

THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF CHILD ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

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“DISCLAIMERS”

- My spiritual training / upbringing
 - Variety of religions
 - Disjointed and contradictory
 - Haphazard, incomplete and on-going
- The Name of G-d
 - The Name of G-d should be treated with respect
 - A Name should not be written, to avoid disrespect, defacing or erasing the Name

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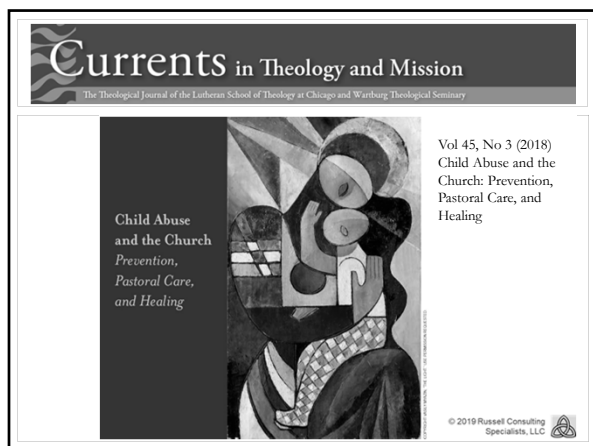


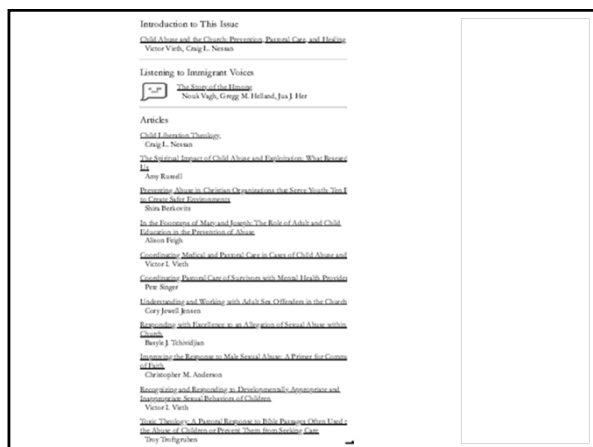
OUR LANGUAGE

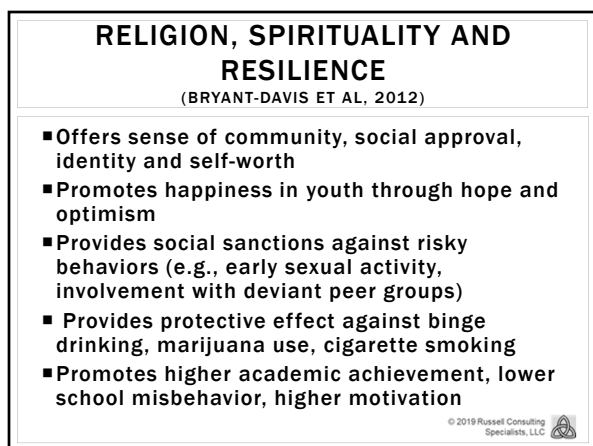
- Avoid reference of abuse “story”
- Avoid labeling individual as victim or survivor
 - May not be ready to claim “survivor” status
 - Push to move from “victim” to “survivor” may be indicative of our own needs
 - “Survivor” may communicate something shameful about being a victim
 - May prefer other terminology (e.g., “thrivor”)

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**RELIGIOUS & SPIRITUAL
DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN**
(BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012)

- **Development of faith along with self-autonomy, self-identity, self-awareness**
 - Concrete logical comprehension to complex and symbolic functioning
 - Faith development creates foundation for social relations, personal identity, personal and cultural meanings
 - Faith synthesizes into world-view and values of love, justice and truth
 - Avenue to meaning, purpose and belonging, hope and optimism
 - Foundation of faith emerges from interaction with primary caregiver

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COMMON BELIEFS

- **The world is fair**
- **The world is safe**
- **Bad things will not happen to me**
- **Bad things happen for a reason**
- **Bad things happen to bad people**
- **G-d is benevolent and just**

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LESSONS FROM ABUSE
(SCHMUTZER, 2009)

