

After Service Care Team Training

Sexual Abuse

On the weekend of May 18 and 19, we will likely have a large number of people coming forward to receive prayer and acknowledge their history of having been sexually abused. Sexual abuse affects 40% of our church, community, and world (one in four women; one in six men). It is a special honor to be able to listen and pray with someone as they unburden this secret for the first time.

But these are also awkward moments. We're not sure what to say. We want to "make things better" but whatever we say can seem to trivialize the experience. There are also legal implications. Sexual abuse is not just a tragedy; it is also a crime. When minors are in danger we are mandated to report. When adults are affected we want to encourage that they seek legal justice and protection.

As you prepare for these conversations there are a few things that are important to consider:

- You are not serving as a "counselor" but as a Christian friend who will listen, encourage, and pray. For someone who has likely lived in silence with this secret for years, the power of simply listening cannot be over-estimated.
- When someone talks to you about sexual abuse they are being courageous. Likely, if this person has told someone about their experience, they were not believed, told not to speak badly about their abuser, or nothing was done. It takes courage to speak for the first time (or again after a bad response). This training is to ensure that their experience at Summit is not one of those bad experiences.
- You need to realize that most people had or have a prior relationship with their abuser. Only 11% of sexual abuse is by a stranger. 29% is by a family member. 60% is by a known non-family member. This may add to their sense that they are doing something wrong by "talking bad about" a parent, aunt/uncle, babysitter, neighbor, friend, etc...

Four Objectives

In the after service conversations we are asking you to do four things. We are not asking our after service care team to walk the full journey of restoration with those who come forward. We do want you to establish a sense that Summit is a safe place to take the journey of restoration ahead and connect them with good resources for that journey.

These four objectives serve as a general outline for your conversation. Do not feel like you have to strictly stick to the order, but be sure that you accomplish each of the objectives.

- I. **Listen well:** Your objective in listening is simply to allow someone whose lost their voice and been silenced by threats of shame to feel heard and, thereby, cared for.

To be heard is a powerful thing to someone who has suffered long and/or their pain has been ignored. You do not have to have "answers" or give directives in order to represent Christ well by listening.

- a. *Have you come forward today to talk about things that have happened to you?* This question gives them a chance to give a simple, short "yes" to break the ice and decide they really are going to talk about this.
 - i. Affirm their courage. "What you're doing takes a lot of courage... You're a strong person for coming forward even if you feel scared and overwhelmed right now."
 - ii. Affirm they have made a good choice. "You're doing the right thing. You shouldn't have to carry this alone."
 - iii. Clearly say "I believe you."
- b. *When did the abuse occur?* This question allows safer information to be shared first. It is easier to give an age or time frame than giving details about who abused them or what form the abuse took. Many people will tell as much as an after service conversation allows with this minimal prompting.

- i. If they do not naturally begin to share more of their experience, ask one or two of the following questions (as best fits what they have told you): Have you ever told anyone about the abuse? Who was the person who abused you? How long did the abuse last? Do you feel safe from abuse where you currently live?
- ii. Ask **mandated reporting questions** (see #2 below). In all conversations, be sure to ask the questions under objective two. We will have the appropriate people present to allow needed reporting to happen. This is important for two reasons:
 1. People only become less motivated to report active abuse or child endangerment if they wait. Now is the best (possibly only) time to get this information.
 2. The church is liable for how we handle cases of known abuse.
- iii. If the conversation (a) moves to the individual asking you for advice or (b) continues in length beyond what your campus setting allows, then use a statement like the following to transition the conversation:

“I can tell this weekend service is very timely for you and will be the start of a significant work of God in your life. Your willingness to talk about your suffering and seek hope is very commendable. Our conversation is starting to go beyond my training as an after-service prayer team member, but I’m excited about the things our church has put in place to help you experience God’s healing and restoration [move to discussing material under #4 below].”

