

# whyfaithmatters

Responding to sexual violence and abuse

*A handbook for advocates and allies*

Written by Sarah Butler  
Interviews and Editing by Karri Whipple  
Foreword by Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

FaithTrust   
INSTITUTE

Working together to end  
sexual & domestic violence

# table of contents

## FOREWORD

Foreword by Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune	1
Terminology and Definitions	2

## INTRODUCTION

### WHY FAITH MATTERS

What this Handbook Offers	5
Statistics on Religion	6
Foundation: Resources and Roadblocks	8
The Role of Spiritual/Religious Community	9
Culture and Religion, Religion and Culture	10
Spirituality as Self Care	10
What this Handbook is NOT	11

## CHAPTER 1

### ADDRESSING RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ADVOCACY

Understanding Religion & Spirituality as a Cultural Competency	13
Recognizing Our Own Bias	13
The Discomfort of Not Knowing	16
A Spiritual Crisis <i>is</i> a Crisis	16

## CHAPTER 2

### SPECIFIC CONCERNS THAT MAY BE RELATED TO RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

American Indian & Alaska Native	22
Buddhism	26
Christianity	29
Hinduism	32
Islam	35
Judaism	38

## CHAPTER 3

### ABUSE WITHIN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS AND/OR SITUATIONS

Child Sexual Abuse	41
Abuse by Clergy/Spiritual Leader	41
Immigrant and Refugee Survivors	42
Campus Sexual Assault Survivors	43
LGBTQIA+ Survivors	43

## CHAPTER 4

### ASSESSING THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF SURVIVORS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ADVOCACY

Indirect	45
Direct	45
Spiritual Assessment Tool	46
Boundaries	47

## CHAPTER 5

### FOSTERING COLLABORATION WITH RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

Creating Networks of Support for Survivors	49
Mandated Reporting & Confidentiality	51
Suggestions for How Faith Communities Can Address Sexual Abuse and Violence	52
How Spiritual Communities Can Help	53

## APPENDIX

FAQs	55
Culturally-Specific & Community-Specific Resources for Survivors	56
Recommended Reading: Sexual Abuse and Violence	57
Information About Specific Spiritual Traditions	58
About Our Advisors	60

---

This document was supported by a grant from RALIANCE, a collaborative initiative to end sexual violence in one generation, made possible through a commitment from the National Football League (NFL). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the NFL.

Graphic design by Kelli Design / [kellidesign.com](http://kellidesign.com)

© 2019 FaithTrust Institute.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without prior written permission from the publisher.

# foreword by Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

Of course faith matters. At least for the majority of us in the United States who are part of a faith tradition. It is a major part of who we are, whether we were raised in a particular tradition in childhood or chose a particular tradition as adults. Whether we are active or inactive in that tradition, the stories, the music, the texts, and the people have all shaped us to a greater or lesser degree. Whether our experiences have been positive and/or negative, when we face a crisis or experience trauma, it is likely that dimensions of our religious experiences will surface.

When faced with the trauma of sexual violence or abuse, persons of faith will often turn to their religious/spiritual beliefs and practices; there, they are likely to find either the resources they need or the roadblocks they don't. Either way, it matters.

Even though sexual violence is fundamentally about violence, because it involves sexual contact, invariably issues of sexuality come to the fore. For better or for worse, our faith traditions have shaped our understandings of sexuality—all too often with misinformation. Questions about virginity, purity, “adultery,” same-sex sexual contact, “sex outside of marriage,” “marital duty,” incest, etc. will likely impinge on a victim's/survivor's efforts to respond to and cope with assault or abuse.

Many of our traditions have perpetuated a great deal of confusion between sexual violence and sexuality, which has led to a great deal of pain and confusion for individual survivors. The patriarchal context of most religious traditions has shaped most teachings about sexuality and sexual violence. For example, the understanding of the rape of women began as a property crime committed against the man who “owned” her—husband, father, etc. It was also viewed as “adultery” for which the woman (victim) was responsible.

There is no question that religious teachings have often exacerbated the trauma experienced by victims/survivors. Fortunately for some, religious teachings have actually been a resource. This is the goal that we seek. There are numerous teachings that offer support, empowerment, and justice to those who have suffered sexual trauma. But these have been long neglected by faith leaders and faith communities out of ignorance and fear.

An understanding that faith matters is a dimension of cultural competence that is vital to the well-being of victims/survivors. As an advocate, you can better facilitate the needs of victims/survivors by addressing their spiritual traditions as possible roadblocks or resources. We hope that this publication will help prepare you to do just that.



Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

June 20, 2019

For further discussion, see *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* by Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune (Pilgrim Press, 2005).

# terminology & definitions

## Anti-Semitism

Hatred, prejudice, hostility, or discrimination against Jews.<sup>1</sup>

## Culture

The ideas, customs, beliefs, and social behavior of a particular group of people or society.

## Cultural Humility

The “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person].”<sup>2</sup> *Learn more.*

“To practice cultural humility is to maintain a willingness to suspend what you know, or what you think you know, about a person based on generalizations about their culture. Rather, what you learn about your clients’ culture stems from being open to what they themselves have determined is their personal expression of their heritage and culture.”<sup>3</sup>

## Faith

Belief in, experience of, and relationship with God(s), a higher power, or in the doctrines or teachings of a religion or spiritual practice; a belief system that influences one’s world view; trust and practice in a tradition of wisdom, learning, perception, enlightenment; a particular religion or spiritual tradition.

## Faith or Spiritual Community

A body of persons adhering to a particular set of beliefs and practices.

## Historical Trauma

Cumulative mass trauma effect from the perpetration of colonization, oppression, and/or spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental torture across multiple generations. The collective continued impact on individuals, family, and community results in cultural, environmental, societal, and economic damage and distress for the population.<sup>4</sup>

## Intersectionality

A feminist theory that describes the complex, overlapping interactions of systems of oppression that impact individuals and communities. Introduced by lawyer and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality allows one to understand the vulnerability and disempowerment created by compounding forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.<sup>5</sup> *Learn more from Kimberlé Crenshaw.*

## Islamophobia

“Islamophobia is a closed-minded hatred, fear or prejudice toward Islam and Muslims that results in discrimination, marginalization and oppression. It creates a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslims and transforms diversity in name, language, culture, ethnicity, and race into a set of stereotyped characteristics. As such, Islamophobia is a system of both religious and racial animosity.”<sup>6</sup>

# terminology & definitions

## Racism

Hatred, prejudice, hostility, or discriminations against others based upon their race, color, ethnicity, culture, or national origin. Founded upon a belief in racial supremacy, racism can be expressed both individually and systemically.

**Institutional racism** refers to the societal policies, practices, beliefs, and structures that support and enforce racist discrimination, inequality, and oppression. Institutional racism impacts all areas of public and private life, including employment, health, parenting, education, housing, justice, political representation, etc.

## Religion

Any formal or institutionalized expression of spiritual beliefs.

## Spiritual

Of or relating to the spirit or soul; sometimes distinguished from, or seen as distinctly different from, physical reality. This term may also be used by those who don't believe or follow a particular religious tradition, but who strive to attend to their own inner life, to embody the values of connection, compassion, and empathy, and to honor the ineffable in the world.

## Spirituality

The state or quality of being dedicated to or in communion with God(s), a higher power, religion, spiritual entities or values, ancestors, community, and/or nature. In some traditions, this concept is held in opposition to physical reality.



---

<sup>1</sup> <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism>

<sup>2</sup> Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Owen, J., Worthington Jr., E. L., & Utsey, S. O. (2013). Cultural humility: Measuring openness to culturally diverse clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. doi:10.1037/a0032595 (2)  
For more information and citations, visit [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_humility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_humility)

<sup>3</sup> <https://thesocialworkpractitioner.com/2013/08/19/cultural-humility-part-i-what-is-cultural-humility/>

<sup>4</sup> Definition provided by Elena Giacci

<sup>5</sup> <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.islamophobia.org/research/islamophobia-101.html>

# introduction

**Why Faith Matters**

What this Handbook Offers

Statistics on Religion

Foundation: Resources and Roadblocks

The Role of Spiritual/Religious Community

Culture and Religion, Religion and Culture

Spirituality as Self Care

What this Handbook is NOT



## Why Faith Matters

When we talk about faith and spirituality, we refer to the complex beliefs that an individual holds about their relationship to something greater than themselves. They may describe this in terms of the tenets of a particular religion, a connection to ancestors, devotion to nature, or to a state of being or enlightenment. In the aftermath of trauma, these core beliefs may become central to the victim's/survivor's recovery and healing process.

To be an effective advocate or ally to a survivor of sexual assault or abuse, it's essential to understand the importance that a person gives to their religious and spiritual beliefs and practice. Those beliefs will not only impact the decisions that the survivor makes in the aftermath of abuse, but they may also determine how the survivor understands and processes the abuse.

For survivors, their faith and spirituality can offer:

- A connection to something greater than themselves and the tangible world
- A connection to community and support
- A connection to family, tradition, history
- Spiritual sustenance
- A moral and ethical framework
- A meaningful language of hope and healing
- A spiritual recognition of the reality of suffering



## What this Handbook Offers

This handbook is a resource for advocates and allies, to help explain the important role of religion and spirituality in the lives of many survivors. It's also a toolkit to integrate conversations about spirituality when assisting survivors. This will not be a comprehensive look at religious or spiritual beliefs as they relate to sexual violence.

What we offer here is a brief overview, based upon interviews with scholars and practitioners of diverse spiritual traditions, of some of the most common concerns and questions that survivors bring up in the aftermath of sexual victimization. Our goal is to highlight ideas, concepts, and cultural realities that may be influencing a survivor of a particular spiritual tradition.

It is essential to recognize that, even if a person is raised in a particular tradition, they may have drastically different ideas and beliefs from the more general information that we offer here. Just as there may be dozens or hundreds of different interpretations of a particular sacred text or spiritual tenet, a person's spiritual beliefs can be intensely personal and unique. This handbook will not provide you with answers, but will hopefully allow you to ask sensitive, respectful questions. **And then you must listen.** The answers may help you understand more fully the needs of the survivor with whom you are working.

**The primary message that we want to convey is that spirituality matters to many people. It impacts their beliefs, their decisions, and how they make sense of their lives.** As an advocate, you'll never be able to fully understand the complexity of someone else's spiritual beliefs or experiences, but you can ask what it means to them.



*According to Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study, about six-in-ten adults say they regularly feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being, and 46% say they experience a deep sense of wonder about the universe at least once a week.<sup>1</sup>*

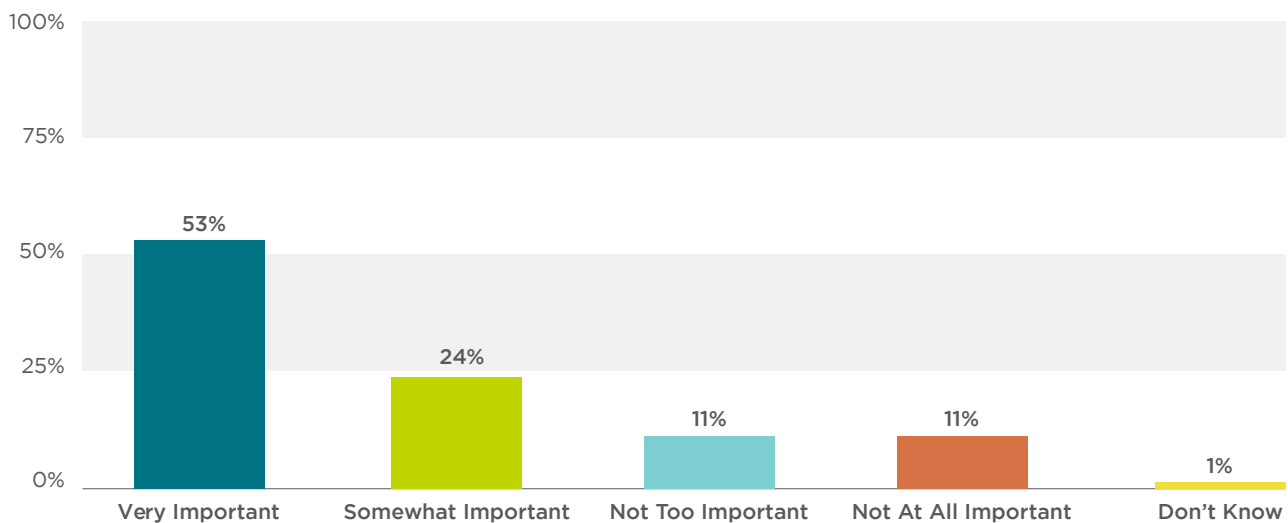
### Statistics on Religion

77% of Americans report that religion is important in their lives. For some people, their spiritual beliefs and religious community are the very core of their identity and life. Religion and culture are often inextricably intertwined. It can be impossible to distinguish one from the other, especially for a person within the tradition.

