

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & ADULTS



What is spiritual abuse?

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.

(House of Bishops' Safeguarding Guidance)

This is not a separate category of abuse, it is a form of emotional and psychological abuse relevant for faith contexts.

Types of spiritual abuse



- the misuse of Scripture, the authority of leadership or penitential discipline, with a requirement to be obedient to the abuser
- enforced accountability and pressure to conform
- requirements for secrecy and silence, with isolation from others external to the abuse context
- oppressive teaching
- censorship of decision making
- intrusive or forced healing and deliverance ministries or rituals
- the denial of the right to faith or the opportunity to grow in the knowledge and love of God



Spiritual Abuse might be seen in a leader who is intimidating and imposes their will on other people, perhaps threatening dire consequences or the wrath of God if disobeyed.

They may say that God has revealed certain things to them and so they know what is right.

Those under their leadership are fearful to challenge or disagree, believing they will lose the leader's (or, more seriously God's) acceptance and approval.

It is important to note that all abuse of children, young people and adults can lead to the crushing of people's spirit, damage their sense of identity, sense of self and personal confidence, consequently harming their spiritual development.