



# BEST PRACTICES FOR COMPLEX CONCILIATION ISSUES

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**Summary:** Traditional conciliation processes and practices that work well for most conflict situations may not be appropriate or sufficient in cases involving complex issues, such as power imbalances, trauma or abuse and could actually cause significant harm in such cases. Many complex issues may be effectively handled by carefully following the practices set forth in this training or by involving other professionals with special expertise. However, conciliators should always be alert to significant complicating factors, recognize the limits of their own training and experience and know when it is necessary to seek assistance, modify or enhance a process, or refer a case elsewhere.

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# PART I

## CHRISTIAN CONCILIATION NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

1. Since 1982, Christian conciliation has been used to resolve thousands of legal, family, church, business and community conflicts.<sup>1</sup> Client feedback to the major conciliation ministries<sup>2</sup> has indicated that by God's grace most of these cases have resulted in mutually agreeable resolutions of material issues and genuine repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation between the parties.
2. Even so, Christian conciliation has not always been carried out in a biblically faithful and beneficial way. Over the years, formal complaints have been filed against several conciliators. In most of these cases, those complaints were resolved to the satisfaction of the complaining party. Many other complaints have been voiced through social media or news articles and have not been formally resolved.
3. In 2021, a series of complaints against a particular conciliator were confirmed through a lengthy formal investigation. This situation was not resolved to the satisfaction of the complaining parties and has been publicized through articles on the internet, which triggered a new wave of criticism through social media.
  - ["Statement of Acknowledgement and Public Confession,"](#) Live at Peace Ministries
  - ["A Christian Peacemaker Who Left a Trail of Trauma,"](#) Christianity Today
  - ["A Needed Reassessment of Christian Conciliation,"](#) RW360
  - "Christian mediation/conciliation groups rarely have any understanding of abuse, power dynamics or frankly even healthy corporate structures and policies and have little to no accountability structures for themselves. More often than not they are dangerous and perpetuate abuse." Rachel Denhollander
  - "Abusive organizations – and often those affiliated with Christian communities, using Bible passages like Matthew 18 or 1 Corinthians 6 – work to dismantle and attack the reputation of the American legal system.... People come to view the courts as places to avoid instead of places to find justice. Sometimes abusive organizations use their own policies and procedures to eliminate the threat the legal system poses.... Religious arbitration may have less to do with honoring a set of beliefs than with controlling legal outcomes." Wade Mullen

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<sup>1</sup> Christian conciliation is typically defined as biblically informed mediation and arbitration.

<sup>2</sup> Peacemaker Ministries, Institute for Christian Conciliation, Ambassadors of Reconciliation, Crossroads Resolution Group, RW360

- “Abuse survivors see how so-called Christian/biblical conciliation methods get weaponized to silence victims and remove their civil rights under guise of forgiveness and reconciliation.” Brad Sargent
  - “A mediation is a process that assumes an equal power dynamic, which is why it is a helpful tool to resolve conflicts between equals, but woefully inadequate when there are power differentials (abuser/ victim, individual/institution, etc.). Advocacy is required in such cases. Regrettably, as a conciliator, I’ve learned this the hard way. The training in the Christian conciliation world – at least that I received – does not adequately address this dynamic.” Daniel Teater
4. During the following months, RW360 received critical reports regarding the services of six other conciliators in cases that were handled between 2010 and 2016.
  5. Specific complaints about Christian conciliators:
    - Deciding who was responsible for a conflict without gathering all of the facts
    - Peremptory judgments and labeling people without adequate knowledge
    - Protecting and flattering influential parties or those who pay the bills
    - A lack of courage and willingness to confront powerful parties
    - Dual relationships (conciliator became a counselor, mentor and intimate friend)
    - Failing to account for power imbalances, trauma and abuse among the parties
    - Failing to provide adequate screening and pre-mediation coaching
    - Using standard conciliation approach in cases involving abuse and trauma
    - Allowing multiple parties to gang up on a single party
    - Forcing agreements or reconciliation on the parties
    - Abusing the conciliator’s power and influence
    - Emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual harassment or abuse of parties
    - Failing to encourage parties to report abuse
    - Failing to provide a means for feedback or filing a complaint
    - Doing ministry without meaningful accountability
    - Colleagues failed to confront or report questionable behavior
  6. We must assume that the complaints described above are only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, it is likely that many more people have received deficient and harmful services under the banner of “Christian conciliation.” Therefore, it is vitally important that the entire Christian conciliation community do everything in its power to identify deficiencies in the past training and practice of Christian conciliators and promote a new generation of “best practices” that will help to reduce the likelihood of such conduct and harm in the future.

7. Improved training is especially needed for complex situations that require special care
  - a. Power imbalances (personality, verbal skills, position/ authority, credentials, etc.)
  - b. Reported experiences of abuse (emotional, physical, domestic violence, sexual, elder, spiritual, bullying)
  - c. Parties who have reported significant emotional or physical trauma or demonstrated traumatic responses (elevated sympathetic nervous system, decreased cognitive function in certain situations, etc.)
  - d. Crisis situations that call for an accelerated process (family, financial, employment, public scandal, etc.)
  - e. Culturally and emotionally charged conflicts (politics, race, vaccinations, etc.)
  - f. Divorce (custody and visitation, property settlement, marital support)
  - g. Group conflict
  - h. Workplace dynamics or culture conflict (toxic workplace, partiality, inequity of pay or benefits by gender, race, etc.)
  - i. Faith or denominational differences (e.g., Christian/non-Christian)
  - j. Complex or high value legal issues
  - k. Tax issues (sales of stock or assets, real property, debt forgiveness, etc.)
  - l. Possible termination of employment (actual or perceived)
  - m. Allegations of criminal misconduct (fraud, embezzlement, theft, assault, etc.)
  - n. Addictions and substance abuse
  - o. Mental health disorders, potential suicide
  - p. Physical disabilities
  - q. Cultural differences
  - r. Spiritual warfare
8. Many Christian conciliators have not been adequately trained or are not fully using their training to deal with all of these issues, which has sometimes resulted in conciliator failures or flawed conciliation processes that have harmed parties, dishonored God and discredited the ministry of Christian conciliation. This seminar is a first step toward improving the overall training and performance of the Christian conciliation community.

## PART II

### BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL CONCILIATION CASES

#### A. PRE-MEDIATION

1. Preface

This training will not make you an expert in handling all complex issues, especially those involving issues of trauma or abuse. Lord willing, however, this training will make you more sensitive to these types of complex issues and help you to know when you need to enlist the help of experts or refer a matter to more qualified professionals. Identifying your limitations is part of wise stewardship of power within the conciliation process.

2. Essential character qualities in a conciliator

a. Standard conciliator training developed by respected ministries typically promotes valuable skill development. Without godly character, however, these skills can be used carelessly, unwisely and even destructively.

b. See [Portrait of a Peacemaker](#) and [Peacemaker's Prayer](#)

c. Gospel centered, motivated and empowered (Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 1:5)

d. Identity in Christ (John 1:12; Eph. 1:5, 5:1)

e. Love (Matt. 22:37-40)

f. Gentleness (Matt. 11:28-29)

g. Humility (James 3:13)

h. Shrewdness (Matt. 10:16)

i. Innocence (Matt. 10:16)

j. Discernment (Prov. 16:21)

k. Prudence (Prov. 22:3)

l. Wisdom (James 3:17)

m. Faith (Matt. 19:26)

n. Courage (1 Cor. 16:13)

o. In others, pray that God will enable you grow to be more like Jesus!

3. The intake process is where you have the opportunity to begin "[Building Passport](#)" with the parties so they can answer "yes" to three vital questions: "Can I trust you?" "Do you really care?" "Can you really help me?"

4. Develop a thorough intake and screening process
  - a. Identifying complex issues early on can provide time to address them appropriately and prevent major problems later.
  - b. Be alert to issues that require special expertise, preparation or referrals.
  - c. Include [specific cautions and disclaimers](#) on your website or professional literature describing your ability and limits for dealing with trauma, power imbalances and abuse.
  - d. Include discerning questions on your intake forms and questionnaires.
    - [www.rw360.org/request-for-conciliation-assistance-form](http://www.rw360.org/request-for-conciliation-assistance-form)
    - [www.crossroadsresolution.com/request-assistance](http://www.crossroadsresolution.com/request-assistance)
    - [www.aorhope.org/open-case](http://www.aorhope.org/open-case)
  - e. Use [Interview Agreements](#) that provide initial informed consent regarding the conciliation process, confidentiality guidelines and disclaimers, as well as your feedback and grievance policies. Review all of this verbally with the parties as part of the intake process (see links above).
  - f. Require signed Information Release forms.
  - g. Use validated screening tools, such as [The Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns](#) (see additional screening information in Appendices 1 and 2)
  - h. Use personal interviews to dig deeper (see questions in Appendix 2).
  - i. In cases of possible abuse, interview parties individually rather than as a couple in order to avoid intimidation. When in doubt, consider all cases as possible abuse cases and repeatedly affirm the importance of hearing the parties' voices independently.
  - j. Be familiar with and follow your state's abuse reporting requirements and encourage others to do the same.
5. When there are significant questions about the existence or extent of abuse, use outside investigator to assess types and levels of abuse. In many cases, it is best to postpone a conciliation process until this is completed. In some cases, however, it may be helpful for the parties to proceed with a carefully limited conciliation process to address pressing issues related to abuse (separate living arrangements, custody and visitation of children, financial arrangements, etc.) or to provide appropriate care and support that is not being provided by their church or another caring agency.
  - a. [GRACE](#) (Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environment)
  - b. [Ministry Safe Institute](#)
  - c. [Guideposts Solutions](#)
  - d. [Psalm 82 Initiative](#) – Four Tools of the Abuser