*77% of Americans report that religion is important in their lives.*

### Importance of Religion in One’s Life

*% of adults who say religion is . . .*

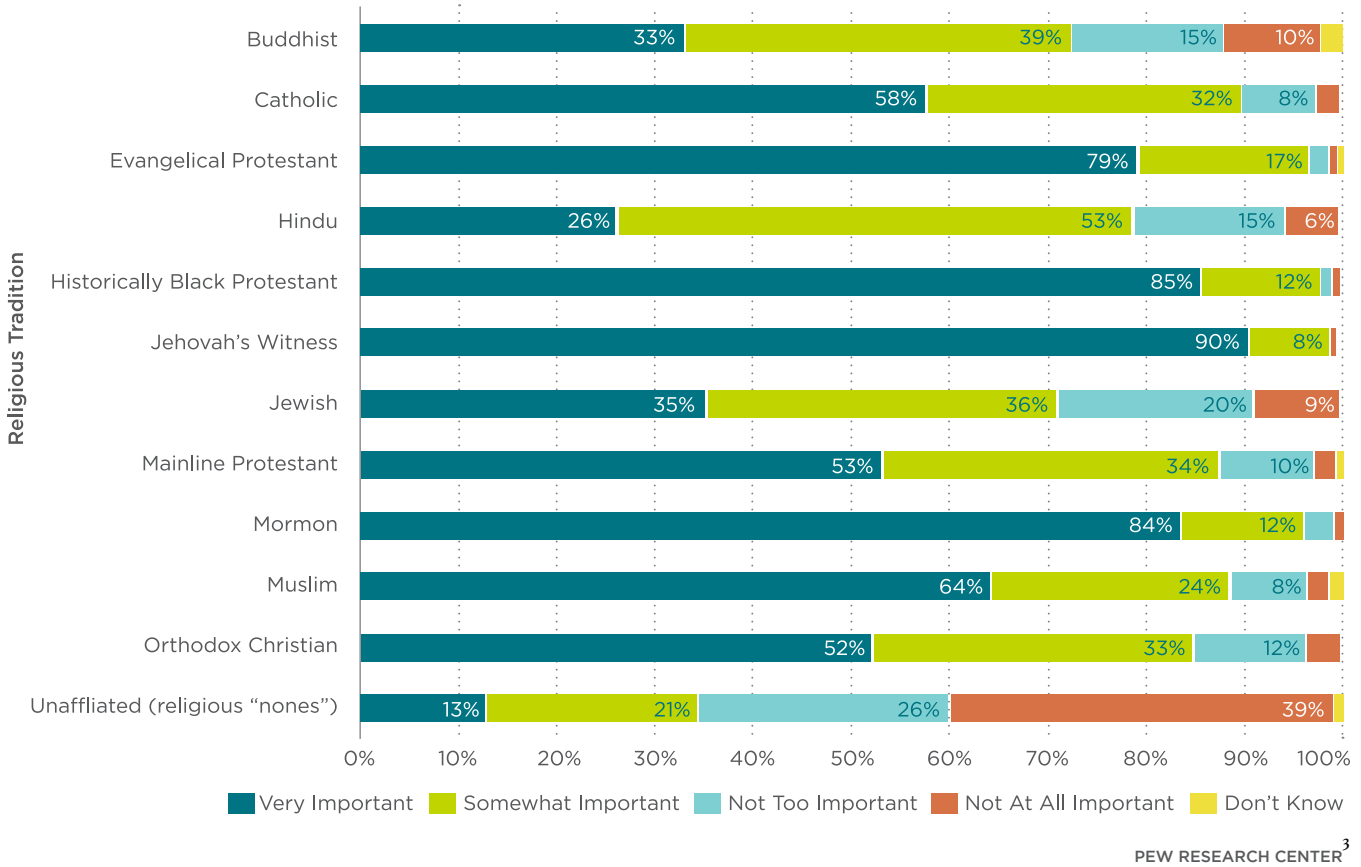


PEW RESEARCH CENTER / 2014<sup>2</sup>



## Importance of Religion in One’s Life by Religious Group

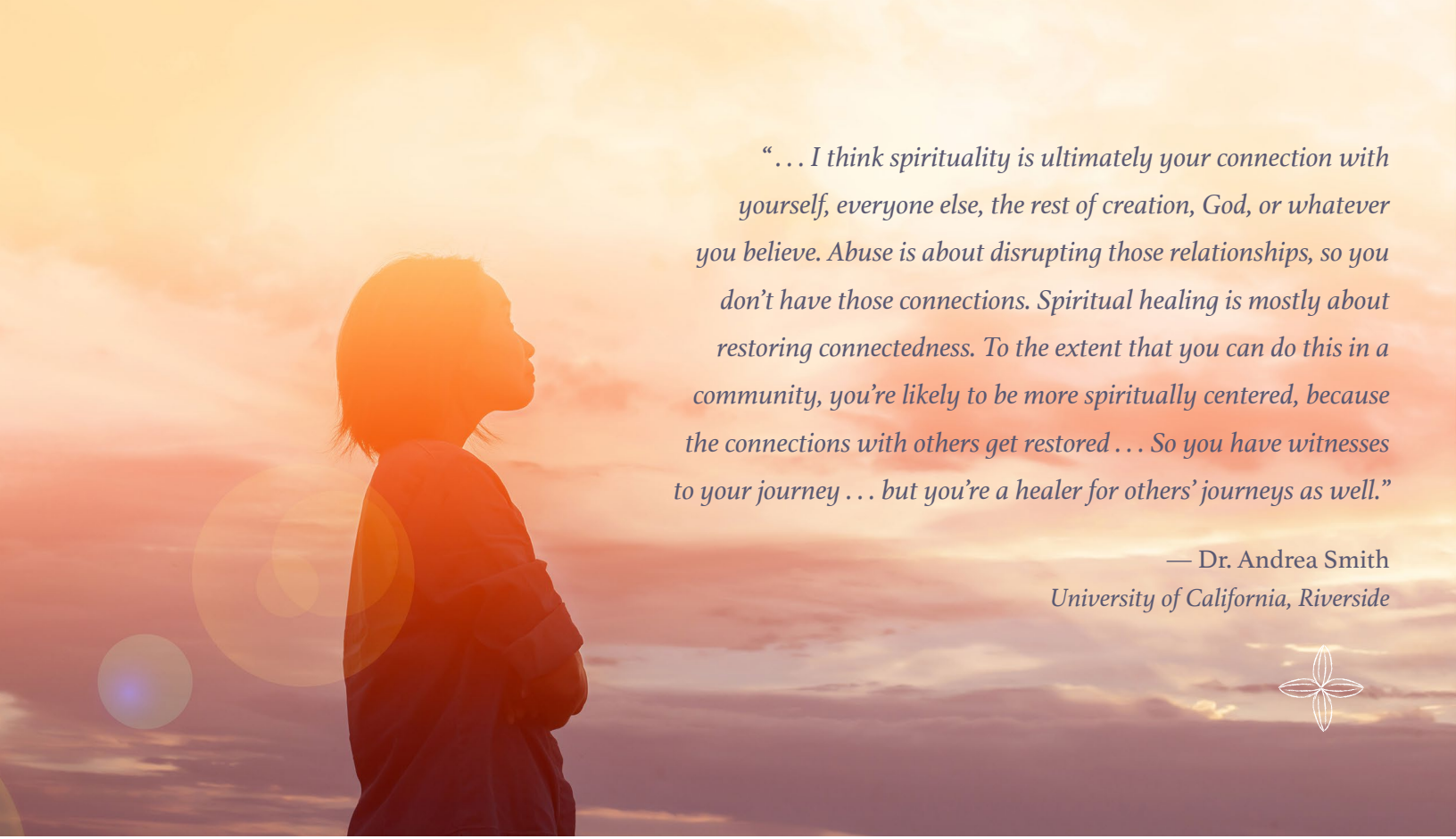
% of adults who say religion is ...



These statistics can help us understand the general cultural significance of religion and spirituality. However, it's more important to listen to the survivors of sexual abuse and assault who have told us the central role of spirituality and religion in their lives, and how their beliefs impact their response to and healing from abuse.



*More important than statistics about the general population are the stories and lives of survivors for whom their spiritual beliefs, practices, and community have been essential to their survival and healing. They should be the guide for our advocacy work.*



*“ . . . I think spirituality is ultimately your connection with yourself, everyone else, the rest of creation, God, or whatever you believe. Abuse is about disrupting those relationships, so you don’t have those connections. Spiritual healing is mostly about restoring connectedness. To the extent that you can do this in a community, you’re likely to be more spiritually centered, because the connections with others get restored . . . So you have witnesses to your journey . . . but you’re a healer for others’ journeys as well.”*

— Dr. Andrea Smith  
University of California, Riverside



## Foundation: Resources and Roadblocks

The sacred texts, rituals, teachings, traditions, prayers, and practices of any religious or spiritual tradition can act as a resource or a roadblock for victims/survivors. It’s important to recognize that spiritual traditions will offer both. For example, while one text, prayer, or ritual may be harmful, another may provide tremendous solace.

### A Roadblock:

- Justifies, minimizes, or excuses abusive behavior or oppression
- Silences or subjugates the less powerful
- Prioritizes forgiveness over the safety and healing of the survivor
- Perpetuates silence and shame
- Seeks to preserve and protect the institution and/or community at the expense of the well-being of those who are harmed

### A Resource:

- Will be a source of comfort and connection
- Supports the end of violence and oppression
- Encourages healing and prioritizes safety
- Empowers survivors
- Recognizes that mutuality, trust, and respect are the true foundation for relationships
- Seeks accountability for those who harm others
- Provides guidance and direction
- Stands on the side of justice with those who have been harmed

### Common roadblocks for survivors, across many faith traditions:

- Traditional gender role expectations and power (female submission, male headship)
- Ideas of family structure (parenting rights and obligations, beliefs about divorce)
- The definition and purpose of suffering (God's will, punishment for imperfection)
- Expectations for forgiveness and reconciliation (turn the other cheek, forgive and forget)
- Concepts of purity and chastity
- Ideas of accountability and justice that don't center or support the victim/survivor
- Silence and/or lack of public discourse about sex, sexuality, and sexual violence (these topics are relegated to the realm of the "private" or "unspoken")
- Respect for elders that silences and diminishes the rights of younger people
- Contested ideas about birth control, abortion, health care
- Lack of acceptance and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people
- Ideas of obedience which result in holding the victim accountable for the abuse, rather than focusing on the harm done to them

**Our job as advocates is to learn what meaning survivors place on their spiritual beliefs and religion, as well as how it affects safety, options, and their decision-making.** Whenever possible, we want to access and support the helpful resources of their spiritual tradition. We need to understand and respect the role that these beliefs and traditions hold for the individual as we work with them.

### The Role of Spiritual/Religious Community

The survivor's religious/spiritual community may be a critical stabilizing force in their life. It may be their primary support system and an essential resource. For many people, when they are victimized, they may seek support and guidance from their spiritual community and its leader/teacher. This may be the first place they disclose the abuse and seek assistance.

The religious community may also be a place where they encounter roadblocks that impact their decision to seek help and advocacy services. This is one reason that outreach to faith communities can be so important. Educating spiritual leaders and communities can have a direct impact on the safety and healing of survivors.

What survivors need from their spiritual and religious communities:

- To be heard and believed
- Encouragement and support through the healing journey
- Comfort, solidarity, prayer/meditation
- Confidentiality
- Affirmations of their dignity, self-worth, and value
- Interpretations of religious and spiritual texts that serve to support and encourage the victim/survivor, and that hold perpetrators accountable for their actions

*You will learn more about the spiritual crisis that is common for survivors in Chapter One.*

## Culture and Religion, Religion and Culture

It can often be impossible to separate someone’s culture from their religion. Sometimes, what we think of as a “religious” belief or practice may actually be a cultural experience or expectation.

For example, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is often viewed as a Muslim practice. However, this isn’t true. There is no support for this practice in any Islamic text. FGM is practiced in countries which are now mostly Muslim, but the practice existed before Islam became the dominant faith in these areas. What is important to realize is that people will use the faith to support the practice—to give it authority. Muslims who are from Mali, for example, may see this as a religious practice. Therefore, it would be important to understand that a survivor with whom you are working may connect FGM to the religious beliefs of her community.



The United States, despite its diversity, remains a Christian culture. For people who are raised within that religion, the influence and pervasiveness of Christianity in the larger culture may be invisible. For those who aren’t Christian, it’s obvious. Much of what is generally viewed as “American culture” is shaped by Christianity—it’s enmeshed in our laws, politics, art, media, etc. For examples, laws regarding divorce, same-sex marriage, reproductive health care, etc. have all been based upon interpretations of Christian scripture and tradition. Some holidays recognized by government and business, such as Christmas, are religious. Holidays from other religious or spiritual traditions are never given this type of state-sanctioned support.



