

ABUSE

Humans have been mistreating and inflicting harm on each other since the beginning of recorded history. From the killing of Abel by his brother Cain in **Genesis 4** to the horrible atrocities witnessed today, the human family in this fallen world continues its bent on sinful behavior against each other. One aspect of this behavior is what we now call **abuse**. The Bible speaks to that subject but, before we turn there, let us understand what abuse is.

Merriam-Webster has several definitions for the word abuse. They include the following:

Improper or excessive use of a substance. In the **Resources** folder in which you found this article, you will find an article entitled **Substance Abuse** that addresses this portion of the definition. We commend it to you.

Language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, and angrily (verbal abuse).

Physical maltreatment of anyone, including sexual abuse (physical abuse).

Abuse in any of these is wrong, harmful to someone else or yourself, and is criminal and sinful in all cases. Perpetrators and victims both need help.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse happens mostly in relationships between men and women, married and unmarried. It usually happens in private, shielding the abuser from intervention, and may increase in intensity over time. For some verbal abusers, it can lead to physical abuse. Here are the usual forms of verbal abuse between individuals:¹

Name calling

Condescension: sarcasm and often belittling remarks

Manipulation: subtly turning situations and blaming the other

Criticism

Demeaning comments

Threats

Blame

Accusations

Withholding: ignoring conversation and presence

Gaslighting: discounting the emotions of the other person

Persons who experience verbal abuse in spousal and other relationships often wonder whether they are to blame, they question themselves and their worth and, over time, develop low self-esteem. Along the way they often rationalize the abuse, not realizing its destructive power. In the process they experience distress and constant mental exhaustion.

The end game for the abuser is power and control in the relationship. The victim should extract themselves from the relationship but, too often, feel powerless to do so. Both the abuser and the abused need help. If you are on either end, especially a victim, seek support and get counseling. If you know a perpetrator or victim as a family member or friend, steer them in the direction of professional and spiritual help.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse in relationships and within families takes this subject to a whole new level. While verbal abuse is repulsive and ungodly, physical abuse is criminal and done to assert power and control. **Non-sexual** physical abuse include:²

Kicking

Hitting

Slapping

Shoving

Shaking

Hair-pulling

Strangulation

Restraining the victim against their will

Threats of violence

Throwing objects at or near the victim

Torturing

Use of a weapon (gun, knife or other)

Some of these forms of physical abuse can start mildly but increase in intensity over time. Unfortunately, the more severe forms can result in permanent injury or death. Those at highest risk for physical abuse in spousal or other relationships range in age

from 18-24, but abuse can be directed at anyone, including children, teens, the elderly, even pets. Most but not all physical abuse is conducted by males against females.

Sexual abuse is another form of physical abuse and can be perpetrated against a spouse, family member (including a child), friend, or co-worker, but can start verbally with³

Sexual harassment and verbal sexual assault.

Repeated requests for sex.

Saying sex is an obligation.

Threatening dissolution of the relationship if sex is withheld.

Threatening to have sex with someone else.

Threatening to withhold money or something else if you don't have sex.

Saying sex is owed due to a previous favor, like paying for dinner.

Sexual abuse may be any of the following³

A complete vaginal, anal, or oral sexual act against anyone who is unwilling, including spouses (the term for this is *rape*).

An incomplete sexual act attempted but unsuccessful.

Unwanted touching of any part of another person's body.

Exposing genitals to an unsuspecting victim.

Forcing someone to watch pornography.

Forbidding a victim from using birth control.

Distributing images of a sexual act with a partner without their consent.

Coercing a partner to perform sexual acts in front of or involving children.

Taking advantage of a sexual partner, unable to consent because they are underage or a vulnerable adult, they are on drugs, inebriated, sleeping or unconscious.

Men commit 95 percent of sexual abuse. One third of those committing sexual assault were previously the victims of sexual assault themselves.

All forms of physical abuse, sexual and non-sexual, are criminal. Victims need to extract themselves from relationships in which they have been assaulted, need to bring criminal charges against the perpetrator so they can receive justice and get help, and should seek counseling and other forms of protection and support. Some victims have a tough time, for assorted reasons, doing this. If you are a victim, please seek help. If you know someone who is experiencing physical abuse, especially if they have confided in you, plead with them to get help.

Biblical Guidance

The Bible identifies abuse for what it truly is – **sin**. Abuse is a total disregard of others, their feelings, and their well-being. It is selfish and destructive. God, who is Love, instructs us to *love* one another (**1 John 4:7-8, 16**). Sinful abuse of another is the polar opposite of the love God desires in our lives.

Abuse is thought by some to be rooted in *anger*, but that may miss the point. Anger is an emotion that God gave us to alert us to problems. We call this proper emotion *righteous* anger. The apostle Paul, writing about this, said, “**In your anger do not sin**” (**Ephesians 4:26**). It is when anger is not controlled and channeled in the right way from within our being that it can lead to sinful behavior, including abuse. Anger is not the root cause of abuse; a sinful heart is. **James 3:13-16** and **Matthew 12:33-35** speak to this condition.

A few Bible passages that condemn those who would abuse others can be found in **Exodus 22:22**, **Isaiah 10:2**, and **1 Thessalonians 4:6**. All of us are susceptible to abusing others because all of us fall short of God’s desire for us to sacrificially love one another. Only the love of Jesus living in and overflowing through us will guard our hearts and help us avoid abuse or any other sinful behavior (**Romans 8:9-11**).

If you have abused someone, acknowledge it, confess it, and deal with it in a God-honoring way. Seek biblical counseling and/or share the burden of your sin a small group setting with other believers (**Galatians 6:1-10**). In order to be pleasing to God, do whatever it takes to atone for an abuse you perpetrated or break the pattern of abusive behavior into which you may have settled.

Those who have been abused are wounded and hurting. If that is you, Jesus offers healing (**Psalms 147:3**). “**Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you**” (**1 Peter 5:6-7, KJV**).

Closing Thoughts

Abuse is an ugly reality that emanates from a sinful heart. Both the abuser and the abused need the touch of God to bring about forgiveness, healing, and restored wholeness.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Abuse**. Here are other resources you may wish to explore:

¹ [11 Common Patterns of Verbal Abuse - One Love Foundation \(joinonelove.org\)](https://www.joinonelove.org/11-common-patterns-of-verbal-abuse)

² [What is Physical Abuse? \(domesticshelters.org\)](https://www.domesticshelters.org/what-is-physical-abuse)

³ [What Is Sexual Abuse? \(domesticshelters.org\)](https://www.domesticshelters.org/what-is-sexual-abuse)

[What does the Bible say about abuse? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/What-does-the-Bible-say-about-abuse)

[59 Bible verses about Abuse \(knowing-jesus.com\)](https://www.knowing-jesus.com/59-bible-verses-about-abuse)

[What Is Sexual Abuse? \(domesticshelters.org\)](https://www.domesticshelters.org/what-is-sexual-abuse)

[Verbal Abuse: A Biblical Perspective \(probe.org\)](https://www.probe.org/verbal-abuse-a-biblical-perspective)

[What is a biblical understanding of child abuse? \(compellingtruth.org\)](https://www.compellingtruth.org/what-is-a-biblical-understanding-of-child-abuse)

[Spiritual Help for Abuse Victims \(hiddenhurt.co.uk\)](https://www.hiddenhurt.co.uk/spiritual-help-for-abuse-victims)
