

WORD OF



HEALING FOR THE FRACTURED

SOUL

SESSION 69

RHEMA GRADS
DISCUSS MINISTRY
DEVELOPMENTS

RHEMA FIRES CRAIG HAGIN

What it Teaches Us About Accountability,
Domestic Violence & Child Protection



Tuesday
6/9/26
8:00 PM ET

With Special Guest & Rhema Grad

TRACIE CHAPMAN



RESISTANCECHICKS.COM

Rhema Bible Church Statement Regarding Craig Hagin- From Kenneth W. Hagin, Senior Pastor of Rhema Bible Church -June 3, 2026

The ministry leadership of **Rhema Bible Church has ended Craig Hagin's employment, leadership roles, and association with Rhema Bible Church and its ministries**, effective June 3, 2026. Craig, who served as Chief Operating Officer, is no longer authorized to serve, speak, or act on behalf of Rhema. In early 2026, Craig was placed on sabbatical following charges in a **pending criminal matter**. That matter remains before the courts, and we believe it is important to allow the legal process to proceed without speculation; therefore, we will not comment further on those proceedings at this time.

Within the past week, our leadership team became aware of **separate and credible information** regarding **conduct inconsistent with the standards expected of those serving in ministry leadership**. After Lynette and I returned from overseas ministry travel and were fully briefed on these matters, we exercised our responsibility as overseers of this ministry and took immediate action to end Craig's employment. As a result, Craig no longer serves in any ministerial, leadership, or administrative capacity and has no role in the governance, direction, operations, or decision-making of this ministry.

This is a deeply painful matter for our family, our church, and our Rhema worldwide family. Craig remains a member of our family, and we continue to pray for repentance, healing, and restoration in his personal life. At the same time, we have a responsibility to act clearly and decisively to protect the integrity of this ministry, the trust placed in us, and the people we serve. As part of our responsibility to exercise faithful stewardship and maintain appropriate internal safeguards, Rhema has removed Craig's access to all organizational systems, accounts, and ministry platforms.

We recognize that this news is painful and raises understandable questions. Due to the ongoing nature of this situation, including related legal and personal matters, we will refrain from sharing additional details publicly at this time. We ask our church family, employees, students, alumni, licensed ministers, missionaries, and ministry partners to continue praying for everyone affected and to remain focused on the work Rhema continues to accomplish around the world.

APPEARANCE BOND — DISTRICT COURT

IN THE DISTRICT COURT, TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA
STATE OF OKLAHOMA,

DISTRICT COURT
FILED



MAR 23 2026

CF-26-1224

Plaintiff,

DON NEWBERRY, Court Clerk,
STATE OF OKLA. TULSA COUNTY

AP-26-1863

vs.
CRAIG HAGIN

Defendant,

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, That we, the above named defendant, as principal, and the undersigned bondsman, corporation and other signers as sureties, jointly and severally acknowledge ourselves to owe and be indebted to the State of Oklahoma in the sum of 10,000 Dollars (\$ 10,000) to be levied on our property, real and personal, cash deposits and escrow deposits, wherever found, to the use of the State of Oklahoma.

THE CONDITION OF THIS BOND IS SUCH that if the above named defendant, now charged in the District Court of Tulsa County, with the crime of CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

and admitted to bail in the above stated sum, shall personally be and appear before the said Court, in the division to which said case is assigned, on the 26 day of March 2026 9:00 AM, as ordered for arraignment, preliminary hearing, trial or judgment, and from day to day and term to term thereafter as ordered, or on the first day of the next jury term of said Court, if so ordered, and from day to day and term to term thereafter as ordered by said Court, and not depart therefrom without leave, and shall do and receive what shall be enjoined upon him by said Court, until this cause is finally determined, then this bond to be void, otherwise to be in full force and effect.

Principal (Defendant) Craig Hagin

Address [Redacted]

Surety [Redacted]

Address [Redacted]

Surety Mike Pugh - 40035769

Address [Redacted]

Surety-Licensed Bondsmen [Redacted]

Office Address 301 N. Denver Tulsa, OK 74103

Corporate Surety Russell Roberts 200351

Dated, filed and approved this 20 day of March, 2026

By [Signature]

By [Signature] Deputy

Attorney-in-Fact

AFFIDAVIT AS TO UNDERTAKING AND QUALIFICATIONS OF SURETY

(Required of all licensed bondsmen, under penalty of perjury, 59 O.S., § 1322; 12 O.S., § 61; 12 O.S., § 62)

STATE OF OKLAHOMA, COUNTY OF TULSA, SS

The undersigned licensed bondsman, being duly sworn, on oath states:

That neither he or she, nor anyone for his or her use, has been promised or has received any security or consideration for his or her undertaking, except as stated herein.

Consideration received or promised \$ 10,000

Security received or promised: (List deeds or mortgages and describe personal property.)

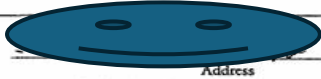
He Got

[Signature]

CONDITION OF BOND

Such promise, security or consideration was received from:

Name CRAIG HAGIN



Address

That he or she is presently duly licensed, registered, and in all respects authorized by law to become surety in this undertaking, 59 O.S., § 1301 et seq.; 22 O.S., § 1101 et seq.; 12 O.S., § 61 et seq.; 22 O.S., § 1320.

That he or she is worth double the sum to be secured, over and above all exemptions, debts and liabilities, 12 O.S., § 1301 et seq.; 22 O.S., § 1101 et seq.; 12 O.S., § 61 et seq.

That he or she has not signed or countersigned this bond in blank, nor has he or she given a power of attorney to, or otherwise authorized, any person to countersign his or her name to this bond unless that person is a licensed bondsman directly employed by a bondsman giving such power of attorney, 59 O.S., § 1316.

That he or she has attached hereto all receipts for collateral accepted by him or her, fully described in detail, 59 O.S., § 1314; 59 O.S., § 1322.

That he or she is authorized, and legally capable, in all respects, to enter into this undertaking, both personally and on behalf of the corporate surety above-named; and that this undertaking is within, and does not exceed, the limitations and conditions of the power of attorney granted him or her by said corporate surety, all pursuant to 59 O.S., § 1320.

That he or she is familiar with the provisions of Oklahoma Statute regarding the effects of defects, omissions and irregularities in such undertakings, 59 O.S., § 1326.

That all legal requirements of licensing, registration and certification have been met by this bondsman, 59 O.S., § 1320.

That the bondsman fully understands that willful misstatement of any material fact herein may subject him or her to prosecution for perjury, and/or to proceedings seeking denial, suspension or revocation of the bondsman's license, 59 O.S., § 1310.

That he or she is a resident of the County of Tulsa, State of Oklahoma

COUNTS

Parties appear only under the counts with which they were charged. For complete sentence information, see the court minute on the docket.

Count # 1. Count as Filed: CF.21.1685.1719.1, CRUELTY TO ANIMALS, in violation of 21 O.S. 1685, Class: B5
Date of Offense: 03/19/2026

Count # 2. Count as Filed: CF.21.1685.1719.1, CRUELTY TO ANIMALS, in violation of 21 O.S. 1685, Class: B5
Date of Offense: 03/19/2026

05-19-2026 [CTFREE]

HAGIN, Craig Wayne

JUDGE KEVIN KELLER: DEFENDANT PRESENT, NOT IN CUSTODY AND REPRESENTED BY RONALD FRALEY. STATE REPRESENTED BY ELISSA ANDREWS. PRELIMINARY HEARING (ISSUE) PASSED TO 7/7/26 @ 9 AM IN ROOM 347. PASSED AT DEFENSE REQUEST. BOND TO REMAIN; DEFENDANT RECOGNIZED BACK.



COURTS DOCKETS LEGAL RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE OF THE COURTS

The information on this page is NOT an official record. Do not rely on the correctness or completeness of this information. Verify all information with the official record keeper. The information contained in this report is provided in compliance with the Oklahoma Open Records Act, 51 O.S. 24A.1. Use of this information is governed by this act, as well as other applicable state and federal laws.

+ Track Case

IN THE DISTRICT COURT IN AND FOR TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

In Re the marriage of M.M. HAGIN, Petitioner, v. C.W. HAGIN, Respondent.	No. FD-2026-1081 (Family and Domestic: DIVORCE WITHOUT MINOR CHILDREN) Filed: 06/04/2026 Judge: FD Docket A
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PARTIES

HAGIN, C W, Respondent
HAGIN, M M, Petitioner

ATTORNEYS

Attorney TATE, JESSIKA M (Bar #22103) TATE LAW FIRM 510 N SHERIDAN RD SUITE A TULSA, OK 74115	Represented Parties HAGIN, M M
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EVENTS

Get Text Reminders

None

ISSUES

For cases filed before 1/1/2000, ancillary issues may not appear except in the docket.