2. Screen for Mandated Reporting: In the conversation you need to ask two sets of endangerment questions; one for minors (which involves mandated reporting) and one for adults (which is not mandating reporting, but we want to encourage).

a. Questions regarding the potential abuse of minors:

Note: If the person you speak with is a minor, you will want to inform them, “The things we talk about may require me to report them to Child Protective Services for your protection or the protection of other children.” For licensed professionals this is a requirement of their code of ethics; in the church, we do this as an act of honor. It helps to prevent the unexpected consequences of mandated reporting from feeling like another action that takes away their voice.

- i. (If the individual you are talking to is younger than 18 years old) Are you living with or still interacting with your abuser?
- ii. Do you know of any children your abuser is or might be currently abusing?
 1. If you get a “yes” answer to either of these questions, then this case will need to be reported to the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) we will have at each campus.
 - a. Continue the rest of your conversation normally (objectives #3 and #4)
 - b. After you’ve prayed and shared resources say something like:

“Some of the things you’ve shared raise concerns for your safety or the safety of other children [whichever is relevant]. We want to and have a responsibility to make sure that all children we know who are exposed to abuse are safe. That is why we have a social worker here, so that needed follow up can be made for situations like you have described.”

- c. Walk with this person to the care-team leader to find the LCSW.
- d. Sit with this person while they talk to the LCSW for support unless they ask you to not to be part of this conversation.
- e. If they are unwilling to talk to the LCSW, then let them know you are still required by law to share the limited information you have and that the case will be handled better with their full story.
- f. If they are still unwilling to talk to the LCSW, then you need to share what information you have been given with the LCSW.

b. Question / statement regarding the active abuse of an adult:

- i. Are you currently in any danger from your abuser?
- ii. Sexual abuse is a crime, even if you know or are related to the abuser, and should be reported to the legal authorities. We have a police officer on site if you think it would be beneficial to talk with him/her about your situation.

1. If you get a “yes” to either of these questions, then we will have a police officer present at each campus.

- a. Continue the rest of your conversation normally (objectives #3 and #4)
- b. After you’ve prayed and shared resources say something like:

“Choosing to report a crime is intimidating even when it’s the right thing to do. We have a police officer here to help you understand your rights and what the process would look like going forward if you choose to press charges. Learning to rightly identify what happened to you as a crime and that you can speak in a way to bring a measure of justice can be an important step in recovering from abuse. It is also an important step in protecting others who may be in danger. The officer is here to answer your questions and help you take any steps you want to take today.”

- c. Walk with this person to the care-team leader to find the police officer.
- d. Sit with this person while they talk to the police officer for support unless they ask you to not to be part of this conversation.

2. In order for legal charges to be pressed against the sexual abuse of an adult, the adult must be willing to (a) press charges and (b) stick with those charges through the process. This is different than the mandated reporting and intervention on behalf of children. For this reason, we do not want to push adults to begin something they are unwilling or not ready to complete (it can make their situation worse). We do want them to have the opportunity to ask questions, hear from a friendly officer (those with power and authority can be seen as “bad” or “against me”), and have the opportunity to press charges, if desired.

3. Pray: Your objective in this prayer is to model for this individual what it is like to talk honestly to God as One who cares deeply about them and their suffering. The only wrong ways to pray are to pray (1) with words that ignore the pain or (2) with words are “neater” than the pain.

- a. Use this person’s name several times as you pray.
- b. Acknowledge this prayer comes with unpleasant emotions by mentioning the specific emotions this person shared with you in prayer (i.e., fear, anger, confusion, etc...)
- c. Thank God that we can come to him with these honest, raw emotions in prayer.



- d. Affirm the courage of this person to God in prayer.
- e. Thank God for allowing this person to be at Summit to have a safe place to talk this weekend.
- f. Pray for protection over this person's thoughts and emotions in the coming days.
- g. Pray that God would give them the strength to continue on their journey towards restoration.