### *Context is Key*

*“Religions are practiced in context. They are shaped by cultures and traditions that might actually contradict the religion. It is important to know that cultural traditions should never violate the basic principles of Islam. For example, Islam is not a compulsory religion, so you should not be told that you must keep your faith. Also, God is just so there can be no justification for injustice within Islam.”*

— Imam Mohamed Magid  
ADAMS Center

## Spirituality as Self Care

For people who are not religious or spiritual, the centrality of religion in others’ lives can be baffling. For those folks, it may help to think of a survivor’s spiritual life and practice as a form of self-care. Recent science has shown that the experience of awe can have beneficial psychological and physical implications.<sup>4</sup> The role of community and connection in psychological well-being is indisputable.<sup>5</sup>

Prayer and meditation have proven psychological and physical benefits.<sup>6</sup> For many, religious and spiritual practices and beliefs are a key to processing, recovering, and healing from trauma. Spiritual communities may be one place to seek support and guidance. These are just a few of the examples of how spiritual belief and practice can be viewed as a critical factor in healing and recovery.

This concept doesn't do justice to the fullness of someone's spiritual life, but it may help bridge the understanding between someone who has a spiritual/religious life and someone who doesn't.



*“The traumatic event challenges an ordinary person to become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist. The survivor is called upon to articulate the values and beliefs that she once held and that the trauma destroyed. She stands mute before the emptiness of evil, feeling the insufficiency of any known system of explanation. Survivors of atrocity of every age and every culture come to a point in their testimony where all questions are reduced to one, spoken more in bewilderment than in outrage: Why? The answer is beyond human understanding.”<sup>7</sup>*

— Judith Herman, MD

## What this Handbook is NOT

This handbook is not meant to summarize each faith tradition in two pages. The nuance and complexity of faith traditions and beliefs have compelled and inspired great thinkers—theologians, ethicists, mystics, philosophers, scientists, writers—for thousands of years. Spiritual traditions are ever-changing and adaptable—in constant conversation with other traditions, different cultures, new ideas and interpretations, and current human experiences.

This handbook does not provide answers. If anything, our goal is to elicit more questions, greater engagement, and deeper understanding. **The key to this is compassionate listening.**

Each survivor's journey is unique. As an advocate or ally, you have the privilege of being a supportive presence and witness to their experience. Listening deeply is often the most profound and affirming way to support a survivor. Asking—rather than telling or directing—provides an opportunity for them to share what is important to them, where they are struggling, where they feel lost, or how they are finding their way to healing.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/importance-of-religion-in-ones-life/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/importance-of-religion-in-ones-life/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-awe/201704/the-emerging-science-awe-and-its-benefits>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/your-brain-prayer-meditation-ncna812376>

<sup>7</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 1997) 178

# chapter 1

## **Addressing Religion and Spirituality within the Context of Advocacy**

Understanding Religion & Spirituality as a Cultural Competency

Recognizing Our Own Bias

The Discomfort of Not Knowing

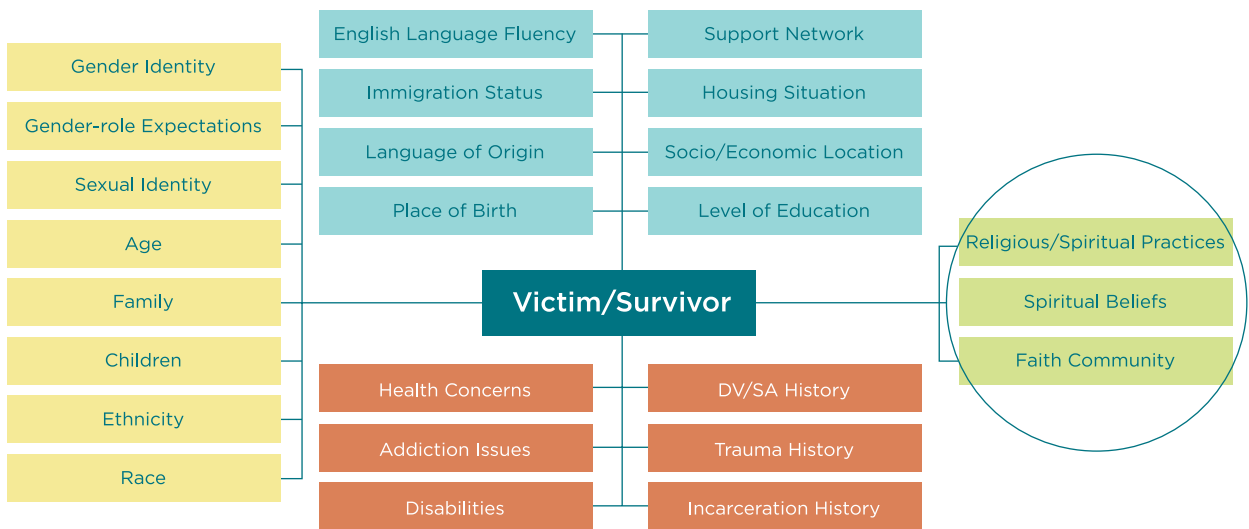
A Spiritual Crisis *is* a Crisis



## Understanding Religion and Spirituality as a Cultural Competency

There are so many aspects to a survivor’s identity and location. And, while you may feel comfortable asking about their level of education or economic situation, you may not feel as comfortable asking about their religion or spiritual life. For some survivors, these aspects may be a key to understanding and working with them to ensure safety, healing, and recovery.

An intersectional approach to advocacy should include an understanding of the survivor’s religious tradition and culture. In the United States, people who practice religions other than Christianity are often victims of cultural biases, prejudice, and hatred, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Recognition of religious disempowerment and discrimination will help you to better serve the needs of those with whom you work.



*“There needs to be a shared language around faith and trauma. All too often, spiritual growth is not connected to issues of trauma. We have to show that this relationship is not broken.”*

— Adrienne Spires  
CALCASA

## Recognizing Our Own Bias

One of the challenges, and opportunities, of advocacy work is the need for self-awareness about our own beliefs, ideas, experiences, and how those impact our work with survivors. It’s important to consider your personal experiences with faith, spirituality, and/or religion—both positive and negative.



*“It is important that advocates who want to address the religious/spiritual questions of survivors engage in ongoing inquiry into their own experiences, attitudes, beliefs garnered from their own religious tradition, experiences etc. and interrogate their own prejudices, biases, stereotypes about other people’s traditions. It is important to recognize, as Gandhi said, that ‘there are as many religions as there are people.’ Also, practicing non-judgement and compassion are key.”*

— Rev. Dr. Sally MacNichol  
CONNECT NYC

**Here are a few questions to ask yourself about your beliefs and attitudes about religion/spirituality.**

- What’s your personal experience and relationship with religion/spirituality?
- How do your personal experiences interfere or help with your ability to listen to survivors talk about the role of spirituality in their lives?
- What pre-conceptions about religion in general, or about specific spiritual traditions, do you hold?
- Can you work with survivors whose religious or spiritual beliefs and practices are different from your own? What beliefs, ideas, or experiences might help or hinder you?
- How would you work with survivors who share your spiritual tradition but have different interpretations and understandings of that tradition? What might help or hinder you?
- Are you able to maintain appropriate boundaries about the issue of religion? What is challenging to you about maintaining boundaries in relation to spirituality? *(See page 47 for a discussion of boundaries.)*

**It’s also important to think about the systems in which we work, and the experience that we’ve gained through working with survivors.**

- What have you encountered in the anti-violence movement regarding spirituality and religion? What is your organization’s culture around these issues?
- How do you feel about talking about religion/spirituality in your role as an advocate?
- What barriers or challenges around spirituality have you personally encountered when working with survivors?
- What difference have spiritual beliefs or practice made in the lives of survivors with whom you’ve worked?
- What are some roadblocks that religious cultures and traditions put in the way of survivors, and how do you respond to them?
- What potentially healing resources can religious and/or spiritual beliefs, practices, and traditions offer survivors?



Your personal experiences and beliefs can profoundly impact your interactions with survivors. Being survivor-focused requires self-awareness, as well as sensitivity and appropriate boundaries.

In the appendix, there are links to websites that can help you explore the different faith traditions that are discussed in this handbook. This is one way to support your personal anti-bias work.

Just as we must recognize and confront the reality of racism, xenophobia, sexism, and misogyny, we cannot ignore the profound impact of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism on survivors of those faith traditions. Some survivors will not feel safe talking with you about their culture or faith unless you make it known to them that you are open to the conversation—and that you can be trusted to respect them and their faith.

### Bias Self-Assessment

We all have unconscious biases. As advocates, we have the opportunity to learn from those with whom we work. Cultural humility asks us to commit to life-long learning and to challenge ourselves to expand our viewpoints and understanding. To this end, consultation and anti-bias educational opportunities can be powerful ways to address these issues in ourselves, our communities, and our organizations.

As a first step, you might [explore this resource](#) which includes links to a hidden bias online test.<sup>1</sup>



*“I encourage people to practice cultural humility. It really isn’t possible for people to learn everything there is to know about Islam (or any faith tradition they are not familiar with), nor is it necessary. Having cultural humility and a belief and assumption that there are positive resources and teachings can be very helpful when working with survivors of any faith tradition.”*

— Salma Elkadi Abugideiri  
*Peaceful Families Project*

*“In all instances, we are to listen. If an advocate doesn’t know what to say, don’t say anything. Be present in the moment with the survivor. At times, one does not have to say anything, and that’s okay.”*

—Antonia Clemente  
*The Healing Center NY*

## The Discomfort of Not Knowing

For some, it is unusual to encounter people with different religious beliefs and cultural traditions. It can be disorienting and uncomfortable to encounter someone who is different. This may be particularly true for advocates working in rural areas. This handbook will help alleviate some of this potential unease, and answer basic questions.

Advocates take pride in understanding the systems that victims/survivors encounter in the aftermath of sexual violation. We are people with resources, and we like to help. Generally, when a victim comes to us, we know what to do or where to go for answers and assistance.

When a survivor has spiritual questions, and when those questions are significant and important to them, many advocates may not know how to respond. This is particularly true if the survivor is from a different culture or tradition than the advocate. If you feel uncomfortable engaging around issues of religion or spirituality, trust in your ability to learn from survivors. Respect is the key to all conversations that center around cultural difference.

These are the times to remember that this is the survivor's story; they are experts about their experience. Call upon your curiosity, the positive regard you extend to those with whom you work, and the ethic of cultural humility<sup>2</sup> to allow the survivor to tell you what is most important to them.



*“Victims/survivors may question their faith and relationship with God.  
Trauma taints ideas of faith and redemption.”*

— Adrienne Spires  
CALCASA

## A Spiritual Crisis *is* a Crisis

In the aftermath of any trauma, a survivor may question their most fundamental beliefs. Struggling to make meaning of suffering, they may encounter a crisis of faith. For a person of strong religious beliefs, this can mean a dismantling of the very foundations upon which they have lived and built their life.

While the names of their God(s) may differ, the questions survivors may ask are often similar:

- Why did God let this happen to me?
- What have I done to deserve this?
- Is God punishing me?
- Where was God when I needed help?
- Does God blame me?
- Why aren't my prayers heard?
- Do I have to forgive the person who did this to me?
- My belief must not be strong enough. Am I being punished for not being a good (follower of my tradition)?

It is essential to recognize the importance and reality of a spiritual crisis. To ignore it or brush it aside is both disrespectful and harmful.

Some people's spiritual beliefs are irreparably damaged by the experience of violence and abuse. If their religion has been central to their lives, this will be an experience of tremendous loss. Recognizing, understanding, and responding to this grief will be an integral part of the victim's/survivor's healing journey.

As advocates, we aren't meant to be spiritual advisors. However, there are ways to respond that may be helpful for the survivor and which will assure them that you recognize the significance of these spiritual questions and concerns.

- 1 Let them know that you understand that their religion and spirituality is an important part of their life, and you respect that.
- 2 Ask the survivor what they think—what these spiritual questions and doubts mean to them.
  - What do you think/feel about your doubts?
  - Where did you learn that? How else might you view that idea or belief?
  - What does your faith leader say about it? Are there others who believe differently or who have different interpretations?
  - What does your tradition say about violence? Justice? Peace? Oppression?
  - Have you talked with someone about this before?
  - Is there someone you trust who would be helpful to talk with about these questions?
  - Do you have a spiritual advisor whom you can speak with about these questions?
  - What aspects of your faith and spirituality are supportive, restorative, or inspiring? Do those aspects speak to you as someone who has been harmed, injured, and traumatized?
  - What spiritual practices support you and give you strength?
  - Have you read or heard from other victims/survivors from your spiritual tradition? Would their experiences and thoughts be helpful for you?