Issue # 1. Issue: DIVORCE WITHOUT MINOR CHILDREN (DIVWOMC)
Filed By: HAGIN, M M
Filed Date: 06/04/2026

Party Name	Disposition Information
	Pending.

DOCKET

Date	Code	Description	Party	Count	Amount
06-04-2026	[TEXT]	FAMILY AND DOMESTIC INITIAL FILING.		#1	
06-04-2026	[DIVWOMC]	DIVORCE WITHOUT MINOR CHILDREN			

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF TULSA COUNTY
STATE OF OKLAHOMA

In Re the Marriage of:

M. M. HAGIN,

Petitioner,

and

C. W. HAGIN,

Respondent.

FILED
 DISTRICT COURT
 TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA
 June 5, 2026 1:05 PM
 DON NEWBERRY, COURT CLERK
 Case Number FD-2026-1081

Case Number **FD-2026-1081**

AMENDED MOTION FOR TEMPORARY ORDER

Biblically, credible information inconsistent with ministry leadership would include patterns of sexual immorality, deception, abuse of power, violence or intimidation, lack of self-control, financial dishonesty, spiritual manipulation, failure to protect the vulnerable, retaliation against truth-tellers, or refusal to repent. The standard is not perfection, but Scripture does require leaders to be above reproach, self-controlled, gentle, faithful, honest, humble, and accountable.

The Bible does not require leaders to be flawless, but it does require them to be trustworthy. When credible information points to sexual misconduct, deception, abuse, coercion, intimidation, financial dishonesty, spiritual manipulation, or refusal to repent, that is not a public-relations problem. That is a biblical leadership problem.

Biblical Summary

In Scripture, leaders are expected to be above reproach, faithful, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, gentle, honest, hospitable, not violent, not greedy, not domineering, and able to care for those entrusted to them. The standard is character under pressure, not image under applause.

1. Sexual immorality or sexual exploitation

What it includes: This includes adultery, sexual secrecy, pornography-driven behavior, sexual coercion, exploitation, grooming, or any sexual conduct that violates covenant, consent, holiness, or trust.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:2 says an overseer must be above reproach and faithful to his wife. Titus 1:6-8 requires leaders to be blameless, self-controlled, holy, and disciplined. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 says believers are called to holiness and not sexual immorality.

Plain language: A ministry leader cannot preach holiness publicly while living in sexual deception privately.

2. Violence, intimidation, harshness, or abuse

What it includes: A leader who uses fear, rage, threats, intimidation, cruelty, violence, or abusive control is operating against the nature of Christlike leadership.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:3 says a leader must not be violent but gentle. Titus 1:7 says a leader must not be violent, quick-tempered, or overbearing. Psalm 11:5 says God hates the one who loves violence. Colossians 3:19 warns husbands not to be harsh with their wives.

Plain language: A ministry leader cannot be entrusted to shepherd people while terrorizing, controlling, or harming people.

3. Lack of self-control

What it includes: Addictions, compulsions, rage, sexual acting out, substance misuse, uncontrolled appetites, or repeated reckless behavior matter because leadership requires discipline.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:2 requires self-control. Titus 1:8 requires discipline. Galatians 5:22-23 lists self-control as fruit of the Spirit. Proverbs 25:28 says a person without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Plain language: When someone cannot govern themselves, they should not govern spiritual matters affecting others.

4. Deception, lying, secrecy, or double-life behavior

What it includes: This includes hiding misconduct, misleading people, manipulating facts, concealing risk, or presenting one image publicly while living another privately.

Biblical standard: Ephesians 4:25 says to put away falsehood and speak truth. Proverbs 12:22 says lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. Luke 12:2 says nothing covered will remain hidden. 2 Corinthians 8:21 says to do what is honorable not only before God but before people.

Plain language: A double life destroys ministry credibility because ministry leadership depends on trust.

5. Abuse of spiritual authority

What it includes: This includes using Scripture, title, family name, pulpit authority, prayer, prophecy, submission language, or loyalty language to control, silence, threaten, or pressure others.

Biblical standard: 1 Peter 5:2-3 tells leaders not to domineer over those entrusted to them. Matthew 20:25-28 says kingdom leadership is servant leadership, not domination. Matthew 23:4 condemns leaders who place heavy burdens on others without helping them. James 3:1 says teachers will be judged more strictly.

Plain language: Spiritual authority is not permission to control people. It is a higher burden to protect them.

6. Failure to protect the vulnerable

What it includes: A leader who ignores, minimizes, enables, conceals, or mishandles harm against women, children, victims, the weak, or the oppressed is violating a core biblical duty.

Biblical standard: Proverbs 31:8-9 says to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Psalm 82:3-4 says to defend the weak and rescue them from the wicked. Isaiah 1:17 says to seek justice and correct oppression. Luke 17:2 gives a severe warning about causing little ones to stumble.

Plain language: A leader who protects image over vulnerable people has failed the shepherding test.

7. Greed, financial dishonesty, or misuse of resources

What it includes: This includes exploiting ministry money, donors, staff, followers, organizational systems, or church resources for personal gain, concealment, or control.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:3 says a leader must not be a lover of money. Titus 1:7 says a leader must not pursue dishonest gain. 1 Peter 5:2 says leaders must not serve for shameful gain. 2 Corinthians 8:20-21 emphasizes financial accountability and avoiding suspicion in handling resources.

Plain language: Ministry money and resources are stewardship, not entitlement.

8. Pride, arrogance, or being unteachable

What it includes: A leader who cannot receive correction, refuses accountability, attacks questioners, or treats himself as untouchable is biblically disqualified in character.

Biblical standard: Titus 1:7 says a leader must not be arrogant or overbearing. Proverbs 16:18 says pride goes before destruction. James 4:6 says God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Galatians 2:11-14 shows Paul publicly correcting Peter when Peter was wrong.

Plain language: No leader is too anointed to be corrected.

9. Quarrelsomeness, slander, retaliation, or attacking accusers

What it includes: A leader who responds to legitimate concern by attacking, smearing, threatening, retaliating, or destroying credibility is not demonstrating biblical maturity.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:3 says a leader must not be quarrelsome. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 says the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind and able to correct with gentleness. Proverbs 10:18 warns against slander. Romans 12:17-19 warns against repaying evil for evil or taking revenge.

Plain language: Accountability does not attack truth-tellers. It investigates truth.

10. Drunkenness, substance misuse, or impaired judgment

What it includes: The Bible specifically includes sobriety and sound-mindedness as leadership standards because a leader's judgment affects others.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:2-3 says a leader must be sober-minded and not given to drunkenness. Titus 1:7 says a leader must not be given to drunkenness. Ephesians 5:18 warns against drunkenness and calls believers to be filled with the Spirit.

Plain language: A leader's judgment matters because people are affected by their decisions.

11. Poor management of household or family responsibilities

What it includes: This does not mean a leader's family must be perfect. It means a leader's home life, patterns of care, relational integrity, and household stewardship matter.

Biblical standard: 1 Timothy 3:4-5 says a leader must manage his own household well, because if he cannot care for his household, how can he care for God's church? Titus 1:6 also connects leadership credibility with household order and faithfulness.

Plain language: Private conduct is not irrelevant when public ministry depends on moral trust.


12. Refusal to repent

What it includes: Failure is serious, but refusal to repent, submit to accountability, make restitution, change behavior, or accept consequences is even more serious.

Biblical standard: Matthew 3:8 says to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Luke 17:3 says if someone sins, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 describes godly sorrow producing earnestness, accountability, and change. Galatians 6:7 says a person reaps what they sow.

Plain language: Being sorry exposure happened is not the same as repentance.

Biblically, credible information inconsistent with ministry leadership would include patterns of sexual immorality, deception, abuse of power, violence or intimidation, lack of self-control, financial dishonesty, spiritual manipulation, failure to protect the vulnerable, retaliation against truth-tellers, or refusal to repent. The standard is not perfection, but Scripture does require leaders to be above reproach, self-controlled, gentle, faithful, honest, humble, and accountable.



As we sit with the weight of this announcement, one thing becomes clear: moments like this aren't just organizational decisions — they're ethical crossroads. They force us to confront the gap between what a ministry, a leader, or a community says it stands for and the choices made behind the scenes. And when that gap widens, people get hurt, trust is shaken, and accountability becomes more than a principle — it becomes a necessity.”

Next, we're going to step back from the specifics of this situation and talk about the broader issue: ethics in leadership.

What does ethical stewardship actually look like?

How do organizations protect people, not just reputations?

And why is transparency — even when it's painful — a cornerstone of integrity?”

What Is Accountability?

Accountability is more than admitting a mistake. It is the willingness to own both the behavior and the impact of that behavior.

True accountability includes Honesty Facing the reality of one's actions without denial, minimization, or excuses.

Transparency Communicating clearly about what happened, what is being done, and what consequences or safeguards are necessary.

