



is it "abuse"?





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We hear stories about it in the news, it's a hot topic in the media, it's everywhere. It involves celebrities, athletes, students, politicians, or maybe the family sitting next to you at church.

When is it an affair? When can it be defined as abuse? The answers may not always seem clear.

To understand abuse, it's important to understand the dynamic of power and control at its heart. Abuse occurs when one person controls another in a way that diminishes and eventually destroys the other's sense of self. In addition to more blatant sexual and physical abuse, emotionally abusive behaviors such as coercion, intimidation, threats, isolation, and blaming can be equally devastating. A person who is abused begins to feel increasingly powerless and consequently feels more dependent on the person who abuses. This then gives the abusive person an even greater sense of power. This behavior can become a vicious cycle, a trap that holds captive those who become entangled. In this context mutual consent is impossible.

In our churches, we are called to be one body, the Body of Christ. In the holy marriage relationship, two are called to become one flesh and reflect the relationship between Christ and His bride (the church). Our Lord sacrificed himself for His church. We are called to follow Him, not exercising a power over others, rather giving up power for the sake of others. This is the power of the cross, the power of the Kingdom of God. Abusive behavior, in contrast, uses power over others for selfish gain. This destroys the Lord's design for His church.

Church leaders, those who act in the Lord's name, in powerful and trustworthy positions, must be held to a high standard. Abusive behavior by church leaders reveals a misuse of the power and position entrusted to them. Patterns of destructive behavior may seem harmless at first but can escalate into more serious emotional, physical or sexual abuse, causing great harm in the church. It is *always* the responsibility of church leaders to maintain healthy boundaries in all of their relationships. When sexual boundaries are crossed in relationship with a church leader, it's not an affair, it is abuse.

Abuse Awareness 2011 sponsored by the Safe Church Ministry of the CRCNA. For more information, contact:



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