

The Pre-Abuse Setup – Dan Hitz

What makes one person more vulnerable to abusive situations than another?

When emotionally healthy people check out a spiritually abusive church, they don't stay. They recognize the dysfunction. Healthy people put up boundaries which unhealthy people try to violate or outright reject. However, **brokenness created in the "pre-abuse setup" produces a susceptibility to further abuse.** I have a friend who says, "Home is where the outside matches the inside". It is the reason why a woman who has grown up with an abusive alcoholic father and doesn't deal with her wounds can find herself married to her second abusive alcoholic husband. The way her husband treated her while dating felt familiar to her "normal" feelings growing up. She may even feel uncomfortable around healthy men – she sees herself way below his level. Those wounded by abuse often fall prey to **"learned helplessness"**. Those abused when they actually were powerless to stop it continue to believe that they are helpless victims long after they actually have the resources to overcome.



Pre-abuse factors include **past physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect.** The atmosphere is familiar, but surely a church must be a safe place. Those who **grow up in a dysfunctional family** without an appropriate mother or father figure may be used to – or addicted to – chaos. An abusive religious system offers structured chaos. The chaos is ordered around "Scriptural" issues which seem to be worth fighting for. Those who are **socially isolated** are susceptible because they are looking for an accepting community. His Chapel (Not the real name of the church.) was our family. We had many brothers and sisters who all believed as we did – who all suffered the same reproach for what we held dear. People outside the system were deemed unsafe so we stuck together. However, we found out later that our relationships were only as strong as our adherence to the system. Abusive systems play off of the members' guilt and shame. "No one else would accept me like these people if they knew what I struggled with." I did find much forgiveness and confidentiality inside the system, but I also knew that implications could be made if I left. People with **poor life skills** lack the interpersonal boundaries and assertiveness necessary to stand strong against abuse. They also fear that they can't stand on their own. Learned helplessness leaves them vulnerable to the dictates of the system. Along with poor life skills comes **poor or no foundation for evaluation of appropriateness.** The system offers them so much of what they are looking for, but they lack the ability to perform a mental cost/benefit analysis. "Does the perceived benefit of staying in the system outweigh the emotional toll of performing to system specifications?" is a question that many are unable to adequately answer.

If you would like more information about Reconciliation Ministries, or any of the ministries we offer, visit us on the Web at www.recmin.org, or call (586) 739-5114. You may also e-mail us at info@recmin.org. **All correspondence will be kept strictly confidential.**