6. Do not conciliate abuse cases between the primary abuser and victim unless the abuser demonstrates genuine repentance consistently over time, and the victim has requested intervention. The initiative to engage in repair the relationship must follow the lead and needs of the victim, not the abuser's needs. One of the key indicators of repentance is letting go of any demand on the victim and acknowledging that a broken relationship is part of the consequences of the sin.
  - a. Abusers are usually master manipulators and can easily use a conciliation process to manipulate and re-abuse their victims.
  - b. Guard against attempts to paint unwilling victims as defying biblical calls for conciliation and reconciliation (e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).
  - c. Be diligent to not conflate forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration as one and the same event. These events are sequential and typically take a significant length of time.
  - d. For more detailed information on handling cases involving abuse and assessing repentance, see sections IV – VI.
7. Provide full documentation and disclosure of the entire conciliation process
  - a. Provide all parties with copies of the [Handbook for Christian Conciliation](#) and [Guiding People through Conflict](#), give them plenty of time to review these documents, and then invite them to ask questions.
  - b. Explain what your role as a conciliator involves and what it does not involve (neutral mediator, not a legal advocate or professional advisor). Ask what each party heard you say is your role. Work diligently to be sure it has been clearly understood.
  - c. When it comes to explaining and conducting a conciliation process, it is not good enough to communicate so that you *can be understood*; you must seek to communicate so clearly that you *cannot be misunderstood*.
  - d. Explain confidentiality commitments and limitations of Rule 16:
    - The goal of these commitments is to create an environment where parties feel comfortable being completely transparent and confessing their wrongs without fear of legal liability or inappropriate publicity. These commitments also give room for those involved to talk with the goal of understanding without the concern of 'soundbites' taken out of context.
    - All information will be treated as "settlement negotiations" (inadmissible in court).
    - This does not protect information that would be discoverable outside the conciliation process.
    - These clauses are sometimes seen as being equivalent to a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) and can therefore make parties feel that they cannot

disclose important information about the conciliation process. Even so, these commitments are actually far less legally restrictive than a normal NDA.

- The confidentiality commitment that is included in RW360's interview and conciliation agreements indicates that the parties agree "*not to discuss our communications with people who do not have a necessary interest in the conciliation process or to post any such information on the internet.*" This is "good faith" commitment with an entirely subjective standard, so conciliators should make it clear to the parties that this does not provide legally enforceable confidentiality protection or sanctions. Emphasize that the best protection against critical public exposure is to secure sincere repentance, confession, restitution, forgiveness and reconciliation.

8. Whenever possible, work with a co-conciliator (a necessity in complex cases)
  - a. In complex cases the co-conciliator helps to spot and address power imbalances, triangulation, experiences or realities of partiality.
  - b. You gain twice the wisdom, experience and discernment.
  - c. While one conciliator is talking, the other is listening and discerning.
  - d. A co-conciliator may help you to see your own mistakes.
  - e. One conciliator may connect better with a particular party.
  - f. A great way for an experienced conciliator to mentor a younger conciliator.
9. Group mediations require special care
  - a. Individual training does not equip you for group mediations.
  - b. The complexity of a mediation process increases geometrically with the size of a group because each conciliator and party must relate to some degree to all of the other conciliators and parties.
  - c. This complexity is even greater if there is an imbalance in the size of sub-groups (e.g., one party against six parties). In such cases, it is usually wise to do multiple mediations with sub-groups, or to ask the larger group to designate representatives to meet with the other party.
  - d. When dealing with groups, it is essential to have multiple conciliators and special training.
  - e. Understanding the dynamics and context of the group is essential. For example, family groups are different from work groups, church councils and school boards.
  - f. [See Defusing Explosive Meetings](#) (six focusing and filtering questions)



10. Conflict coaching and assigned personal preparation is crucial
  - a. The more complex, emotionally charged, power-imbalanced or trauma influenced a mediation is, the more important it is to provide thorough assessments, personal homework and coaching. In cases involve trauma or abuse, it is usually wise to advise the parties to receive professional counseling prior to mediation and to work alongside the counselors in determining if and when conciliation is likely to be beneficial.
  - b. The better prepared the parties are prior to mediation, the more smoothly the mediation is likely to go.
  - c. Helpful tools include [The Peacemaker: Personal Application Study Guide](#) and online courses at the [RW Academy](#).
11. Recognize that family, employment and church cases involve inherent power imbalances.
  - a. Many exercises of authority are legitimate and do not qualify as abuse.
  - b. Leaders need to exercise their authority wisely and graciously.
  - c. Questioning the use of authority does not automatically mean disrespect.
12. Criminal cases can involve dual jurisdictions.
  - a. God has established civil authorities to enforce criminal law (Rom. 13:1-7).
  - b. God has established the church to address spiritual issues (Matt. 18:12-20).
  - c. Conciliation has been successful and beneficial in cases involving issues like embezzlement, theft, fraud and even assault.
  - d. When attempting to provide conciliation, communicate and cooperate fully with civil authorities, who are usually open to conciliation.
  - e. Successful conciliation can motivate civil authorities to exercise appropriate mercy (e.g., delayed prosecution that can result in a cleared record).
13. Recruit a fully qualified conciliation team
  - a. Doing this creates biblical safety for conciliators and parties (see Matt. 18:6)
  - b. Two heads are usually better than one
  - c. Gender sensitivity
  - d. Training and experience
  - e. Theological compatibility
  - f. Cultural compatibility (recruit a “cultural translator” to assist team)
  - g. Time availability

14. Encourage meaningful support for the parties.

- a. This can make all the difference!
- b. Spouses
- c. Spiritual supporters who are there only to support and advise a party
- d. Supporters who act as personal advocates in cases of trauma or abuse
- e. Legal or expert representation and advocacy
- f. Clearly describe the roles and limits of supporting individuals (e.g., parties are encouraged to speak for themselves, but others may request to offer insights, questions or advice).

Bad example: "In our arbitration, the other party's lawyer ran the show, and what should have been handled in a day was dragged on for three, leaving us all with tens of thousands of dollars' worth of debt. The only ones that benefited from our arbitration were the lawyers, not our church or either party. The opposing lawyer was able to withhold key facts about the accuser from the arbitrators. The panel of arbitrators, who as I recall, were pastors, were "played" by a very good, slick lawyer."

- g. Show respect for the parties' spiritual leaders but be on the lookout for how those leaders can sometimes be part of the problem.
- h. Professional counselors, psychologists, physicians and other specialists as evaluators, resources, advisors or witnesses.

## **B. DURING CONCILIATION**

- 1. Never underestimate the power of the gospel and the means of grace.
  - a. Ephesians 2:13-16 - Jesus delights to destroy barriers and dividing walls.
  - b. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 - The weapons we fight with have divine power.
- 2. Continually focus on delivering the "[Three P's of Satisfaction](#)" (Process, Personal, Product satisfaction).
- 3. Constantly guard against the natural human tendency to draw premature conclusions (Prov. 18:17) and take time to carefully and thoroughly collect all of the information needed to provide meaningful guidance and to reach accurate conclusions.
- 4. Constantly guard against the natural human tendency to form biases and favor certain people over others (Jas. 2:8-9).

## 5. Use of Scripture

- a. God's Word is living and active. It can not only reveal the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (Heb. 4:12) but also provide a light and path on how to move ahead in a conciliation process (Ps. 119:105).
- b. A conciliator should make effort to avoid misusing Scripture, which can include misapplying (e.g., passages on submission), seeking to force or manipulate conviction on a heart issue, or simply throwing a passage at a party like a projectile. As Oswald Chambers warns:

"Now there is a wrong use of God's word and a right one. The wrong use is this sort of thing – someone comes to you, and you cast about in your mind what sort of man he is, then hurl a text at him like a projectile, either in prayer or in talking as you deal with him. That is a use of the word of God that kills your own soul and the souls of the people you deal with. The Spirit of God is not in that. Jesus said, "the words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."<sup>3</sup>

- c. One way to avoid these misuses is to seek to combine Scripture with insightful questions that invite and encourage self-discovery that transfers responsibility to parties (e.g., Phil. 4:8-9).
  - d. Another way is to ask parties what Scripture God has been using in the situation in their heart to encourage, teach, or convict them.
  - e. For additional insights on the use of Scripture in conciliation, see Philip Monroe's excellent paper, [Guidelines for the Effective Use of the Bible in Counseling](#).
- ## 6. Caucuses are one of the most powerful tools in a conciliator's tool belt!
- a. Private meetings to get feedback, encourage, pray, admonish, teach, explore options.
  - b. Keep them balanced, if you meet with one party, then meet with the other.
  - c. Clarify what will and will not be shared with others.
  - d. Keep them as short as possible. Extensive coaching should be done prior to conciliating.
- ## 7. Resist the temptation to fake or force agreement, repentance or reconciliation.
- "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

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<sup>3</sup> As cited from the Complete Works of Oswald Chambers on CD-ROM.

