

What Is Abuse?



1. Abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of others (such as a child or spouse, the elderly, or the disabled) in a way that causes physical, emotional, or sexual harm. Abuse causes confusion, doubt, mistrust, and fear in the victims and sometimes inflicts physical injury. Most, but not all, allegations of abuse are true, and should be taken seriously and handled with great care.
2. Abuse tends to become more severe over time. The Lord condemns abusive behavior in any form—including neglect and physical, sexual, or verbal abuse. Most abuse violates the civil laws of society. (See First Presidency letter, “Responding to Abuse,” July 28, 2008.)

Teaching Doctrine

3. The doctrine of the Church commits all leaders and members to protect each individual (see Matthew 18:6; Ephesians 5:25, 28–29; “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2017, 145).
4. Abuse in any form is sinful, tragic, and in total opposition to the teachings of the Savior (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:37).
5. The Savior extends succor, healing, and strength to victims of abuse because of His infinite and eternal Atonement (see Alma 7:11–12; 34:10).
6. Those who commit abuse in any way are accountable to God (see Doctrine and Covenants 101:78). Heavenly Father and His Son offer forgiveness to those who have committed abuse when they change their behavior and fully repent (see Mosiah 14:4–12; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43).
7. The principles in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” are vital for all members to understand and will help everyone avoid the evils of abuse (see Gordon B. Hinckley, “Save the Children,” Ensign, Nov. 1994, 52–54).

How Can Abuse Be Prevented?

8. Encourage couples and families to live the gospel in the home. They should establish patterns of kindness, respect, and open communication so that all family members are comfortable discussing sensitive matters (see “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2017, 145).
9. Encourage parents to teach children information and skills appropriate to their age and maturity so they will know what to do if faced with abuse.
10. Make members aware of these publications: Preventing and Responding to Spouse Abuse: Helps for Members (1997) and Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse: Helps for Members (1997).

Selected Teachings

11. We condemn most strongly abusive behavior in any form. We denounce the physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse of one's spouse or children....No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to hold the priesthood of God. No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to be a member in good standing in this Church. The abuse of one's spouse and children is a most serious offense before God, and any who indulge in it may expect to be disciplined by the Church. (Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?”, Ensign, Nov. 1998, 70-72)
12. In all that Christ was, He was not ever envious or inflated, never consumed with His own needs. He did not once, not ever, seek His own advantage at the expense of someone else. He delighted in the happiness of others, the happiness He could bring them. He was forever kind. In a dating and courtship relationship, I would not have you spend five minutes with someone who belittles you, who is constantly critical of you, who is cruel at your expense and may even call it humor. Life is tough enough without having the person who is supposed to love you leading the assault on your self-esteem, your sense of dignity, your confidence, and your joy. In this person's care you deserve to feel physically safe and emotionally secure. Members of the First Presidency have taught that “any form of physical or mental abuse to any woman is not worthy of any priesthood holder” and that no “man who holds the priesthood of God [should] abuse his wife in any way, [or] demean or injure or take undue advantage of [any] woman”—and that includes friends, dates, sweethearts, and fiancées, to say nothing of wives. (Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU Devotional Address, “How Do I Love Thee?”, February 15, 2000)
13. Husbands, you have been entrusted with the most sacred gift God can give you—a wife, a daughter of God, the mother of your children who has voluntarily given herself to you for love and joyful companionship. Think of the kind things you said when you were courting, think of the blessings you have given with hands placed lovingly upon her head, think of yourself and of her as the god and goddess you both inherently are, and then reflect on other moments characterized by cold, caustic, unbridled words. Given the damage that can be done with our tongues, little wonder the Savior said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If it is possible to be more condemning than that, we speak even more vigorously against all forms of sexual abuse. Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be. In that same spirit we speak to the sisters as well, for the sin of verbal abuse knows no gender. Wives, what of the unbridled tongue in your mouth, of the power for good or ill in your words? How is it that such a lovely voice which by divine nature is so angelic, so close to the veil, so instinctively gentle and inherently kind could ever in a turn be so shrill, so biting, so acrid and untamed? A woman's words can be more piercing than any dagger ever forged, and they can drive the people they love to retreat beyond a barrier more distant than anyone in the beginning of that exchange could ever have imagined. Sisters, there is no place in that magnificent spirit of yours for acerbic or abrasive expression of any kind, including gossip or backbiting or catty remarks. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels”, Ensign, May 2007, 16-18)

Other Resources

1. Abuse: Help for the Victim,” ministeringresources.lds.org.
2. “Abuse: Help for the Offender,” ministeringresources.lds.org.
3. Articles of Faith 1:12; Doctrine and Covenants 121; 123.
4. Benjamin M. Ogles, “Agency, Accountability, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ: Application to Sexual Assault”, BYU Devotional Address, Jan. 30, 2018.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood,” Ensign, May 2002, 52–59.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?” Ensign, Nov. 1998, 70–72.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2005, 24–27.
8. Richard G. Scott, “To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2008, 40–43.
9. LDS Family Services courses Strengthening Marriage and Strengthening the Family.



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