Responsibility Accepting the effect one's actions had on others, even when the intent was different from the impact. Repair Taking concrete steps to restore trust where possible.

Changed Behavior Demonstrating growth through consistent actions over time, not just emotional words in the moment.

Accountability matters because it builds trust, strengthens emotional maturity, protects relationships, and creates safer organizations. Accountable people understand that discomfort is part of growth. They do not treat correction as persecution. They understand that owning harm is not weakness; it is integrity

Understanding DARVO

DARVO is a response pattern often seen when someone is confronted with wrongdoing, harm, misconduct, abuse, betrayal, or unethical behavior.

DARVO has three parts:

Deny The person rejects, minimizes, or reframes the concern. Examples: “That never happened.” “You are exaggerating.” “You misunderstood.” “You are being too sensitive.”

Attack The person shifts attention away from their behavior and attacks the credibility, motives, emotions, history, or character of the person confronting them. Examples: “You are unstable.” “You are bitter.” “You just want attention.” “You are trying to destroy me.” “You are the real problem.”

Reverse Victim and Offender The person presents themselves as the victim and the harmed person as the offender. Examples: “I cannot believe you would do this to me.” “You are ruining my reputation.” “You are attacking my family/ministry/career.” “I am the one being abused here.” DARVO can be deliberate, habitual, defensive, or part of a larger pattern of manipulation. Regardless of motive, its function is the same: it avoids responsibility and shifts the emotional burden onto the person seeking truth.

Why Accountability and DARVO Are Mutually Exclusive

Accountability and DARVO cannot coexist because they are built on opposing foundations.

Accountability requires facing reality. DARVO requires denying or distorting reality.

Accountability accepts responsibility. DARVO shifts blame.

Accountability centers the harm done. DARVO centers the discomfort of the person being confronted.

Accountability repairs trust. DARVO deepens confusion, fear, guilt, and relational damage. **Accountability asks**, “What did I do, and how do I make it right?” **DARVO asks**, “How do I escape consequences and regain control of the narrative?”

When DARVO is present, the conversation usually stops being about truth and becomes about managing the accused person’s reaction.

The harmed person may leave the conversation feeling confused, guilty, defensive, ashamed, or unsure whether their experience was real. That is the danger. **DARVO does not just avoid accountability. It punishes the pursuit of accountability.**

Signs DARVO May Be Happening

DARVO may be present when someone: Immediately denies without reflection.

Minimizes the harm.

Attacks your character instead of addressing the concern.

Changes the subject to your tone, timing, motives, or emotions.

Claims they are the real victim.

Uses spiritual, family, professional, or organizational language to pressure you into silence.

Focuses more on their reputation than the harm caused.

Demands forgiveness without repair.

Treats consequences as persecution.

Makes you feel guilty for naming what happened

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DARVO Inside Organizations

DARVO does not only happen in personal relationships. It can happen inside churches, workplaces, ministries, schools, nonprofits, families, and institutions.

Organizational DARVO may sound like:

“You are hurting the mission.”

“You are causing division.”

“You should have handled this privately.”

“You are attacking leadership.”

“You are bitter.”

“You are damaging the organization’s reputation.”

“This is gossip.”

“We need to move forward.”

“We need to focus on restoration.”

These phrases can sound spiritual or professional, but **when they are used to avoid truth, silence victims, protect leadership, or bypass accountability, they become part of the harm.** Healthy organizations do not punish people for raising legitimate concerns. Healthy organizations investigate, document, protect, respond, and repair

When Accountability Improves, DARVO Reduces

DARVO thrives where accountability is weak. The less a person or organization is willing to own harm, the more likely they are to deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender.

But when accountability increases, DARVO loses power. Accountability anchors truth. DARVO thrives on distortion.

Accountability accepts consequences. DARVO avoids consequences.

Accountability builds trust. DARVO corrodes trust.

Accountability creates safety. DARVO creates confusion.

Accountability protects people. DARVO protects image.

Where accountability grows, DARVO shrinks. Where responsibility is embraced, denial loses its grip. Where truth is honored, reversal tactics fail.

Where humility enters, attack becomes unnecessary. Where integrity deepens, manipulation loses power

Protecting yourself from DARVO

When DARVO is happening, the goal is not to win an argument. The goal is to protect your clarity, safety, and integrity.

Helpful steps include: Stay grounded in facts. Return to the specific behavior, impact, and concern. Do not chase every accusation.

DARVO often works by pulling you into defending yourself instead of addressing the original issue.

Document what happened. Keep records, dates, messages, timelines, and summaries.

Set boundaries. Accountability cannot be forced through endless arguing.

Seek outside support.

Trusted advocates, counselors, supervisors, legal professionals, or trained support services can help you stay clear.

Watch behavior over words. **Real accountability produces changed behavior**, not just emotional explanations

Conclusion, Truth or Evasion

Accountability and DARVO sit on opposite sides of the truth.

One creates repair. The other creates confusion.

One builds trust. The other protects ego, image, power, or control.

One says, “I will own the harm.” The other says, “I will make you regret naming it.”

In relationships, workplaces, churches, families, and organizations, choosing accountability is not optional if safety and trust matter.

You cannot build healthy relationships on denial. You cannot build safe organizations on blame-shifting.

You cannot heal harm by reversing victim and offender. You cannot restore trust without truth.

Simply put: **When accountability improves, DARVO reduces—because truth leaves no room for distortion**

ETHICS

DARVO exposes deception. Accountability confronts responsibility.

But ethics brings us back to righteousness — not image, not influence, not institutional survival, but doing what is right before God and people.

True leadership is not measured by how well it protects a name. It is measured by how faithfully it protects the vulnerable.

What Ethics Means in Leadership

Ethics is not public relations.

Ethics is the disciplined practice of choosing what is right, just, truthful, and protective when power, reputation, money, relationships, and fear are all in the room.

Ethics asks who has been harmed, who has power, who has a duty to act, and who is being protected.

Ethics prioritizes truth over comfort and safety over image management.

Ethics requires leaders to act consistently, not selectively, based on status, money, family ties, popularity, or institutional risk.

Ethics does not confuse forgiveness with the removal of consequences.

. Ethical Leadership Standards

Standard	Ethical Question	Failure Pattern
Truthfulness	Are we telling the whole truth, or only what protects the organization?	Minimizing, vague statements, “rumors” language, half-truths.
Protection of the vulnerable	Are victims, children, witnesses, and whistleblowers safer because of our response?	Protecting the accused while isolating the harmed.
Accountability	Are consequences tied to conduct and responsibility?	Private forgiveness used to bypass public responsibility.
Transparency	Are decisions, conflicts of interest, and processes clear enough to be trusted?	Secret handling, insider protection, no documented process.
Impartiality	Would we respond the same way if this person had no title, money, family role, or influence?	Double standards for powerful or well-liked people.
Repair	Are we addressing the harm, not just controlling the story?	Reputation management dressed up as restoration.

What Ethics Means in Leadership



Ethical Red Flags After Harm Is Disclosed

The organization moves faster to defend the accused than to protect the harmed.

Victims are pressured to stay quiet “for unity,” “for the church,” or “to avoid division.”

Leaders ask for grace for the offender but offer little safety, clarity, or repair for victims.

The concern is framed as gossip, bitterness, rebellion, or attack instead of being investigated on its merits.

A leader’s family, finances, influence, or platform quietly shapes the response.

Restoration is discussed before truth, accountability, consequences, or victim safety are established.

The process is private when secrecy protects the institution, but public when pressure is placed on the victim.

Faith-Based Ethical Lens

For ministry leadership, ethics is not separate from faith. It is part of faithfulness. Scripture consistently connects leadership with truth, justice, protection of the vulnerable, humility, and fruit that can be examined.

Scripture	Ethical principle
Micah 6:8	Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.
Proverbs 31:8-9	Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of the poor and needy.
Isaiah 1:17	Learn to do right; seek justice; defend the oppressed.
Matthew 7:15-20	Fruit reveals the true nature of a tree.
Luke 17:1-3	Jesus warns against causing little ones to stumble and calls for rebuke when sin occurs.
1 Timothy 3:1-7	Leaders must be above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, and well thought of.
James 3:1	Teachers are judged with greater strictness.
Ephesians 5:11	Have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness, but expose them.

Ethical Response Framework

When harm is disclosed, an ethical organization should move through a clear, documented process:

- Receive: Listen without intimidation, spiritual pressure, or retaliation.
- Protect: Address immediate safety for victims, children, witnesses, and vulnerable people.
- Document: Record what was disclosed, who was notified, what steps were taken, and when.
- Report: Contact appropriate legal, child protection, law enforcement, licensing, or governing authorities when required.
- Separate roles: Remove conflicts of interest. Do not let close friends, relatives, direct supervisors, or financial beneficiaries control the review.
- Investigate: Seek facts through an impartial process that does not retraumatize the harmed.
- Act: Apply consequences based on conduct, risk, role, and responsibility.
- Repair: Provide support, resources, apology where appropriate, policy correction, and measurable follow-up.
- Review: Ask what the system missed and what must change so the harm is less likely to repeat.