- a. Beware of the pride, laziness, impatience, unbelief, desire to “fix things,” and, worst of all, the temptation to “play God” that can cause you to push for a resolution that God has not yet brought about.
  - b. Forced agreements and false reconciliation can delay or prevent justice, increase trauma and lead to further harm.
  - c. Our job is to gently instruct; it’s God’s job to grant repentance (2 Tim 2:24-26).
  - d. If your prayers and reasonable efforts do not lead to a party showing the fruit of repentance, acknowledge that fact and plan an honest, realistic and biblically faithful path forward. For example, will the person commit to seeking God’s view of their heart as a next step? Will they walk a path of repentance? How can they participate in a Galatians 6:1-2 relationship? Who will they trust with that and how will the other party know progress in that? (e.g., 2 Cor. 7; Heb. 12:12-15; Matt. 18:15-20). It’s better to delay a mediated result than it rush a dishonest result.
  - e. Conciliation sometimes is assisting individuals in clarifying and establishing current reality. Then assisting them in discerning and determining God’s view and biblically commendable attitude and paths for those involved, as well as willingness to persist in that.
8. Resist Efforts to Use non-disclosure agreements (NDAs).
- a. These agreements can be legitimate when used in contracts or employment agreements to protect an organization’s legitimate private information (e.g., trade secrets, strategic plans, identities of counselees and clients).
  - b. But these agreements are dangerous when used to cover up sin, which can allow a wrongdoer to continue with the same behavior and harm other people.
  - c. Insurance companies sometimes insist on NDAs as a condition of paying damages.
  - d. NDAs may be appropriate as a last resort to resolve a conflict when there is no other way to successfully address a wrong and bring about some level of resolution, and when all parties are fully informed of the long-term limitations and potential consequences of the agreement. In such cases, the parties can often at least reduce the scope and extent of an NDA so that it balances the need to provide confidentiality with the need to respect the parties and prevent future harm.
  - e. If an NDA is necessary, encourage a flexible approach, such as allowing a mutually agreeable public statement that acknowledges wrongdoing, but further comment and description is not allowed by either party. You could also agree to a specific plan of accountability and correction, which may or may not be public. Finally, you could include specific conditions upon which the non-disclosure

agreement is cancelled, such as other credible reports of similar wrongdoing or an abuser engaging in types of ministry or employment that may allow similar misconduct in the future. The goal here is to avoid unnecessary public scandal while also sending the message that the situation has been properly addressed and safeguards have been put in place to prevent similar wrongdoing.

f. Helpful articles:

- [Should Christians Sign Non-Disclosure Agreements?](#)
- [NDAs Kept These Christians Silent. Now They're Speaking Out Against Them](#)
- [Should Christian Organizations Use NDAs?](#)

9. Be prepared to be judged and condemned yourself (1 Peter 2:18-25)

- a. When you make mistakes, errors in judgment or actually sin against the parties, model the principle of confession. The Gospel is also for reconcilers too!
- b. When you are unfairly judged or condemned, use that as an opportunity to model the principles of peacemaking as well by listening patiently and humbly, resisting the temptation to become defensive, and accepting responsibility for any portion of fault or blame that is truly yours.

## **B. POST- CONCILIATION**

1. Post Conciliation Evaluations and Grievances

- a. Establish a meaningful accountability structure for ministry so that feedback and grievances will be directly received and reviewed by trusted individuals who have the wisdom, experience and authority to hold you accountable to address feedback, complaints and grievances.
- b. Make it easy for clients and their advisors to provide feedback and express disappointments, criticism and suggestions for improvement (see [Conciliation Assistance Report](#)).
- c. Respond quickly, humbly and graciously to negative feedback.
- d. Before responding, ask someone else to give you an objective evaluation of the complaint.
- e. Provide a credible, written [Grievance Process](#) that ensures an objective evaluation of and response to client complaints. Make sure it covers simple complaints and complex, multi-party complaints that may result in negative public statements.

2. Report questionable behavior in another conciliator.

- a. Reject the “good Christians don’t complain or give negative reports about others” attitude (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 12:15; 15:32; 17:10).

- b. If you observe troubling behavior in another conciliator, show authentic love by raising your concerns with that person (Heb. 3:12, 1 Thess. 5:14-15). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns: “Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin” (Life Together).
  - c. If you are not satisfied with the conciliator’s response or have reason to believe that the conciliator may be involved in a pattern of incompetence or misbehavior, seek support from mutual friends or conciliators (Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 13:7; Matt. 18:16) or the organization to which that person is accountable (Matt. 18:17).
3. Conciliation Clauses in Contracts and Membership Agreements
- a. Legally binding [conciliation clauses](#) are appropriate in relationships of equal bargaining power (e.g., business contracts) and where there is genuine informed consent (e.g., a pastor and a church).
  - b. However, because of past abuses of these types of clauses, RW360 no longer recommends legally binding conciliation clauses in relationships of unequal bargaining power or resources, such as church membership or employment agreements (see [examples of informal conciliation agreements](#)).
4. Specialized Training
- a. Academic degrees and professional training (law, counseling, ministry, etc.) are valuable but do not provide adequate training for the complexities of Christian conciliation.
  - b. Supplemental training in a special area does not necessarily qualify a conciliator to handle complex cases, but it can sensitize you to complex issues and the need for assistance or a referral.
  - c. Although full-time professionals can justify the time and expense of advanced training, it is often too costly for those who occasionally volunteer their services. Therefore, volunteers should be especially sensitive to situations that are too complex for their level of training.
  - d. If you want to serve in conciliation cases involving power imbalances, abuse and trauma, please invest time and energy in advanced training!
    - [RW Academy](#)
    - [Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation](#)
    - [Ambassadors of Reconciliation](#)
    - Special trauma informed care training is often available through local social services

## PART III

### TRAUMA-INFORMED MEDIATION

#### A. INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA

##### 1. What is trauma?

For the purposes of this training, trauma is defined as the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event or series of events, or ongoing dynamics, such as an accident, single incident or constant abuse or natural disaster, that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes physical, limbic and amygdala driven responses to real or perceived similar situations, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes a person's sense of self and their ability to feel and manage a full range of emotions.

Experiencing something traumatic can have a profound effect on your life on a daily basis. The difficult part of defining trauma is that both the thing being experienced and the experience itself combine to have a traumatic impact.

The key to understanding the definition of trauma is realizing that it is not only about what happens to a person that matters; it's how that person experienced that event that matters. As Mundi Kolber writes:

The ANS [automatic neural system] has two parts – the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic is what drives our fight/flight response by stimulating cortisol and adrenaline to mobilize us to fight or flee danger. Additionally, a lesser-known, but equally significant reaction from the sympathetic nervous system is the fawn response. In this state, our bodies attempt to neutralize prolonged danger by pleasing or accommodating others rather than acknowledging our discomfort....

[I]n fight/flight mode our bodies respond with corresponding levels of arousal to perceived threats. In some instances, we may feel only mildly activated, whereas in other situations we may be hypervigilant and feel totally out of control. When this happens, the higher-thinking parts of our brains become so disconnected from our actions that two things can occur. First, our bodies unconsciously respond to the threats in the best ways they can – without necessarily consulting the higher brain. Second, we may behave completely contrary to our “normal” selves in order to deal with real or perceived dangers.

Conversely, the *parasympathetic* nervous system is in play when we are in a relaxed state. However, another function of the parasympathetic nervous system is to shift the body into a “freeze” state as a way of coping with terror when a person perceives they are in danger and there is no escape. This is our bodies' way of trying to protect us from actual or perceived impending doom without consulting our thinking brains. When the freeze response is activated, it occurs

on a continuum from mild foggy or not feeling present to fainting or physical collapse.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, a traumatic situation can change how your brain interprets information. This can affect your memory, moods, emotions, and your feelings of safety and security. This is often referred to as “dysregulation.”

After you experience trauma, your body begins to live on high alert. You become more sensitive to your surroundings, which is known as hyper-awareness. Things that might seem insignificant to other people can trigger strong feelings and reactions for you.

Dysregulation typically leads to a reliance on emotional reactivity rather than thoughtful responding. As dysregulation increases, the amygdala becomes the driving force for your interactions.

Until safety is established the brain is in a constant state of hyper-vigilance and functions almost exclusively in survival mode (the autonomic nervous system) and is literally unable to even access the higher functioning needed to process through the damage and work toward mending a relationship.

This is why understanding the effects of trauma is so important. Many people suffer from trauma without realizing it and this way of life becomes their new normal.

## 2. What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a particular kind of trauma that develops in some people who have experienced an especially shocking, scary, or dangerous event.