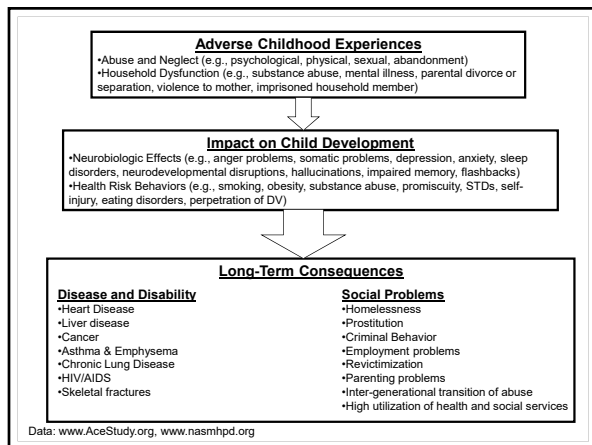
- **I do not have control over my body.**
- **The world is not a safe place for me.**
- **G-d—the Almighty—did not prevent or stop my abuse.**

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ACE STUDY FINDINGS

■ Childhood experiences are powerful determinants of who we become as adults

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SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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REALMS OF PERSONHOOD

(SCHMUTZER, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2009)

- Abuse often leaves person uncertain of what to make of the experience
 - How to make personal meaning about its occurrence
 - How to interact with others
 - How to reconcile it with religious or spiritual beliefs and practices

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REALMS OF PERSONHOOD

(SCHMUTZER, 2009)

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REALM OF SELF

(SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- “Sexual abuse fractures the unity of personhood” (p. 71)
 - Sexual abuse dissects the individual
 - Abuse is on the offender’s terms
 - Emotional, psychological and somatic impact
 - Sexuality of the individual is disrupted
 - “‘Take two verses and call me in the morning’ is both simplistic and unethical.”

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IMPACT OF ABUSE: SELF

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012; REINERT & EDWARDS, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **Self esteem**
 - Self-blame and low self-image, shame
 - Perception of self as unlovable, deserving of abuse leading to risk-taking behaviors
- **Somatic problems**
 - Sleep, eating disorders; physical ailments
- **Emotional issues**
 - Fear, anxiety, depression, aggression
 - Self-harm, substance abuse, hyper-arousal
 - More depressive symptoms; more posttraumatic symptoms (if not involved in religious organization)

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REALM OF COMMUNITY

(SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **“Sexual abuse isolates the ‘self’ from community” (p. 73)**
 - Humanity is rooted in relationships with G-d and others
 - Victimization is alienating
 - Community is no longer safe or supportive
 - Religious community may be even more segregating
 - Stigma, conspiracy of silence
 - “Two witness rule” (Deut. 19:15)

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IMPACT OF ABUSE: COMMUNITY

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GALL, 2006; REINERT & EDWARDS, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **Trust**
 - Alienated from community; authority problems
 - Abusive parents distort image of G-d
- **Interpersonal issues**
 - Parental attachment issues
 - Emotional and physical abuse has negative impact on religiosity for males & females when perpetrated by fathers, not mothers
 - Poor social support network
 - Difficulty maintaining appropriate intimate relationships; social stigma

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REALM OF G-D

(BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **“Sexual abuse mars connecting metaphors for G-d”** (Schmutzer, p. 75)
 - G-d as parent / father / protector is disrupted
 - Prayers of “Our Father ...” may be retraumatizing
 - G-d who never showed up to protect
 - Dissonance with father who repeatedly rapes child
 - Child forced to pray w/ father before abuse
- **Higher power out to judge, punish or condemn**

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IMPACT OF ABUSE: G-D

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GALL, 2006; REINERT & EDWARDS, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **Spiritual issues**
 - Question nature of G-d, feel abandoned, doubt existence
 - Perception of G-d as unloving, distant or controlling
 - Younger abuse victims may suffer more spiritual disruption
- **Trauma exacerbated when victimized by religious figure**

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IMPACT OF ABUSE: ATTACHMENT

(REINERT & EDWARDS, 2009)

- **Correspondence theory**
 - If parental attachments are secure, attachment to G-d likely be secure
 - If parental attachments are insecure, attachment to G-d will correspond and be insecure
 - In secure bond, child usually adopts religious values and practices similar to parent, or no religious values if parents are nonbelievers
- **Correspondence between internal working models of self and others, and of G-d**
 - Affects such things as whether G-d is conceptualized as loving or harsh, distant or close, or controlling or compassionate

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IMPACT OF ABUSE: ATTACHMENT

(REINERT & EDWARDS, 2009)

■ **Compensation theory**

- One's later relationship with G-d can make up for the affective deficits from earlier insecure attachment to parents
- Children with insecure attachments to nonreligious parents have a tendency to turn to G-d and religion as they mature
- Children with insecure relationships to very religious parents are more likely to turn away from the religion in which they were raised
- Sudden religious conversions are associated with an insecure attachment history

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INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SPIRITUALITY

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WHY COLLABORATE?

(BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012; WALKER ET AL, 2009)

- **APA: Psychologists are ethically mandated to consider the client's religion as an aspect of diversity when formulating a treatment plan**
 - Assess at intake
 - Re-evaluate over course of treatment

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WHY COLLABORATE?

(BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012; WALKER ET AL, 2010)

- **"No other human preoccupation challenges psychologists as profoundly as religion."** (Wulff, 1991, p. 16)
- **Religious and spiritual faith may be profoundly damaged by abuse**
- **Many abuse survivors attempt to make use of religion and spirituality to make meaning of abuse**

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WHY COLLABORATE?

(BILICH ET AL, 2000)

- **Clinicians lack knowledge or training to deal w/ spiritual issues**
 - Survey of 400+ clinical psychologists – only 5% had training on religious or spiritual issues (Shafranske & Malony, 1990)
- **Rabbis / Clergy not prepared to deal with serious abuse or mental illness**
 - Clergy more likely to have congregant seek help from them than clinician (Hohmann & Larson, 1993)
 - Clergy may fail to recognize suicide risk (Domino, 1985)

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WHY COLLABORATE?

(BILICH ET AL, 2000)

- **Therapy often challenges abuse victims to change their belief systems**
 - Hate, lack of worth, terror in unpredictable world
 - Purely cognitive approach may leave client without a model or worldview to replace one learned from abuser
- **Professional boundaries may restrict clinician's ability to effectively build trust with client (lacks mutuality)**

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BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

(BILICH ET AL, 2000)

- Collaboration broadens support network for survivor
- Collaboration broadens scope of therapy, creating multidimensional approach
- Collaboration minimizes some problems caused by managed care
- Collaboration allows both therapist and minister to model love and caring inherent in spiritual model

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TYPES OF COLLABORATION

(BILICH ET AL, 2000)

- Minister / Rabbi as consultant
- Therapist as consultant
- Referrals
- Limited collaboration
- Full collaboration
 - Therapy and spiritual guidance offered as integrated whole

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GOALS OF TREATMENT

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- Building trust in self and others
- Create a sense of safety in world
- Create a new worldview
- Enhance sense of self-worthiness
- Develop appropriate coping skills
- Present healing images of G-d to foster healthy, personal relationship
- Create new metaphors to foster healing

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TIPS FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GONSIOREK ET AL, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- Seek out compatible therapists
- Obtain informed consent
- Provide therapist with education
- Watch for therapist resistance/bias
- Explore religious perceptions and expectations of MH treatment

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TIPS FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GONSIOREK ET AL, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- Explain to therapist how to work within survivor's religious system
- Incorporate formal liturgical provisions for expression of lament (w/ psalms of praise)

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TIPS FOR THERAPISTS


(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GONSIOREK ET AL, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2009)

- Consider religion as aspect of client diversity
 - "We've talked about how the abuse affected you physically, emotionally, and socially. I wonder how it might have affected you spiritually?"
- Maintain open, supportive, neutral stance re: religion / spirituality
- Assess own biases and issues of countertransference
- Seek out compatible spiritual leaders
- Prepare client; obtain consent

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TIPS FOR THERAPISTS
(BILICH ET AL, 2000; GONSIOREK ET AL, 2009; SCHMUTZER, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2015)

- Educate the spiritual leader about client's issues
- Provide emotional support for spiritual leader to hear abusive acts
- Help spiritual leader set limits
- Watch for spiritual leader resistance/bias
- Incorporate rituals, new metaphors into healing processes
- Reassess for role of religion / spirituality

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2010)

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - Most empirically supported treatment for CPA/CSA
 - Ask about religion and spirituality during initial assessment (APA ethical mandate)
 - P · R · A · C · T · I · C · E

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)

- Psycho-education & Parental treatment
 - Assess acculturation level and concerns related to treatment
 - Educate parents re: spiritual impact of abuse
 - Consult w/ spiritual leader to incorporate teaching on religious and ethnic culture in education and parenting

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)

- **Relaxation**
 - Focused breathing, mindfulness & meditation
 - Incorporate religious traditions in meditative practices (i.e., repetitive prayer while breathing)
 - Joshua 1:9 – “Be strong and courageous”
- **Affective expression and modulation**
 - Feeling identification, thought interruption, positive imagery
 - Utilize songs, stories, passages in thought-stopping (i.e., demonstrate G-d’s unconditional love for all)

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)

