



Our biblical mandate

To create cultures and relationships where people are safe and can grow

Isaiah 61:1-3

To love, value and respect others

John 13:34-35

To create cultures and relationships where people are safe and can grow

John 4:18



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Core course content and learning objectives

Module 1

Understanding spiritual abuse

Module 2

The impact of spiritual abuse

Module 3

Responding well

Module 4

Healthy cultures

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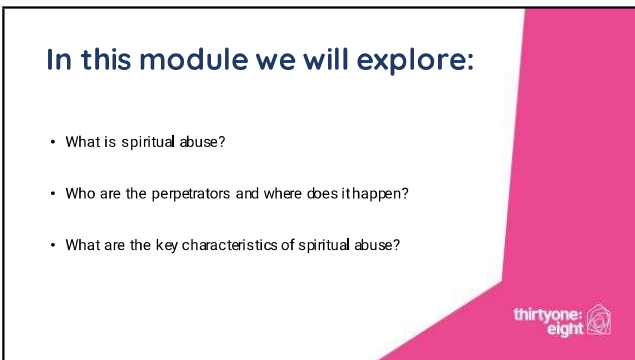
Course Context

- This course addresses the issue of spiritual abuse in the Church and Christian organisations
- Change of government definition of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) to include coercive control
- Growing awareness of coercive control in Church with underpin by new cases complaints and research
- 2017 BU/Thirtyoneeight research where notably 1002 people identified as having experienced Spiritual Abuse

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- What is spiritual abuse?
- Who are the perpetrators and where does it happen?
- What are the key characteristics of spiritual abuse?

Understanding spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it. However, holding a theological position is not in itself inherently spiritually abusive, but misuse of scripture, applied theology and doctrine is often a component of spiritually abusive behaviour



Discussion

Who are the perpetrators of spiritual abuse?

Are there particular expressions of Church where spiritual abuse is more likely to occur? If so, why?



Who and where?

- Leaders
- Leadership style
- Those in parallel power positions
- Those in lower power positions
- Individuals and groups
- Vulnerability
- Across denominations and expressions of Church
- In the UK
- Intentionality

Spiritual Abuse can happen anywhere but it does not happen everywhere



Messages from research:

People told us:

"I think people assume the abuser is usually the person with more 'power' e.g. The church leader but I think church leaders are often not very protected from being abused themselves from members of their church"

"This is when the leader or senior leaders of a church operates in their own authority whilst abusing and manipulating the congregation and begins to take the place of God in their lives."

"The local church as a corporate body"

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Key characteristics

Coercion and Control

- Use of scripture to coerce and control
 - Enforced accountability
 - Manipulation and exploitation
 - Pressure to conform
 - Censorship
 - Requirement for blind obedience
 - Use of 'divine calling' to coerce
 - Exclusion and isolation
 - Public shaming and humiliation
 - Threats of spiritual consequences for actions
- (Oakley, 2009; Oakley & Kinmond, 2013)

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Discussion

Read and consider the key characteristics of spiritual abuse?

Can you think of an example of each?



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Examples of characteristics:

"In my experience, my 'accountability' involved a hard hand. I was told I was to be 'disciplined.' I was to come under the authority of my house group leaders, and work through my issues with them. Again, in the correct setting, this would be a good thing. I embraced the opportunity to talk through and pray through areas of my life. Yet even in those early days, I remember feeling pressurised, and pushed into action."

"Keep your head down, and your mouth shut, and no-one is going to get hurt. Look on it as a case for 'keeping unity.'"

"Would they go the extra mile? If so, they likely would face greater demands. (Fantastically disguised under the heading of 'being given greater responsibility'). If not, they were those who could not be trusted. They had betrayed their leaders. Their decision to do so would take them into a time of isolation, and loneliness."

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Discussion

- Read the three-part case study in the workbook and at each stage consider **what, if any are your concerns?**

- At which point might you consider this to be spiritual abuse?