It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to help defend against danger or to avoid it. This “fight-or-flight” response is a typical reaction meant to protect a person from harm.

The main difference between PTSD and the experience of trauma is important to note. A traumatic event is time-based, while PTSD is a longer-term condition where one continues to have flashbacks and re-experiencing the traumatic event. In addition, to meet criteria for PTSD there must be a high level of ongoing distress and life impairment.

3. Trauma is typically caused by traumatic events, especially those that are out of the ordinary and are directly experienced as threats to safety, survival and preservation. Common examples of trauma include:
  - a. Being verbally or emotionally abused

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<sup>4</sup> *Try Softer*, by Mundi Kolber, pp. 26-27.



- b. Being physically or sexually abused
  - c. Being neglected as a child
  - d. Experiencing spiritual or religious abuse
  - e. Being in an accident or natural disaster
  - f. Being physically attacked or assaulted
  - g. Witnessing domestic abuse or violence
  - h. Witnessing bodily harm or death
  - i. A fear of harm or high stress environment
  - j. Betrayal, rejection or loss in a significant relationship
  - k. Divorce
  - l. Abrupt and unexpected loss of a job
  - m. Mistreatment by people who are trusted or have major influence or authority
4. Signs and symptoms of trauma
- a. Irritability, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance
  - b. Feeling ineffectual, feeling trapped and hopeless
  - c. Tardiness, absenteeism, irresponsibility
  - d. Exhaustion and physical illness
  - e. Conflicts between colleagues, or lack of collaboration
  - f. Lack of flexibility, rigidity, impatience
  - g. Poor communication
  - h. Blaming others
  - i. Disruption in ability to maintain positive sense of self
  - j. Disruption in ability to manage strong emotions
  - k. Apathy, detachment and numbing, dealing with intrusive thoughts
5. Responses to trauma
- a. Traumatized individuals may respond to perceived threats in two ways: depersonalization/dissociation or hyper-arousal, what we often think of as the 'fight, flight or freeze' phenomena. In recent years, some experts have added a

third possible response described as “fawning,” which includes excessive pleasing behavior to appease the other person or avoid a threatening situation.

a. Depersonalization/disassociation (hypo-arousal) is typically characterized as feeling:

- Frozen internally, disengaging, deflecting engagement to surface matters
- Self-contained
- Going “still” or “silent”
- Detached, suspended in time
- Numbness, derealization (detachment from one’s surroundings)
- Compliance (consent to the wishes of others)
- Mini-Psychosis (losing touch with reality)
- Decrease in heart rate and respiration

b. Hyper-arousal is typically characterized as:

- Reactive, hyper-vigilant (exaggerated intensity of behaviors)
- Increase in heart rate and respiration
- Exaggerated startle response
- Anxious

## 6. Screening for trauma

a. Most people have experienced some level of trauma during their lives, but most of these experiences do not create long-term changes in how they respond to daily life. Even so, the kinds of conflicts that necessitate conciliation may bring some of these “minor” traumas to the surface, and if a person has experienced major traumas, some aspects of conciliation are even more likely to trigger traumatic reactions.

b. Therefore, it is prudent for a conciliator to make it a standard practice to do some level of screening for trauma during the initial screening process. For example, the following question is included in RW360’s initial [Request for Conciliation Assistance form](#):

- Does this situation remind you of other situations where you have experienced significant stress, pain or suffering?
- [If the answer to the first question is yes] Please briefly describe those situations and how they have impacted your life?

c. If a potential client answers these questions affirmatively and there is even a slight indication that those past experiences have caused lasting trauma, it is

wise to postpone mediation and seek expert assistance, preferably by referring the person to a counselor who is qualified to assess trauma and, if necessary, provide the therapy that is needed to prepare the party to participate safely and effectively in a conciliation process.

- d. Professional counselors who provide trauma-informed therapy often use written evaluations to assess a client's level of trauma. Three common evaluations are: [Brief Trauma Questionnaire](#) (BTQ), [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACE) Questionnaire, and [PTSD Check List](#). RW360 does not recommend that Christian conciliators attempt to use these forms themselves, but it may be helpful to read these three forms simply to familiarize yourself with the kind of questions and insights professionally trained counselors use.

## 7. Diagnostic Questions Prior to and During Mediation

- a. If you discover that a potential client has experienced some level of trauma that may impact his or her ability to participate safely in a mediation process, it will be helpful for you to constantly evaluate the situation even if moving ahead with conciliation by asking yourself these types of questions:
  - Are there indications that parties could be operating out of their prefrontal cortex or the amygdala?
    - Amygdala activates “fight, flight, freeze, fawn” responses
    - Prefrontal cortex leads to brainstorming and problem-solving
  - Are clients responding thoughtfully or reacting emotionally to the environment?
  - Do I observe indications that the client is significantly challenged to self-regulate? Does the client express difficulty in self-regulating?
  - Are we discerning about clients and their potentially operating out of fear-driven physiology and/or heart idolatry fear?
  - Does the client seem able to have empathy for the other party?
  - Am I equipped to know if the client is able to participate safely in mediation? What do I need to have confidence in my assessment?

## B. TRAUMA-INFORMED MEDIATION

1. Research shows that when people who have experienced trauma have recognized how that trauma has affected them, learned how to manage their reactions and are beginning to gain a genuine sense of some control over the outcomes of a process, they are more likely to experience successful participation in a mediation and support the outcomes.
2. When a party has not yet achieved this level of understanding and self-awareness, however, it is necessary to postpone conciliation until the party has time to undergo sufficient trauma-informed therapy to prepare them to participate without harm to themselves or others and engage successfully in a conciliation process.
3. Diane Langberg's excellent book, [Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores](#), is *must reading* for mediators as part of becoming equipped to provide safe, compassionate, and effective trauma-informed mediation. Diane provides biblically grounded insights on trauma and suffering and addresses our own heart-challenges when engaging suffering and conveying the hope of the gospel and the healing of Christ.
4. Next to the goal of ministering with true love and compassion, your top priority as a trauma-informed mediator is to provide a setting and a process that is not only *actually safe* but also *perceived as being safe*. Therefore, you need to give prayerful attention to every detail of the process, including:
  - Checking and rechecking clarity of expectations and arrangements
  - More than normal personal contacts with parties
  - Care with when documents and how written processes are distributed; more reliance on conversation with delivery rather than sending and asking to in writing about concerns and questions
  - Clear explanation of purposes and expectations of preparation assignments
  - How the issues and agreements are worded
  - How pre-mediation coaching is conducted
  - Making sure the traumatized party has strong and meaningful support throughout the process
  - Which parties and witnesses are allowed in the room at what time
  - The physical arrangement of the room and the parties
  - Arrange a signal for a party who might be triggered that enables him or her to communicate concerns or discomfort to you so that you are able to call a break for your own reason, without revealing the real reason for the break.

- Be constantly observant of everyone's physicality in the room. Abusers can subtly intimidate. Or victims may be hyperaware and take responsibility for the normal tension of others physicality and responding to something you are unaware of.
  - How you guide the conversation (e.g., use more closed rather than open-ended questions at the beginning so you can guide the conversation and avoid foreseeable triggers)
  - Take frequent breaks and caucuses to find out how the parties are feeling about the process
  - If tensions begin to get high, take a long recess to give parties time to think, pray and relax
  - Constantly ask yourself the diagnostic questions in the previous section
5. A conciliator should be especially *sensitive to the way that trauma impacts a person's brain*.
- Trauma typically de-activates the logical thinking areas in the neo-cortex and activates the more primal part of the brain that produce fight-flight-freeze-fawn responses to stressful situations. These responses are often manifested through a person's feelings and their body's automatic physiological responses, which take precedence over the ability to calmly think things through.
  - One of the best ways to serve a party who is still dealing with the effects of trauma is to use a "bottom-up approach" that recognizes the precedence of a party's feelings and bodily sensations and seeks to build a compassionate and trusting relationship that makes it safe to look at the reasons why a person feels unsafe and unable to control thoughts and feelings when triggered. Thus, the party is gently guided through a process of using his or her entire brain, integrating both feeling and thinking, which contributes to a sense of safety and slowly strengthens his or her ability to engage in reasoned conversation, to see things from other perspectives, to offer insights and suggestions, and to participate in making decisions and reaching agreements that are authentically mutual.
  - For a much more detailed description of a "bottom-up approach," see [Why a Bottom-Up Approach to Trauma Therapy is So Powerful](#).
6. When a party has had sufficient counseling to be less subject by the dysregulation caused by trauma, you can *begin to use more of a "top-down approach" in conciliation*. This approach relies more on the parts of the brain that are associated with thinking, speaking and current emotional awareness. This enables the party to focus more on interpreting information, evaluating perspectives and correcting inaccurate thinking. One of the most helpful tools in this process is to turn to God's Word for meaningful assurances and guidance, including:

- God's **forgiveness** provides comfort and hope to victims who struggle to forgive and overcome trauma symptoms, as well as to perpetrators who are traumatized by their own guilt.
- God's **steadfast love and mercy** comforts those who are tempted to question his love in the midst of their suffering.
- Although God allows us to experience suffering and harm in this life, he promises to **protect** us from any suffering that would separate us from him or cause us eternal harm.
- Although healing from nightmares, anxiety, doubts and other symptoms of trauma may be incomplete in this life, God promises his children **perfect healing** in the life to come.
- Those who doubt their worth and value can be encouraged by remembering their **identity in Christ** as dearly loved children.
- The Bible is filled with hundreds of passages that reinforce these assurances and promises, including:

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress" (Ps. 107:13)

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10)

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Ps. 91:1-2).

