

Spiritual Abuse & Cults - Why Some Fall Prey
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The vast majority of people who join cults were approached at a very low period of their lives. They may have been suffering from deep depression, grief, crisis, profound uncertainty, or questioning their purpose in life. Some are also fearful about the direction they see this world taking and they worry about their survival.

Many also join cults for reasons that are deeply personal and rooted in their own personalities or emotional make-ups. These individuals tend to also be prone to involvement in abusive interpersonal relationships and have often had very abusive or dysfunctional childhoods (i.e. a substance-addicted parent). The following personality traits are often indicative of a tendency toward involvement in abusive relationships and/or cults: low self-esteem, a fearful nature, unable to trust their own judgment, need to rely on others they feel are more grounded, little in the way of family or social support, history of victimization, history of mental illness.
Spiritual abuse is all about Power and Control

Of course, there are also those who have had little in the way of religious instruction and get sold on the notion of having their spiritual needs satisfied and their theological questions finally answered. Some cults may offer a "free home Bible study" or some form of charity—but everything has a price!

spiritual abuse IS . . .
. . . ALL ABOUT POWER & CONTROL!

Like abusive relationships, cults seek to:

1. Keep members under their control.
2. Keep members from leaving.
3. Satisfy the perverse needs of those in control.

Abuse tactics

Intimidation, Coercion, & Threats

- * "We speak for God, so do what we say."
- * "There is nowhere else to go—all other religions are false, evil, satanic, etc."
- * "You can't be saved without us".
- * "You'll be damned to hell if you leave."
- * "You will lose everything if you leave."

Cults often threaten members with excommunication if they don't comply with the rules or if they question the leadership. This is a very serious threat as it means losing one's relationship with loved ones who remain in the cult. Members may also be required to do things that are illegal or which contradict their moral values (i.e. not reporting abuse to authorities; risking a child's life by refusing needed medical treatments).

Emotional Abuse & Criticism (to enforce compliance & dependency)

- * Perfect adherence to the rules is expected.
- * Rule breakers and questioners are labeled: disloyal to God, rebellious, demonic, "apostate", mentally unstable, etc.
- * Negative comparisons with members who are "more faithful" to the leadership (God).
- * Independent thinking is denied; complete reliance on the leadership is demanded.
- * Defectors suffer character assassination and may come to believe that they deserved the "discipline" (false guilt is induced).

ISOLATION

(to keep members dependent & unaware of opposing points of view)

The cult becomes the defining force in the member's world by restricting members' ability to report abuses.

The cult becomes the defining force in the member's world by:

- * Dictating what members do, read, where they go, who they are to associate with, etc.
- * Severing relationships with loved ones outside the group so members lack outside support if they decide to leave.
- * Convincing members that outside associates are harmful to their relationship with God and the group.
- * Controlling access to outside resources (i.e. higher education, certain types of employment).
- * Restricting members' ability to discover that their lifestyle is not the norm.
- * Restricting members' ability to report abuses.

DENYING & MINIMIZING

- * Cults typically deny the existence, severity, or impact of any abuse allegations, including those used in the indoctrination process (spiritual, mental & emotional abuse).
- * Cults do not acknowledge members' concerns regarding rules, doctrines, or blatant abuses.
- * Cults use mind games (i.e. make members believe they are imagining abuses, are demonic, rebellious, weak in faith, or not studying their literature enough).
- * blaming members for provoking the victimization or "discipline".

DECEPTION

(to maintain member loyalty & support and to ensure that the unsuspecting public adopts a "hands-off" policy in regards the cult)

- * Cults lie, conceal, withhold, or omit information so gain unfair advantages
- * Cults portray abused members as deserving of abuse/discipline, while portraying the cult as above reproach.
- * Cult leaders do not accept blame, making excuses for behavior, rules, and doctrinal changes.
- * Cults blame the membership when things go wrong.
- * Cult leaders define what is/isn't important, monopolize all decision-making, enforce self-serving rules, and consider members to be generally subservient.
- * Some cults use threats of physical or sexual abuse of loved ones to enforce the compliance of members.

USING OTHERS

- * Cults often degrade members about outside relationships & encourage members to dissolve them.
- * Cult leadership uses other adherents to relay messages to targeted members.
- * Cult leadership may harass straying or ex-members & their families at their homes.
- * Cults use loved ones as leverage. Non-compliance with the rules can mean loss of ties to loved ones.
- * Some cults use threats of physical or sexual abuse of loved ones to enforce the compliance of members.

GENDER PRIVILEGE

- * Most cults are patriarchal, and pain-stakingly define male & female roles.
- * Women are denied leadership roles, in patriarchal cults. They are not allowed to teach adult males, are expected only to support their husbands' ministries, and are to do only what the leadership says.
- * Women may be guilted into submission to all male authority, including the cult's leadership and her own husband.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

* Cults often conceal or deny information regarding finances/financial operations.

* Members may be required to relinquish all or a percentage of their assets or finances to the cult, or they may be guilted into doing so. Some cults even persuade members to disinherit family and leave estates to the organization.

* Active members may be encouraged to withdraw business from the business establishments of former members.