



# Dialogue

For People Who ENJOY Learning About Themselves!

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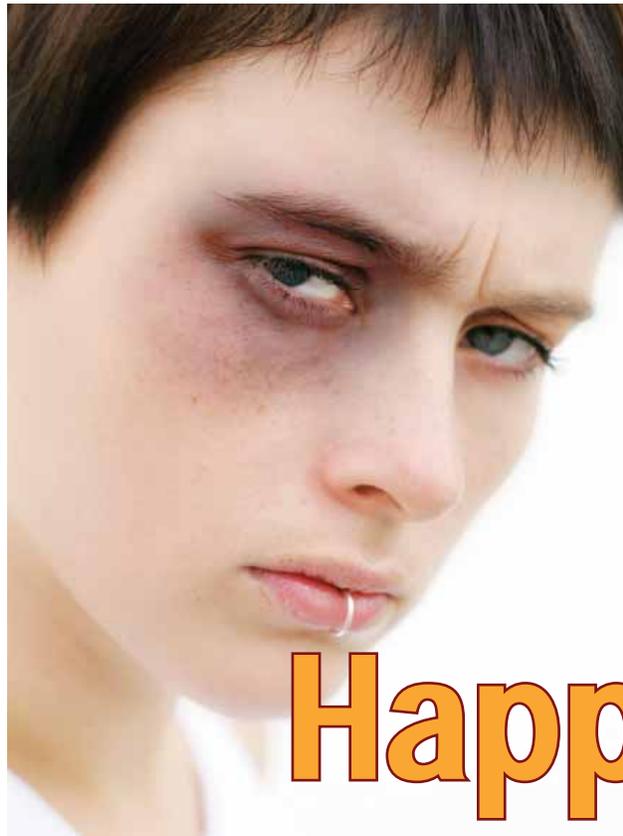
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## How Does Abuse Happen?

By Steven J. Chen, PhD

**A**s a therapist, I know that abuse can happen to almost anyone, almost anywhere at almost anytime. I hear nearly every day about abuse committed by parents, partners, and clergy.

How can such horrors happen? What can we do to stop it?

### Human Nature

We all have a natural ability to momentarily enjoy hurting others. Such sadistic behavior may show itself in pre-adolescent children. At these ages, some boys feel glee at physically mistreating playmates and animals, and some girls derive pleasure from gossiping about and demeaning their peers.

After proper, non-violent handling of this misbehavior by the adults, most of

us stop doing such things. But the ability to feel very short-lived glee while hurting others is still in our genes.

Adults who were brutally disciplined as children or who live in violent or deprived situations into their adult years can maintain and even strengthen these impulses. These are the people who may choose to abuse.

### Desperation

Both the abuser and the abused need to believe they have no other worthwhile choices. Whether they are children, insecure spouses, faithful followers of some

“all powerful” religious system, or soldiers who believe they must please their powerful superiors to survive, the abuser and the abused see themselves as desperate. Only desperate people live with abuse.