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Module 2:

The impact of
spiritual abuse

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In this module we will explore:

- The different impacts of spiritual abuse
- How such an experience can affect one's faith



The impact of spiritual abuse

"This whole experience is the equivalent of someone depth charging our insides" (Oakley, 2009)



Main impact of spiritual abuse

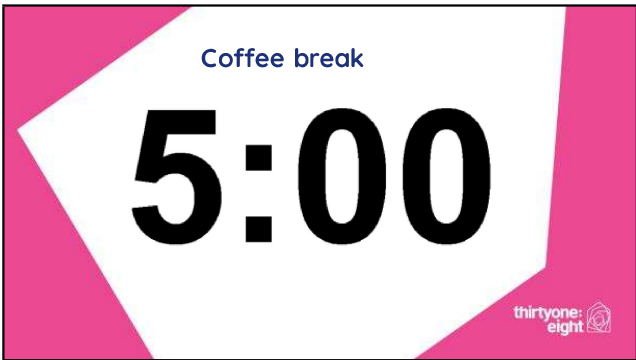


Oakley & Kinmond (2013)










Module 3:

Responding to spiritual abuse



In this module we will explore:


- How to respond well to spiritual abuse
- The importance of policy and procedure
- Pathways for referral




Discussion

Responding well to spiritual abuse:

Read the statements in the workbook. Consider whether the responses are helpful or unhelpful?





Responding well to a disclosure

- Follow the normal guidelines for listening to a disclosure
- Ensure the person knows you are taking what they say seriously
- Do not judge, minimise, blame or defend.
- Take care when using the bible or prayer
- Take care with Matthew 18
- Confidentiality with limits
- Support for all

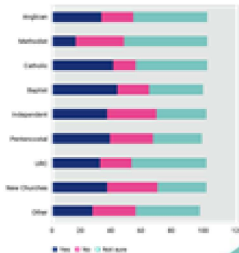


Where to go for support...

- **Church leaders** - "Within the Church, I would speak to our Senior pastors"
- **Thirtyone: eight** - "If I became aware of spiritual abuse elsewhere my first port of call for advice etc. would be thirtyone: eight."
- **Friends and family** - "Christian leaders/friends outside of the circle where the spiritual abuse is taking place"
- **Church safeguarding officer** - "Our church safeguarding officer"
- **Statutory agencies** - "Would speak to statutory agencies or counselling"
- **Counselling** - "Would speak to statutory agencies or counselling"
- **External support** - "I turned to my wife and parents"



Responding through policy



Responding through policy and referral pathways

"A clear policy, with precise steps on what should be done".

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Module 4:
Healthy cultures

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In this module we will explore:

- Characteristics of a healthy Christian culture
- Being part of the culture
- Looking to the future

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Discussion

Healthy cultures:

What are the hallmarks of a healthy Christian culture?

Draw or write what you think the hallmarks of a healthy Christian culture may look like!



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Healthy cultures

- Respects, values and nurtures each person
- Allows questions and calm disagreement
- Guides and empowers through biblical teaching
- Guides behaviour but respects choices
- Nurturing and nurtured leadership
- Values 'whole life' service
- Healthy accountability
- Models inclusion

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Discussion

Part of the culture:

Consider the different forms of power.

Which do you use most when in a leadership position and which when you are being led?

Complete the table in the workbook.



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Power can be good

- God gives man power in Genesis
- It is how we use power that matters

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And finally



Getting the whole church congregation or
organisation on board!

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Summary and key messages

- Coercive control occurs in Churches and Christian Organisations
- Leaders can experience this too
- Everyone needs to be aware of the signs and Indicators of spiritual abuse
- Knowing how to respond matters
- Developing a healthy safeguarding culture is crucial
- Recognising I am part of the culture

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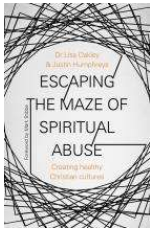
Review of learning objectives

By the end of this course you should:

- Have an enhanced understanding of spiritual abuse.
- Have a sound understanding of the impact of spiritual abuse.
- Be equipped with the knowledge to know how to respond and take action within the context of appropriate policies and procedures.
- Be inspired to help develop healthier cultures within your church, charitable organisation or professional setting.



Further learning and resources



"As a victim of spiritual abuse within a Christian counselling environment I welcome the publication of one of the first books on this topic to be written within the United Kingdom. The authors experience shines through the pages."

"Easy to read and makes one think about spiritual abuse, especially if one has been through it, but didn't know quite what it was."

"Both writers of this book have a gentle confidence in their handling of this important subject. I highly recommend this book to readers."

Also visit the www.thirtyoneeight.org for more resources and useful help leaflet on this topic.



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