

# Tuesday Truth for Youth: Long, Hot, Summer—at Home

Abuse Has a Season, but Can End Now

The downstairs door slammed hard enough to shake the house. Jeff lay on his bed, wide-awake, counting the heavy steps as his father climbed up to the second level. In the next room, Jeff's little sister Suzie laid asleep—at least, Jeff hoped she was asleep.

Dad was drunk again—that was nothing new. Most nights he came home drunk, long after midnight. The good nights were when he just stumbled to his bedroom in a drunken stupor and fell asleep.

Jeff could hear him angrily cursing as he entered the hallway...tonight was not going to be a good night.

When the door to Jeff's room loudly slammed open, Jeff sat up. He didn't look forward to what was coming, but it was better to make himself the exclusive target of his dad's anger than to allow Suzie to be hurt. For years he had tried to protect his mom and his little sister from his dad's drunken outbursts of anger. Now Mom was gone—she had just disappeared a few months ago. Maybe the strain of living like this had finally been too much for her, Jeff wondered. Jeff, at fifteen, was left alone to both try to protect his sister and confront his dad.

Dad was already taking off his wide leather belt, slurring his words as he accused Jeff of something—it didn't really matter what. Tonight it was forgetting to take the garbage out. Last week it had been leaving the kitchen in a mess. Whatever Jeff did was just an excuse for his father's rage.

He cringed as his father dragged him from the bed, and he cried out as the belt tore into his back, still sore from the last beating. Someday, he thought, someday I'll be big enough that I won't have to take this anymore. I'll take Suzie with me and we'll get away from here...for good!

Only a few weeks ago he'd found out that he wasn't protecting Suzie as well as he'd hoped. Dad didn't beat her like he did Jeff, but Suzie had finally confessed that late at night, while Jeff slept, Dad came to her room and sexually abused her. The discovery made Jeff hate his father even more! He stood in his dark room, struggling to break free from his father's grip,

but he knew he was trapped. Their whole house was a trap, and Jeff didn't see any way out for any of them.

### What's the Problem?

Tons of studies have been done, but nobody truly knows what causes an adult to abuse a teen. We do know, however, that people who grow up in abusive homes are more likely to become abusers themselves, unless they get help to break the damaging cycle of violence. Parents sometimes have such poor parenting skills and coping abilities that they lash out at their children in anger and frustration. Drug and alcohol abuse and mental health problems also contribute to family violence.

Young people are often afraid to report violence in the home. They may fear that the abuser will treat them even worse once he/she finds out that they have spoken out. They may be afraid that their family will be broken up and they will be sent to a foster home, as is the case in many places when abuse is reported. They may be afraid of having to face their abuser in court. In many cases, the abused are simply super embarrassed and have a lot of shame and blame themselves for the abuse and feel that, somehow, they've brought the abuse upon themselves. For many reasons, most crimes of abuse are not reported to the police or authorities. Young people just...suffer in silence.

Not all abuse occurs at home. In many countries, cases have been brought to light where children have been physically and sexually abused in places where teens tend to hang out; at school, by teachers; or at church, by pastors or church members, and away on traveling games or at the ball-field, by sports coaches. Any adult who is in a position of power and authority, and uses that authority to hurt a teenager, is simply an abuser.

### Summertime Increase

Logically speaking, I end up discovering more incidents of abuse during the summer times, simply because the typical "first line of defense", which are usually people like teachers, school counselors, principals, people at after-school programs, etc. don't have regular and consistent access to the teens. I end up seeing them more during this time of the year, and something really interesting happens after about the first two weeks when school is out; there is usually a "honeymoon period" where the teens are usually pretty stable and things are generally okay. Simply put, for those first two weeks or so, they're out and about getting school out of their system, so to speak; but then I tend to see a shift happen, in that reports of abuse start to sky rocket, because the teens are basically spending the majority of their time living in their abusive and toxic home environments with little to no additional emotional and physical support or relief.

It's not that they don't have the support, but the nature of abuse makes

someone who's being abused tend to feel and think that they are alone and have no one—and that they are basically a piece of garbage and don't deserve to have safety or feel safe. I know, it's a really messed up and sad reality, but that's why I want to share it with you, because if I'm not talking about you, chances are you know someone who's exactly in an abusive situation. I want to inform you and give you the tools for you to feel sure that you know how to respond. No matter who you are, I want to tell you that, when everyone is celebrating independence, you too can be free from abuse!

## By the Numbers

More than 600,000 children are abused in the U.S each year. An estimated 600,000 children (unique incidents) were victims of abuse and neglect in 2021, the most recent year for which there is national data. The actual number of children abused is likely underreported because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

## What You Need to Know

“Abuse means treating another person with violence, cruelty, hate, harm, or force. Abuse is never OK. No matter who's doing it or where it happens. And it is never the fault of the person who is being abused.”

It is called physical abuse when someone does things like hit, beat, shove, shake, or choke a person. This can leave marks or bruises. Physical abuse includes hitting with an object like a belt. Or throwing an object at someone to injure them. Or pushing into a person's space to threaten or make them feel unsafe.