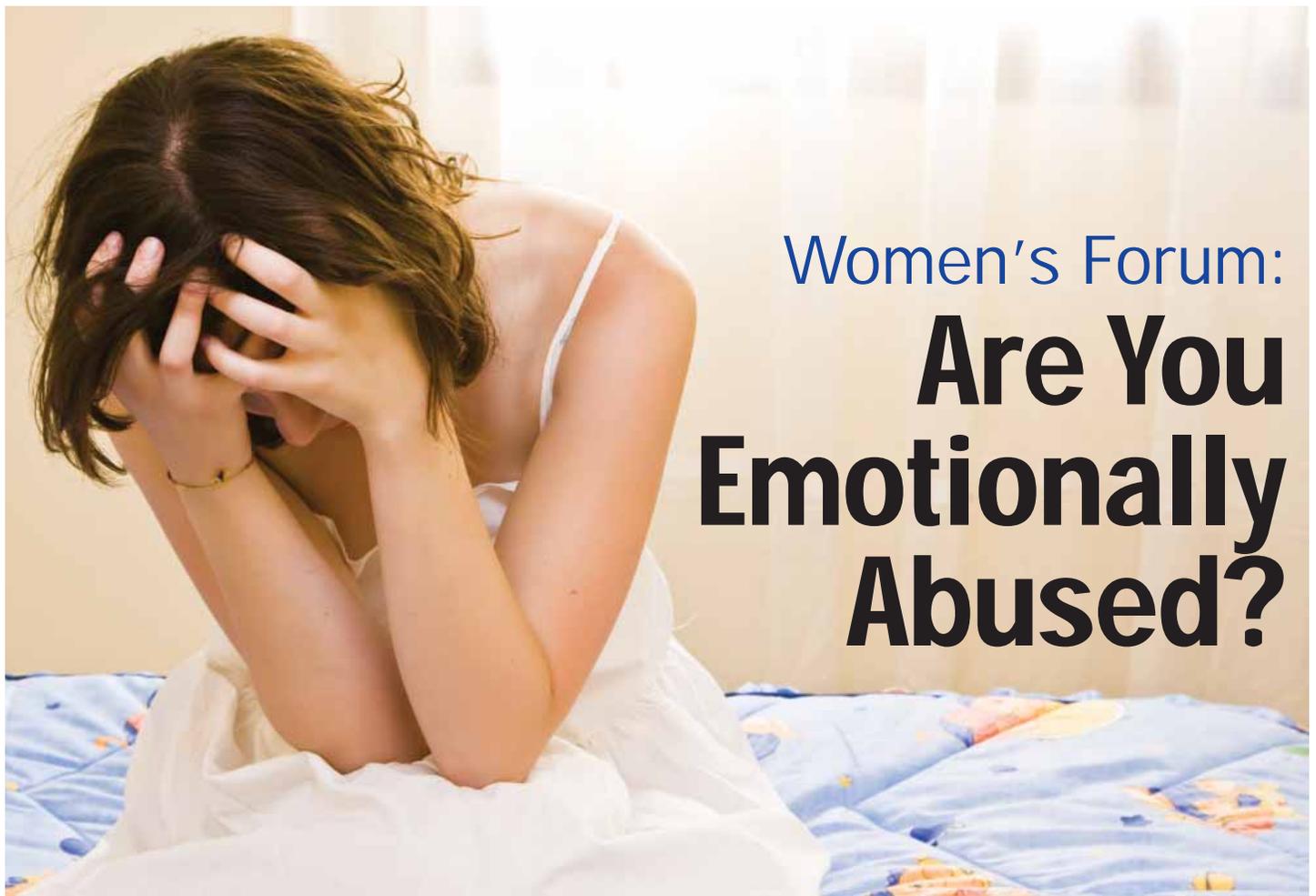
### Faith Without Doubt

Young children have no choice but to believe in their parents’ power. Spouses may believe too strongly in their partner, or in the power of love. Those abused by clergy can believe too much in their leaders, or in what the leaders are preaching. Soldiers can believe too much that their country is right no matter what it does.

Faith without doubt is a necessary component of all abuse. It doesn’t cause

**“Only desperate people live with abuse.”**

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## Women's Forum: **Are You Emotionally Abused?**

Many women find that emotional abuse is difficult to name or even talk about. They often wonder if it is serious because you cannot see it, like bruises or broken bones.

**E**motionally abused women state that one of the biggest problems they face is that others seldom take it seriously. These questions will help you identify if you are being emotionally abused, and provide some ideas on what you can do about it.

### **What is your relationship like?**

- ▶ Do you feel that something is wrong with your relationship, but you don't know how to describe it?
- ▶ Do you feel that your partner controls your life?
- ▶ Do you feel that your partner does not value your thoughts or feelings?

- ▶ Will your partner do anything to win an argument, such as put you down or threaten you?
- ▶ Does your partner get angry and jealous if you talk to someone else? Are you accused of having affairs?
- ▶ Do you feel that you cannot do anything right in your partner's eyes?
- ▶ Do you get mixed messages, such as the reason you are abused is because he loves you?
- ▶ Are you told that no one else would want you, or that you are lucky your partner takes care of you?
- ▶ Do you have to account for every moment of your time?

- ▶ When you try to talk to your partner about problems, are you called names such as bitch or nag?
- ▶ Are you prevented from going to work or school?
- ▶ If you wish to spend money, does your partner make you account for every penny, or say you don't deserve anything?
- ▶ Does he use the children against you in arguments?
- ▶ Does your partner blame you for everything that goes wrong?

### **How are you affected?**

- ▶ Are you unable or afraid to make decisions for yourself?
- ▶ Do you do anything you can to please your partner or not upset him?
- ▶ Do you make excuses for your partner's behavior?
- ▶ Are you forgetful, confused or unable to concentrate?