"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps. 34:4).

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 17).

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-29).

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

See also: Ps. 91:4-6; Joel 2:25; Ps. 23:1-6; Prov. 1:33; Isa. 61:1-8; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Lam. 3:21-24; Isa. 51:12-15; Ps. 145:18-19; Isa. 54:10; Ps. 34:18-19; 2 Cor. 1:3-7.

- One of the best ways to bring these promises into a mediation process is to provide a client with several relevant passages prior to mediation so that he or she can reflect and pray over these promises before a joint meeting.
7. A third vital element of trauma-informed mediation is to help a party to learn how to *manage his or her own emotions*.
- This requires both self-awareness (what am I feeling?) and self-engagement (how do I direct the power of these feelings?)
  - This process can involve learning to read one's body (increasing pulse, muscles tightening, etc.) and learning to accurately read and interpret one's emotions (what am I feeling right now? Why do I feel this way? How might his feeling move me in an unhelpful direction?)
  - If time permits, one way to assist a party to develop these abilities is to encourage them to complete RW360's [Discovering Relational Wisdom 3.0 course](#) prior to mediation. Another option is to provide a party with relevant resources on trauma developed by the CCEF (see section 6 below).
  - In cases involving significant trauma, it is wise and sometimes necessary to postpone mediation until a party has worked with a qualified counselor to learn how to understand and manage the impact of former traumatic experiences.
  - A mediator should also monitor the interactions throughout the mediation process be ready to call a recess or caucus whenever emotions seem to be getting the upper hand and any party needs a break to self-evaluate and regain emotional control.
8. A fourth important element of trauma-informed mediation is to help a party gain a sense of *genuine empowerment*. The key element here is to guide the process in such a way that the party is encouraged and enabled to speak for himself or herself as much as possible, to make his or own decisions (sometimes after thoughtfully discussing issues with the mediator or other advisors during a caucus), and to have genuine sense that he or she has an equal amount of autonomy and voice into the process and its outcome.
9. There is much, much more that can be learned about how to carry out trauma-informed mediation. One of the best places to start is spend a few hours digesting the [excellent trauma focused resources developed the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation](#).

## **PART IV**

### **THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IMBALANCE AND ABUSE**

#### **A. UNDERSTANDING POWER**

1. Power is the capacity to influence or shape something, the ability to make something happen or to stop something from happening (Diane Langberg).
2. Origins of Power
  - Power is not inherently evil: “Power belongs to the Lord” (Psalm 62:11).
  - All image bearers possess power (Gen. 1:26-28).
  - All power is derived from the Lord (see Dan. 2:21, John 19:11; Rom. 13:1-7).
  - In a fallen and chaotic world, power must often be exercised to maintain order and to do justice (Rom. 13:1-7).
3. Power imbalances are natural and not inherently wrong and vary by context.

“Power is what enables us to make things happen or not. In this sense everyone has power, but we do not all have it to the same degree. Power as influence is always relative to our resources.” - Richard Gula

  - Knowledge - Education, training, skills acquired, cognitive ability
  - Verbal - Language, mastery of words, speaking quickly
  - Emotional - capacity to express, read, and process emotions (EQ)
  - Spiritual - Scriptural knowledge, relationship with God
  - Positional - office, title, role, or position
  - Relational - trust-based relational credibility, who you know and can access, wooing and winning social capital through connection, perceived power
  - Physical - physical characteristics, strength, gender and sexual identity
  - Cultural - Age, race, gender, and ethnicity
  - Resource - money, time, material goods
  - Perception – the other person’s view of you or people like you or in your position

#### **B. MISUSE OF POWER**

1. We must be careful to not to label all exercises of power as abuse (e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; Rom. 13:1-7). Many exercises of power in the church or family or by employers or civil officials are appropriate and necessary, even though some people experience it in a negative way.
2. “You cannot do justice without recognizing how power has been used to exploit and abuse, but you also cannot do justice without exerting power yourself.” Tim Keller



3. Power imbalances can easily lead to abuse, especially if we realize that power tends to remove the restraints of sin the normal people face. Moreover, studies indicate that as people grow in power, they tend to lose their capacity for empathy.<sup>5</sup> These dynamics and lead to the misuse and abuse of power in every human setting.
  - Intimate partner violence (Domestic violence)
  - Family/parenting
  - Church/religious/spiritual
  - Workplace bullying (organizational “conflict”)
4. In addition to the noetic effects of sin,
5. In 2021, two major denominations have issues reports that reveal the seriousness and extent of abuse of power within the church.
  - [“Southern Baptists Refused to Act on Abuse,”](#) Christianity Today
  - [“Report on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault,”](#) Presbyterian Church in America
6. For the purposes of this report, we are defining “abuse” as a pattern whereby a person in a position of authority or trust seeks to serve himself and uses that position to domineer and control others through behaviors such as grooming, manipulating, shaming, dismissing, bullying, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading or insulting.
  - Abuse can include behaviors that are not inherently evil but become evil when being used in a self-seeking way to use others.
  - See GRACE ministry’s detailed definitions of [Emotional and Spiritual Abuse](#).
7. Abuse occurs when power is misused in relationship to another image bearer of God to exploit, manipulate or control the vulnerability of another for one’s own ends (Ezekiel 34:1-16, Matthew 23).
8. Scripture repeatedly condemns “oppression” of all kinds, using words that mean to “exert power over” or to afflict, harass, suppress, exhaust or crush others (see, e.g., Isa. 1:17). Such oppression is especially evil in the eyes of God when it is carried out by spiritual leaders (Jer. 23:1-2; Ezek. 34:7-10).
9. Power is seductive, self-deceiving, controlling and easily misused:
  - Power often involves an intoxicating mixture of pride, self-righteousness, fear, control, fits of anger. These factors are magnified when we delude ourselves into believing that we are acting for the glory of God.

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<sup>5</sup> See [One Solution to Political Polarization](#)

- As illustrated all too tragically by the kings of Israel (Saul, David, Solomon, Herod, etc.), the Pharisees and countless modern politicians.
- Jesus aptly described this dynamic as “Lording it over them” (Mark 10:42).
- Signs and tactics of abuse: fear, anger, alliances, avoidance, technicalities, etc.
- In marriages
- Church disciplinary cases
- Pastors and leadership teams
- Christian conciliators
- Consequence: Grief, broken relationships, loneliness, and in some cases, God brings upon us the suffering we imposed on others through the misuse of power (e.g., David/Bathsheba/Absalom), all of which dishonors God and discredits his church.

### **C. SPIRITUAL ABUSE**

1. Spiritual abuse is often difficult to define and prove because it is often a subjective experience that lacks the objective evidence of physical or sexual abuse. Here is how two major denominations have recently defined spiritual abuse:

“Spiritual abuse is an attempt to exert power and control over someone using religion, faith, or beliefs. [It is often used to] solidify the power, prestige, and gratification of the abuser ... or to manipulate peoples’ emotional responses or loyalty for the benefit of the church, institution, or of another individual.... The means are a misuse of Scripture and of the victim’s desire to please God and their leader. Victims suffer shame, confusion, and spiritual doubt, having a negative impact on the victim’s perception of God’s character.”<sup>6</sup>

“In human relationships there are areas of legitimate authority. When power or control is exercised beyond the appropriate boundaries of such authority, whether in the context of a religious organization or in individual relationships where spiritual authority is claimed, this constitutes spiritual abuse. This can happen when spiritual authority is misused to manipulate peoples’ emotional responses (such as fear, guilt or shame) or loyalty, for the benefit of the church, institution or of another individual. Spiritual abuse may also include or underlie other forms of abuse such as sexual, physical, verbal, psychological or emotional abuse when these take place within the context of a religious organization.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [PCA Report on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault](#), p. 2436

<sup>7</sup> Salvation Army of New Zealand definition of Spiritual Abuse

## 2. Key Characteristics of Spiritual Abuse<sup>8</sup>

- Coercion and control
  - Use of Scripture to coerce and control
  - Use of “divine calling” to coerce
  - Manipulation, pressure and exploitation
  - Expectation of excessive commitment and conformity
  - Enforced accountability
  - Censorship: Inability to ask questions, disagree or to raise concerns
  - Requirement for obedience
  - Fear
  - Isolation and rejection
  - Public shaming and humiliation
  - Threats of spiritual consequences
- Insincere encouragement or comfort, false gratitude and dependance, requirement of personal loyalty, especially equating it to spirituality
- See “[The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse](#)” for more details.

