

How We Can Address Abuse

Here are some suggestions for victims of abuse, their Church leaders, and their families.

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The Savior spoke seriously of abuse: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6; see also Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).

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. The Church’s position is that abuse cannot be tolerated in any form.

The following ideas can help, whether you are a victim of abuse or the victim’s Church leader or parent.

To the Victim

As a victim¹ of abuse, you are not to blame for the abuse you have experienced, nor do you need to be forgiven of actions someone has taken against you. You may wonder how the Savior can help heal you. You may think that the Savior’s atoning sacrifice was only for those who sin and need to repent.

So how does the Savior help you? Because of His sacrifice, He understands. The Savior has divine empathy. Although we may not know exactly how the Savior was able to feel all our pains, we can have faith that He understands, in a perfect way, each man, woman, and child (see 2 Nephi 9:21). He can provide peace and strength to move forward.²

Through His Atonement, the Savior helps those who have been hurt. He can help “by healing and compensating us for any suffering we innocently endure.”³

Regardless of when or how the offender is held accountable, you can “rest assured that the Perfect Judge, Jesus the Christ, with a perfect knowledge of the details, will hold all abusers accountable for every unrighteous act.”⁴ Know also that those “who abuse spouse or offspring . . . will one day stand accountable before God.”⁵





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To Church Leaders

All leaders and teachers who serve youth and children are required to take the online training “Protecting Children and Youth.”⁶

No Church leader should ever dismiss a report of abuse or counsel a member not to report criminal activity.⁷ Church leaders and members should fulfill all legal obligations to report abuse to civil authorities. However, areas have different reporting laws. Some areas require clergy to contact law enforcement, but other areas prohibit it.

It is important for leaders to understand that victims of abuse may have a difficult time trusting others—especially those in positions of authority. The situation may be emotionally challenging; the victim’s difficulty in talking about it may not be connected to you personally in any way. Meeting with leaders alone may feel scary for victims of abuse. Victims can invite a trusted adult to be with them when they meet with priesthood leaders.⁸

No matter when someone was abused, he or she can benefit from support and professional help. Most victims heal best when they have their feelings validated, they feel safe and protected, they feel that someone believes them, and they understand how the abuse has affected them. Support can help them find peace and not feel alone as they seek to find healing.⁹

Standing against abuse regardless of who is involved should be the standard. When offenders are in positions of authority and trust, however, abuse is more serious and can be more harmful to the victim. Those in positions of trust who abuse others need to be held to a higher standard because they have violated the trust of the victim. The Church has a zero-tolerance policy for abuse, and that is particularly true for those in positions of trust and authority.



ONLINE RESOURCES

- Abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org
- Addictionrecovery.ChurchofJesusChrist.org
- “Protecting Children and Youth” training on ChurchofJesusChrist.org



Teach your children how to recognize abuse, prevent it, and get help if something inappropriate happens.



To Parents

Although stories of abuse by someone in authority receive more attention in the news, victims are most often abused by someone they know. The offender may be a family member, relative, or neighbor. The offender can be any age. The offender is rarely a complete stranger.¹⁰

But there are a number of signs of abuse that we can teach our children in order to help them recognize and avoid it. Teach your children that if someone asks them to do something they know to be wrong, they can say no. Here are some examples of how offenders might force, threaten, or entice victims:

- Perpetrators use their position, authority, age, size, or knowledge to force the victim to do what they want.
- They say that they do not want to be the victim’s friend unless the victim does what they say.
- They take something and will not give it back unless the victim does what they say.
- They threaten to spread lies about the victim unless the victim gives in.
- They offer gifts, favors, or other rewards to get what they want.
- They tell victims that no one will believe them and they’ll get in trouble if they tell someone about the abuse.
- They threaten to hurt the victim or a loved one if the victim doesn’t do what they say.¹¹

Addressing abuse is a complex situation. There are no simple answers, but we can find great comfort in the words of Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “There is no physical pain, no spiritual

wound, no anguish of soul or heartache, no infirmity or weakness you or I ever confront in mortality that the Savior did not experience first. In a moment of weakness we may cry out, ‘No one knows what it is like. No one understands.’ But the Son of God perfectly knows and understands, for He has felt and borne our individual burdens. And because of His infinite and eternal sacrifice (see Alma 34:14), He has perfect empathy and can extend to us His arm of mercy. He can reach out, touch, succor, heal, and strengthen us to be more than we could ever be and help us to do that which we could never do relying only upon our own power.”¹²

May we turn to the Prince of Peace and through Him find hope and healing. ■

NOTES

1. Some individuals prefer the term *survivor* rather than *victim*.
2. See “How Can the Savior Help Me as a Victim of Abuse?” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
3. D. Todd Christofferson, “Redemption,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2013, 110.
4. Richard G. Scott, “To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2008, 42–43.
5. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
6. See “Protecting Children and Youth,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org/callings/church-safety-and-health/training-and-video-resources/youth-protection.
7. See “Protecting Members and Reporting Abuse,” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
8. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 31.1.1, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
9. See “Should I Get Professional Help?” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
10. See “Recognizing Patterns of Abuse,” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
11. See “Talking to Children about Abuse,” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
12. David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 90.
13. See “Talking to Children about Abuse,” abuse.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.



TREATING ALL PEOPLE WITH KINDNESS AND RESPECT

Just as it is important to teach children how to prevent abuse or respond if someone is trying to abuse them, it is also essential for children to understand that they should respect others. Following the guidelines for conduct and behavior as described in the standards booklet *For the Strength of Youth* is a good place to start. Also teach children the following principles:

- It is not OK to hurt someone else—physically, verbally, or emotionally—no matter what. Do not say things to put people down or that will hurt other people. Do not create or share pictures, videos, or messages that are harmful and hurtful to other people.
- You should not touch the private parts of another person, even if you or they ask. Do not take off your clothes in front of someone. And do not look at another person’s private parts.
- When someone says no or asks you to stop doing or saying something, listen to them. If the other person does not want to be touched, tickled, or kissed or participate in any other behavior, do not do it.
- Do not bully others or force other people to do things that you want them to do. Respect their agency.¹³