- **Cognitive coping skills**
 - Relationship b/n thoughts, behaviors & feelings
 - Religion & spirituality as coping mechanism compromised
 - Identify discrepancies in G-d described by abuser and what is in religious teaching / text
 - Highlight roles of women in sacred text / ministry
 - Modify image to reflect feminine aspects of G-d

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(PARGAMENT ET AL, 2008)

- **Cognitive coping skills (cont.)**
 - Lamentation
 - Visualization exercises:
 - Sit in place of Mary Magdalene weeping outside empty tomb (losses experienced)
 - “Woman, why are you weeping?” → presence and support in pain
 - Rituals of purification
 - Replaces feelings of contamination, shame and guilt with spiritual cleansing and reconciliation

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)


- **Trauma narrative and cognitive processing**
 - Importance of talking about trauma to process & integrate abuse
 - Lessons learned?
 - What advice would child give to others?
 - Religious traditions have stories that serve to make meaning of suffering and overcome adversity
 - Story of Job

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(CARLSON ET AL, 2000; WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)

Trauma narrative and cognitive processing (cont.)

- **Explore child's perception of how G-d feels re: abuse**
 - Empty chair technique w/ G-d
 - Questions to explore child's relational identify w/ G-d
 - How do you believe G-d thinks of you as a person?
 - What is your perception of G-d's view of you as a person?
 - How do you think G-d sees you as a person?
 - How do you think G-d sees others?
- **Address cognitive distortions based on abuse**
 - Sin caused abuse, biblical edicts (children obey), absent G-d
 - G-d loves everyone else but victim
 - Separate problem from client identity

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT
(WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010; WALKER ET AL, 2015)

- **In-vivo desensitization to trauma reminders**
 - Prevents generalization of anxiety to safe setting
 - Identify passages from sacred texts that offer strength and courage when feeling threatened
- **Conjoint parent-child sessions**
 - Improve communication b/n parent and child
 - May need initial meeting w/ parents to prep them
 - Encourage open discussion regarding spiritual meaning of trauma for all
 - Child may express anger at G-d / parents
 - Caretaker(s) may offer prayer for healing

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SPIRITUAL ISSUES & TF-CBT

(MALTBY & HALL, 2012; WALKER ET AL, 2009; WALKER ET AL, 2010)


- **Enhancing safety and future development**
 - Verbalize feelings, identify warning signs, practice new skills
 - Nighttime ritual involving prayer to foster sense of safety w/in religiously committed families
 - Prepare client that they will likely have to re-negotiate meaning of trauma & spiritual implications with new developmental capacities and experiences

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WHAT ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

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A WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- **Therapist: Is it my responsibility to help client forgive?**
- **Minister/Rabbi: Is forgiveness necessary for spiritual healing?**
- **Forgiveness should integrate theology and psycho-dynamic disciplines**
- **"The unrealistic expectation for children to put the abuse behind them and remember it no more or for the [offender] to repent and sin no more also has devastating consequences for the traumatized victims." (Bryant-Davis et al, citing Doyle, 2009)**

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A WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012;
 PARGAMENT ET AL, 2008; SCHMUTZER, 2009)

- May deligitimize natural feelings of bitterness and betrayal
- Victim/Survivor **MUST** be on own timetable for forgiveness
- Explore concept of forgiveness as process, not instant requirement
- Have client consider personal emotional benefit of forgiveness rather than solely as religious obligation or gift to the offender
 - Reframe as shift from anger to peace

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A WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012;
 PARGAMENT ET AL, 2008)

- Premature forgiveness may engender guilt, shame and resentment
- Pressure to forgive may lead to early termination of therapy and departure from church or synagogue
- Distinguish forgiveness from pretending trauma didn't matter or was somehow "helpful"

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A WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000; BRYANT-DAVIS ET AL, 2012;
 PARGAMENT ET AL, 2008)

- Forgiveness – allows survivor to let go of pain to allow for happiness
 - Does NOT remove responsibility from offender
 - Does NOT require survivor to forget
 - Does NOT require reconciliation with offender

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DEALING WITH FORGIVENESS

(BILICH ET AL, 2000)

- **Therapist and clergy/rabbi**
 - Discuss what forgiveness is and what it isn't
 - Time varies by person
 - Scriptures to guide understanding
 - Help survivor distinguish between forgiveness and forgetting
 - May lead to misplaced trust; future safety issues
 - Help survivor avoid premature forgiveness
 - Pressure may be perceived as re-creation of abuse
 - Survivor as responsible for abuser's salvation

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QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

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