Accountability Is Not Revenge

A common manipulation tactic is to label accountability as bitterness, revenge, unforgiveness, or an attack. That is dishonest.

Ethical accountability is about protection, truth, repair, and prevention.

Accountability	Revenge
Seeks truth and safety.	Seeks personal harm or humiliation.
Uses evidence, process, and proportional consequences.	Uses retaliation or unchecked emotion.
Protects future victims.	Focuses only on payback.
Allows real repentance to be tested by fruit.	Demands punishment without regard for repair.
Requires leaders to own their duty.	Can become personal vengeance if not grounded.



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Ethical accountability is about protection, truth, repair, and prevention.

Quick Ethics Checklist

- Have we listened to the harmed without pressure or intimidation?
- Have we protected vulnerable people immediately?
- Have we documented the concern and our response?
- Have we reported to outside authorities when required?
- Have we removed conflicts of interest?
- Have we avoided spiritual language that pressures silence?
- Have we applied the same standard regardless of title or influence?
- Have we separated forgiveness, restoration, and leadership eligibility?
- Have we measured repair and prevention, not just issued a statement?

Ethics is the line between real restoration and reputation management. It requires truth, protection, accountability, transparency, and repair. Any church, ministry, nonprofit, or system that claims to care about people must be willing to examine not only what happened, but how it responded after it knew.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN IMAGE PROTECTION AND ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

ASPECT	IMAGE PROTECTION	ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY
 <p>1. Level of Problem Analysis</p>	<p>REPUTATION / INDIVIDUAL “Who caused this, and how do we control the fallout?” Protects the name, the platform, and the image.</p>	<p>SYSTEM / SAFETY “What happened, who was harmed, and what needs to change so this does not happen again?” Examines culture, power, policies, and prevention.</p>
 <p>2. Focus</p>	<p>PERSON / PLATFORM / PERCEPTION “Who did this?” “Who is talking?” “How do we stop the damage?”</p>	<p>TRUTH / HARM / REPAIR “What happened here?” “Who was impacted?” “What is needed for safety and repair?”</p>
 <p>3. Intent</p>	<p>CONTROL / CONTAINMENT “Keep this quiet.” “Move on.” “Protect the ministry / organization.”</p>	<p>TRUTH / SAFETY / CONSEQUENCES / GROWTH “Tell the truth responsibly.” “Protect those harmed.” “Remove access to power when necessary.”</p>
 <p>4. Response to Harm</p>	<p>DENY / MINIMIZE / ATTACK / REVERSE “That didn’t happen.” “You’re causing division.” “You’re hurting the mission.”</p>	<p>ACKNOWLEDGE / INVESTIGATE / PROTECT / REPAIR “We will take this seriously.” “We will document concerns and protect from retaliation.”</p>
 <p>5. Treatment of Victims and Families</p>	<p>PRESSURE / SILENCE “Don’t talk about this.” “Forgive and move on.” Places the burden on the harmed person to protect the institution.</p>	<p>CARE / PROTECTION / SUPPORT “Are you safe?” “What support is needed?” Prioritizes victims, children, families, staff, and members.</p>
 <p>6. Outcome</p>	<p>COVER-UP / CONFUSION / REPEAT HARM People stop reporting. Trust collapses. Harm repeats because the system never learns.</p>	<p>TRUTH / LEARNING / SAFER SYSTEMS Reporting pathways improve. Victims are treated with dignity. Trust can begin to rebuild because truth is not treated as the enemy.</p>

Spiritual Manipulation

After we talk about the church announcement, DARVO, accountability, and ethics, the next layer is **spiritual manipulation**.

Because sometimes the issue is not just what happened — it is how spiritual language is used afterward to control the response. Spiritual manipulation happens when Scripture, authority, honor culture, forgiveness, grace, loyalty, or “touch not God’s anointed” language is used to silence victims, rush forgiveness, protect reputations, or make people feel like questioning harm is the same as questioning God.

Common tactics of spiritual abuse include guilt, fear, shame, isolation, and twisting biblical principles. A victim may be told they are divisive for speaking up, bitter for wanting accountability, rebellious for asking questions, or unforgiving for needing safety and truth. Supporters may be pressured to stay silent “for the sake of unity,” while the person harmed is expected to carry the burden of protecting the institution’s image. That is not biblical restoration. That is control dressed up in religious language.

True spiritual leadership does not manipulate people into silence. It protects the vulnerable, tells the truth, submits to accountability, and understands that grace does not erase consequences. Forgiveness is not the same thing as access. Mercy is not the same thing as enabling. And unity that requires victims to be quiet while harm is minimized is not unity — it is preservation of power.

One of the clearest signs of spiritual manipulation is when Scripture is used to protect power instead of protect people. The Bible should lead us into truth, repentance, justice, mercy, and safety — not fear, silence, and cover-up.

Manipulated verse / phrase	How it is commonly manipulated	Healthier biblical understanding
Psalm 105:15 / 1 Chronicles 16:22 — “Touch not mine anointed...”	Used to silence anyone who questions a pastor, leader, minister, or organization.	This verse does not mean leaders are above correction. Biblical leaders are accountable to God, Scripture, and the body.
Hebrews 13:17 — “Obey them that have the rule over you...”	Used to demand unquestioned obedience to church leadership.	Spiritual leadership is stewardship, not domination. Obedience does not require submitting to abuse, cover-ups, or unethical conduct.
Romans 13:1 — “Submit to governing authorities...”	Used to tell people they must submit to all authority, even harmful authority.	Authority is not a blank check. When authority protects evil or violates God’s justice, Scripture gives examples of righteous resistance.
Matthew 18:15-17 — “Go to your brother privately...”	Used to force victims into private meetings with offenders or prevent public accountability.	Matthew 18 is not a tool to hide abuse. Crimes, safety concerns, and leadership misconduct may require outside reporting and broader accountability.
1 Peter 4:8 — “Love covers a multitude of sins.”	Used to pressure people to hide sin, abuse, or misconduct.	Love does not cover up harm. Biblical love seeks truth, repentance, restoration, and protection of the vulnerable.
Ephesians 4:32 — “Forgiving one another...”	Used to rush victims into forgiveness before safety, truth, or accountability.	Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, restored access, or removal of consequences.

One of the clearest signs of spiritual manipulation is when Scripture is used to protect power instead of protect people. The Bible should lead us into truth, repentance, justice, mercy, and safety — not fear, silence, and cover-up.

Matthew 6:14-15 — “If you do not forgive...”	Used to scare victims into silence by making them feel spiritually endangered if they are still processing harm.	Forgiveness should not be weaponized. God cares about justice, healing, and truth, not forced emotional compliance.
Luke 6:37 — “Judge not...”	Used to shut down discernment, correction, or exposing wrongdoing.	Scripture warns against hypocritical judgment, not righteous discernment. Believers are also told to test fruit and confront sin.
Proverbs 10:12 — “Love covers all offenses.”	Used to suggest loving people means staying quiet about serious harm.	Love may cover minor offenses, but it does not conceal abuse, exploitation, or corruption.
1 Corinthians 13:7 — “Love bears all things...”	Used to pressure people to endure mistreatment in the name of love.	Love is not enabling. Biblical love does not require tolerating abuse or protecting offenders from consequences.
Malachi 3:10 — “Bring the full tithe...”	Used to pressure people financially, imply poverty is caused by disobedience, or guilt people into giving beyond their capacity.	Giving should not be coerced. Scripture teaches generosity, but also condemns exploiting the vulnerable.
2 Corinthians 9:7 — “God loves a cheerful giver.”	Twisted to shame people for not giving enough or to manipulate emotional giving.	This verse actually says giving should not be done reluctantly or under compulsion.
Jeremiah 29:11 — “Plans to prosper you...”	Used to promise outcomes God did not personally promise, sometimes to keep people loyal to a leader’s vision.	The verse has a real historical context. It can encourage hope, but it should not be used as a guarantee of someone’s agenda.
Philippians 4:13 — “I can do all things...”	Used to pressure people to endure impossible demands, burnout, or abuse.	Paul was speaking about contentment through Christ, not becoming endlessly available or spiritually invincible.
James 1:2 — “Count it all joy...”	Used to minimize suffering or tell victims to be happy about harm.	Trials can produce endurance, but that does not make abuse acceptable or remove the need for protection.

