

What are the signs of abuse we should look for in a woman's life?

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The wife of a verbally or emotionally abusive spouse is one whose self-esteem has been diminished by constant criticism, blaming, name-calling, mocking, manipulation, public embarrassment, or humiliation. She may become more withdrawn and isolated under her husband's control. Or she may always seem anxious or uncomfortable, worrying about how her spouse will treat her in front of others or what he'll think of her comments. Essentially she's lost the ability to think for herself or have her own opinions. She's always wondering, *Can I say that? Is that okay?* She's not free. She's been robbed of her power to choose, which is a basic right God gives every person.

As a result, she functions like a child instead of a grownup. So if you ask her to go to the movies or invite her to a baby shower, it's as if she has to ask permission from her husband to go. This also happens with economic abuse, as a husband either strictly limits the money his wife can receive or withholds it altogether. She may always have to account for the money she spends, or she may never seem to have the money she needs, even for basic necessities like clothing or food.

A victim of physical abuse may always seem to be making excuses for injuries, such as bruises, dislocated or broken limbs, burns, or even bite marks. She may go out of her way to cover her wounds, wearing long-sleeved clothing in summer or uncharacteristic hats to hide bruises around her face or hair that's been pulled out.

If you suspect abuse, you can ask, "Is everything okay?" Or say, "I sense there's something wrong. Do you want to talk?" Though she may deny anything's wrong, she'll remember you gave her the opportunity to talk. And when she's ready, she'll come back.

Once she opens up, it's important to avoid saying anything that would blame her for the problem, which is where many well-meaning pastors and lay-counselors go wrong.

When a woman first begins to disclose her abuse, she's often afraid and not yet ready to make any changes. She may feel overwhelmed or even guilty that she's told you about it. She's longing for a listening ear. So it's good to begin by offering to pray for her. You can say, "I can't imagine how difficult this is for you. I'm concerned for you. Here's my phone number if you ever need anything." Eventually you can let her know resources exist to help her. You can offer to help find a counselor and even call to make the appointment for her. This is helpful because an abused woman likely has lost the ability to think for herself or to find needed resources.

Be respectful, however, if she doesn't want to begin counseling right away. Showing respect for her decision is empowering to her because she's likely not able to say "no" anywhere else. It's important to show respect for her as an adult, even if she's choosing badly in the moment.

But offer to help her figure things out. Help her find and pay for a good attorney if she needs legal advice, give her information about a local shelter, and help her

come up with a safety plan so she'll be prepared if she decides to leave an abusive situation.

Realize, however, that the abused woman must ultimately make decisions for herself. A woman who's been under the influence of an abuser is used to being controlled. A well-meaning friend may come along and want to tell the woman what to do and even try to do it for her. But the abused woman needs to figure it out and do it herself. That's part of her growth through this.

God deeply cares for the mistreated and oppressed. [Psalm 34:18](#) says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed" (NLT). The Bible teaches it's okay for an abused woman to seek help. [Proverbs 27:12](#) tells us, "The prudent see danger and take refuge." And in [1 Samuel 20](#), we see how David fled from Saul in an effort to protect his own life. Christ came to bring those in darkness into the light ([John 12:46](#)). He wants to bring abusers to repentance and bring healing to abused women.

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