

## **Counseling and Abuse**

Recovery from abuse can be considered as a process having four overlapping stages.

- 1) Impact stage.
  - b) Lasts for a few hours to several days and is characterized by shock, disbelief, anxiety, and fear.
  - c) Victims often confused about whether to report the abuse and frequently there is fear that the abuse may recur.
  - d) At this stage, counselors can give support, guidance as decisions are made, or help in finding medical care and safety.
  - e) Often none of this help is given because the victim is too afraid, confused, powerless, or embarrassed to report the abuse or to seek help.
- 2) Denial stage.
  - b) In order to cope with the stress, the victim tries to push aside the trauma of abuse and return to a precrisis stage of functioning.
  - c) Victims at this stage need to feel secure, organized, and in control.
  - d) May appear that everything has returned to normal, but the hurt is still present and will need to be dealt with before complete healing occurs.
- 3) Process stage.
  - b) Begins when the experience of assault can no longer be suppressed.
  - c) Often some crisis event or emotional distress may trigger the old feelings and the victim is flooded with a nxiety,d epression, nightmares, flashbacks, and constant thinking about the assault.
  - d) A period when the victim needs to talk, to express feelings, to struggle with guilt and anger, and to feel counselor support.
  - e) May find comfort and help by joining support groups.
  - f) Can find support in church.
- 4) Integration.
  - b) Comes as the individual begins to feel no longer controlled or dominated by the effects of the sexual assault or assaults.
  - c) Person has grown to a higher level of psychological and spiritual maturity and is able to move on with life.

### **Helping the Children of Abuse**

- 1) The advocate for the sexually abused child runs the risk of being smothered by indifference and a conspiracy of silence.
- 2) Pressure from peer group to ignore, minimize, or cover up the situation may be extreme.
- 3) Children rarely report sexual or physical abuse.
  - b) Don't know who to tell.
  - c) They may have been threatened with further harm if they talk to anyone about the abuse.
- 4) Signs to suspect abuse or neglect.
  - b) The child seems unduly fearful, especially of parents.
  - c) The child is poorly groomed or inappropriately dressed for the weather.

- d) The child appears undernourished or inappropriately fed.
- e) The child's injuries or sicknesses are inappropriately treated in terms of bandages or medication.
- f) The child is withdrawn and depressed or overactive and aggressive.
- g) The child seems disinterested, unable to concentrate, inclined to cling to adults other than the parents or unable to get along with other children.
- h) The parents are rigid, highly demanding of their children and inclined to punish harshly.
- i) The parents have experienced multiple stresses such as marital discord, divorce, debt, frequent moves, job loss, or other pressures.

### **Helping the Adult Victims of Incest and Abuse**

- 1) Some victims carry the pain of childhood abuse into adulthood and never share the secret with anyone.
- 2) Perhaps 20-30% of college-age females have been sexually victimized as children; sobering to recognize how many silent victims of abuse may be in your church.
- 3) If you suspect abuse in a counselee, do not hesitate to raise the issue gently.
  - b) Mention that the problem is common.
  - c) That victims do not deserve the abuse.
  - d) That people can get over their feelings of shame and hurt.
  - e) Often the gentle, caring, nonjudgmental encouragement of a sensitive counselor is all the counselee needs to break a long-guarded secret and to deal with the bottled-up feelings and questions about abuse.

### **Helping the Victims of Rape**

- 1) Rape victims have been classified in three ways, depending on how they respond to the rape.
  - a) Majority show the rape trauma syndrome.
    - i) Begins with acute stress immediately following the rape.
      - (1) May be fear, anger, anxiety, shock, self-blame, and disbelief, often expressed by crying, sobbing, tenseness, nausea, or restlessness; sometimes hidden behind a calm, composed exterior.
      - (2) Victim may be flooded with feelings of terror, concern for her safety, and guilt because she did not struggle more.
      - (3) Some women wonder if the myth really is true which says that women secretly attract rapists.
    - ii) Two or three weeks after the rape, many women begin to experience nightmares, irrational fears, and restless activity.
    - iii) Often there is a decision to move, change a phone number, stay indoors at night, or spend more time with close friends.
    - iv) Women need support, freedom to express feelings, acceptance, an opportunity to talk with someone who considers them normal, and guidance as they make decisions.
  - b) Second general response to rape has been termed the "compound reaction."
    - i) Victims with previous physical, psychiatric, or social difficulties sometimes develop more intense symptoms such as depression, psychotic or suicidal behavior, psychosomatic disorders, drug use, excessive drinking, or sexual acting out behavior.