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James 1:2 — “Count it all joy...”	Used to minimize suffering or tell victims to be happy about harm.	Trials can produce endurance, but that does not make abuse acceptable or remove the need for protection.
Genesis 50:20 — “You meant evil... God meant it for good.”	Used to tell victims their abuse was part of God’s plan, sometimes before they have even healed.	God can redeem evil, but that does not mean God approved the evil or that offenders should avoid accountability.
Romans 8:28 — “All things work together for good...”	Used to minimize trauma by saying “God will use it,” instead of addressing harm.	God’s redemption is real, but this verse should not be used to bypass grief, justice, safety, or responsibility.
Ephesians 5:22 — “Wives, submit to your husbands...”	Used to keep women in abusive marriages or silence them under male authority.	Submission is never permission for abuse. The same passage commands husbands to love sacrificially, not dominate.
1 Corinthians 6:1-7 — Lawsuits among believers	Used to discourage victims from seeking legal help, police protection, or civil accountability.	This passage should not be used to hide crimes or prevent lawful protection. Abuse and exploitation may require outside authorities.
Proverbs 19:11 — “It is his glory to overlook an offense.”	Used to pressure people to ignore repeated harm or serious misconduct.	Overlooking a minor offense is not the same as ignoring patterns of abuse, danger, deception, or exploitation.
Titus 3:10 — “Warn a divisive person...”	Used to label whistleblowers or victims as divisive.	A person exposing harm is not automatically divisive. Sometimes the division is caused by the wrongdoing, not by the person naming it.
1 Samuel 24 — David refusing to harm Saul	Used to teach that people must never confront abusive leaders.	David refused personal revenge, but he still fled from Saul, named the danger, and did not stay under unsafe authority.
Numbers 12 — Miriam and Aaron opposing Moses	Used to scare people away from questioning leadership.	This story is not a universal ban on confronting leaders. Scripture also shows prophets, apostles, and ordinary believers correcting leaders.

One of the clearest signs of spiritual manipulation is when Scripture is used to protect power instead of protect people. The Bible should lead us into truth, repentance, justice, mercy, and safety — not fear, silence, and cover-up.

Matthew 5:39 — “Turn the other cheek.”

Used to tell victims to keep accepting abuse.

This is about refusing personal retaliation, not remaining in danger or allowing ongoing harm.

John 8:7 — “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”

Used to suggest no one can hold anyone accountable because everyone sins.

Jesus stopped hypocrisy and execution, but He still said, “Go and sin no more.” Mercy and accountability both remain.

When Scripture is used to control, silence, shame, or protect power, that is not the heart of God. God is truth, God is light, God is justice, God is mercy, and God is a defender of the vulnerable. His character never requires victims to disappear so leaders can stay comfortable.

And I want to close with this: these things do not stop with one announcement, one church conflict, one leadership failure, or one family crisis.

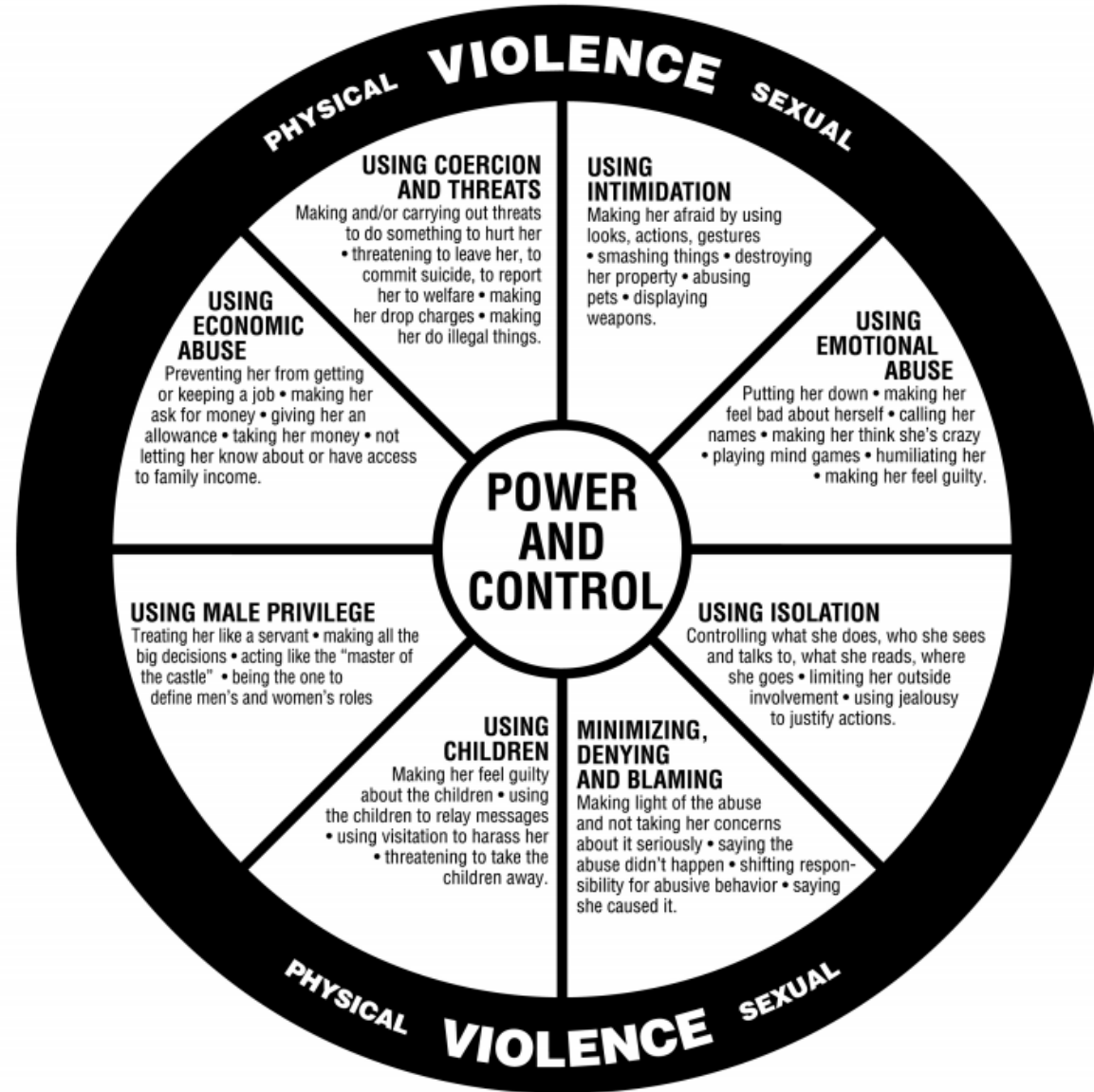
DARVO, lack of accountability, unethical leadership, and spiritual manipulation do not just impact adults in the moment — they shape families, children, and generations.

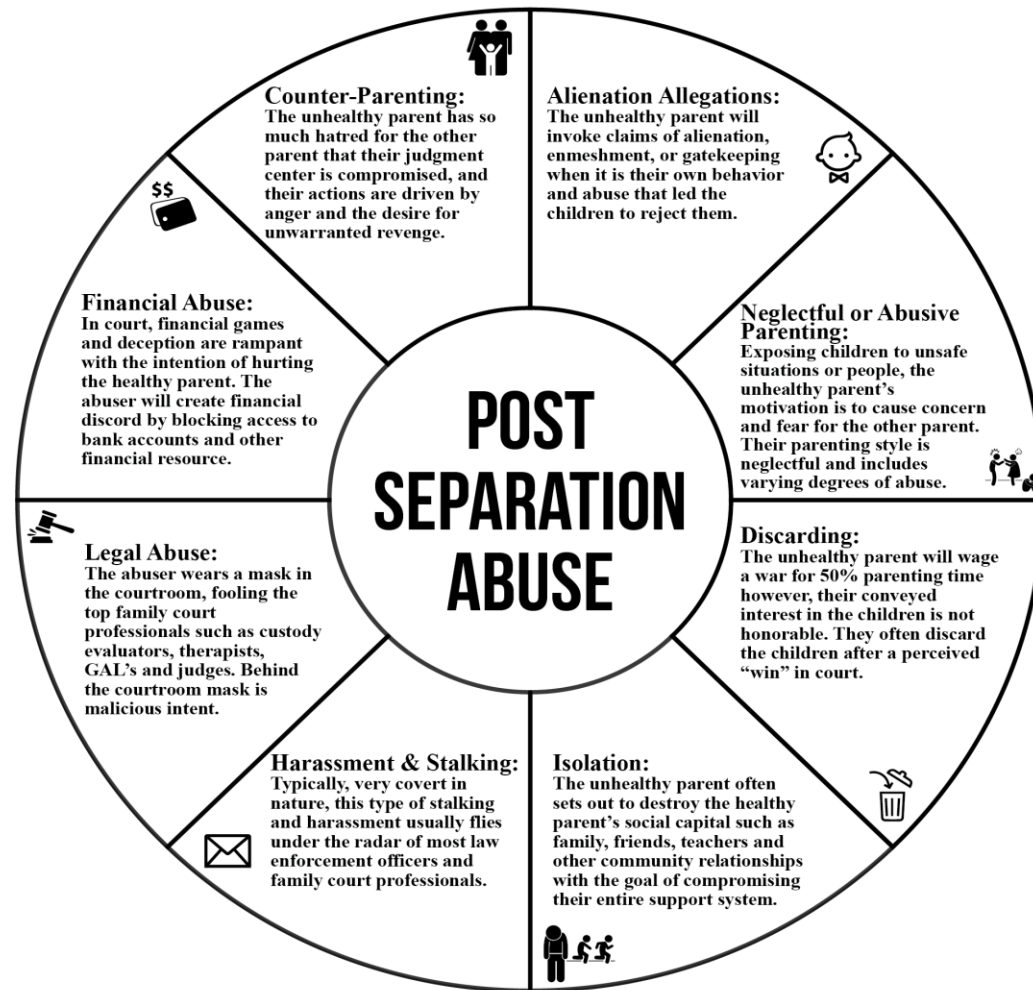
Children learn from what we normalize. They learn whether truth is safe. They learn whether harm gets addressed or hidden. They learn whether power protects people or protects itself.