## D. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE MISUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH

### 1. Advise pastors to build personal safeguards

- Beware the “magnification factor” – leaders are 10x “louder” than they realize.
- Guard against idolatry
  - Good goods can become bad gods
  - Desire → Demand → Judge → Punish (James 4:1-3)
- Remember that you are a steward of the power God entrusts to you:

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.... ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’” (Matt. 25:14, 20-21).
- Cultivate a servant’s heart and mentality:

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you

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<sup>8</sup> *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures* (Dr. Lisa Oakley and Justine Humphreys)

must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:42–45).

➤ Cultivate the character of Christ:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29).

➤ Exercise power in the light and the power of the gospel:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5–11).

➤ Strive to be “approachable”<sup>9</sup>

➤ Establish genuine accountability<sup>10</sup>

- Find advisors who tell you what you don’t want to hear (see 2 Tim. 4:3; cf. Rehoboam, 1 Kings 12-15; Abraham Lincoln, *Team of Rivals*).
- Seek and receive advice and correction humbly (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 13:10)<sup>11</sup>
- Schedule a rigorous annual performance review.

## 2. Building Organizational Safeguards

➤ Implement all of the personal safeguards throughout your leadership team.

➤ Beware of protective systems and image management<sup>12</sup>

- Manipulative personal strategies
- Protective inner circle

➤ Submit unresolved issues to denominational review with a humble and teachable attitude ...

➤ But always treat formal judicial processes with caution to avoid falling into rigid legalism that neglects “justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23). The Bible always trumps denominational rules!

➤ When necessary, seek assistance from professional conciliators.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See [www.rw360.org/approachability](http://www.rw360.org/approachability)

<sup>10</sup> See [www.rw360.org/accountability](http://www.rw360.org/accountability)

<sup>11</sup> See *The Cross and Criticism* (Alfred Poirier)

<sup>12</sup> *Something’s Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse* (Wade Mullen)

<sup>13</sup> See [www.rw360.org/christian-conciliation-service](http://www.rw360.org/christian-conciliation-service) and [www.rw360.org/reassess-cc](http://www.rw360.org/reassess-cc)

- Build safe organizational pathways for complaints, reporting or asking for help. Be clear about why and how the path is safe.
- The goal is to identify and address problems as early and safely as possible in order to prevent trauma and sincerely live out the organization's commitment to approachability and accountability.

## PART V

### MEDIATING IN CASES INVOLVING POWER IMBALANCES AND ABUSE

#### A. SERVING IN CASES INVOLVING ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Psalm 82:3-4, “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

1. Allegations of abuse in the church, family or workplace create an automatic tension because those involved typically view the situation from two different perspectives:<sup>14</sup>
  - How would I want an abuse claim handled if I were accused?
  - How would I want an abuse claim handled if I were the person disclosing my abuse?
2. A conciliator also needs to recognize and be open about the tension between the legal system and the court of public opinion (“innocent until proven guilty” vs. “guilty until proven innocent”).
3. In spite of these tensions, it is almost always best to advise the overseeing organizations to take all claims of abuse seriously (only 2-7% of abuse are false), provide safety for victims, report appropriately to civil officials and investigate rigorously and objectively, while withholding judgment until the end.
4. It is essential that conciliators, church leaders and counselors grow in knowledge and insight about the dynamics of abuse in order to be able to accurately identify assess abusive dynamics in individuals and organizations. As explained in Wade Mullen’s book, [Something’s Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself from Its Power](#), this should:
  - Understanding institutional impression management strategies that create context of abuse (secrets, sacred roles, exclusive inner circle)
  - Identifying manipulation and grooming behavior of an abuser (flattery, favors, and alliances)
  - Recognizing the strategies individuals and organizations utilize to gain power and control over a victim’s internal and external world
  - Discovering how victims are silenced in abusive dynamics (retaliation, intimidation, and pleas).

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<sup>14</sup> See “[Why it so hard to have constructive conversations about abuse?](#) By Brad Hambrick

- Understanding the defense mechanisms of an abuser (denial, excuses, justifications, and comparisons)
  - Distinguishing sincere institutional repentance versus insincere tactics of concession (the apology score card)
  - Identifying tactics used to manipulate a public image (demonstrations: statements, distancing, and rehabilitation)
  - Learning the language of abuse and naming it properly enables the first step to stop the cycle of destruction
5. If the parties request a conciliation process, it is essential to realize that the normal assumptions about power dynamics in Christian Conciliation (i.e., that there is equal power, mutual guilt, joint responsibility for a solution and a shared goal of interpersonal reconciliation) are compromised if not altogether invalid in cases involving abuse. Therefore, it is unwise and can actually be quite harmful to follow a “standard conciliation” process (e.g., each party is directed to get the log out of his eye before focusing on the speck in the others’ eye.).
  6. Where there are allegations of abuse automatically and immediately assess for trauma and respond accordingly.
  7. Research shows that although mediation can be helpful and successful in cases involving power imbalances and abuse, the process must be carefully and deliberately modified to account for these dynamics.
    - a. Mediators “may inadvertently exacerbate an existing power imbalance by imposing impartiality on an unlevel playing field” (Turner and Saunders. 1995).
    - b. Power is contextual and having equal power is not a necessity for a fair mediation. Having a stronger party does not inherently mean they will abuse power. (Green, 2005).
    - c. The litmus test for assessing power imbalances is a determining how it affects a party’s ability to self-determine. (Gewurz, 2001)
    - d. Increased power: can (1) reduce the accuracy with which we judge others’ emotions; (2) reduce felt compassion toward others who suffer; and (3) alters emotions. (Dacher Keltner)
    - e. Conclusion: There is literature to support settlement negotiations and mediation when power imbalances exist, but when those imbalances are a result of abuse, or will result in a re-enactment of abuse, the approach should be changed to provide genuine safety, justice and reconciliation.
  8. Stewarding Power Redemptively During Mediation
    - a. Assess power dynamics wisely

- Who has power? What power do they have? How does this affect each party's capacity for self-determination?
  - What is the level of fear in the parties?
  - Who controls more of what the other party wants or needs at any given moment?
  - Have abusive dynamics been reported?
- b. Advocate for justice lovingly (Prov. 31:8-9, Jer. 22:3, Psa. 82:3))
- Name reality
  - Directly confront abusive behavior
- c. Protect the vulnerable and accommodate power differentials gently (2 Tim 2:24, Gal. 6.1)
- Allow the weaker party to speak first, unless that puts that party in a more vulnerable position by speaking without having everyone hear together the stronger party.
  - Change the format (Ex. Restorative Justice, removing log and speck assignment, shuttle negotiation, etc.)
  - Empower by providing weaker party with more options
  - Focus on repentance, restitution, rather than the interpersonal process of reconciliation
9. How do you mediate in a case where abuse is alleged but the power dynamics do not seem to support that conclusion?
- Assess for trauma
  - Understand and identify dynamics such as learned helplessness, influential intimidation, the cost to the person of potential outcomes that are not obvious
  - Check for an information power imbalance (one person has incriminating evidence on the other, or information that can be doled out but is necessary to the other)
  - Check for a resource power dynamic
  - Check for a relational connection power dynamic (one party is in close relationship with someone who has power and uses that outside of structure, or without transparency)
  - Understand how someone can abuse 'up'



## PART VI

### MEDIATING CASES INVOLVING DOMESTIC ABUSE

#### 1. Basic Principles of Conciliating Cases of Domestic Abuse

- a. All abuse has to do with an effort to diminish or remove a victim's voice and choice for the abuser's own purposes, mission, agenda, goals.
- b. "Abuse occurs in a marriage when one spouse pursues their own self-interests by seeking to control and dominate the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors."<sup>15</sup>
- c. "Most often, when we encounter abuse, it is subtle. Any one instance or occurrence of most behaviors can be explained away or dismissed. To answer the question 'Is it abuse?' we need to determine whether such an event is part of a much broader system of oppression."<sup>16</sup>
- d. Symptoms of abuse: physical anguish, shame, faith struggles, hypervigilance, intrusions, avoidance, lack of affect, single emotion expression, agreeableness, speaking second or vaguely until the other view is stated to agree with, lack of individuation, sense of diminished autonomy, over reliance on prescribed roles and/or overwhelmed emotions.
- e. One of the most helpful things helpers can do is to help victims practice God-given agency. As image bearers of God, victims have the opportunity to break out of oppression and find freedom when they are ready. Helpers may be tempted to act on behalf of victims and try to rescue them. However, that puts the helper in the place of removing autonomy and God-given agency. Helpers can legitimately grieve with and assist victims in seeing that their current reality does not have an easy path of no suffering no matter what path they take. Even so, God enable us when it seems like we just cannot.
- f. A care team should be assembled whose main goal is to care for and protect the victim.

#### 2. Things a Conciliator Should Never Do

- a. Do not attempt to serve as a conciliator in a case that is beyond your training, experience, or is irresistibly pulling you into being a party or advocate for one person or view.
- b. Do not attempt a conciliation process when there has been abuse until there is genuine evidence of repentance (see below). Exception: Victim requests meeting

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<sup>15</sup> *Is It Abuse*, Darby Strickland, p. 24

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, p. 25

with fully informed consent, perhaps to address issues that need immediate resolution (separation agreement, financial support, handling of debts, child custody, visitation or support, etc.)

