

The National Domestic Violence HOTLINE

What is Spiritual Abuse?

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There are many different types of abuse, but one you may not be aware of is spiritual (or religious) abuse. **If it's discussed at all, most examples of spiritual abuse refer to a church elder or faith leader inflicting abuse on congregation members, often by creating a toxic culture within the church or group by shaming or controlling members using the power of their position.** However, spiritual abuse can also occur within an intimate partner relationship.

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. Signs of spiritual abuse between intimate partners include when an abusive partner:

- ridicules or insults the other person's religious or spiritual beliefs
- prevents the other partner from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs
- uses their partner's religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate or shame them
- forces the children to be raised in a faith that the other partner has not agreed to
- uses religious texts or beliefs to minimize or rationalize abusive behaviors (such as [physical](#), [financial](#), [emotional](#) or [sexual abuse](#)/marital rape)

Spiritual abuse is no less harmful or difficult to endure than any other kind of abuse, as a person's spiritual life is deeply personal. However, it can be very difficult to identify, as many victims may not recognize they are being abused. In addition, the abusive partner may claim that any challenge to the abuse is an assault on their own religious freedom. **Regardless of either partner's religious or spiritual beliefs, abuse of any kind is never acceptable or justified.**

If you are experiencing spiritual abuse, it can help to create a [safety plan](#) that might include:

- reaching out to a trusted member of your spiritual/religious community for support
- exploring options for practicing your faith/religion in a safe way
- creating an [emotional safety plan](#)

Hotline advocates can help you create a plan to stay safe while exploring options and resources with you. We are available 24/7 by calling 1-800-799-7233, or you can [chat live](#) on our website from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. Central.

Tags: [religious abuse](#), [safety plan](#), [spiritual abuse](#)