It is called emotional abuse when someone uses harsh or cruel words or treats the person with scorn. This can tear people down, or make them doubt their worth. Some abusers act mean or possessive. Some use fear or threats to control a person. Some try to shame a person for who they are. Some target people because of their looks, race, or because they identify as LGBTQ+. They might harass, use hate speech, or threaten harm. Emotional abuse can happen in person or online.

It is called sexual abuse when an adult (or much older teen) forces, pressures, or tricks a young person into sex acts of any kind. This includes sexual touching, grabbing, or kissing. It includes showing the young person private parts of their body, or asking to see theirs. It includes showing sexual or nude pictures, or asking them to pose for pictures like this. It includes giving money or gifts for doing sexual acts. Sexual abuse can happen in person or online.

It's called grooming when an adult [or other age] abuser tricks someone into trusting them, admiring them, or depending on them. They try to use this

false sense of trust to trick someone into sexual abuse. This can happen in person or online. If you feel uncomfortable about the way someone is getting personal with you, talk it over with an adult you trust.

Sexual abuse might also be called sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape.

If any of kind of abuse has happened to you, tell an adult you trust right away.

## Most Common Abuse

I have found that absolutely the most common type of abuse (and the most difficult to identify) is emotional abuse. The different types of emotional abuse can tend to include gaslighting, which is when a person or a group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories.

Other types of common emotional abuse are:

- Rejecting or ignoring: telling a child they are unwanted or unloved, showing disinterest in child; little or no affection, not validating the child's feelings
- Shaming or humiliating: calling a child names, belittling, demeaning, berating, mocking, using language or taking action that takes aim at child's feelings of self-worth
- Terrorizing: accusing, insulting, punishing with or threatening abandonment, harm or death, setting a child up for failure, manipulating, taking advantage of a child's weakness or reliance on adults, slandering, screaming
- Isolating: keeping child from peers and positive activities, confining child to small area, forbidding play or other experiences
- Corrupting: engaging child in criminal acts, telling lies to justify actions or ideas, encouraging misbehavior

Very common among teens who are dating is the teen equivalent of adult domestic violence, which is basically when you have someone who the teen is dating, who is physically abusing them. By physical abuse, I mean, hitting, kicking, throwing them up against things, throwing things at them or choking, pushing, or any other type of physical aggression at them. In fact, for someone to be physically abused there doesn't technically even have to be any actual physical contact being made between the abuser and the abused; just having the abused be anxious, nervous, or fearful about the threat of the physical aggression is enough to count as physical abuse.

## What the Bible Says

Jesus cherished and valued children and teens. He said:

“Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea . . . . See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:5, 6 & 10, NIV).

The apostle Paul had good advice for parents: “Parents, don’t be hard on your children. Raise them properly. Teach them and instruct them about the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, CEV).

Some people use Bible verses about discipline to support their belief that it’s OK to abuse their children. They look at verses like: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15, NIV). They suggest that this means it’s OK to beat your children with an actual rod. However, some Bible scholars think this refers not to beating with a rod, but as a metaphor of using a rod like a shepherd’s rod—to wisely train and guide them.

While many Christians believe that occasional spanking is an appropriate form of discipline, nothing in the Bible supports beating, harming, or otherwise abusing children. The family is a place for love and gentle guidance, and children are to be cherished. “Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3, CEV). Children and teens are valuable in God’s sight. He does not intend them to be hurt or harmed—ever!

## Make the Call!

Simply put: if you are being abused, in any way, or know of someone who is being abused, pick up the phone and call "9-1-1"! Will it, in the short-term, make things more complicated and bring more attention to an already bad situation? It certainly will—and that's exactly what needs to happen.

Will your friend initially be angry with you and feel like you broke your promise to not tell? Yes, but I'd rather they be angry at you, and trust me, they'll likely get over their anger, rather than you keep their secret and keep them in an abusive relationship that just continues to pile on the trauma—or worse off, that they get seriously and permanently injured or even killed, due to an abusive situation gone wrong. And, unfortunately, I've seen my share of abuse situations gone horribly wrong! Can you imagine the guilt and regret that you would feel if you knew that you could have done something to help stop the abuse? Trust me, you don't want those sorts of traumatic memories.

The problem with any sin, especially this one, is that it only grows in its sin-i-ness (yes, I made up that word...but you get the idea), if left to itself. In the dark it just continues to grow and gain power of all that it touches.

The Apostle Paul, who definitely had his share of abusing people (Galatians 1:13 & Acts 26:9-11), wrote this to the Christians in a church in the city of Ephesus. They were struggling to know and do and live out what they knew to be the truth in a sinful and corrupt culture. I share this final piece of guidance with you in the hopes that you will take this command as a spiritual and an emotional alarm:

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral,

impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5: 1-14, NLT).

You Can Be Free!

Love shouldn't hurt. No matter what anyone tells you, being in any sort of relationship should help the person to be a better version of themselves, not less of who they are. Jesus makes it clear that "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10b, NLT). Let this be the summer that you or, someone you know and love, declare your freedom from abuse. In this time of celebrating independence, Jesus promises: "If the Son gives you freedom, you are free!" (John 8:36, CEV)

Additional Resources  
Abuse Help for Teens

How Adults Can Help Abused Teens

Healthy Relationships

Statements on Abuse and Family Violence from the Adventist Church

Ten Ways to Prevent Child Abuse

How to Spot Child Abuse

Intervene