

How to Effectively Minister to Those with Past Abuse

PRESENTED BY:

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A View from the Counselor's Office

- **Most abuse occurs in the context of a previously established relationship**
 - Although incidents can be with a foreign or isolated contact
- **Three different types of abuse: sexual, physical, and emotional**
 - Most examples of abuse can be grouped into these categories

- **Abuse is one of the most difficult issues anyone can talk about with another person**
 - The embarrassment, shame, and memory can be traumatizing
- **Triggers are some of the most challenging things in life to cope with after an incident(s)**
 - They are unexpected and difficult to control, but time helps

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- The past, present, and future are all affected by an abuse experience(s)
 - The past may be defined as yesterday, or it may be 10 years ago

- Its important to know personal limits with your ability and/or effectiveness to help with abuse
 - A list of referral options is critical in order to not do more harm, and to prevent the escalation of abuse or even death

Let's Begin with Some Definitions
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- Biblical perspective of relationships with one another
 - **Ephesians 4:2** = Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
 - **1 Peter 3:8** = Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.
 - **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** = Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

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- Merriam-Webster's definition of abuse
 - **1** : a corrupt practice or custom
 - **2** : improper or excessive use or treatment
 - **3** : language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, and angrily
 - **4** : physical maltreatment

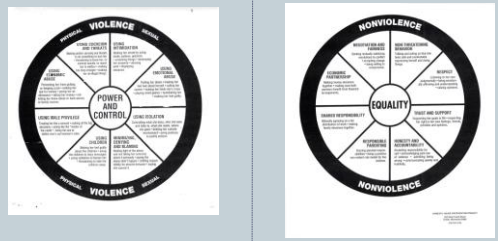
- Steve's definition of abuse
 - A moment(s) where one person selfishly exerts his or her own will upon another person without consent. It results in some type of harm, diminished personal value, and has lasting effects on functioning as desired.

Key Questions to Ask

- Does the relationship still exist where the abuse happened?
 - If so, any ongoing distress will be worse
- How close (physically and emotionally) is/was that relationship?
 - The more expectations on that relationship, the more difficult and complicated the healing process will be

- What symptoms are you experiencing right now?
 - Significant symptoms may have physiological effects that need to be treated by a doctor or other professional
- What are the legal implications of the abuse, if any?
 - Legal solutions are sometimes necessary safeguards that help prevent the abuse from occurring again

The "Duluth Project" Material



Understanding the Spectrum of the “Wheels”

- Selfishness ↔ Selflessness
- Secrecy ↔ Transparency
- Double Standards ↔ Unity
- Confusion ↔ Clarity

Appropriate Responses to the Key Questions

- **Ensure safety**
 - Reducing the stress level of the person preserves the ability to make critical decisions
- **Minimize triggers**
 - Avoiding the “bungee cord” effect is very helpful in regards to experiencing consistency with new changes

- **Evaluate changes to unhealthy patterns**
 - A strategic plan is necessary to order priorities and create the opportunity for changes
- **Identify other people or professionals to involve**
 - Asking for help isn't easy for the abused person, so asking again can be even harder than the first time

Resources You Need to Recommend

- **Community services with social and legal connections for domestic abuse**
 - Shelters, advocates, and law enforcement are available. They also can meet any physical needs that are present
- **Specific groups or helpful material for sexual abuse**
 - Sexual abuse not only affects the person who experienced it but their immediate family members as well

- **A licensed professional for emotional abuse**
 - This is one of the broadest categories and one that is often very misunderstood, minimized, and treated as less serious than the others
- **In general, there will be many “pieces of the pie” that need to be in place to help people recover.**
 - Your role as a Stephen Minister is essential, yet it may not hold as much authority as other resources
 - *“..listen, care, and encourage without advice or judgment..”*

Community Contact Information

- **Marshfield:**
 - Personal Development Center: 384-2971
- **Wisconsin Rapids:**
 - Wood County Crisis Intervention: 421-2345 / 384-1555
- **Stevens Point:**
 - CAP Services’ Family Crisis Center: 343-7125
- **Wausau:**
 - United Way’s “First Call for Help”: 211

Possible Outcomes of the Helping Process

- **Personal growth, perseverance, and hope**
 - Each person involved in an abusive situation or incident can identify things about him/herself that need to change as soon as possible
- **Reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing**
 - All three operate without timelines and exact formats, but are the most desirable of the long term outcomes

- **Accountability, high structure, or separation**
 - Strategic plans can help reinforce healthy behaviors in the person that caused or inflicted the abuse and provide for an environment that increases the courage of the abused
- **Legal boundaries, supervised contact, or divorce**
 - Sometimes each one of these options are necessary in order to preserve the long term health, wealth, and future functioning of the abused

A Critical Question: When can I leave?

- **Separation can be a valuable catalyst for change**
 - It may be necessary to create space and distance that ensures safety, reduces negative symptoms, and establishes clear boundaries and expectations for both people in a relationship
- **Divorce is an option – within a Biblical framework**
 - **Matthew 18:15-17** establishes a framework for ending any type of relationship
 - Other passages (i.e. **Malachi 2:13-16**) speak to the high value of the covenant of marriage and what violates that union

Essential roles for you as a Stephen Minister

- **A listening ear for venting or for encouragement**
 - Many times counseling is sought out initially just so that these two needs can be met in a healthy way

- **A connecting point for support or stability**
 - You may be more of an anchor than you realize – especially if you were there when the healing changes began

- **Call for help and recruit others for obtaining changes**
 - As trust is built, you can transfer that trust to another person that is more effective or skilled at helping than yourself

- **Continue to remind the person that the spiritual disciplines are key to persevering through change**
 - Focusing on the basics in life can go a long way for someone as they can get lost in the overwhelming nature of change

Summary Points

- **Focus on a Biblical view of healthy relationships, separation, accountability, or divorce**

- **Finding practical or local resources offering valuable services is critical to the helping process**

- **Establishing personal boundaries, filtering personal issues, and meeting the person where he or she is at is critical**

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- Be patient when needed, but sound an alarm when circumstances demand it
- Change is a slow process and/or can sometimes plateau for people who need to modify behaviors
- Model the grace and hope that's needed, but also the support that is essential when the abused is faced with difficult decisions

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- Relationships can be messy no matter what – especially in a fallen world with imperfect people
- Humility with recommendations is always a good plan of attack – don't take control away from the person as you don't "live in their shoes" 24/7
- There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors – for you as a Stephen Minister as well

My Contact Information

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