- c. Do not confront an abuser before the family is safe, comfortable, protected and prepared, or else the abuser may immediately retaliate against the family.
- d. Do not play into the abuser's agenda (e.g., promote unbiblical submission).
- e. Promptly confront and prevent gas-lighting and blame-shifting.<sup>17</sup>
- f. Do not expect or encourage a victim to focus prematurely on her contribution to a broken marriage (Matt. 7:1-3). There may be a future time when the victim may benefit from examining her heart and understanding how she has not loved God first and others as herself, but the examination of her entanglement in the abuse should not be addressed until well after the abuser has accepted full responsibility for his wrongs. The safety of the victim and the abuser's repentance should be the sole priority before there can be any move toward relational reconciliation or repair.
  - Bad example: During the initial part of a conciliation process, a wife described a clear and vivid pattern of the husband's sinful behavior, which fully satisfied the definition of domestic abuse. Instead of realizing that this was not a normal marital mediation, the conciliator said, "Well, I've heard a lot of what you think your husband has done wrong, but I've not heard you admit to anything you've done wrong." The woman was crushed and retreated into a protective shell. The husband's abuse was never properly identified, confronted and corrected, and the couple ended up divorced.
- g. Do not promote relational forgiveness or a victim's response to initial signs of repentance before there is ongoing evidence and affirmation of genuine repentance.
  - "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
  - Christians should distinguish the difference between having an attitude of forgiveness versus extending forgiveness, a transaction which occurs only after repentance and ownership of sin has taken place.

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<sup>17</sup> "Gaslighting" refers to a specific type of manipulation where the manipulator is trying to get someone else (or a group of people) to question their own reality, memory or perceptions.

### 3. Things a Conciliator Should Always Do

- a. Make sure you are fully trained and qualified to serve in a particular case.
- b. Be an advocate for the gospel, for justice, for truth and clarity, for God's honor, for a proper conciliation process and for both parties, while making sure that the victim is supported by a person who is qualified and committed to be an advocate for the victim.
- c. Make sure there is sufficient evidence of repentance and accountability to ensure that the conciliation process will be constructive and will be protected from being used as a new means of abuse.
- d. Until there is evidence of genuine repentance, encourage individual counseling that protects the confidentiality of the victim.
- e. Be constantly aware of how deceptive and manipulative abusers can be; assume the abuser is able to deceive and manipulate you. Be on guard against being used by the abuser to advance his agenda.
- f. Use at least two conciliators, both male and female
- g. Encourage the victim to be accompanied by a spiritual supporter and advocate.
- h. Provide genuine biblical safety
- i. Be gentle when questioning a victim's story so you do not contribute to her abuse.
- j. Constantly give people the ability to choose what to do ("choicing") so they feel they still have agency. The ability to say yes or no at any time. Don't give the impression that anyone has control over anyone other than themselves. This helps to counter the "de-voicing" many victims have experienced.
- k. If conciliation is warranted, alter the conciliation format entirely to focus on the abuse dynamic, which should include asking the victim to prepare and present a detailed impact statement. The abuser would be expected to listen without objection, blaming or excusing and to then offer sincere and detailed confession as well as restitution.

### 4. Screening

- a. See the screening recommendations in Appendix 1.
- b. Because we cannot always screen for abuse thoroughly, and victims do not always recognize they are abused, we should actually continue with low level screening throughout the conciliation process to see whether we need to pause or terminate the process. One way to do this is to do an occasional private caucus

with a party and ask these types of questions, which is a kind of reverse screening:

- How comfortable are you saying what you think, raising difficult topics, disagreeing with the other person, and standing up for what matters to you?
- How confident are you that both parties will: (a) follow the rules (b) share essential information (c) hear each other out (d) cooperate (e) stand by promises and agreements?
- Is there anything about this process that makes you concerned for your own safety (or for the safety of your children)? If so, please say more.
- How well do you understand this process, your legal rights and options, and the things you need to know to fully and effectively participate? What are your remaining concerns?

## **5. Assessing for Genuine Repentance**

- a. A repentant abuser will respect boundaries and not push for them to be changed before the victim is ready.
- b. Why Assess for Repentance?
  - It is loving for the offender
  - Contributes to safety of others
  - Helps the offended discern how to respond
  - Protects the offender and offended 's relationship with the Lord
  - Can feel uncomfortable for us
  - Zacchaeus- Luke (19:8-9) "When is a thief no longer a thief. When he is a generous man" - Chris Moles. See also Eph. 4:22-24
- c. Wordily Sorrow vs Godly Regret (2 Cor 7:10-13)
  - Godly regret is good. (Unpacked in Point C)
    - Focused on how it offends God
    - God's word as measure for how we see sin
    - Brings restoration and redemption
    - It has a redemptive energy and eagerness
  - The opposite of Godly remorse is not always remorselessness-

- Feel sorry for how it is affecting themselves. Self-pity
- Pride will always regret making a fool of itself
- Detect that the people around us think it is stupid or silly or reprehensible
- Repentance is Not
  - A mere apology
  - A promise to do better
  - Fear of consequences for self
  - Partial
  - Words without evidential fruit
  - Established short term
- Godly regret leads to salvation.
  - Be willing to cause Godly Regret
  - Do not be fooled by worldly regret

#### d. Real Repentance

- Recognizes the chief offense is against God (Ps 51)
- Will agree with Scripture's indictment of their heart
- Will be painfully specific (Acts 26:10-11)
  - Even if there are consequences
- The offender recognizes that God's grace allows us to turn from our sins. Rely on God not self (1 Thess. 1:9)
- The offender possesses a strong desire to dismantle the old, sinful self. Grows in hatred of their sin (Paul in Acts; Acts 22:4, 1 Cor 15:9, Gal 1:13, 1 Tim 1:13).
- Fear of Lord increases- (Proverbs) Seeks to move away from path of death to life
- The offender wholly acknowledges the specific effects of his or her sin on all the lives it touched.
- The offender is patient while others verify his or her repentance. (Gal 5:22-23)
- Our need to be always repenting

## Resources:

- [How to Discern True Repentance When Serious Sin Has Occurred, Darby Strickland \(JBC 34:3 \(2020\): 30–47 \(Free download here for two weeks only\)](#)
- [Abusers and True Repentance, Phil Monroe](#)
- [The Doctrine of Repentance by Thomas Watson](#)

## 6. Is it time for a separation?

- a. Although couples should not be encouraged to separate impulsively, there are certainly times when a separation is not only appropriate but necessary.
  - When there is any doubt whatsoever that a spouse or children may not be in a safe position and could be further manipulated or abused.
  - A separation can also be a helpful way to give an abuser the opportunity to demonstrate submission to a restoration process and an ongoing pattern of sincere repentance and life change.
- b. When a separation is warranted, a conciliator can work with the couple and their attorneys and their spiritual community to develop an agreed separation plan, which can include ongoing professional counseling, custody and visitation arrangements, financial support, accountability and specific benchmarks that need to take place before reuniting the family.

## 7. Is it time for divorce?

- a. All divorce is a result of sin but not all divorce is sinful.
- b. It is helpful if the parties' church has established a biblical policy on divorce. For example:
  - RW360 [Relational Commitments](#): "We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. For example, Scripture teaches that divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Our church believes that the continued use of pornography or ongoing patterns of emotional, spiritual, physical or financial neglect or abuse may also constitute biblically legitimate grounds for divorce. If you have questions about these issues, please talk with one of our leaders."
  - RW360 recognizes that different churches hold different positions on what constitutes biblical grounds for divorce. For relevant articles on this issue, please see [www.rw360.org/articles-divorce](http://www.rw360.org/articles-divorce).

- c. A delicate balance: it is important to show as much respect as possible for the parties' church leaders, who ideally should be the ones to help the parties decide if they have grounds for divorce. If you, as a conciliator, disagree with their church's policy, realize that it is each spouse's choice to follow this church and this doctrine, make an appeal (which you could assist with), or potentially choose another church.
- d. Do all you can to help victims discern the path of wisdom and love, always trusting that God himself is their Shepherd and Protector.