- ii) Such women need referral for help that is more in-depth than crisis counseling.
- c) A third response to rape is the “silent rape reaction.”
  - i) These women have not told anyone about the rape, have never talked about their feelings or reactions, and have carried a tremendous psychological burden.
  - ii) Later in life these women may develop anxiety, fear of men, avoidance of sexual behavior, unexplained fears of being alone or going outside, nightmares, and a loss of self-esteem.

### **Helping the Victims of Mate Abuse**

- 1) Most often women are victims.
  - a) Increasing husband abuse.
  - b) When women abuse, they may do more damage because they use more than their hands.
- 2) In both cases, the victim often has low self-esteem.
  - a) In case of women, distorted belief that the husband’s role as head of the home gives him the right to tyrannize his family.
  - b) Sometimes the victim is even made to feel that she, rather than the abuser, is the real cause of the problem.
  - c) In some cases, the abuser may usually be loving and willing to provide for the family, except for periodic and often unpredictable explosions of rage and violence.
  - d) Most victims are reluctant to report the abuse.
    - i) Realistic fear that abusing mate could explode in more violence if he (or she) discovers that the family aggression has been reported.
    - ii) A woman whose livelihood depends on her abusive husband is reluctant to risk being cut off from food and shelter, especially if this would make her solely responsible for the care of her children.
    - iii) Some Christian women believe that wives should be submissive to their husbands, even if the husband’s behavior is intensely violent and life threatening.
- 3) Nonverbal signs of spouse abuse.
  - a) A history of miscarriages.
  - b) Frequent visits to the emergency room for treatment of illnesses or injuries.
  - c) Signs of ongoing stress, such as headaches, gastrointestinal ailments, vague “not feeling well” complaints, or excessive use of tranquilizers or alcohol.
  - d) Withdrawal and isolation from friends, church, and family.
  - e) Moody, discouraged, unpredictable, or depressive behavior, sometimes accompanied by periodic suicide attempts.
  - f) Frequent absence from work.
  - g) Reports from others, including neighbors or children, about conflict or disruption in the home.
  - h) References to previous abuse or violence in the home.
- 4) Counselor should not be reluctant to raise the issue
  - a) Christian counselor wants to help the couple maintain and heal the marriage, but when the risk of further violence seems high, it may be wise to help the abused mate and children get away from the danger and withdraw to a place of security and safety.
  - b) Once the immediate danger is lessened, counseling is likely to focus on issues of guilt, low self-esteem, the biblical position on husband-wife relationships, the difficulty of

learning to forgive, and the battered mate's feelings of guilt, anger, discouragement, hopelessness, and worries about coping in the future.

- c) Later the counselor may be involved in helping the husband and wife deal with issues of communication, conflict resolution, sexual adjustment, husband-wife roles, trust, and other issues of marriage counseling.

### **Helping the Victims of Elder Abuse**

- 1) Abuse not only comes from younger family members, but from hospital personnel, employees of nursing homes, neighborhood vandals, their own mates, or impatient workers in stores or government offices.
- 2) Pastor may be first to suspect elder abuse.
- 3) Whenever an older person talks about mistreatment, the counselor can listen with sympathy and sensitivity.
  - a) Report of mistreatment may be more imagined than real.
  - b) Wise to talk with care givers, including the older person's relatives.
  - c) Abuse greater when older people have needs that are great, but the care givers have limited resources or abilities to meet these needs.

### **Helping the Abusers**

- 1) Abusers tend to be condemned, ignored, and incarcerated without treatment.
- 2) Return to abuse is much less likely among those who have been treated.
- 3) When confronted with their violent actions, many abusers deny what they have done, excuse their actions, or try to shift the blame onto the victim or somebody else.
- 4) Counseling abusers is often a long-term process dealing with the counselee's anger, low self-esteem, and lack of self-control.
  - a) Many lack communication, problem-solving, conflict-resolution, and stress-management skills.
  - b) Since many victimizers were earlier victims of abuse, it often is important to deal with attitudes and insecurities that have built up over a lifetime.
  - c) Many have never learned how to express their feelings in nonviolent, socially appropriate ways.
  - d) Some have rigid and domineering attitudes about leadership or the role of the husband or parent.
  - e) Others are entrenched in erroneous beliefs.
    - i) Victims enjoy the battering.
    - ii) Victims encourage it.
    - iii) Violence is the macho way to assert authority.
    - iv) All of these attitudes must be challenged and changed if abuse is to cease.
- 5) Abusers also need to understand forgiveness, including the ability to forgive themselves.
  - a) They need to see that abuse is not an unpardonable sin.
  - b) The God who forgives can and will give help and guidance to those who sincerely want to rebuild their lives and live in ways that do not hurt others.