Remember, your role as an advocate is to be supportive, not to endorse or dismiss the survivor's beliefs. Remain survivor-focused. Understand your limitations and boundaries regarding the survivor's spiritual and religious beliefs and traditions.

**Not all victims/survivors will experience a spiritual crisis. However, it's important that you recognize the possibility and impact of a spiritual crisis for some people.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>

<sup>2</sup> <https://socialwork.sdsu.edu/insitu/diversity/cultural-humility-a-lifelong-practice>

# chapter 2

## Specific Concerns that May Be Related to Religious or Spiritual Beliefs

American Indian and Alaska Native

Buddhism

Christianity

Hinduism

Islam

Judaism



Religious and spiritual beliefs are as nuanced and diverse as each person who believes. There is no simple definition of any spiritual tradition. The concepts that we offer here are generalizations that arise out of specific religious traditions and texts, based upon insights offered by the spiritual leaders, academics, practitioners, and advocates who helped create this resource. However, each of the spiritual traditions that we discuss is varied and diverse. And every individual's relationship to the texts, rituals, practices, ceremonies, and beliefs of their tradition will be uniquely their own.

Rather than provide a synopsis of each faith tradition here, we've included a list of websites that may be useful to you in understanding the history and beliefs of each spiritual tradition we've included in this handbook. You can access those resources in the Appendix (page 58).

For a more complete and nuanced discussion of working with survivors of different traditions, we recommend *Walking Together: Working with Women from Diverse Religious and Spiritual Traditions*, edited by Jean Anton. While *Walking Together* is written for domestic violence advocates, the discussions of culture and spiritual traditions are a valuable exploration in relation to survivors of sexual violence.

Again, when we talk about religious and spiritual traditions, we are also talking about the culture in which they are developing and are lived. It is impossible to encapsulate the impact of colonialism, enslavement, and the historical traumas that have affected these traditions and those who follow them.



*“ . . . in my experience, a victim’s/survivor’s faith or faith community or spirituality play a critical role in shaping their understanding of relational rights and responsibilities, guiding their decisions about safety, and how and where they access resources for healing and wholeness.”*

— Rev. Dr. Sally MacNichol  
CONNECT NYC

Across traditions, there are concepts that prove problematic for many survivors of sexual violence. Many of these relate to bodily autonomy and expected gender roles. For example, in some religious communities, there may be confusion about the distinction between sexual assault and sexuality. Regardless of the lack of consent, or the violence or coercion of the assault, the victim is viewed as a participant in a “sexual act.” This serves to excuse the perpetrator while blaming, silencing, and shaming the harmed individual [or victim]. This silence and shame also ensures that the issue can continue to remain invisible.



*“For some, in the aftermath of trauma, religious tradition and spiritual practices are not a source of healing or solace and need not be central to their healing, even if the person was previously a devoted practitioner. Everyone heals in their own way and in their own time; for some, stepping away from their spiritual tradition can be a healing choice.”*

— Emily Cohen  
Sexual Assault Center, Nashville, TN

The following issues and concerns are found in many spiritual traditions (and frequently apply more strictly to women):

- **Purity/Chastity**  
Sexual violation may be viewed as a “stain” on the victim, diminishing their worthiness in the eyes of the community.
- **Modesty**  
Modesty is often seen as a religious obligation. If someone is assaulted, the community may assume that the victim was immodest and brought the violence on themselves.
- **Respect**  
In many traditions, accusing authority figures, elders, or spiritual leaders—who are often men—of assault is viewed as disrespectful because of the person’s position in the community. This may be a central issue in cases of clergy/guru misconduct, child sexual abuse, and incest.
- **Obedience**  
When obedience is a key tenet of a spiritual tradition, there is little room for questioning or diversity of opinion and thought. In hierarchical spiritual communities, this concept can be used to support the position of the powerful and ensure that victims and the less-powerful are silenced and shamed.
- **Submission/Silence**  
A male-dominated, hierarchical worldview may mean that those outside this structure are not heard and have little power to effect change. Those who speak up may be humiliated, discredited, shamed, and/or shunned.

- **Protection of the religious community from the influence of outside culture**

Some traditions, especially those that are more insular and/or persecuted, may express the need to protect the religious institutions and tradition from outside influences. This may mean rejecting interaction and reliance on legal/criminal/educational systems of the larger dominant culture.

- **God/Higher Power only imagined as male**

In some traditions, the absence of female or feminine aspects within the conception of divinity means that women are viewed as excluded from the sacred, or less than men. This theology also tends to define male experience as normative, thereby erasing the lived experiences of women. This can also result in male-only leadership and authority (see next bullet point).

- **Male leadership in the faith community**

In traditions that only authorize male leadership, or where the majority of leadership is male, issues that predominately impact women and the vulnerable may not be recognized or addressed. Theology created by the powerful often upholds the invisibility and/or silencing of those who aren't given or allowed leadership roles in the community.

- **Hierarchy within the faith community**

Limiting leadership roles and access to authority allows those with power to define accountability. Transparency and diversity of thought are not supported. In the cases of clergy abuse, or abuse within faith communities perpetrated by other leaders, this can facilitate institutional denial and cover-ups, and deny victims/survivors the ability to find justice.

- **Rigid gender roles**

Defining the spheres (physical, emotional, spiritual, economic) in which one can participate, and how one is allowed to participate, based upon one's gender means that people are forced to construct their identities according to a gender binary. Strength, leadership, and power is generally defined as male; women are expected to do the emotional labor of caring for the family, taking care of children, and caring for the home. Rigid gender definitions impact everyone. The term "toxic masculinity" describes the damage done when men are expected/raised to be strong, invulnerable, aggressive, unemotional, and focused on sex. Male victims/survivors of sexual violence often keep silent about sexual abuse because of cultural/religious expectations and ideas about masculinity. Those who don't conform to gender roles and binaries are also less likely to receive support.



# American Indian & Alaska Native



## Snapshot

- Tradition's Origin: Indigenous to North America
- There are 573 federally recognized Indian Nations in the United States.<sup>1</sup> These hundreds of different of tribes, nations, bands, pueblos, communities, and villages all have different and unique cultures, traditions, and identities.
- In 2017, the Native American/Alaska Native population was estimated over 2% of the US population; this is over 6 million people.<sup>2</sup> The majority of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in metropolitan areas, rather than on tribal lands.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to colonization, it's estimated that there were hundreds of Tribal Nations, each with their own languages, political structures, and spiritual traditions. There was never one single religion or spiritual practice, but rather a multitude of traditions and beliefs.

The legacy of colonialism, genocide, forced assimilation, and the systematic destruction of Tribal Nations has severely impacted the languages, cultures, and spiritual traditions of American Indians and Alaska Native people. For years, they were prohibited and punished for following their spiritual practices.

*"In 1978, after decades of pressure from an increasingly organized Native American lobby, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) in order to extend the definition of constitutionally protected religion to encompass the beliefs and practices central to the spiritual health of Native communities."*<sup>4</sup>

Many Native Americans/Alaska Natives identify as Christian—primarily Evangelical and Catholic. An estimated 20 percent are Catholic.<sup>5</sup> Native people may integrate both tribal spiritual traditions and beliefs with Christian teachings and worship.



American Indian and Alaska Native women experience unparalleled levels of sexual and domestic violence. More than 4 in 5 women have experienced violence and over 50% have experienced some form of sexual violence.<sup>6</sup> Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Native people often suffer even higher rates of sexual and physical violence.<sup>7</sup> Hundreds of Native women are murdered and go missing each year.<sup>8</sup> Native American women are also actively targeted by human traffickers. The continued racism of the dominant culture, the history of colonialism, and the denigration of American Indian and Alaskan Native people means that when these crimes are reported, they often go unexamined by police.<sup>9</sup>

### Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Respect for Elders:** In most American Indian/Alaska Native Tribal Nations and villages, elders are revered and hold a place of honor in the community. If a victim/survivor is being abused by an elder, they may be ignored, not believed, or face difficulties within their community if they speak out.
- **Family Oriented:** There is an expectation that family problems are kept private, and that people support their family members. If the perpetrator is part of the community, a victim/survivor may fear retaliation from the perpetrator's family or condemnation from the community if they speak out about the assault. This can make accountability difficult.
- **Spiritual Leadership:** In many communities, traditional healers and spiritual leaders are taught through their families, and it's believed that they are chosen by the Spirits. Therefore, they are honored and held in high regard. Traditional spiritual leaders may be considered above reproach. This dynamic makes abuse by spiritual leaders possible, and makes it difficult for victims/survivors to speak up.
- **Shame:** Shame is one of the most common responses to trauma; the humiliation and dehumanization of abuse causes victims to blame themselves. One of the manifestations of historical trauma (because of residential school experiences, elders' stories of torture, etc.) is that there is often a message that one's pain and suffering is ignored, and you'll be punished, shamed and ostracized if you try to report. While concerned American Indian/Alaska Native advocates, victims, and survivors are promoting change and demanding justice, shame remains a primary concern for many who have been assaulted.
- **Religious Privacy:** Some Native American victims/survivors cannot discuss the details of their spiritual ceremonies, rituals, and practice. Many of these are considered sacred and not shared with people outside the tradition. The ongoing appropriation of spiritual symbols, rituals, and traditions by non-Native people, a form of cultural colonization, may make victims/survivors wary of talking about their beliefs and practices with someone who isn't American Indian or Alaska Native.



### Possible Resources

#### **Spiritual ritual/practice:**

Depending on the victim's/survivor's community, there may be specific healing ceremonies, purification practices, songs, prayers, or dances that may bring them comfort or healing.

#### **Storytelling:**

An important part of many indigenous communities, storytelling may help the victim/survivor give voice to their experience. As a shared, communal practice, it may also strengthen their connection to others in their community.

- **Criminal Jurisdiction for Indian Nations:** The US government has limited the authority of Tribal Nations to investigate, prosecute, and punish felony crimes (such as sexual assault) committed by non-Indians on tribal lands.<sup>10</sup> Federal and state prosecutors, who have this authority, have often declined to prosecute these crimes. This history of ignoring violence perpetrated on Native American lands makes most attempts by victims/survivors to find justice through the existing systems futile and hopeless.
- **Mistrust of the Systems:** To report an assault, survivors often engage with the same system(s) that have wounded their families and communities in the past, or which continue to harm them. “The lack of perpetrator accountability from Federal government, community, tribal leadership, and legal groups continues to add to the hopelessness of reporting,” says Elena Giacci, advocate.



*“Indigenous spirituality is a way of being. There’s never a time or place where I can separate my spirituality, my path, who I am, from my skin.”*

— Elena Giacci  
Advocate

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau: A More Diverse Nation - <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/diverse-nation.html>

<sup>3</sup> HHS, Office on Minority Health - <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=62>

<sup>4</sup> The Pluralism Project - <http://pluralism.org/religions/native-american-traditions/issues-for-native-peoples/religious-freedom-for-native-americans/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/native-american/demographics/index.cfm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.strongheartshelpline.org/domestic-violence-in-indian-country-and-alaska/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.niwrc.org/resources/sovereignty-soul-confronting-sexual-violence-native-america- webinar by Prof. Sarah Deer \(2018\)](https://www.niwrc.org/resources/sovereignty-soul-confronting-sexual-violence-native-america- webinar by Prof. Sarah Deer (2018))

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.niwrc.org/resources/special-collection-missing-murdered-indigenous-women-girls>

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International (2007) - <https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/mazeofinjustice.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://indianlaw.org/safewomen/racial-discrimination-and-denial-equality-under-law>

From page 25:

<sup>11</sup> <https://theconversation.com/why-native-americans-struggle-to-protect-their-sacred-places-101300>

<sup>12</sup> <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/>

<sup>13</sup> David E. Simmons, *Improving the Well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families through State-Level Efforts to Improve Indian Child Welfare Act Compliance* (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2014) - <https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Improving-the-Well-being-of-American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Children-and-Families.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, *The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration*. (*J Psychoactive Drugs*, 2003 Jan-Mar 5(1):7-13) - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12733753>

## Colonialism and Historical Trauma

In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull “Inter Caetera.” This established the Doctrine of Discovery—the spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians.

In the 1800s, the Monroe Doctrine, inspired by the Doctrine of Discovery, declared US control over the Western Hemisphere. Manifest Destiny, a policy that justified American expansion westward, propagated the belief that the United States was destined to control all land from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond. In an 1823 Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, the Doctrine of Discovery became part of US federal law and was used to dispossess Native peoples of their land.<sup>11</sup> The result of these policies was state-sanctioned genocide of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples and their cultures.

From the 19th century until the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of American Indian children were taken from their parents and their communities and placed in residential boarding schools,<sup>12</sup> which were funded by the US government and run by religious institutions. These schools were created to assimilate the children into European-American culture by destroying the cultures, languages, traditions, and communities of Native peoples. The children often suffered horrific physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and spiritual and cultural deprivation.