When families and communities excuse abuse, silence victims, or call accountability “division,” the next generation inherits confusion, fear, mistrust, and broken patterns. But when we tell the truth, protect the vulnerable, repent where we have failed, and choose courage over comfort, we create a different legacy.

We show our children that love is not pretending harm did not happen. Faith is not silence. Grace is not enabling. And forgiveness does not require abandoning wisdom, safety, or justice.

Every generation has a choice. We can pass down denial, secrecy, and spiritual language that protects power — **or we can pass down truth, healing, courage, and a faith that actually reflects the character of God.** The legacy we leave will not be measured by how well we protected an image. It will be measured by whether our children and grandchildren were safer, freer, and more whole because we chose to do what was right.





EMOTIONAL ABUSE

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Emotional abuse involves actions such as controlling another person by using emotions to criticise, embarrass, shame, blame, or otherwise manipulate them.

Emotional abuse can happen in all kinds of relationships, including in intimate relationships, friendships, family relationships, and in work settings.

It is common that emotional abuse happens in combination with other forms of abuse or coercive control.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Emotional abuse can look like:

- Constantly checking on or attempting to control the other person's behaviour
- Isolating the individual from their family and friends
- Name-calling and belittling
- Shaming or blaming
- Silent treatment
- Withholding affection and attention as a form of punishment
- Gaslighting
- Constantly arguing or criticising



IMPACTS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

The challenge with emotional abuse is often that it is invisible to those around us, and as such, may cause us to carry further shame and denial around what is occurring.

Emotional abuse, much like physical abuse, certainly leaves scars. When exposed to emotional abuse, you may experience psychological effects, such as a diminished sense of self and lowered self-esteem, along with increased anxiety and worry. It can also result in physical symptoms such as stomach ulcers, heart palpitations, and insomnia.

THE CYCLE OF ABUSE

While not all abuse occurs in a clear cycle, the cycle of abuse is a helpful model to understand what abuse can commonly look like. The cycle of abuse is split into four stages to help people recognise common patterns and reasons why it may be difficult for the person experiencing the abuse to leave their situation. The four stages are:

1 Tension

In this stage, external stressors become apparent to the abuser, e.g. financial issues or work-related concerns). The abused partner tends to try and find ways to ease the tension.

2 Incident

Eventually, the tension will build up to the point of eruption. The abuser feels the need to “release” to help them feel as though they are back in control and in power. This will result in abusive behaviour towards the abused partner.

3 Reconciliation

Sometime after the incident, reconciliation occurs (also referred to as the honeymoon phase). Here, the abuser goes above and beyond to show love and affection towards the abused partner, often through grand gestures. For the abused partner, this results in positive feelings through the release of dopamine and serotonin.

4 Calm

During the period of calm, both partners may engage in justifying or excusing the abusive behaviours to help with getting back to the “status quo” and to make themselves feel more comfortable with the experience. Often, the abused partner will engage in self-talk, convincing themselves that the abuse was “not that bad”.

RELATIONSHIP RED FLAGS

As much as we'd like to see the best in our partners, there are times when being aware of and paying attention to "red flags" is critical. Read on below for some common red flags indicating the presence of emotional abuse.



NAME CALLING

Your partner name calls you or demeans you.



SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS

Your partner exerts control over who you can see and when.



EXERTING CONTROL

Your partner tries to control you, your time, and your movements.



MONITORING

Your partner monitors where you go and stalks your whereabouts.



BELITTLING

Your partner often makes you feel silly or dumb by talking down to you.



THREATENING

Your partner makes threats of leaving or causing harm or damage.



GASLIGHTING

Your partner uses manipulation or questions your reality.



SURVEILLING

Your partner monitors you through access to your phone, or your social media.



CRITICISM

Your partner frequently criticises your appearance or what you do.



BLAMING

Your partner blames you for their unhealthy or abusive actions.



WITHHOLDING AFFECTION

Your partner punishes you by withholding attention or affection.



LOVE BOMBING

Your partner overloads you with compliments and gifts and then uses these actions to manipulate you.

THINGS TO AVOID WITH EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Of course, when it comes to emotional abuse, you should take action to address it or to remove yourself from the abusive environment. There are, however, some strategies that will not serve you well when it comes to addressing emotional abuse and that may escalate the abusive behaviours further.

Read on below for three examples of actions and strategies that do not work with emotional abuse.

ARGUING WITH THE ABUSER

Trying to argue with an abusive person can escalate the problem further and may result in violence. There is no way to argue with an abuser because the reality is that they will always find more ways to blame, shame, or criticise you. This may also result in gaslighting behaviours where the abuser may use manipulation, demeaning language, or try to make themselves out to be the victim.

ATTEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND OR MAKE EXCUSES FOR THE ABUSER

We all want to believe the best in people close to us, and as such, it might be tempting to try to make sense of the other person's behaviour or to come up with excuses to justify their actions. Trying to find ways to sympathise with or minimise an abuser's actions can make leaving the situation more difficult and may cause you to build a stronger and harder-to-break trauma bond.

ATTEMPTING TO APPEASE THE ABUSER

Appeasing the other person might seem like a quick and efficient way to de-escalate the conflict or abuse. However, this tends to backfire quickly and may instead enable further abuse. Instead of trying to change yourself or adjust your behaviours to meet the abuser's wants and needs, focus on setting and maintaining clear boundaries and avoid engaging with them where and if possible.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Psychological trauma is a person's experience of emotional distress resulting from a dangerous or upsetting situation that is not able to be easily resolved or managed.

Most of us will at some point in our lives experience a traumatic event of some kind. This may involve a car accident, a sudden death or a complicated medical emergency. While some will come out fine following this, others may develop symptoms that last a lifetime.



THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

When we are in a dangerous or potentially harmful situation our stress response will be triggered in the body. Short term this results in fight, flight or freeze responses. Many individual will be able to come out of this and return to normal without any major concerns, however for some, the effects of trauma can be long-lasting and devastating. Individuals who develop PTSD as a result of trauma may experience for example flashbacks, hyper-vigilance, significant mood fluctuations, nightmares, and somatic symptoms.

WHAT CAUSES TRAUMA?

There are many different traumatic experiences a person can be exposed to, and the reality is that what is traumatic to one person, may not be traumatic to someone else.

However, there are some general experiences that can overall be classified as traumatic, including any form of abuse (e.g. physical, emotional or sexual), the sudden death of a loved one, accidents resulting in injury or harm (physical or psychological), as well as any form of neglect.

TRAUMA BONDING

WHAT IS TRAUMA BONDING?

Despite popular belief, trauma bonding is not the process of bonding with another person over shared trauma. Instead, trauma bonding is the emotional attachment that can form in abusive relationships.

Trauma bonding is one reason that leaving an abusive relationship can feel complicated and overwhelming. It often involves positive and loving feelings for the abuser, making the abused person feel attached to and dependent on them.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Trauma bonding can be challenging for the individual experiencing it to identify at times. However, there are some common signs to look out for, including:

- Frequently covering up or making excuses for the abuser's behaviour
- Lying to friends or family about the abuse
- Thinking the abuse is your fault
- Believing the abusers promise they'll change (even though they never do)
- The abuse follows a clear cycle

THE 7 STAGES OF BONDING

There are seven generally accepted stages to the trauma bonding process.

These include:

- Love bombing (grand displays of affection)
- Gaining trust
- Criticism
- Manipulation
- Resignation (also known as the fawn response of trauma)
- Distress
- Repetition



SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDING

As an individual experiencing trauma bonding you may...

DEFEND YOUR PARTNERS BEHAVIOUR

1

You may find yourself constantly defending your partner's behaviours to yourself and others. This can include justifying their behaviours by pointing to external factors such as work, finances, stress, or other people. It can also involve blaming yourself for your partner's behaviour.