- ▶ Have you noticed changes in your eating, sleeping, alcohol or drug use?
- ▶ Have you lost interest or energy to do the things you used to?
- ▶ Do you feel sick, anxious, tired or depressed a lot of the time?
- ▶ Have you lost contact with your friends, family or neighbors?
- ▶ Have you lost self-confidence and feel afraid that you could not make it alone?

### What can you do about it?

- ▶ Realize that emotional abuse is a serious problem and you can get help.
- ▶ Recognize that emotional abuse is as bad or worse than physical abuse.
- ▶ Take your own safety and the safety of your children seriously.
- ▶ Know that emotional abuse can lead to physical violence or death.
- ▶ Know that you are not to blame for your partner's abusive behavior.
- ▶ Find people to talk to that can support you. Consider going for counseling.
- ▶ Do not give up if community professionals are not helpful. Keep looking for someone that will listen to you and take emotional abuse seriously.

**Trust yourself and your own experiences. Believe in your own strengths. Remember that you are your own best source of knowledge and strength, and that you already have the tools you need to survive.**



- ▶ Recognize that you have the right to make your own decisions, in your own time, and that dealing with any form of abuse may take time.
- ▶ Trust yourself and your own experiences. Believe in your own strengths. Remember that you are your own best source of knowledge and strength, and that you already have the tools you need to survive.

### Where can you turn?

- ▶ Women's help lines. Find the number in the front of your phone book.
- ▶ Shelters do accept women who are emotionally abused and have not been

physically abused. The help line can refer you to the one nearest you.

- ▶ If you have been threatened with harm or death, or are being stalked (followed and harassed) by your partner or ex-partner, you can call the police. Dial 911, or find out the emergency number.
- ▶ If you are considering leaving, especially if you have children, see a lawyer.

Abused women are at the greatest risk of being harmed or killed when they leave. Ensure that you have a safety plan in place.

### ■ How Does Abuse Happen?

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abuse, but it provides fertile ground so abuse can flourish.

#### Absolute Power

“Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” ‘Nuff said!

#### What Can We Do To Stop It?

**Human Nature:** We can't change human nature but we'd better be alert to it. If we treat others as if they shouldn't have power they will want to use their power on us.

**Desperation:** Everyone must have healthy options. The only legitimate use

of economic, social, political, religious, and military power is to provide what humans need. Eliminate desperation to eliminate horror.

**Belief Without Doubt:** When your government, partner, religious leader, or military superior insists that you believe something without doubt, you are in danger! Protect yourself by maintaining your right to doubt, even if you choose to believe. And teach everyone you know to do the same. People who insist that you believe them without doubt may be good, misguided people who love you, but they are wrong. Maintain your right to doubt. Never give up your right to think.

#### Absolute Power

Insist that all power must be shared. Cooperate wisely. Share your power but do not relinquish it.

#### Eliminating Abuse

Most parents, spouses, clergy, and soldiers do not abuse. Most adults do not abuse.

Those who do abuse need their victims to “cooperate” by: believing they are desperate, giving up their right to think, and deciding they are powerless.

Never give abusers the tools they need to hurt you. Keep your power.

# Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

## Education, Prevention, and Recovery

By the American Psychological Association

### What is Child Sexual Abuse?

There is no universal definition of child sexual abuse. However, a central characteristic of any abuse is the dominant position of an adult that allows him or her to force or coerce a child into sexual activity. Child sexual abuse may include fondling a child's genitals, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal and anal intercourse. Child sexual abuse is not solely restricted to physical contact; such abuse could include non-contact abuse, such as exposure, voyeurism, and child pornography. Abuse by peers also occurs.

Accurate statistics on the prevalence of child and adolescent sexual abuse are difficult to collect because of problems of under-reporting and the lack of one definition of what constitutes such abuse. However, there is general agreement among mental health and child protection professionals that child sexual abuse is not uncommon and is a serious problem in the United States.



The impact of sexual abuse can range from no apparent effects to very severe ones. Typically, children who experience the most serious types of abuse—abuse involving family members and high degrees of physical force—exhibit behavior problems ranging from separation anxiety to posttraumatic stress disorder. However, children who are the victims of sexual abuse are also often exposed to a variety of other stressors and difficult circumstances in their lives, including parental substance abuse. The sexual abuse and its aftermath may be only part of the child's negative experiences and subsequent behaviors. Therefore,

correctly diagnosing abuse is often complex. Conclusive physical evidence of sexual abuse is relatively rare in suspected cases. For all of these reasons, when abuse is suspected, an appropriately trained health professional should be consulted.

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