In the post-boarding school era, the separation of Native families continues. Disproportionally, state social services declare Native parents unfit and mandate the forced removal of the children from their homes. The children have often been sent to white Christian families for adoption—even when there is no basis for removal.<sup>13</sup>

It’s imperative to understand this history of colonization: forced removal from sacred lands, forced removal of children, and the criminalization of all aspects of traditional life. Historical trauma response, also termed historical unresolved grief,<sup>14</sup> is the individual and community reactions to the reality of historical and ongoing trauma. When working with American Indian/Alaska Native survivors, the potential for distrust of federal and state systems, and of non-Native advocates and organizations, is a logical outcome of the experience of generational oppression. It’s also important to recognize that the traditional spirituality of American Indian/Alaska Native people was compromised by religious organizations that supported forced assimilation—and that harm was done in the name of religion.





# Buddhism



## Snapshot

- **Spiritual Texts** (dependent on the tradition): The Sutras, Tipitaka, The Book of the Dead, the Pali Canon
- **Primary Figure/Leader:** Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha
- **Tradition's Origin:** India/Nepal around 480 BCE
- **Primary Sects:** Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana
- **Divinity:** Nontheistic (no God)

In the United States, Buddhists are 1% of the population; that's more than 3 million people. Two-thirds of American Buddhists are of Asian heritage.<sup>1</sup>

## Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Karma (the law of cause and effect):** The belief that one's past actions create or impact one's current and future situation means that victims/survivors may see the sexual abuse as a response or pay-back for past bad deeds or actions.
- **Compassion (Bodhicitta):** The victim/survivor may be encouraged to have compassion for the perpetrator of the sexual violence, and may not show themselves the same level of compassion. Externalizing compassion and understanding may mean that the victim doesn't process the pain and trauma.
- **Suffering:** One of the core tenets of Buddhism is the recognition of the reality of suffering. Tied with the concept of karma, the victim/survivor may blame themselves for causing the situation that made the abuse possible, and assume that they deserve to suffer.
- **Secrecy and Silence:** There may be a code of silence around sexuality, and it can be seen as shameful to talk about sex and sexual violence.

- **Devotion to Teacher/Lineage:** Speaking out about sexual violation within the spiritual community may be seen as bringing disrespect to the teacher, the lineage, or the community. Devotion to one’s teacher often makes them above reproach, even if they are abusive. In some cases, the teacher has defined sexual assault as a means to enlightenment for the student.
- **Resiliency:** In some Asian cultures, an emphasis on resiliency, not bearing grudges, moving on from affliction, and not spreading suffering means that there can be a stigma around therapy. Those who seek counseling are seen as weak. This can prevent victims/survivors from seeking help, and convince them to remain silent.
- **The Sangha (spiritual community):** The sangha is considered one of the central gifts of Buddhism. It can be a place of tremendous support. However, if the sexual violence is committed by another member of the sangha, or by the teacher, the victim/survivor may feel they will lose this important resource if they speak out about the abuse.
- **Right Speech:** The concept of Right Speech (one of the five precepts for ethical conduct) can be misunderstood to silence victims/survivors. Some practitioners have interpreted speaking about abuse or making an accusation as “speaking ill of others.” This is a misinterpretation of the principle. In fact, telling the truth about what happened is the embodiment of Right Speech.
- **Non-Judgement:** In some Buddhist communities, there is an emphasis on non-judgement and “moving beyond right and wrong.” This can make it difficult for individuals to understand that the person who is responsible should be held accountable for the harm caused to another.



*“It is important to realize that teachers and other community members are not yet Enlightened. They are all working to find Truth, which is different for everyone. Therefore, there is no one correct path, answer, understanding to which a victim/survivor must conform.”*

— Jan Chozen Bays  
Great Vow Zen Monastery



## Possible Resources

**Practicing Compassion (bodhicitta):** The victim/survivor is called to show compassion for themselves.

**Right Action (samyak karmanta)—non-violence toward self and others:** The victim/survivor is encouraged to care for themselves, while also understanding how the perpetrator has done harm.

**Right Mindfulness (samyak smriti)—transformation of suffering:**  
*“Affirm that [recovery and healing] is a process of self-discovery. What happened was not because of bad karma.”*  
— Lama Willa Miller

**Following Your Own Dharma:** Seeking help allows one to continue to grow, learn, and work toward Enlightenment.

*“Doubt should be honored. It should encourage victims/survivors to speak with the Sangha (faith community) and ask questions . . . Doubt can help to empower faith and self-determination.”*  
— Jan Chozen Bays

## Advocacy Example by Emily Cohen

The Four Noble Truths can be used to name, diagnose, and work to end the suffering of sexual assault.

- **First Noble Truth—There is suffering.**  
Sexual abuse and violence causes suffering for victims/survivors, their families, and their communities. Survivors speaking out about abuse is not the cause of suffering.
- **Second Noble Truth—There is a cause for that suffering.**  
Sexual violence is a manifestation of many cultural influences including misogyny; entitlement; power dynamics based on control and domination. There are also the physical and emotional responses to violation and trauma that survivors experience.
- **Third Noble Truth—There is a way to end the suffering.**  
There are many ways we can work to end individual and community suffering. Seeking help and healing for the trauma, insisting on justice for survivors, and requiring accountability for the abusers are essential. We can work to change the culture through education and training about sexual violence, modeling equitable relationships, and addressing the needs of the vulnerable and oppressed.
- **Fourth Noble Truth—The way to end suffering can be found in the Eightfold Path.<sup>2</sup>**  
Work with survivors and/or yourself to see how the Eightfold Path can be a victim-centered tool. The eight practices of the Path are: right understanding (*samma ditthi*), right thought (*samma sankappa*), right speech (*samma vaca*), right action (*samma kammanta*), right livelihood (*samma ajiva*), right effort (*samma vayama*), right mindfulness (*samma sati*), and right concentration (*samma samadhi*).



*“The more the advocate can practice deep listening, the better. Rather than knowing core beliefs, advocates need to listen and ask questions.”*

— Lama Willa Miller  
*Natural Dharma Fellowship*

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center Report: Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faith - <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://tricycle.org/magazine/noble-eightfold-path/>



### Snapshot

**Spiritual Texts:** Christian Bible, which includes the Old Testament and the New Testament; Apocrypha

**Primary Sects:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Orthodox

**Primary Figure/Leader:** Jesus of Nazareth, Christ

**Tradition's Origin:** Middle East (present day Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories) around 2,000 years ago.

**Divinity:** Monotheistic God (often expressed as the trinity of Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit)

In the United States, 71% of the population identifies as Christian. There are many denominations of Christianity throughout the world. In the United States, the most common are Roman Catholicism (the Catholic Church), Protestant, Evangelical.<sup>1</sup>

### Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Purity/Virginity:** For some Christians, there is a strong prohibition on pre-marital sex. In this situation, there may be no distinction between a consensual sexual relationship and non-consensual sexual violation—both would be seen as a sin. The ideal of purity and chastity, while theoretically applicable to both males and females, is usually a stricture directed at women and girls.
- **Social Stigma/Blame:** There is often judgement of women who are viewed as immoral, or “loose.” Victims of sexual violence may fear that they will be viewed as responsible—due to their actions, their dress, their attitudes, their bodies. *“Black women are often characterized as loud and calling attention to themselves. People say that their hips and breasts invite sexual attention . . . if you are sexually assaulted, you are blame worthy.”* – Rev. Dr. Traci West
- **Forgiveness:** In Christian scripture, there is a focus on forgiveness. Many victims/survivors feel pressure to forgive the abuser, and shame for not being able or willing to do so. *“. . . the burden to forgive is cast upon the shoulders of the victim/survivor who already carries the pain and suffering of having been victimized.”*<sup>2</sup> Something often left out of the discussion of forgiveness is the requirement that the sinner repent, which means to truly change and not repeat the sin again.



## Possible Resources

### Spiritual Connectivity:

*“Spirituality as a resource that confirms a sense of being and having worth and dignity, of being connected to some larger community including the saints. Deceased grandmothers, mothers and how their faith nurtured you may provide an empowering spiritual connectedness. Invoking them as part of your spiritual community may be important for you.”*

— Rev. Dr. Traci West

**Music:** *“Music is a vehicle for experiencing a sense of community. It challenges isolation such as when you are alone in a room with a social worker. It is important to recognize as an advocate/direct service provider that someone listening to a hymn with headphones might be an act of spiritual connectedness, not blocking you or your services out.”* — Rev. Dr. Traci West

**Collective Sharing:** *“Healing gets very individualized, whereas for me, I think it needs to be collectivized. If you can be in a space with many people sharing your journey together, that is going to be more spiritually sustainable.”*

— Dr. Andrea Smith

### Feminist/Womanist/Mujerista Theology:

*“Many people work to interpret the Christian Bible in ways that center on women and their experiences. These forms of scriptural interpretation highlight God’s grace, justice, and desire for equality and an end to oppression.”*

— Dr. Mary Streufert

- **Suffering:** The focus on the experience of Jesus, and the suffering that he endured, leads many faithful Christians to believe that sexual violence/abuse and the pain of violation is their “cross to bear.” This acceptance of suffering may keep the survivor from seeking safety or finding help. This interpretation stands in contrast to the idea that Jesus suffered to end the suffering of humans.

*“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10:10.*

- **Shame:** Shame can be connected to the belief that because a victim/survivor was abused, they are responsible for taking part in a sin. The distinction between consensual sex and sexual violation is erased. The responsibility of the sinner (abuser) and the sinned-against (victim) gets conflated, and the victim of abuse feels responsible. There can also be a concern that, by talking about the abuse, the victim/survivor will bring shame onto their family.
- **Rigid Gender Roles:** Some Christians believe scripture states that men are the head of the family, and women are required to be submissive. In these communities, and in the church, there is a hierarchy of power and authority.
- **Respecting Elders/Obedience:** The commandment to honor one’s father and mother, and respect elders, may silence children who are being sexually and physically abused within their family.
- **Externalization of the Problem:** Some Evangelical Christians may think that “real Christians” would not rape or abuse. If there is sexual violence in their community, they want to externalize the issue and the perpetrator. The #ChurchToo movement is having an impact. However, without the recognition that sexual violence is perpetrated by Christians, there is no urgency for introspection or to address ways to fix what is allowing sexual violence and abuse to occur.



*“One of the most difficult things we overlook is that the victim/survivor is often confused by the cruelty of the abuse or violation. We overlook the trauma of being confused about how someone could reduce you to an object, as a means to an end for their pleasure and power.”*

— Rev. Dr. Traci West

*Drew University Theological School*

*“When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”*

Psalm 34:17-18

NRSV



## Black Church Communities

Founded out of hundreds of years of slavery, Black churches have played a central role in the fight against oppression, segregation, and brutality perpetrated by white people. Historically, the churches have offered African American believers a safe haven from the racism of the dominant culture. In opposition to the negative stereotypes of African American families and Black men, Black churches have offered institutions that focus on the power of the Black community and the sanctity of the family. Like all spiritual traditions, Black churches are not monolithic in beliefs, practices, and/or traditions.

The spiritual community and connectivity offered by Black churches within a broader culture that is hostile and violent means that it can be an essential resource of comfort and healing for victims/survivors.

Rejecting involvement with the police and the criminal justice system, which are seen as deadly because of police brutality, mass incarceration, and institutional racism, can mean that victims/survivors and their faith communities may resist working with advocacy organizations—especially those that are culturally insensitive or that offer no resources outside of the criminal justice system.

*“For black women victims/survivors, there can be intense pressure to refrain from calling the police to intervene because of the risk of the police killing the person in your faith community that you’re reporting. This demonstrates broader structural racism and how you might be blamed for inviting more anti-black harm and trauma. Those videos of police harming unarmed black people can have far-reaching consequences—reinforcing your supposed responsibility to your community to be strong and not report what you have suffered.”*

— Rev. Dr. Traci West  
*Drew University Theological School*

There may also be a stigma around counseling and therapy.

*“Victims/survivors may be told that the only help they need is to be found in Jesus.”*

— Adrienne Spires  
*CALCASA*

Many survivors have noted that some Black churches remain socially conservative on issues of sexuality. Sexual violence and abuse is often ignored or denied, and survivors are silenced.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Survey - <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

<sup>2</sup> Marie M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Pilgrim Press: Cleveland, 2005) 165



# Hinduism



## Snapshot

**Spiritual Texts:** The Four Vedas: the Rig-Veda, the Sama-Veda and Yajur-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda; The Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads; the Mahabharata; the Ramayana; the Bhagavad Gita

**Divinity:** Henotheistic/Polytheistic (Many Gods)

**Tradition's Origin:** India, around 1500 BCE

“Hindus make up between 0.5% and 0.8% of the United States adult population, and between 85% and 97% of all US Hindus are Asian American, according to the Pew Forum’s estimates.”<sup>1</sup> Many Hindus in the US also have Caribbean ancestry.

## Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Chastity:** Chastity is highly valued in Hinduism. In the *Brahmacharya* stage of life (childhood to young adulthood) all sexes are required to remain chaste while focusing on learning and education. Chastity is seen as a virtue for a woman throughout her life. Sexual abuse and assault may be seen by the victim/survivor, and their community, as dishonoring them.
- **Virginity:** Virginity is considered an important virtue, and many believe that a woman must be a virgin when she marries. Therefore, sexual assault may be a major concern for victims/survivors, as it is believed to make her less desirable and will limit her options for marriage. This may result in many assault victims remaining silent. “Kanya,” a term meaning virgin, has been used in recent history to shame Hindu women. For more on this, read “What Hinduism Says About Virginity: Kanya to Kanyadaan” by Sarika Persaud in *Brown Girl Magazine*.
- **Fidelity:** Sex outside of marriage is still frowned upon, but the onus is upon the woman. A woman is expected to be faithful to her spouse. If she is sexually assaulted, she may be seen as unfaithful and blamed for the assault. Marriage is a highly valued social institution and considered a permanent bond. A victim/survivor may keep silent about anything that might damage or threaten the marriage, including marital rape, which may not be seen as a violation.

- **Family Authority/Respect for Elders:** It may be difficult for victims/survivors to seek assistance if it goes against the dictates of their family. If the abuser is a family member, it can be seen as shameful to accuse an elder of abuse, especially publicly outside the family. The concept of privacy and not speaking of matters outside the family may make Hindu victims wary of outside help.
- **Humility/Modesty:** A female victim/survivor may minimize her experience of abuse, especially if children or other family members may be harmed, shamed, or impacted by her speaking up or seeking help.
- **Karma (the law of cause and effect):** The belief that one's past actions create or impact one's current and future situation means that victims/survivors may see the sexual abuse as a response or payback for past bad deeds or actions.
- **Interpretation of the Law:** Over 3,000 years ago, Manu the Lawgiver provided social laws by which Hindus should live.<sup>2</sup> Many of the laws support the submission and subjugation of women, however there are many contradictions. The laws that support respecting women are often overlooked. Many people argue that the laws of Manu are both antiquated and impossible to enact in today's world.
- **Rise of Conservatism:** The rise of conservative Hinduism with repressive views on chastity is making it more difficult to speak out about assault and to protect women. It is also targeting young girls to uphold patriarchal values about their bodies and their place in the world.



*Manu the Lawgiver recommended the harshest punishment for perpetrators of sexual assault and rape: “He who violates an unwilling maiden shall instantly suffer corporal punishment . . .”*

Manu Smriti 8.364



## Possible Resources

**Goddesses:** Hinduism is one of the few world religions that still worships goddesses. These female divine figure represent both fierce and loving examples of liberation and justice.

**Panchakanya (The Five Kanya):** Five female heroines from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata who are venerated. Many observant Hindus chant their names in a morning prayer that is believed to remove sin. While the Kanyas have been redefined as chaste and virginal, in the original stories they are strong, resilient, and self-actualized despite attempts to control them. “[The Panchakanya] helps us remember that if we are violated, we should not consider ourselves unclean or unworthy. They can help victims/survivors claim sexual agency.”

— Anindita Bhaumik

**Repentance:** Repentance is not the responsibility of the victim/survivor. They have done nothing wrong and deserve no punishment within Hinduism. Instead, the focus is placed on the perpetrator to seek repentance.

*Continued on next page.*



## Possible Resources / Continued

**Laws of Manu unequivocally states:** “Women are worthy of worship. They are the fate of the household, the lamp of enlightenment for all in the household. They bring solace to the family and are an integral part of dharmic life. Even heaven is under the control of women. The gods reside in those households where women are worshipped, and in households where women are slighted, all efforts at improvement go in vain.”  
— Manu Smriti 3-56



*“We are all ‘Amritasya Putrah,’ or the Children of Immortality,<sup>3</sup> and therefore, no matter what happens to us, we remain a child of God. We do not often change our name if something bad happens to us. Hence, our identity should not change as a result of an assault. God, like a true parent, does not change either. God never stops loving us as God is not punitive or judgmental. Responsibility for the assault is not, and can never be, on the women or victims/survivors, nor is there any punishment for them. Responsibility falls on the perpetrator and on the failure of societal systems of protection. God does not discriminate and never shuns victims. An assault is not the victim’s fault. We are all part of that Supreme Divinity and we can never be seen or treated as an impure or fallen person.”*

— Anindita Bhaumik  
Advocate/Educator

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center Report: Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faith - <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/31478379/Manu\\_Smriti\\_Sanskrit\\_Text\\_With\\_English\\_Translation](https://www.academia.edu/31478379/Manu_Smriti_Sanskrit_Text_With_English_Translation)

<sup>3</sup> Svetasvatara Upanishad, Chapter 2, verse 5



### Snapshot

**Spiritual Texts:** Qur'an, Hadith

**Primary Sects:** Sunni, Shia

**Tradition's Origin:** Makkah (Mecca) on the Arabian Peninsula (current day Saudi Arabia) in 610 CE

**Divinity:** Monotheistic God (Allah)

In the United States, Muslims are 1.1% of the population; that's 3.45 million people.<sup>1</sup>

### Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Self-Blame/Victim Blaming:** Victims/survivors may blame themselves, or others in their communities may blame them for the violence. Even if the victim is a child, there can be a misconception that they could have prevented the abuse. There is also concern that the victim will “bring shame” upon their family.
- **Confusion about Consensual and Non-Consensual Sex:** There is often a misunderstanding of consent, and a belief that the victim is equally responsible. “The religion is very clear, that sexual intimacy has to be consensual. But that’s not necessarily how people live their lives. Lots of women don’t believe that they have the right to consent or not consent,” says Salma Abugideiri.
- **Purity and Virginity:** Women in particular are expected to maintain chastity. From a religious perspective, both men and women are responsible for abstaining from pre-marital sex, however, culturally, women carry this burden. The perceived lack of purity may also impact women’s marriage options. “The family or community may not focus on the crime of sexual assault, but rather that the victim/survivor has had sex,” says Salma Abugideiri.
- **Covering the Flaws of a Fellow Believer:**<sup>2</sup> The teaching about covering the faults of another is predicated on the ideas of discretion and privacy, as well as preventing defamation. This teaching may be used to ensure silence about sexual abuse, particularly incest and molestation. However, when used this way, people are confusing faults with crimes.



## Possible Resources

**Justice:** Believers are commanded to stand up for justice and to bear witness, even if it is against family members or people with status in the community.

*“God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you, that you may receive admonition.” — Qur’an 16:90*

*“O you who believe. Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor; for God can protect you both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts) lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” — Qur’an 4:135:*

**Accountability:** Islam emphasizes that human beings are given a choice as to how they behave, and that each person is accountable for their own choices, with a final reckoning on the Day of Judgement (Qur’an 6:164; 53:38-41).

*Continued on next page.*

- **Family Solidarity:** There is a strong sense of family solidarity over individual needs. If the abuser is a family member, the victim/survivor may prioritize silence, out of respect for elders, for fear that they will lose family relationships, or that there will be legal consequences impacting the family, or that the family will be judged by the larger community.



- **Sin:** Many victims/survivors believe that they are part of the sin of sexual violence, but they are not. The sin rests solely with the perpetrator. The victim is a victim, and is not held accountable.

### Advocate Advice: Salma Elkadi Abugideiri of Peaceful Families Project

Simply asking survivors a few questions can lift up resources from Islamic teachings. Some examples might be:

- What does the Qur’an say about someone who has been abused?
- What does the Qur’an say about injustice?
- Whose side is God on—that of the oppressor or the oppressed?

Advocates can ask those questions so that the survivor can provide the answers. There has to be a belief and an assumption [on the part of the advocate] that Islam has those positive teachings.





*“In my work doing cultural sensitivity trainings, people don’t know or believe that Islam has anything positive to offer. I would want people to know that Islam is a religion that values human dignity, and by that I mean men and women, and every human being. There’s nothing in Islam that supports any kind of abuse, let alone sexual violence. There’s nothing in our religion that supports, allows, or makes it conducive for one person to violate someone else’s body.”*

— Salma Elkadi Abugideiri  
*Peaceful Families Project*

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center Update - <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://karamah.org/press/what-do-we-have-to-hide-the-islamic-principle-of-satr-and-cultural-bias-2>

<sup>3</sup> Narrated in Bukhari & Muslim



## Possible Resources / Continued

### **Accountability (continued):**

Perpetrators of sexual violence are responsible for their behavior and will be held accountable, if not in this world, then in the hereafter. This teaching can be comforting for survivors who are not able to bring the perpetrator to account, for any number of reasons. It is also helpful to address the self-blame that some survivors experience for being victimized.

**No victim-blaming:** The Qur’an clarifies that the blame is on the perpetrator of oppression or injustice, not on the victim, and reminds perpetrators that they will face a painful punishment in the hereafter (Qur’an 42:42).

*“If anyone earns a fault or a sin and throws it onto one who is innocent, that person carries on himself/herself (both) a falsehood and a flagrant sin . . . ”*  
Qur’an 4:112

**Reporting:** Because of Islam’s emphasis on justice, there are many teachings that address the case of the oppressed. Although there are teachings that encourage believers to cover each other’s faults, when it comes to oppression, the Prophet Muhammad clearly advised his followers to intervene and prevent the oppressor from committing further injustice.<sup>3</sup>

*“God does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged. And ever is God Hearing and Knowing . . . ”* Qur’an 4:148

**Repentance (tawbah):** There is a clear process outlined for repentance, which includes acknowledging the sin one has committed and feeling remorse, resolving to abstain from that sin and changing one’s behavior, and asking for forgiveness from both the victim and from God. Survivors of sexual violence should never be pressured to forgive the perpetrator, although they may ultimately do so as part of their journey toward healing.



# Judaism

## Snapshot

**Spiritual Texts:** Tanakh (Hebrew Bible); Talmud (Interpretative traditions of Tanakh and one of the bases for Jewish law)

**Primary Denominations in the United States:** Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist  
**Tradition's Origin:** Middle East (present day Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories)

**Divinity:** Monotheistic God (LORD, YHWH, HaShem, the Shekhina)

Religious observance does not always define who one is as a Jewish person. While some Jewish people are deeply steeped in religious practice, others are more drawn to Jewish heritage and cultural practice than religious observance.

## Roadblocks: Common Issues and Concerns

- **Shaming the Community by Speaking Out:** As a minority religion which is often persecuted, Jewish victims/survivors may resist seeking help outside their religious community. There is a cultural demand to maintain the community's reputation by presenting the Jewish people and faith in only positive ways to the dominant culture.
- **Prohibitions Against Defaming Another Person (lashon hara):** Traditionally, this command has been interpreted to stop slander and defamation. However, in some communities, it has been interpreted to silence allegations of abuse, protecting individuals and institutions from accountability. There is an exception to this prohibition when speaking out will protect someone, including oneself, from harm. In that case, one is mandated to speak up.
- **Prohibition on Turning a Jew Over to Civil Authorities for Criminal Conduct (mesirah):** This prohibition has been interpreted by insular religious communities to avoid criminal justice oversight. This is another way that allegations of abuse, particularly child abuse, have been silenced and denied. Many believe that this prohibition is no longer appropriate, and there are existing exceptions for when a Jew is a danger to the community, or when someone needs protection.





- **Male Leadership and Authority:** Traditionally, men have been the religious authorities, teachers, and scholars. Even women who are now in leadership positions may have been trained by men who are unaware of their biases toward masculine leadership styles, textual interpretation, and understandings of traditions.
- **Textual Interpretation:** Because men have been the religious authorities, their interpretation of the Torah, Talmud, and other religious texts have often left women invisible. Even in stories that directly address the experience of sexual violence and abuse, traditional interpretations have focused on larger themes or metaphorical understandings of the violence rather than the lived experience of a survivor of rape. *“The discussion of rape is circumvented even when it is the topic of the biblical text at hand (e.g. in the rape of Dinah or the reproductive slavery of Bilhah and Zilpah),”* says Professor Mika Ahuvia. This avoidance of the issues related to sexual violence diminishes the experience of rape and sexual abuse, and makes it seem unworthy of discussion or recognition.