COVER UP THE ABUSIVE ACTIONS

2

Covering up the abusive actions is a common symptom of trauma bonding. This can be both covering up physical signs of the abuse occurring, such as applying makeup or wearing clothes covering marks, but can also include covering through excuses and explaining away signs of abuse to others around you.

WANT TO HELP THEM "BE BETTER"

3

Many individuals experiencing trauma bonding will find themselves staying in the relationship out of hope or expectation that they can "help" their partner through the struggle or address their "demons" resulting in the abusive behaviours. It is common for partners to feel sorry for their partner and blame previous trauma for their behaviours.

FORGIVE THEIR BEHAVIOUR

4

At the centre of an abusive relationship is often an overly forgiving and understanding partner. You may find yourself feeling sorry for your partner more so than for yourself. You may also find yourself frequently feeling as though you had a role in setting off the abusive behaviour, and as such, may be quick to forgive them for their actions.

ISOLATE YOURSELF

5

Finally, as a trauma-bonded individual, you may frequently isolate yourself from other relationships in your life. This may be to avoid conflict with your partner, but it can also result from wanting to avoid having to face the disapproval of others concerning your relationship.

THE STAGES OF TRAUMA BONDING

While each relationship and experience is unique, there are some common stages of the trauma bonding cycle experienced by many of the abused partners falling victim to trauma bonding. Read on below for the seven stages of trauma bonding.

1

Love bombing. Love bombing is when an individual overwhelms you with grand displays of affection. This may include actions such as sending you extravagant bouquets every day for a week, or telling you that they love you early on in the relationship.

2

Gaining trust. In the second stage, the abuser will perform specific actions to gain your trust. This could include going above and beyond to help you with an issue or challenging task.

3

Criticism. The abuser often criticises the victim to the point where the victim starts to blame themselves for the issue at hand. In many cases, the victim believes they deserve the criticism despite doing nothing wrong.

4

Manipulation. Manipulation of the victim is a common strategy by the abuser. This often involves gaslighting the person into believing they have imagined or exaggerated the issue.

5

Resignation. Resignation, also known as the fawn response, involves the victim following along with the abuser's behaviour without questioning them. This is a form of people-pleasing and occurs as a coping mechanism for survival.

6

Distress. At a point during the abuse, the victim will start to experience intensive psychological distress. This can result in overwhelm and panic; however, it may also result in numbness and a sense of psychological paralysis.

7

Repetition. With abuse, unfortunately, this tends to be a repetitive cycle. While the victim may be aware that the behaviour of the abuser is destructive and damaging, the abused partner may fall victim to the cycle and repeat previous behaviours and stages again and again.

THE FAWN RESPONSE

WHAT IS IT?

Fawning refers to the behaviour of consistently abandoning your own needs in favour of others. This is often done to avoid conflict, criticism, or disapproval.

Fawning can sometimes also be referred to as the “please and appease” response and is associated with people-pleasing.

WHY DOES IT OCCUR?

Fawning often occurs as a result of having experienced trauma or disconnect with caregivers in childhood or adolescence. Individuals who have grown up in abusive or neglectful households are particularly vulnerable to this response, which at its core, is a protective behaviour when experiencing fear and distress.

WHAT DOES FAWNING LOOK LIKE?

Common expressions of fawning may include:

- Being overly compliant.
- Telling others what they think they want to hear.
- Trying to please or satisfy others.
- Putting others needs ahead of their own.
- Difficulty with asking for help.
- Assuming responsibility for other peoples emotional responses.
- Often submitting to what others want.
- Struggling to say “no”.
- Easily giving in to peer pressure.
- Have limited or porous boundaries.
- Over-apologising.
- Changing their preferences to align with others.
- Holding back opinions or preferences that might seem controversial.

BREAKING THE BOND

For most people, leaving a relationship where a trauma bond has formed can be incredibly challenging. Even when the person recognises the relationship is toxic, it does not automatically taint the whole experience as all bad. In all relationships, even abusive ones, there are going to be good times mixed with the bad, and the abused partner may feel genuine love and affection for their abuser.

As difficult as it may be, it is possible to break a trauma bond. Taking the following steps can be a helpful start:

GET EDUCATED

The first step is to reflect on your situation and to learn more about the signs of abuse and trauma bonding. Once you can better see the situation with clarity, you will have more power to act.

CREATE A SUPPORT SYSTEM

It is hard to leave a relationship at the best of times, however when the relationship is abusive there are even more barriers in play. Make sure to confide in people close to you who can assist you with both physical and emotional support as needed.

MAKE A PLAN

Making a plan for how to leave, where to go, and how to avoid unwanted contact is critical. This is even more important if there is a threat of harm. If possible, involve your loved ones in the plan and/or reach out to professional support services such as a local domestic violence helpline.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Be prepared for emotional and physical challenges. It is likely that your partner may try and love bomb you to get you to change your mind, or they may engage in manipulation or threats. Make sure you have a plan for managing these attempts if or when they occur.

MAKE YOUR INTENTIONS CLEAR

Once you have left, it is important that someone tell the abuser of your decision as plainly and clearly as possible. They should convey your wish to neither be called nor visited. A professional such as a social worker may be able to help here.

STAY THE COURSE

It is easy to fall into the pattern of questioning your decision or starting to make excuses for the abuser. To give yourself a chance to gain perspective, allow yourself adequate time for no contact and reach out to professional services as needed for ongoing support.

GASLIGHTING

WHAT IS GASLIGHTING?

Gaslighting is the action of repetitively lying to another person to manipulate and control them and the relationship.

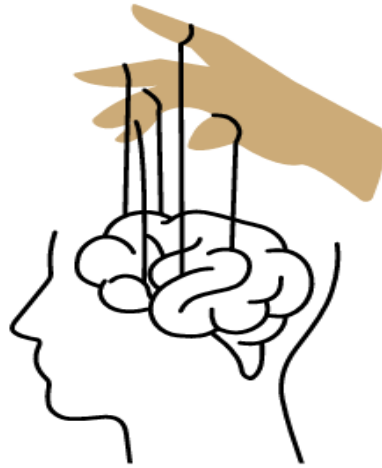
Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse, and the affected person often starts to question their sanity, memories, or perception of reality as a result of the manipulation experienced.

Gaslighting can occur in many different settings and is not something that only happens in intimate relationships.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Gaslighting can happen in a variety of different ways. However, some of the more common forms include:

- Countering by questioning the other person's memory of events.
- Trivialising or belittling the other person's feelings or experience.
- Denying fault and refusing to take responsibility for their actions.
- Questioning the reliability of information put to them.
- "Playing dumb".



WHERE DOES IT OCCUR?

There are several different relationships and settings where gaslighting can occur, including:

- In intimate relationships
- In child-parent relationships
- Racial or ethnic gaslighting (where a larger group is gaslit to discredit the group)
- Workplace-related gaslighting (often occurring between a person in power, such as a supervisor or manager, and their subordinate)

FORMS OF GASLIGHTING

Gaslighting can come in the form of...

COUNTERING

1

This includes making you question reality by saying things such as:

- Are you sure about that? You always have such a bad memory
- I think you are forgetting what happened
- You're overreacting
- It's not a big deal like you're trying to make it out to be

WITHHOLDING

2

This involves the person pretending they don't understand the conversation. They may also refuse to listen to make you doubt yourself. Phrases such as "Now you are just confusing me" or "I have no idea what you are talking about" could be used.

TRIVIALIZING

3

Here, the individual minimises or belittles how you feel about something they have said or done. They might tell you that you are simply overacting (despite your reaction being very reasonable and valid) or that you are being "too sensitive" or precious.

DENIAL

4

Denial involves refusing to take responsibility for their behaviour or words. The person may do this by pretending to forget what happened or saying they didn't do it. They may also blame it on someone or something else, often blaming you for their actions.

DIVERTING

5

Diverting is the action of discrediting you, the facts or the evidence you are presenting to them. Often, this involves them discrediting the source of information by saying things such as, "That is just nonsense you read on some silly website. It is not real."

RESPONDING TO GASLIGHTING

Gaslighting can have a significant impact on your mental health, and whether it happens in an intimate relationship or at work, it is never an okay behaviour. To take back control of your relationship with the other person, it can be helpful to consider a few key steps to respond healthily when experiencing gaslighting.

RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Gaslighting can be hard to recognise. The reality is that the gaslighter is often very skilled at well...gaslighting you. Recognising the signs and patterns of the gaslighting behaviours is step one to addressing your concerns.

TRUST IN YOUR OWN REALITY

It is vital to work on trust and confidence in your reality. This can include keeping a journal or notes about your experiences to see the patterns more clearly, but it also involves kind language and a validating tone toward yourself.

