

Definitions of Abuse

Wounds come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You might think of abuse as a very strong word that refers only to a narrow group of experiences that are the experience of a few. Take a look at the following definitions. Does this change how you perceive abuse? Does it change how you look at what happened in your own story?

Abandonment involves being disregarded, ignored, forsaken or discarded. All human beings are biologically hardwired to attach to another human being. Attachment includes the need to bond, connect, belong and be loved. Physical abandonment can be experienced when a child feels left alone through divorce or death, when working parents leave a child with a caregiver and when everyone in a family is too busy to connect or when physical needs are neglected. Emotional abandonment occurs when a child feels that a parent or caregiver does not value or accept them or neglects or dismisses their emotional and developmental needs, causing a child to lose a sense of who they are, what they feel or what they need.

Betrayal can be defined as the breaking of any implied or stated commitment of care. It is experiencing a closed heart from someone who is either positionally responsible or has communicated that they will provide care and love. Betrayal attacks the dignity of another in its failure to love well, leaving the person betrayed to feel marred, marked, manipulated or ignored. Anger, contempt, loss of trust, loss of faith, numbness and apathy (who cares?) are often connected to the experience of betrayal.

Emotional Abuse may be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal abuse includes defensive anger which is used to threaten, intimidate or distance another. It may include name calling, cursing, criticism, continual blame-shifting, threats and the use of “zingers” as well as being argumentative, changing the subject, withholding support, humiliating, shaming, dominating, controlling, forgetting, denying and rewriting the past.

Nonverbal abuse occurs through emotional abandonment. It may be experienced in degrading gestures such as “flipping the bird”, the silent treatment, looking down and shaking one’s head, refusing to acknowledge someone when he/she enters the room, turning one’s back to another when support is needed and/or appropriate. Economic unfairness may also be a form of nonverbal abuse as well as the unspoken use of “male privilege.”

Emotional abuse may be active or passive. Active emotional abuse (of the type listed above) damages because of its presence. Passive emotional abuse damages because of its absence. The following are examples:

- Not being cherished and celebrated by one’s parents simply by virtue of one’s existence.
- Not having the experience of being a delight.
- Not having a parent take the time to understand who you are – encouraging you to share who you are, what you think and what you feel.
- Not receiving large amounts of non-sexual physical nurturing – laps to sit on, arms to hold, and a willingness to let you go when you have had enough.
- Not receiving age-appropriate limits and having those limits enforced in ways that do not call your value into question.

- ❑ Not being taught how to do hard things – to problem solve, and to develop persistence.
- ❑ Not given opportunities to develop personal resources and talents.

Physical Abuse is any kind of physical harm from hair pulling, squeezing, hitting, slapping, pushing, and kicking to use of a weapon to injure and/or kill. Not being given adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical and dental care.

Satanic Ritual Abuse includes abuse from families who have been involved in the occult (sometimes for generations), people who have been pulled in as children themselves and are programmed to be perpetrators and people from secret lodges, often from the wealthy, educated segments of society. These abusers hide in churches, professions, lodges, and community service organizations. They derive their power to perform supernatural acts by calling Satan to manifest himself in the group rituals, meetings, and ceremonies. Their intent is to gain power through harming and killing the innocent. The most innocent would be an unborn baby. All that they do is a designed perversion of Christianity. The leaders are addicted to evil, engaging in progressively more evil activities. They use alcohol and drugs to dull their consciences and the pain of what their addiction demands that they do. Their consciences become seared. They serve Satan.

Sexual Abuse involves any contact or interaction whereby a vulnerable person (usually a child or adolescent) is used for the sexual stimulation of an older, stronger, or more influential person. (It should be noted here that the stronger or more influential criteria may be real or perceived. Sexual abuse may even occur between two same age children when one child is compliant in nature and the other is the leader.)

Sexual abuse is much broader than forced, unforced, or simulated intercourse. It includes any touching, rubbing or patting that is meant to arouse sexual pleasure in the offender. It may also involve visual, verbal, or psychological interaction where there is no physical contact.

Sexual abuse may also include the abuse of a submissive adult by a person in a position of power, such as a priest, pastor, therapist, boss, doctor or teacher. It may also include forced sexual contact, manipulated or through threats when the aggressor is a romantic interest, colleague, co-worker, spouse or any other known person.

Sexual Abuse – Psychological includes interactions where a child is regularly used to play the role of an adult spouse, confidant, or counselor.

Sexual Abuse – Verbal involves an attempt to seduce or shame a child by the use of sexual or suggestive words. (Occasionally, however, this shaming may be unintentional. The child internalizes the words that a careless adult uses toward him/her and grows up bearing that false image.)

Sexual Abuse – Visual may involve exposing a victim to pornography or to any other sexually provocative scene, including exposure to showering, intercourse, or various states of undress.

Spiritual Abuse is the misuse of Scriptures to manipulate, control, or demand submission. Spiritual authority may be misused to justify inappropriate behavior or deny another the right to attend church or engage in worship. Legalism (non biblical rules) demanding performance to attain a good status in the church can be abusive and give a false sense of self righteousness. Minimizing the pain of the wounded as unspiritual, needing to pray more, read the Bible more rather than entering their pain can feel re-abusive. Ministries to the wounded need the protection of church leaders. Failure to believe reports of abuse in the church and not valuing a person's voice, regardless of age or gender, gives entrance to abuse.

Spousal Abuse or Battering can be defined as follows: A pattern of coercive behaviors used to establish control over another person through fear, intimidation, emotional abuse or social isolation; often including the use of or threat of physical or sexual violence. Spousal sexual abuse involves any contact or interaction whereby a vulnerable person (the spouse) is used for the sexual satisfaction, control or revenge of the other spouse.