pivotal ways concerns the fundamental necessities that perpetrators must face and agree to embark upon if they want to truly change their faulty belief systems and behaviors in deep ways and repair their relationships. This journey to deep change can be a stormy one with many ebbs and flows and riptides. Here are the basics:

- **Two years of a weekly batterers' prevention program** (preferably administered through a DV informed church so that spiritual and cultural faulty thinking can be fully addressed), is essential in order for an alleged perpetrator to recognize that he is the person in the relationship who most needs to change. The pastor or therapist must be skilled at recognizing the escalating harmful dynamics of perpetrators and be expert in dealing with effective interventions as some batterers may escalate their behavior when confronted in order for image management and to maintain control.
- **Pastors need to utilize knowledgeable and psychologically able family and friends**, more than any therapist, law enforcement officer, or spiritual adviser, to influence the perpetrator toward change by confronting him and holding him accountable.
- **A skillful and expert individual therapeutic experience for each member of the relationship** can be extremely helpful as long as that therapist's expertise includes domestic violence training and/or a thorough knowledge of trauma work beyond the typical offerings of graduate school. Therapists for the perpetrator must be open to hearing from the victim; otherwise, the therapist will be working in a myopic and distorted reality of the perpetrator's making. This therapeutic work needs to be done before any couple therapy is begun. If the couple work is premature, each member of the couple will not understand enough about their own dynamics, will not have had the guidance to engage in the change process, and will continue to act out these dynamics even in the therapeutic endeavor. In these instances, the couple's therapist will not be aware enough of the dynamics at play and may take a biased position, causing further harm by possibly laying responsibility at the victim's feet. Abuse is never caused by mistake, and abuse is never the victim's fault. The too often stated position that abuse takes two is incorrect and misleading and creates Double Abuse. This Double Abuse exacerbates PTSD into Complex PTSD and actually makes the service provider an accomplice in the abuse. There may come a time when the victim will have to examine her reasons for being with an Alleged Perpetrator in the first place, but that time comes only after the perpetrator is held accountable for his abusive enactments with his victim.
- **Usually couple therapy should be postponed** until the completion of all other interventions and training and clarity has been achieved as to the faulty belief systems of the perpetrator and all the issues involved. Not until the victim is clear about the reality of her experience to the extent that she is able to set necessary boundaries, the perpetrator has confronted his beliefs and behaviors and learned how wisely and effectively to intervene with his own "acting out," can couple therapy be of useful benefit. The exception to this guideline is if the therapist is extremely skilled and experienced at working with domestic violence couples, his or her practice solely dedicated to this work. If a couple can find such a specialist, couple therapy may begin earlier, if each member of the couple is willing to fully engage in the recovery process.