4. **Connect with Resources:** This conversation is the beginning of a journey towards experiencing God's restoring grace. We have made preparations for there to be several follow up resources to aid people on this journey. As you review these resources, do not make it sound like they "need" to do "all" of these things "now." Instead, each of these things is available as a trusted next step when this individual is ready to take them.

Here is a sample of the handout you can give each person you talk with.



Next Step Resources For Sexual Abuse

We appreciate your courage in sharing your experience with us. We want to connect you with resources that will allow you to experience more of God's restoring grace.

- We have Diane Langberg's book *On the Threshold of Hope* available at all of our campuses.
- We have a free download of Diane speaking on sexual abuse at summitrdu.com/abuse to help you read her book in her voice instead of the voice of your abuser or your fears/shame.
- Our Pastor of Counseling, Brad Hambrick, will be teaching a seminar on "Hope & Restoration After Sexual Abuse" on Saturday May 25 from 4pm to 7pm at the Brier Creek campus, South Venue.
- This seminar will be posted on-line if you are unable attend the live event – summitrdu.com/abuse.
- Our counseling ministry team has been preparing to address the unique challenges of sexual abuse all Spring. You can learn more about and connect with these resources at summitrdu.com/counseling
- If one of these resources does not meet your needs, we are happy to connect you with other best-fit resources in our community.

We are glad to get to walk with you in this challenging time. Thank you for your honesty and courage. We're praying God will more than match your faith with His faithfulness.

One Final Note

It is probable that you will see the individuals you pray with at church again in the coming weeks, months, and years. Having shared their experience of abuse with you, this may be awkward for them.



A common fear amongst those who have been abused is: “If I share what has happened to me, this will become how I am known – ‘the person who was abused.’” We want the Summit to be (1) a safe place to talk about the experience of abuse and seek healing, but we also want it to be (2) a safe place not to talk about or be reminded of abuse.

How you close these conversations is an important part of setting up that second type of safety. Saying something like this can be helpful:

“It is very important to us that you feel safe here at Summit; safe to talk about your abuse and safe to just worship God and participate in the life of our church. This conversation may make that second part awkward for a while, but I want to let you know what you can expect from me when we see each other around church.

- I’ll let you decide whether to initiate conversation.
- I’ll be praying for you regularly.
- I’d like to pray for you about more than your recovery from abuse. Are there other parts of your life I can pray for? [Be sure to pause for an answer]

Thank you for letting me be a part of this part of your life. Your faith to pursue God in light of your suffering challenges my faith. [If applicable] I plan to attend the seminar because I want to learn more about how the gospel speaks to abuse. Maybe we’ll see each other there.”

Post Script

There is another scenario that you need to be prepared for in this after service care time – the possibility that an abuser will come forward to confess his/her sin. In that case, your objectives would be:

1. Listen Well – In ways similar to the material above.
2. Share the Gospel – Be sure this person knows that Christ died for all sin and all sinners.
3. Invite Them to Turn Themselves In – After sharing the gospel you would say something like this:

“Jesus paid your sin debt. You can have great confidence and freedom of conscience in that. But what you’ve described was a crime and not just a sin. There is a debt to society that you owe which the gospel does not remove. The Bible talks about our sin debt to God (Rom. 6:23, 8:31-39) and the role of our civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-5) [read these passages with the individual]. Part of true repentance to God is accepting the consequences of your actions. I am going to ask you tell the police officer we have on site what you just told me.”

4. Walk with Them to the Officer – This is the same as the protocols above.
5. Let them Know You Are Under Obligation to Report. If they are resistant, say something like this:

“I can only imagine how hard this is. You were not expecting for God to move in your life this way today. But you must know I am obligated to report the things you have told me. The choice before you is to self-report, which is in your best legal interest, or be reported and enter the process involuntarily. Even though it is hard, I am asking that you reconsider and talk to the officer yourself.”