*“We are all created in the image of God, male and female . . . the inherent importance and divinity of every person is really valuable. And in the case of a person who doesn’t identify within that gender binary, that’s okay too. The Rabbis also believed in six kinds of gender . . . I think it’s important to keep that in mind. Nobody is devalued . . . When you deface or harm a person, you are defacing God. There is no room for that within the tradition.”*

— Professor Mika Ahuvia

UW Stroum Center for Jewish Studies

*Women’s Prayer for the end of the Sabbath (Ladino)*

*The Well of Miriam*

*I will drink these waters*

*From the well of*

*Miriam the prophetess*

*Who saves us from all troubles*

*And all evil that might befall us*

*And gives us a livelihood without sorrow.*

## Possible Resources

**Stories of strong women:** Hagar, Rachel, Miriam, and Esther all provide examples of strength, authority, and resilience. Hagar is the only figure in the Bible, male or female, to name God (El-Roi, the God who sees me). Rachel is remembered as an intercessory who mourns for her children, “our mother Rachel.” Miriam is a prophetess who leads women in dance to freedom. Esther is a queen, who saves her people.

**Judaism is a faith that encourages multiple interpretations, dialogue, and discovery.** *“It’s important not to let a text or a Rabbi tell you how Judaism does things or understands things . . . For every two Jews, there’s three opinions . . . It’s important to gain authority over your own faith and not let others tell you how to process your experience.”*

— Professor Mika Ahuvia

**The Mikvah (Jewish Ritual Bath)** is traditionally used for the practice of family purity laws, immersion before wedding, and for conversion. Use of the mikvah has expanded to embrace women looking for healing rituals.

**The domestic rituals, such as Shabbat,** *“can contribute to a sense of being part of a larger web, of connecting to ancestors, and are also an opportunity for [survivors] to claim their own space and their own creativity . . . one gets to interpret and . . . engage with the traditions on one’s own terms.”*

— Professor Mika Ahuvia

**Forgiveness** is not something that a victim/survivor is required to give to the person who harmed them. Rather, the person who committed the crime is required to truly change. If there is no true change, there can be no forgiveness.

**From antiquity until the twentieth century,** Jews also turned to angels in prayer and imagined God and the angels surrounding them. The feminine aspect of God, called the Shekhina, was believed to dwell with the Jewish people in exile, suffering on earth with them.

**Blessing Practice modeled on Birkat Kohanim/**

**The Priestly Blessing:** May you feel safe. May you feel content. May you feel peace.

# chapter 3

## Abuse within Specific Populations and/or Situations

Child Sexual Abuse

Abuse by Clergy/Spiritual Leader

Immigrant and Refugee Survivors

Campus Sexual Assault Survivors

LGBTQIA+ Survivors



## Child Sexual Abuse

Child victims of sexual abuse also have important questions related to their spiritual beliefs. Just as adults may question the role of God/spirituality in their traumatic experiences, children may believe that they are responsible for the abuse, or that their “badness” has caused the abuse as a form of punishment. Even children who aren’t raised in particularly religious families may absorb these ideas from the dominant culture.

We know that most child abuse is perpetrated by a family member or someone close to the child. For children who are abused within a religiously-observant family, it is not unusual for the religious beliefs/traditions to be perverted by the abuser to support or justify the abuse. This may also be true in the case of a child abused by clergy or other spiritual leaders/teachers.

This form of “toxic” theology allows the abuser to twist the sacred words, beliefs, and traditions of their faith. Manipulating the child in this way is a form of spiritual abuse—it may impact the child’s relationship with their religious tradition and beliefs, as well as their connection to God(s) or the divine, and their religious/spiritual community.

Children may be much more forthcoming about their spiritual questions and concerns. Their questions may be similar to those of adults:

- Is God punishing me for being bad?
- Why did God let this happen?
- Why doesn’t God hear my prayers?
- I’m supposed to respect my elders. Isn’t it wrong to disobey and tell the secret they told me not to tell?

These are important issues, and a child’s spiritual crisis should be given the same serious attention as an adult’s.<sup>1</sup>

## Sexual Abuse by Clergy/Spiritual Leader

The Catholic abuse scandal has made more people aware of the reality of abuse by clergy. However, this is not only a Catholic phenomenon—it is an issue in every spiritual tradition. While the abuse of children has been the most publicly discussed, adults are also abused by their faith leaders

Like the spiritual abuse discussed above, a predatory leader will use their position of power and their authority to manipulate and abuse an individual in the community. In some traditions, the spiritual leader is viewed as a connection to the sacred, therefore seen as infallible or above reproach. The grooming process that abusers use to gain the trust of victims, whether child or adult, is facilitated by the inherent power of their position, their perceived connection to God or embodiment of spiritual teachings and knowledge, and the trust that people bring to their relationships with spiritual leaders.

The betrayal of abuse committed by a spiritual leader is a violation that may be shattering for survivors and have long-lasting impact. Many who have sought accountability and justice have been shunned, ignored, and silenced by the larger spiritual community. Until very recently, they were not believed.

Their experience, when made public, is threatening not only to the religious institution, but also to the beliefs of others in their community. The outcome is that, in addition to the trauma of the abuse, the victim often loses their faith community, which can be devastating and impede healing.

Traditionally, the institutional response to clergy sexual abuse has been denial, secrecy, and shunning of the victim/survivor. This is not a new issue—activists have been working to bring transparency and justice to their religious institutions for decades. However, in the aftermath of the Catholic abuse revelations and the #MeToo movement, faith-specific campaigns have raised awareness of abuse and harassment by clergy to an unprecedented level. #ChurchToo, #SilenceIsNotSpiritual, #MosqueMeToo, #GamAni, #GuruMeToo are all social media movements that are making the reality of clergy abuse visible. They are also insisting on accountability from the institutions and leadership that knowingly shielded abusers.



---

*“People are so vulnerable and earnest in their spiritual longing . . . Clergy abuse destroys people’s ability to engage in a spiritual path.”*

— Jan Chozen Bays  
Great Vow Zen Monastery

*“It is difficult to bring discussions about sexual assault into institutions where there is hierarchy. Discussing these matters challenges the structure of religion, particularly if the perpetrator is a teacher, and creates dissonance. Many want to prevent these conversations.”*

— Lama Willa Miller  
Natural Dharma Fellowship

---

## Immigrant and Refugee Survivors

For many immigrants and refugees, their faith community may be a significant support system as they build their life in a new country. The barriers that they may face—language, citizenship status, cultural differences, previous experiences of trauma and abuse, lack of knowledge about services—can make it difficult for them to seek support outside of their community. Many immigrant or refugee women have experienced trauma, sexual assault, and/or domestic violence before entering the United States; they may not have received help for this previous abuse.

The serious and complex safety concerns for undocumented immigrants increases their vulnerability to sexual coercion and exploitation. Threats of deportation, fear of police, potential loss of job/livelihood, ICE, concerns for their family, etc. may make safe spaces for spiritual and religious observation critical for them.

It’s important to be able to offer national, regional, and local resources that are culturally-specific and which understand the importance of faith and spirituality, if your organization does not primarily serve their community. The Appendix at the back of this handbook lists resources that may be useful for finding culturally-specific advocacy organizations.

## Campus Sexual Assault Survivors

College students, many of whom are living away from home for the first time, can be without the support systems that they've grown up with, such as their faith community. Many survivors report that the campus offices tasked with addressing sexual assault (such as Title IX offices) have been focused on institutional protection, rather than supporting and assisting survivors. Mandated reporting of sexual violence by colleges and universities often minimizes the true extent of the problem.

As advocacy organizations, it's important to reach out to the campus groups where victims/survivors may often seek help and support—faith-based campus organizations, campus clergy, and spiritual leaders. These people are generally outside of the institutional hierarchy in terms of Title IX response, and may be seen as more safe and victim-centered. Connections with these organizations, including outreach and education of the leaders, staff, and volunteers, can directly impact the survivors in a campus setting. In working with on-campus faith organizations, you may need to research who will be helpful and supportive to victims/survivors. Review the information in Chapter 5 on Creating Networks for Support for Survivors (page 49).

## LGBTQIA+ Survivors

LGBTQIA+ people, particularly trans women, experience disproportionately high rates of sexual assault,<sup>2</sup> and it can be difficult to access advocacy services, as well as medical and mental health providers, who understand the needs of LGBTQIA+ survivors. Homophobia and transphobia create serious safety concerns, such as hate crimes, and also create barriers to seeking services from advocacy organizations, which may be viewed as serving only heterosexual, cis-women. It is not uncommon for LGBTQIA+ people to encounter denial of service because of their gender identity, and/or the refusal by advocates to honor their gender identity, pronouns, and preferred name.

Given the hostility and discrimination expressed towards LGBTQIA+ people, it is common for harmful religious and cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality to arise in the aftermath of a trauma. Even for people who no longer practice or believe in the tradition in which they were raised, the denigrating religious messages may become prominent in their thinking and reaction to the assault and abuse.

51% of LGBTQIA+ people in the United States say they have a religious affiliation; 33% say there is a conflict between their sexual/gender identity and their religious community and beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

There are faith organizations that are “open and affirming,” which means they aim to be fully inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ communities. The Human Rights Campaign has a page dedicated to faith positions on LGBTQIA+ equality.<sup>4</sup> The pages for each tradition include links to inclusive resources and spiritual communities. However, it is important to make sure that these organizations practice full inclusion, rather than being inclusive in name only.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thefyi.org/toolkits/spiritual-abuse-toolkit/>

<sup>2</sup> “Sexual Assault, Sexual Abuse, and Harassment: Understanding the Mental Health Impact and Providing Care for Survivors” *An International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Briefing Paper* - <http://www.istss.org/education-research/sexual-assault-and-harassment.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> “A Survey of LGBT Americans” by Pew Research Center, 2013. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/chapter-6-religion/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions>

# chapter 4

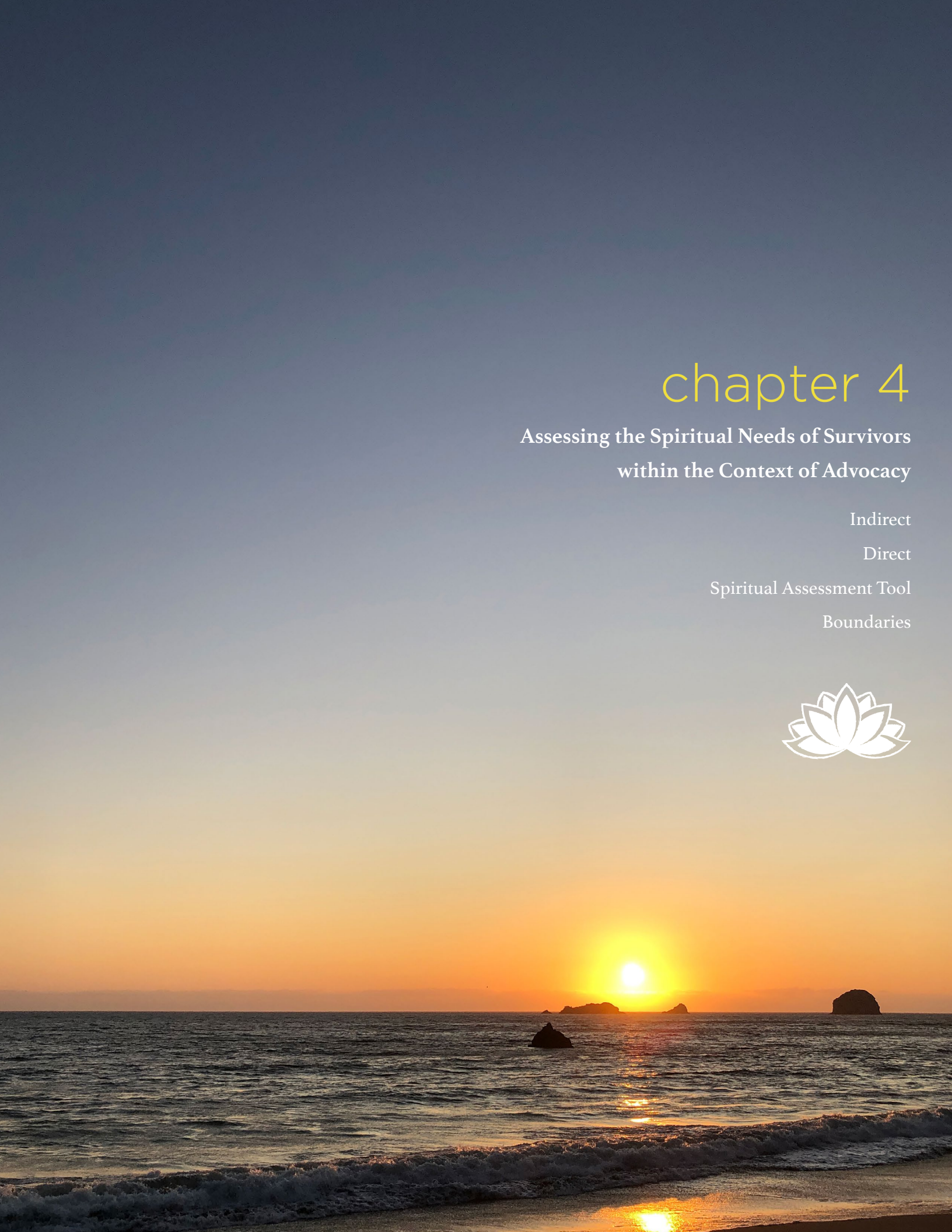
## Assessing the Spiritual Needs of Survivors within the Context of Advocacy

Indirect

Direct

Spiritual Assessment Tool

Boundaries



Your organization's intake process can help you learn about the religious/spiritual needs and concerns of the survivors with whom you are working. There are several approaches that you can use.

