

NOTES FROM “BECOMING A CHURCH THAT CARES WELL FOR THE ABUSED”

College Park Church Small Groups June 2020

The following notes were taken from the online training curriculum [Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused](#). This curriculum was made available to Small Group Leaders and Coaches in June 2020. Quotes may not represent verbatim content or may not list author/presenter. Notes are intended to represent general takeaways: specific details can be found by viewing or reading the curriculum.

LESSON 5: KEY RESPONSES TO SEXUAL ABUSE

Takeaways

“Learn how to ask questions about the situation and suffering, not just the morality.” -Brad Hambrick

- Remove from situation
- Address the issue

“Reaching a conclusion for the victim: that is hope-giving.” -Chris Moles

Counseling the abused is an “invitation into Christ’s sufferings” + There is nothing that he hasn’t borne.

Counseling the abused is different. Don’t miss the issues of power and control: not just marital communicational in general, or “idol,” or focus on failing of the more cooperative person

➤ Disclosure

First, you need to create a safe environment of trust.

When they disclose, there are demonstration huge courage (because of threats, inner shames, fears of how they will be received).

Your main job is to listen well

They will tell the story out of order; put your fears and questions aside for the moment. Let them tell at their pace. Affirm what they're doing as courageous.

After disclosure you need to help them with:

- Legal steps
- Self-care steps

See past their presentation style to what is helpful. Don't ask too many questions about the details. As broader questions like:

- "How are you doing?"
- "How can I help?"
- "What are you fearful of?"

You don't need details

Design questions to help them regain control i.e. "Would you like the door open or closed?"
Etc.

Reaffirm by stating:

- "I am so sorry."
- "This is wrong."
- "This grieves the heart of God."

➤ Types of reporting

Think: Safety first, then reporting

Minors: Reporting is mandated

Is this child abuse according to by laws? Err on the side of asking for guidance from a social worker etc.

Help children by using age appropriate phrases:

- "Thank you for telling me what happened."
- "I want you to feel safe, so I'm going to call someone whose job it is to protect children."
(Child Protective Services)

Adult: Victim chooses if legal steps are taken

Adult victim can ask questions about what effect would happen if they pressed legal charges (emotional, etc.).

I don't have to help them weigh all those questions. Assure them with good questions and support.

Help them find a good counselor!

The work does not go quickly. Follow up concern with phrases like:

- “Keep me informed of what you're learning and deciding.”
- “I'd like to learn alongside you; as much as you're willing and ready.”

LESSON 6: KEY RESPONSES TO PHYSICAL ABUSE

Takeaways

Physical abuse is:

- Episodic – coming in episodes. The abuser is therefore able to say, “It hardly ever happens.”
- More like a concussion (single event causes lasting damage) than smoking (ongoing)
- Usually only get glimpses

Physical abuse happened for one reason: CONTROL

Don't just focus on one narrow event. (Can empower “polite abusers.”)

Gather information about the whole relationship – especially his uses of control.

Point to a pattern of behaviors

Patterns include:

- Threats of violence
- Nonverbal
- Signals of violence

This is the opposite of safety and trust for a biblical marriage.

When you hear of physical abuse: look for other forms of abuse:

- Entitlement
- Justifications
- Threat

Signal of a Physical Abuser = **D.A.N.G.E.R.O.U.S.**

D: Divorce

A: Alcohol or Drugs

N: Narcissistic Tendencies

G: Guns or Weapons

E: Entitled Attitudes

R: Rebellious History

O: Other Violent Behaviors (violence towards pets, road rage)

U: Unstable Mental Health

S: Suicidal threats

-Leslie Vernick

Recognize the presence of power differential dynamic! Specifically: deferring power/control when expectations are not met.

“Sadness can only reveal remorse, not repentance because repentance involves actual change.” -Brad Hambrick

Difference between being rude and being abusive:

- A healthy sinner will feel conviction and not entitlement
- They don't ignore or minimize concern for loved ones
- Close people feel safe to share without more abuse

In a small group setting, initiate a private conversation with phrases like:

- “Are you OK?”
- “You seem nervous to speak up.”
- “How is it going at home?”

They probably won't share at first, but you've shown that you're a safe person.

If abuser owns their sin: first safety, then restoring marriage.

Remember - Common threads of abuse are control and fear

When you respond DON'T:

- Give nonverbal responses-take action immediately
- Over-response by hasty confronting. (May compromise the victim and the intervener)
- Try to be a lone ranger. Instead, seek help from experts.

When you respond DO:

- Ask questions like, “I've noticed ___.” “Are you OK?” “Is something going on?” “How can I support you?”
- Believe the victim!
- Connect the victim with counseling resources
- Know your limits
- Help them develop a safety plan

➤ **Safety Plan** - Comprehensive and something they will implement

Safety plan can include:

- Deescalating
- Leaving the room/house
- Call police
- Use local experts and resources
- Keep plans secret (small “circle”)
- Packing list, address that are safe (home, work)
- Legal counsel (especially for children, pets)

Leaving the relationship/situation creates most vulnerable moment. Involve law enforcement in the planning.

Don't let “I don't want to cause a divorce” to prevent me helping someone with their Safety Plan.

LESSON 8: NON-CRIMINAL FORMS OF ABUSE (VERBAL AND EMOTIONAL)

Takeaways

Civil authorities: for illegal behavior, Church: for immoral behavior – different authorities

Verbal and emotional abuse are hard to objectively define. More beneficial to describe a constellation of qualities that contribute to verbal and emotional abuse:

- Control
- Humiliation
- Manipulation
- Intimidation
- Contradictory demands
- Lying threats
- Isolating
- Blame-Shifting
- Lack of financial access
- One-sided application of Scriptures
- Creating Fear/Shame/Indecisiveness
- Words used to manipulate, control and wound

This is not usually limited to one episode. This is patterns and attitudes of entitlement that lead to tearing down the other.

The emotional abuser feels entitled, justified. Don't blame the victim ("Well, why can't you __?")

Don't do couples/marriage counseling for emotional abuse. Counsel separately.

There can be different responses in different situations in counseling. Ask these 3 questions:

1. Is the abuser present for counseling?
 - If so: There needs to be individual counseling because there is not joint responsibility In counseling there is ownership and strategies to change.
2. Are you only talking to the abused?
 - If so: Believe them, connect them with a counselor, spiritual support/friend who is aware of the whole picture.

- Be justice minded toward abuser. Even if you get slandered, etc. Care about safety and justice for the victim.
- There will be times when we “like” the abuser more than the victim. They may seem charming, working hard etc. versus resisting, still hardened, etc.

Don't blame the victim as the villain. Give time to test.

3. Is the victim a church member?
 - If so: Don't confront the abuser until the victim is ready and there is a safety plan in place. Have a conversation with the abuser using the most tangible examples.

Look for patterns in the abuser like threats. Put together a timeline of their escalations. Connect each behavior to actual/potential outcome. His intention doesn't outweigh the impact.

Abusers want to be obeyed. When expectations are not met there will be punishing and attacking.

Abusers are hard-hearted and wants you to see them as the victim. Be specific of their entitlements and behaviors and say things like:

- “When you speak like ___.”
- “You are critical and harsh when ___.” Be descriptive as possible.
- “When you ___, you ___.”
- “How did you benefit from that?”

Documenting is essential.

Disciplinary document – which should be shared with anyone involved for counseling/care.

“Everyone person involved should be working with the same information.” -Brad Hambrick