

# Markers of Relational Abuse and Violence

(by John Henderson, as quoted in Jason Meyer sermon “Fooled by False Leadership,” Bethlehem Baptist Church)

**MENTAL ABUSE** is a pattern in the use of words and actions to assault, reorder, and control the thoughts and ideas of the other person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

LESS SEVERE	SEVERE	MOST SEVERE
Regular, harsh criticism; Constant questioning and challenging thoughts and perspective; Cold shoulders or silent treatment to punish; Frequent “innocent” sarcasm about the ideas of the other person; Instinctive defensiveness; Habitual dishonesty to avoid accountability and blame others; Using Scripture to correct and control spouse to selfish ends.	Frequent insults; Biting sarcasm; Threats of suicide or harm to self; Playing mind games; False accusations as a means to control; Mocking; Screaming; Using tone to instill fear; Separating the other person from friends; Isolating the other person from contact with friends and family; Withholding help— money, means of transportation, medical care, and other resources.	Threats of physical harm; Vicious, demeaning words; Constant assaults upon character; Threats to harm children or friends; Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation; Relentless attacks upon and controlling of the other person’s view of reality. Really sick distortions of Scripture to torment, mock, and subdue the other person.

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE** is a pattern in the use of words and actions to assault, reorder, and control the emotions and affective state of the other person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

LESS SEVERE	SEVERE	MOST SEVERE
Regular, low-grade anger; Blaming the other person for frustration and irritability; Constant criticism and questioning of how the other person feels; Cold shoulders; Silent treatment when upset in order to arouse guilt or anxiety in the other person; Subtle attempts at humiliation.	Emotional explosiveness; Insults; Biting sarcasm; Threats of suicide or harm to self; Playing mind games; Trying to induce guilt and shame in order to manipulate; Taking advantage of emotional frailty and weakness; Attempts to instill fear in order to control the other person.	Threats of physical harm; Vicious, demeaning words; Constant assaults upon character; Threats to harm children or friends; Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation; Attempts to instill terror for the fun of it; Really aggressive mocking and ridicule.

**PHYSICAL ABUSE** is a pattern in the use of posture, property, and physical contact to assault, punish, and control another person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

LESS SEVERE	SEVERE	MOST SEVERE
A bristled, threatening posture; Hostile facial expressions; Clinched fists; Slamming doors; Getting in the face of the other person; Poking or flicking; Self-harm to punish and manipulate; Refusal to offer simple physical assistance; Use of law enforcement, legal counsel, and churches to threaten the physical and financial livelihood of the other person.	Grabbing; Pushing; Shoving; Stalking; Punching walls; Throwing objects around the house; Spitting; Forced drug use; Destroying the other person's items of value; Slapping; Physically isolating the other person from friends and relatives; Refusal to offer vital physical assistance	Punching; Biting; Stabbing; Shooting; Forced confinement; Torture; Hitting with objects; Physical injury to the other person's loved ones; Active involvement of law enforcement or churches to threaten or severely harm the physical and financial wellbeing of the other person.

**SEXUAL ABUSE** is related to physical violence but more centered around sexual organs, ideas, and acts. Involves the use of sexual thoughts, privileges, and acts to assault, demean, devalue, manipulate, and control the other person for the achievement of selfish ends.

LESS SEVERE	SEVERE	MOST SEVERE
Unwanted sexual touch of genitals, breasts, backside; Pushing for sexual acts that feel demeaning to the other person; Criticizing sexual performance; Comparing to others; Viewing pornography before, during, or after sexual intercourse with spouse; Refusing sex to punish or manipulate; Sexual teasing with no intent to fulfill aroused desires but simply to frustrate the other person.	Coerced sex using threats or incentives (perhaps to avoid a beating or violent outburst); Forcing unwanted behaviors during sex (like sodomy) or unwanted locations (like in a public restroom); Verbal or physical punishment if the other person doesn't comply.	Purposeful injury to sexual organs or breasts; Forced making of pornography, or prostitution, or involvement of other people; Forced sexual intercourse after physical assault; Demanding spouse let other people watch, even their children.

We could add that **SPIRITUAL ABUSE** would be doing any of these things in the name of Jesus and using the Bible to defend them. Abusive leadership uses physical, psychological, and emotional (and spiritual) means to be lord over others. Servant leadership uses physical, psychological, and emotional (and spiritual) means to serve others.