

## **What To Do After Sexual or Physical Abuse**

**By Jill Monaco, PCC, CMCLC**

A quick Google search will tell you abuse is "to treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly."

Abuse has been around since Biblical times. It's, unfortunately, nothing new. However, we are in unusual times, and we are seeing God reveal abusive behavior at an increased speed. We've seen it on the news or in reports about a person we once admired. It's heartbreaking.

God is also bringing healing to those who have been victims of abuse.

I believe what God reveals, He heals. So we can approach this topic with hope! God is on the move to bring healing to His bride in anticipation of His return. We get to choose to be ready - you need to take action. That requires us to prepare our hearts and fill up our oil lamps! Then, you are in the position to receive from God the healing that Jesus paid for on the cross.

If you're reading this, you most likely were abused and may be looking for someone to help you know what to do next.

Sometimes abuse involves more than one category of abuse. For example, if you're abused by a church leader sexually, then it's spiritual and sexual abuse. If you were abused by a spouse physically, it might also include emotional abuse.

Reporting sexual or physical abuse is more straightforward than reporting church leaders who inflicted spiritual, emotional, or psychological abuse. Nevertheless, the common denominator is that they all create a storm of great pain.

For this post, I'm going to share some steps about what you can do if it's the type of abuse that qualifies for help from authorities.

### **Victims of Abuse**

I wanted to report my abuser many times over the years. However, the energy it took to find the proper steps was nearly debilitating. I wish I had someone to help me sort through my emotions, options, and rights. Finding the courage to report abuse is one thing. Finding others to join hands with you is another. [My story of abuse by a priest and the process of how I reported him is here.](#)

Since sharing my story, I've heard from so many people. Men and women share the pain of having their boundaries violated and their voices silenced. I'm so sorry this happened to you.

If you were a minor when sexual or physical abuse happened, you might believe too much time has gone by to do anything about it. But that may not be the case. The statute of limitations varies per state. You don't necessarily need "evidence" to support your claim to have a case opened.

If you're an adult and experienced abuse from a pastor or leader, it's common for victims to question whether it's worth saying anything. There can be confusing emotions like embarrassment, denial, or fear. Or the leader may try to intimidate or threaten you. Some victims gaslight themselves and question if it was abuse or they chose to engage in the behavior. You may be trying to weigh the consequences of reporting someone in power and wonder if anyone will believe you.

There are so many kinds of abuse. It would be challenging for me to tell you what to do in your case without knowing the nuances of your situation. So please take what I suggest to the Lord and let Him guide you.

If you were recently raped or abused – don't wait to follow these steps. Instead, go to a hospital immediately and let them help you get checked out and report to the police. But, again, none of this post is legal advice.

### **Step One: Get Your Heart Ready**

If you are anxious about taking the first step, I want you to take a deep breath and remember that God is with you. I don't mean that to be cliché. You are about to do something so brave, and God

is proud of you. He has what you need to do this in a way He knows is best for you. Spend time in prayer so you may receive His kindness, strength, and wisdom.

### **Step Two: Get an Advocate**

If your abuse was criminal (like sexual or physical abuse or assault), some organizations can assign you an advocate who will be with you through the entire process. They can go with you to the police station, court dates or offer to counsel you. By law, they must keep your information confidential so you can feel supported and trusted to share no matter what comes up along the way. My advocate gave me her work cell so I could call her anytime. She was very sensitive to my questions and made me feel safe.

I recommend searching Google for Coalition Against Sexual Assault. They have different websites for different states. They usually have a 24/7 hotline and a local crisis center.

### **Step 3: File A Police Report**

You don't need to do step 2 before you do step 3. But having an advocate may help you prepare for this step.

You need to file a police report in the city the offense occurred.

They will ask you to write a statement so they have the facts, dates, or evidence for additional meetings or investigations. They also give you some paperwork to take home, explaining your rights and offering hotline numbers.

They will forward the paperwork to a detective who will contact you for further information, which may require another interview.

### **Optional - Get an Order of Protection**

Depending on your situation, they may recommend you get an order of protection. It may be helpful if the offender knows where you live and you are afraid they will reach out to you once the police confront them. They would not be able to call, text, or go to your home or place of employment. And if they do, they are immediately arrested.

#### **Step 4: Counseling**

I highly recommend you get counseling right away. Some counselors and psychologists specialize in trauma therapy. Finding someone may take time, focus, and energy, but feel free to interview them on the phone and ask questions. I found many of them could give me about 15-30 minutes.

You may find this a helpful first place to start: [Diane Landberg, Ph.D.](#), is a psychologist and international speaker working with trauma survivors, caregivers, and clergy worldwide.

[NetGrace.org](#) also offers resources to help give a godly response to abuse in a Christian environment.

#### **Step 5: Legal Action**

You may want to reach out to an attorney. I used one that works with clergy abuse cases. They can assess your situation and help you understand the qualifying factors of a lawsuit and the next steps in your case. I recommend [Jeff Anderson and Associates](#).

#### **My Prayer For You**

I am so sorry you or someone you love endured abuse. I can't imagine what you went through. But I do know that the love of God can come in and heal every broken place. You are stronger than you think. More powerful than you've been allowed to be in the past. You are not a victim. You are an overcomer! I pray for God's comfort to come upon you right now as you read this.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;  
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord that he may be glorified. Isaiah 61:1-3*