



Spiritual Abuse training - handout

Facts

Faith is individual and therefore may or may not align with someone's beliefs from a similar cultural and religious background. Faith is personal and the influence it has on a person's life will be dictated by several factors such as life experiences, community, family, friends and networks. Faith can also provide support during challenging times and provide a sense of belonging.

Spiritual abuse happens when faith is misused and is a form of emotional and psychological abuse that occurs within a religious/belief context, although it can happen in non-religious settings too.

Spiritual abuse is not limited to a certain religion or denomination. Any person of any belief system is capable of perpetrating spiritual abuse, just as anyone can be the victim of it.

Characteristics of spiritual abuse can involve misusing scriptures, requesting unconditional obedience to the perpetrator as a representative of a divine entity, coercion and control, public shaming, isolation, or demanding conformity, with threats of spiritual consequences.

Spiritual abuse can be triggered by a life-changing event, sudden loss of job, economic hardship, divorce, sexual orientation, or defiant behaviours, for example refusing to follow rules, blaming others, arguing and challenging adults, mostly displayed by children and adolescents, as well as poor mental health issues such as enuresis, personality disorders, panic attacks and anxiety, infertility and events that individuals cannot control. There is often the need to attribute these events to supernatural forces.

Warning signs

- Physical injuries
- Wearing amulets or charms
- Smell - related to rituals or sacrifices
- Consumption/application of holy water/ oils
- Removal from groups, education or work
- Self-harm, eating disorders, attempted suicide
- Subject to financial control
- Lack of critical thinking
- Depression/ isolation
- Emotional distress
- Mention of cleanse or ritual
- Change in appearance or personal care
- Visible animosity from carers/ family members
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Mobility struggles
- Partaking in cult-like activities
- Controlled communication/surveillance

Email: bookings@sundialcentre.org

Website: www.sundialcentre.org

Harms

Physical/sexual/psychological and financial abuse
Frequent illness - often untreated
Trauma
Isolation and/or removal from education, work or community
'Honour'-based abuse
Use of guilt/scapegoating
Starvation and/or eating disorders
Humiliation
Poor personal hygiene
Loss of identity

Reasons

Power and control dynamics
Desire for acceptance
Fear
Looking for inner peace
Lack of mental health understanding
Power and gender issues
Maintaining order
'Out of love'
Social and peer pressure
Tradition
Behavioural expectations

Safeguarding

If someone is in immediate danger, call **999**.

If you are concerned that a child may be at risk of experiencing spiritual abuse, then you need to make a **report** to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) / Children's Social Care or the equivalent in your area.

If you talk to a child or an adult about spiritual abuse, please bear in mind the following:

- Find a private space
- Use independent translators (if needed)
- Avoid judgemental language
- Maintain a record of your conversation
- Don't promise not to share information

***NB.** Never approach the family (unless advised by Social Care).

There may be warning signs that spiritual abuse is or will be taking place. Please refer to the Safeguarding Signs tool. This can be found [here](#).

Remember to safeguard siblings.

Tips for Professionals

Inform (adult) victim of your concerns and requirements for a referral

Email: bookings@sundialcentre.org

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Identify the victim's details, including religious, ethnic and nationality background, preferred language and specific needs
Details of the perpetrators
Immediate concerns/risk and specific details of the abuse - Who? What? Where? When? How?
Inform the victim and agencies of the actions that have been taken
Safety plan
Always follow up a safeguarding referral

Helpline numbers

Police: 999

Replenished Life: An independent charity based in Wales, which supports those who have experienced abuse and trauma within faith on **07746 153703** or inbox@replenished.life.

AFRUCA supports families and communities to learn new skills for better protection of children in communities and better parenting on **02077042261** or info@afruca.org.

Nour DV specialises in supporting Muslim women who have experienced domestic abuse, including situations that may involve spiritual or religious manipulation on support@nour-dv.org.uk.

Safe Spaces: church-related abuse support on **03003031056** or safespaces@firstlight.org.uk.

Other Support Services

Support is available for anyone experiencing / at risk of spiritual abuse, as well as those who are worried for someone they know.

The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network
[WHRIN – The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network](#)

31:8 – 0207 735 8941
[Thirtyone:eight home page \(thirtyoneeight.org\)](http://thirtyoneeight.org)

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000
[What You Need to Know About Child Trafficking | NSPCC](#)

National FGM Centre (CALF) – for training and advice
[Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief – National FGM Centre](#)

LWA- Living Without Abuse- 0808 80 200 28
[Religious and Spiritual Abuse | lwa.org.uk : LWA](http://lwa.org.uk)

Support Line- 01708 765200
[SupportLine – Confidential Emotional Support for Children, Young Adults and Adults](#)

Latin American Women's Aid- 020 727 50321
[LAWA – Latin American Women's Aid \(lawadv.org.uk\)](http://lawadv.org.uk)

Email: bookings@sundialcentre.org

Website: www.sundialcentre.org

Latin American Women's Rights Service- 0808 145 4909

[LAWRS – Latin American Women's Rights Service](#)

The Traveller Movement- 0754 1637 795

[Home | The Traveller Movement](#)

Sistah Space – 020 7846 8350

[Sistah Space](#)

Project Salama- 01635 953588

[projectsalama.co.uk](#)

Jewish Women's Aid- 0808 801 0500

[Jewish Women's Aid \(jwa.org.uk\)](#)

Sikh Women's Aid- 0333 090 1220

[Sikh Women's Aid Domestic Abuse Charity \(sikhwomensaid.org.uk\)](#)

Muslim Women's Network- 0800 999 5786

[Muslim Women Network \(mwnuk.co.uk\)](#)

Conversation therapy helplines:

GALOP- 0800 130 3335 helpline

[Helplines – Galop the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity – Galop](#)

LGBT Foundation- 0345 3 30 30 30

[LGBT Foundation – Home](#)

House of Rainbow- +447521130179

[House of Rainbow](#)

Naz and Matt Foundation- support@nazandmattfoundation.org

[Support – Naz and Matt Foundation](#)

Mind Out- 01273 234 839

[MindOut | Mental Health Charity for LGBTQ community](#)

Hidayah – hello@hidayahlgbt.co.uk

[Hidayah LGBT • Gender, Sexuality and Islam](#)

Support U- 0118 321 9111

[Your LGBT+ Resource for the Thames Valley – Support U](#)

Switchboard LGBT+- 0800 0119 100

[Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline](#)

Traveller Pride- [CONTACT | LGBT Traveller Pride](#)

[LGBT Traveller Pride – Gypsy, Roma Traveller support](#)

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