SET BOUNDARIES

In any negative, draining or abusive relationship, it is essential to maintain firm boundaries. Set and communicate your boundaries clearly with the other person, and if needed, reinforce the consequences of breaking the boundaries. Here, it is helpful to practice using assertive language.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE AND COMPASSION

Being around a person who frequently uses gaslighting tactics is exhausting. Make sure to take time out to look after yourself and your needs. Self-compassion is also crucial here, as it is easy to start turning the blame towards yourself when around a person who gaslights.

DISTANCE YOURSELF

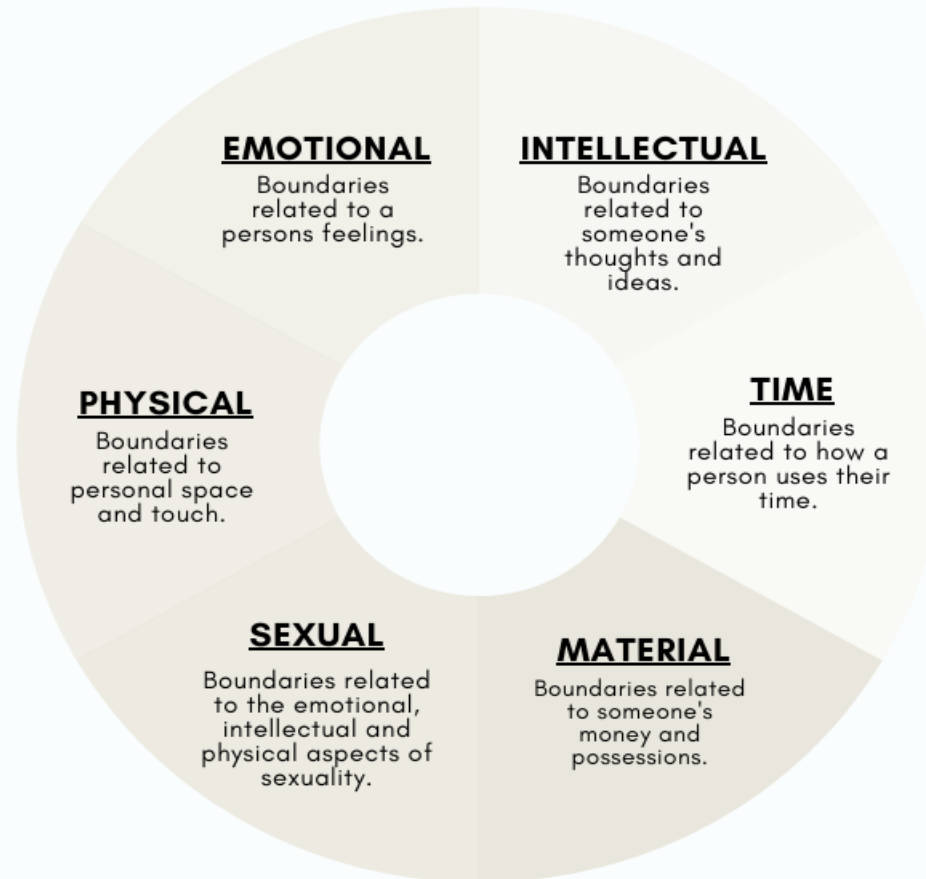
You may need to step back from the relationship with the other person if the gaslighting continues and they fail to respect your boundaries. Whether for a short time or permanently, it is essential to remember that it is okay to step away.

REMEMBER THAT IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT

Whatever happens, remember that this is not your fault. You deserve to feel respected and heard in your relationship and gaslighting behaviours are never productive or positive.

TYPES OF BOUNDARIES

There are many different types of boundaries we can set. Often, we think of boundaries related to emotional and physical needs only. However, it is essential to consider boundaries more widely to build healthy relationships. Read on below for different types of boundaries.



SETTING BOUNDARIES

WHAT TO SAY

"I'm not comfortable with this"

"I'm drawing the line at..."

"I can't do that for you"

"I've decided not to"

"This doesn't work for me"

"Not at this time"

"I don't have the capacity right now"

"I've decided not to"

"I need to ask that you don't do that"

"I disagree with that approach"

"That has not been my experience"

"I'm not comfortable with..."

"This is not acceptable"

"Please don't do that"

WHAT TO DO

USE CONFIDENT BODY LANGUAGE

Face the person you are speaking to, make eye contact, and use a steady tone of voice at an appropriate volume.

PLAN AHEAD

Consider what you want to say and how you will say it before entering a difficult discussion.

BE RESPECTFUL

Avoid yelling, do not attack, or give the silent treatment. It's okay to be firm and concise, but listen actively.

COMPROMISE

When appropriate, listen to and consider the other person's needs. You don't have to compromise, but give-and-take is part of any healthy relationship.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

WHAT IT IS

Assertive communication is a communication style in which a person stands for what they want and need while also considering other people's needs and wants.

This is done without being aggressive or passive.

TRAITS OF ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATORS

- Clearly states their needs and wants
- Confident use of eye contact
- Listens to others without interrupting
- Speak with a balanced tone of voice
- Has a strong and open body language
- Is clear in the message they are relaying

ASSERTIVENESS TIPS

RESPECT YOURSELF

Know what you want and need. It is healthy and okay to express clearly what you need and want, just make sure to also hear the other person while you do it.

STAY CALM

Avoid raising your voice, yelling, name-calling, or storming off. Your best tool is staying calm and remaining collected in the conversation.

PLAN AHEAD

Come prepared with a plan. Think about what you want and need, and be clear about what you are asking of the other person.

SAY "NO" WHEN NEEDED

Boundaries are essential, and sometimes we simply need to say "no". Saying no does not make you a bad person.

RELATIONSHIP GREEN FLAGS

We often hear about the need to look out for “red flags,” but knowing what a healthy relationship looks like is ever more important. Read on for some key “green flags” below.



RESPECT

You respect and value your partner, and express gratitude often.



COMMONALITY

You share important goals, beliefs, and values with your partner.



COMMITMENT

You are invested in your partner and the relationship.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

You communicate your own needs, while also respecting your partners.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

You take responsibility for your actions, and work as a team.



INTIMACY

You feel close and connected with your partner.



EMPATHY

You see your partner’s perspective and understand their feelings.



HONESTY

Your actions align with your words, commitments, and values.



INDEPENDENCE

You have your own separate interests and goals.



CONFIDENCE

You feel comfortable being yourself in the relationship



SAFETY

You respect your partner’s boundaries and feel physically, intellectually and emotionally safe.



BALANCE

You find happiness in time spent together and apart. Some needs are also met outside the relationship through friendships, hobbies, etc.

MY SAFETY PLAN

Name _____

Date _____

Emergency numbers/Crisis services

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

My support people

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

My triggers

My warning signs that I am not doing well

How I can limit means

Appointments scheduled

Provider:	Date/time:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the next 24 hours I will...

MY SAFETY PLAN

Name _____

Date _____

Emergency numbers/Crisis services

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

My support people

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

My triggers

My warning signs that I am not doing well

How I can limit means

Appointments scheduled

Provider:	Date/time:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the next 24 hours I will...

We are here to serve all those affected by relationship abuse 24/7 confidentially. Due to high demand, you may experience longer wait times to connect with a live advocate. If you are unable to wait safely or aren't ready to call, chat or text — you can search our **Directory of Local Providers** section anytime for resources and support in your area.



Call

1.800.799.SAFE (7233)



Chat

Chat live now



Text

Text "START" to 88788

*Visit our page for Privacy Policy.
Msg&DataRatesMayApply. Text STOP to opt out.*



A.I. Chat

Our domestic violence informed compassionate A.I. chat, Ruth, can help when you're unable to reach a live advocate. To speak to a live person, call, chat, or text a live advocate.

Thank you for listening and for being willing to have a hard but necessary conversation.

As a family and child advocate, my heart is awareness that leads to protection. Because what we normalize, excuse, cover, or ignore today does not stop with us. It shapes homes. It shapes churches. It shapes families. It shapes children. And if we are not careful, it becomes the legacy handed to the next generation.

But we have a choice. We can leave behind silence, confusion, fear, and systems that protect power — or we can choose truth, safety, healing, accountability, and courage. We can teach our children that love does not require pretending harm did not happen. Faith does not require silence. Forgiveness does not erase wisdom. And grace never asks us to abandon protection.

If you are experiencing abuse, spiritual manipulation, coercive control, or fear in your home, church, or community, please know this: you are not crazy, you are not alone, and help is available. Reach out to a trusted advocate, counselor, safe friend, domestic violence program, or emergency services if you are in immediate danger.

Truth matters. Safety matters. Children matter. And the legacy we leave will be measured not by how well we protected an image, but by whether the people entrusted to us were safer, freer, and more whole because we chose to do what was right.



Tracie Chapman
Child and Family Advocate
Founder, Oklahoma Child Wellbeing
www.okchildwellbeing.org