## APPENDIX 1 - RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Books on Domestic Abuse

- [Is It Abuse? Darby Strickland](#)
- [When Home Hurts: Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson](#)
- [The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Leslie Vernick](#)
- [Are You in an Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Leslie Vernick](#)
- [Something's Not Right - - Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse-and Freeing Yourself from Its Power: Wade Mullen](#)

### Books on Spiritual Abuse

- [Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church \(Diane Langberg\)](#)
- [The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen](#)

### Books and Articles on Trauma

- [Suffering and the Heart of God: Diane Langberg](#)
- [The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma: Bessel van der Kolk](#)
- [Try Softer: Aundi Kolber](#)
- [The Body Keeps Score: Bessel Van Der Kolk](#)
- [Why a Bottom-Up Approach to Trauma Therapy is So Powerful by Robyn Brickei](#)

### General Articles

- [Building Passport](#)
- [The Three P's of Satisfaction](#)
- [Portrait of a Peacemaker](#)
- [Peacemaker's Prayer](#)
- [GRACE Articles and Videos](#)
- ["Abusers and True Repentance" by Philip Monroe](#)
- [Guidelines for the Effective Use of the Bible in Counseling](#)
- [Guidelines for Victim-Sensitive Victim-Offender Mediation](#)
- [Wade Mullen: How to Recognize Spiritual Abuse in Evangelicalism \(Testimony\)](#)
- [10 Ways to Spot Spiritual Abuse, Mary DeMuth](#)
- [Blog by Gary Thomas - Enough Is Enough](#)
- [A Divorced Couple Shares Their Experience with Spiritual Abuse, By Jessica Lea](#)

### Articles on Trauma

- [CCEF Resources on Trauma](#)
- [12 Very Common Examples of Trauma](#)
- [Trauma Informed Mediation](#)
- [Trauma Informed Conflict Engagement](#)



- [The Three Pillars of Trauma Informed Care](#)

## Screening Tools

- [The Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns \(MASIC\): A Screening Interview for Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Available in the Public Domain](#)
- [The Duluth Model: Understanding Power and Control Wheel](#)
- [Gottman Assessment](#)
- [The Emotionally Destructive Marriage Assessment](#)
- [Do You Know What Questions to Ask? By Leslie Vernick](#)
- See questions in Appendix 2

## Redeeming Power Seminar by Diane Langberg<sup>18</sup>

- [Power Defined](#)
- [Power Abused](#)
- [Abuse of Power in the Church](#)
- [Power Redeemed 1](#)
- [Power Redeemed 2](#)
- [Recommended Resources](#)

## Resources on Mediating Power Imbalances and Abuse

- Burns, Bob, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie. *The Politics of Ministry: Navigating Power Dynamics and Negotiating Interests*. IVP Books, 2019.
- Crouch, Andy. *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*. IVP Books, 2013.  
— — —. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, and True Flourishing*. IVP Books, 2016.
- Davis, AM, and RA Salem. "Dealing With Power Imbalances in the Mediation of Interpersonal Disputes I Office of Justice Programs." *Mediation Quarterly*, no. Issue 6 (December 1984): 17-26.
- DeGroat, Chuck. *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. IVP, 2020.
- Dunlop, Nigel. "Mediation Power Imbalances: Weighing the Arguments." [mediate.com](https://www.mediate.com/articles/dunlop-power-imbalance.cfm), October 2018. <https://www.mediate.com/articles/dunlop-power-imbalance.cfm>.
- Eliades, Dimitrios. "Power in Mediation - Some Reflections." *ADR Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (1999): Article 2.
- Gewurz, Ilan G. "(Re)Designing Mediation to Address the Nuances of Power Imbalance." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 135-62.

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<sup>18</sup> Provided by permission of the Forum of Christian Leaders

- Green, Michael. "Tackling Employment Discrimination with ADR: Does Mediation Offer a Shield for the Haves or Real Opportunity for the Have-Nots?" *Berkeley J. Emp. & Lab*, no. 26 (2005): 321-39. Jordaan, Barney. "Power Imbalances in Mediation: How Far Should a Mediator Go? Part 1," June 24, 2020. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-imbalances-mediation-how-far-should-mediator-go-barney-jordaan>.
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- Keltner, Dacher. *The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence*. Penguin Books, Reprint Edition, 2017.
- Langberg, Diane. "Leadership, Power, and Authority in the Church and Home - Diane Langberg - YouTube." FOCLOnline, February 11, 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFtrQLy-01Q&ab\\_channel=FOCLOnline](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFtrQLy-01Q&ab_channel=FOCLOnline).

## APPENDIX 2 - INTAKE QUESTIONS FOR COMPLEX CASES

Note: A potential conciliation client may not initially disclose circumstances that will identify the case as complex. For individuals, the following questions may help uncover circumstances that you can follow up with additional questions.

- Please describe any responses or reactions in this dispute that are out of character for the other individual.
- Please describe any responses or reactions in this dispute that seem out of step with the situation or is inconsistent or erratic.

### 1. Questions to Identify Possible Abuse

- a. It is generally best to ask these questions when speaking to a spouse individually rather than in front of the other spouse.
- b. From *Is It Abuse*, Darby Strickland, p. 75
  - Are you afraid to disagree with your spouse?
  - What happens when you try to share an opinion that differs from your spouse's?
  - Does your spouse ever ignore you? If so, for how long and when?
  - How can you tell when your spouse is angry? Be specific. What does his anger look like? What does he say? Do?
  - When you are talking about hard things, what are some ways that your spouse expresses disagreement? (Mocking you, walking away, rolling his eyes, throwing things?)
  - What happens if you let him down? Do you feel that there are two sets of rules – one for you and one for your spouse?
  - Do you feel pressure to do things you do not want to do?
  - Does your spouse remind you of times when you sinned against him? When and how?
- c. Similar Questions
  - You mentioned that you have experienced \_\_\_\_\_ abuse (mistreatment, disrespect, etc.). Can you tell me more about that?
  - Are you able to describe how you have experienced the abuse?
  - How long has the abuse taken place?
  - Are you concerned for your personal safety?
  - What steps have you taken to avoid being hurt?
  - What are your greatest fears in your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

- Have you been able to take any steps to hold the other person responsible? If so, could you describe what you have done?
- Have you contacted any authorities regarding the abuse? If so, who and when? What have been the results?
- Who else is being affected by this behavior? (Who else is being hurt?)
- Who else have you contacted about this situation? What have been the results?
- If this behavior doesn't change, what will you do?

d. See also [Do You Know What Questions to Ask? By Leslie Vernick](#)

e. See also [The Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns \(MASIC\): A Screening Interview for Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Available in the Public Domain](#)

f. [See also the Duluth Power and Control Wheel](#)

## **2. Questions to Identify Possible Depression, Anxiety, Stress**

- You indicated that you were diagnosed with clinical depression. How is your depression being treated?
- Can you describe how the depression has affected your life?
- What you described must be causing you a lot of stress. How are you dealing with the stress?
- Mediation in a case like this is likely to be stressful for you. Is there anything else you are dealing with that might affect how you handle this situation?
- How do you relax in light of the challenges you are facing?
- What is your greatest fear?
- What is your greatest hope?

## **3. Questions to Identify Possible Addictions or Effects of Medications**

- How much time do you spend on the computer (Internet, social media, cell phone, etc.)?
- What times of day are you spending that much time on the Internet?
- Where are you when you are on the computer for long periods of time?
- What kinds of sites do you visit on the Internet?
- How often do you drink alcohol? How many drinks at a time?
- Do you use any kind of prescription medications to help you deal with stress or anxiety? What can you tell me about their use that might affect how you deal with this situation?

- Can you tell me if you have been using any non-prescription medications/ drugs to help you deal with stress or anxiety?
- In the past, have you struggled with any kind of addictions? Tell me about your experience. How are you dealing with that today?

#### **4. Questions for Group Reconciliation Cases**

*In these first two questions, look for indicators of leadership stress and turnover.*

- In the past two years, have any staff or lay leaders resigned their positions? If so, please describe how many and why you think they resigned?
- How is this situation affecting you personally?

*In these questions, look for signs that the entire congregation or organization is being impacted by the conflict.*

- What are the trends in worship attendance? Offerings? Bible class attendance?
- You said that this is just a dispute between the elders and the pastor.
  - How many of the elders and pastor are married?
  - By your description, this has caused stress among them. How many do you think have talked with their spouses or friends? [Or: Do you think any of them have talked with their spouses or friends? If so, how many others do you think have heard about these concerns?]
  - How do you think these conflicts have affected the staff? Do you think any of those staff members have talked to their spouses or friends about the stress they are experiencing at the church?
  - How have these conflicts affected other boards (lay leaders, etc.)?
  - The total number of elders, pastor, and other staff are \_\_\_\_\_. If the elders, pastor, and other staff have talked with their spouses, you can double the number of people involved. And if any of the spouses and friends have mentioned these issues on social media or talked with anyone else at church, it is likely that many more are involved. However, many of them have received their information second or thirdhand. How do you think that might be affecting people's attitudes toward the pastor or elders?
  - Even if the pastor and elders are reconciled, others have been affected and may not be involved in the reconciliation. What do you plan to do to bring healing to the entire community?
- You described a serious dispute between the board and the president.
  - Is this dispute having any effect on other staff at the church (school, university, etc.)?
  - What is the effect?

- If other staff are effected, how do you think they are responding to this situation?
- If staff and board members are stressed by this situation, who else might they be talking to?
- If this situation is not resolved in a peaceful way, how will that affect donors (contributors, supporters) of the organization?
- If the \_\_\_\_\_ (key person) leaves the organization, what impact will that have on:
  - Other staff?
  - Board members?
  - Congregational members (or students or clients or similar)?
  - Major donors (or revenues)?
  - The reputation of the organization?
- What has been done so far to address this situation?
  - What have been the results?
  - What other options have you considered?
  - What will happen is nothing else is done to address the situation?