### Indirect Assessment

Using your standard intake process and/or general conversations, you may learn about the survivor's religious/spiritual life without having to ask direct questions. In particular, strength-based questions can naturally generate information about a survivor's faith.

#### Regarding Their Support System:

- Do you have a support system? Who does it include? Who do you trust? Who are your biggest supporters?
- What has helped you survive so far? Where do you find your strength? What nourished your spirit? What gives you courage?

#### Regarding Safety Planning:

When safety planning or working on legal documents (protection orders, etc.), ask if there are specific places besides home, work, or school that they might want to include, such as a place of worship or spiritual center. Also, if discussing the survivor's weekly schedule, you can determine if religious or spiritual activities are a part of their life.

If the place of worship or spiritual center is included in the protection order, it's important to communicate with the leadership of the community to ensure that they will honor the protection orders. This is especially critical if the perpetrator is also a member of the spiritual community.

### Direct Assessment

In your conversations with the survivor, there may be many opportunities to ask directly about their spiritual life and beliefs. The more transparent and open you are, the more comfortable they will be.

Remember, especially if the victim/survivor is part of a minority faith community, they may be hesitant to talk with you about their beliefs, especially if they assume you have a different belief system. As the advocate, you are in the position of power in the situation; be aware of the inherent power dynamics in the relationship. They may not know if you are a safe person to talk to about something so important.

The best way to directly help a survivor talk about personal but important topics like spirituality is to normalize the conversation. These questions can be approached as yet another important facet of learning about and understanding someone. A supportive and non-judgmental response to answers about their spiritual and religious life helps the survivor know that it is safe to talk about their beliefs and traditions.

On the next page, we have included a Spiritual Assessment Tool that we hope will help normalize the conversation about faith. Including spiritual assessment will provide you with insights to help the survivors with whom you are working, and will offer an additional avenue for comfort, support, and healing.



---

*“Knowing how important the spiritual beliefs and traditions in the life of a survivor are for safety, for healing, there’s no way I wouldn’t ask [about spiritual beliefs] - of course always with humility, respect and genuine curiosity - at the service of being more effective.”*

— Rev. Dr. Sally MacNichol  
CONNECT NYC

---

## Spiritual Assessment Tool

Many medical professionals use spiritual assessment to address the psychological, emotional, and neurophysiological impact of pain and suffering. We are adapting this model for advocates to talk with survivors of sexual violence. This is not offered as a checklist. Rather, we offer these questions as examples of ways to start the conversation about spiritual beliefs and traditions in the life of the victim/survivor with whom you are working.

<b>S</b>	Spiritual Belief System	Do you have a spiritual life that is important to you? Do you have a formal religious affiliation? What is your clearest sense of the meaning of your life at this time?
<b>P</b>	Personal Belief System	When you are afraid or in pain, how do you find comfort? What are the beliefs and practices of your tradition that you personally accept? In what ways is your spirituality/religion meaningful to you in your daily life? Are there texts, prayers, ceremonies, or rituals that you find personally supportive or which give you comfort? Has the assault impacted your beliefs and values? What do you find to be supportive, restorative, inspiring in your faith beliefs and spiritual tradition? How do you understand the abuse, given your spiritual or religious beliefs?
<b>I</b>	Integration with Spiritual Community	Do you belong to any religious or spiritual group? Do you attend services, prayer or meditation group? How do you participate in that group? In what ways is this group a support to you? Have you sought help from your community about the sexual assault? What was the response?
<b>R</b>	Religious Practices and Restrictions	What activities does your religion/faith encourage, discourage? What meaning do these practices hold for you? To what extent do you follow these practices?
<b>I</b>	Implications for Care/Advocacy	Do you have a spiritual teacher, faith leader, or mentor who you would like to be part of our work together as you navigate healing?
<b>T</b>	Trauma Recovery	Are there aspects or resources of your tradition/practice that you think might be helpful in addressing the physical and psychological trauma of abuse? Things that ground you in the present and provide stability—such as yoga, conscious breathing, prayer, dance, chanting, singing, listening to spiritual music, reading aloud, ritual bathing or purification?

Modified and adapted from "Pain, Suffering, and Spiritual Assessment," 2nd Ed, 11/06 from the University of Wisconsin Hospital & Clinics, Madison, WI



The most important guideline is to allow the victim/survivor to set the agenda. They may not wish to discuss this with you, or may want to have the conversation at another time. Also, don't underestimate the power of asking—regardless of the answer. Listening is a powerful healing tool.

## Boundaries

The area of religion and spiritual belief is intensely personal and powerful for many people. You may have strong feelings and opinions about your own tradition, or about something the survivor has said about theirs.

It's important to remember your role, as well as the power that you hold in that role. As someone seeking help and guidance, the victim/survivor is less powerful than you. As an advocate, you have a vital role to play in their life, and therefore, must be mindful of your position.

Out of respect, you can and should support the survivor's efforts to address their spiritual issues and concerns and connect with their faith community in helpful ways. Below are some ways to do this.

- Keep your interactions survivor-focused—this is *their* experience.
- Remember that your personal beliefs and views are *yours*. Proselytizing or trying to convert someone to your beliefs is not appropriate.
- Keep in mind that self-disclosure is tricky. Sharing your personal beliefs may make you feel good, but does it help the victim/survivor? Are you redirecting the conversation to yourself and your beliefs, rather than focusing on them?
- Listen with humility, curiosity, and warm regard; ask questions that build upon what the survivor has said about their beliefs or practices.
- Respect their boundaries. If they don't wish to discuss the subject, don't continue to ask about it.
- Understand that not all religious or spiritual communities will be supportive for survivors. As an outsider, you may recognize toxic theology, victim-blaming, or other forms of psychologically and spiritually harmful beliefs. Your role is to help the survivor explore these issues for themselves, not to tell them their spiritual or religious beliefs are wrong or bad, or that they need to leave their religion or spiritual community.



### Advocate Advice from Adrienne Spires of CALCASA

*Open-ended Questions: Ask open-ended questions about self-care and healing with regards to faith. Give the victim/survivor space to share and guide the conversation. These questions should be on intake forms.*

*Listen to Their Questions/Concerns: Let them guide the conversation and affirm the questions that they are asking. Also, listen for ways that faith leaders/ communities may have attempted to rationalize the violence or blame the victim/survivor.*

*Encourage Action: Encourage victim/survivor to read, journal, pray, join peer groups, and use other forms of self-affirmation.*



# chapter 5

## Fostering Collaboration with Religious and Spiritual Communities

Creating Networks of Support for Survivors

Mandated Reporting and Confidentiality

Suggestions for How Faith Communities

Can Address Sexual Abuse and Violence

How Spiritual Communities Can Help



## Creating Networks of Support for Survivors

Religious and spiritual communities and faith-based organizations are often the bedrock of both urban and rural communities, particularly for underserved populations. In addition to emotional and spiritual support, faith communities can be a vital resource for food, clothing, transportation, employment, and other basic daily living needs. How can you engage religious communities in addressing and preventing sexual violence?

### Learn your area's faith-based resources.

Start with the resources you know and work from there. Do the spiritual leaders in your area meet together for mutual support or civic reasons? In many areas, religious and spiritual communities have joined together to address local issues such as poverty, homelessness, and social justice concerns. Does a faith-based organization you already collaborate with participate in such a coalition?

### Learn your area's spiritual leaders.

You have many potential allies in a faith community, not only the head rabbi, pastor, imam, or bishop. Others might include:

- Elders
- Cantors
- Lay ministry leaders
- “First Ladies”
- Outreach ministry/non-denominational ministry
- Stephen Ministers
- Hospital and prison chaplains
- Parish nurses
- Female community leaders
- Those not affiliated with services but who are respected in the community

Seek out leaders who are largely responsible for organizing local events and who are known in the community for advising others wisely.

### Make connections.

Do any agencies you already partner with (food banks, charitable organizations, law enforcement, etc.) also partner with faith communities? Use those connections/events to meet spiritual leaders, thank them for their service to the community, and express a desire to collaborate. These relationships—and trust—will develop over time.

### Explore common ground.

Remember that spiritual communities and advocates both care about and work toward the well-being of families and the community. Find shared goals, such as justice, peace, compassion, violence-free families, etc. Communicate using this shared language. Prevention programming may also provide opportunities for collaboration and relationship building. Encourage religious communities to learn how to be strong allies for survivors.



### Advocate Advice from Adrienne Spires of CALCASA

***Research History:** It's important for advocates to do their own research on the history of barriers between faith leaders and crisis centers. Learn where some of the discomfort originates and how others have addressed it.*

***Learn Basic Faith Tenets:** Advocates are not scholars, but it is important to know basic tenets of different religions. It is important to understand not only beliefs, but how they affect issues of demeanor, posture, interactions, etc.*

***Respect Traditions:** Learn how faith traditions handle trauma. Respect the survivor's tradition and listen for how they understand it. Even if you disagree on how women are viewed in a tradition (beliefs about abortion/the morning after pill, for example) still listen and respect the ways in which faith affects all aspects of identity.*

## Evaluate openness and willingness to work with survivors.

Research the organization's/congregation's website and social media accounts:

- Review their mission statement, vision, tenets.
- If the leader has a blog, recorded talks, written sermons, or reflections, see if they have written or spoken about gender-based violence and, if so, find out what they have said.
- Identify other people in leadership.
- Explore their events, trainings, educational offerings, and community outreach programs.
- If there are appropriate opportunities, attend events they are hosting to get to know the leaders and the community better.

In-Person Meetings:

- How does the spiritual leader react when you approach them about sexual violence? Do they step away from you? Do they change the subject quickly? Do they indicate interest by asking questions?
- How do they respond when you ask if they have encountered sexual violence in their community? If they say no or they don't know, they may benefit from training.

You might ask:

“Have you ever talked about sexual abuse with your faith community?”

“We work with survivors from many religious backgrounds. Can we tell you about our services?”

“We provide training on sexual abuse. Would you be interested in training opportunities for your congregation?”

If they indicate that they know sexual violence has affected their communities, you can respond:

“How did you and your community respond?”

“Are you comfortable addressing it?”

“We would love to help you have those conversations.”

“What resources exist in your community to assist survivors?”

“Are you familiar with the local sexual assault resource center?” If yes, how would you describe your relationship?”

“We can help survivors access safety, advocacy, and other resources.”

“We can provide training on how to identify and address sexual abuse.”

## Recruit leaders to be trained on sexual violence and abuse.

Does your center offer trainings to the public? Invite spiritual leaders, particularly those who are already involved with your center. Keep in touch with them and invite them to your events. Use the annual events, such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Teen Dating Violence Month, etc., to offer educational information that they can share with their community.



***Terminology:** Be aware of what terminology is used in relation to the culture of the victim/survivor—in some cases avoid using Western terminology. For example, instead of “human rights,” use dignity and an honorable life; instead of “feminism,” use honoring women.*

— Imam Mohamed Magid  
ADAMS Center

**Ask them to teach you about their spiritual tradition.**

If your organization is serving people from their tradition, you could invite a faith leader to give a brief lecture to the staff/volunteers of your organization about their religion/spiritual tradition. Alternately, many interfaith organizations offer round-table events to discuss particular issues from a multi-faith perspective. You could ask them to host, or co-host, an event around sexual violence and abuse. Current events are often popular for these discussions, so you can draw upon issues in the media, or significant local issues.

**Ask them to consult with you to improve the cultural sensitivity of your organization's services and programs.**

They can help you better understand issues in their culture such as modesty practices, language, respectful ways to address someone, etc.

**Remember that both faith-based and community advocacy organizations can be overburdened and underfunded.**

Many religious leaders are not paid for the community events and services in which they participate. When they cannot attend, do not assume it is because they are disinterested or antagonistic. Travel in rural areas can be expensive and very time-consuming. When possible, consider hosting meetings at faith-based organizations to maximize the opportunity for faith leaders to join you.

**Choose Collaboration.**

View each religious leader as an ally until you discover otherwise. Begin work as though you are on the same team because doing so can make it happen. Remember that you have things to teach and things to learn.

## Mandated Reporting & Confidentiality

**Openly address the topics of mandated reporting, confidentiality, and liability with faith leaders.**

These topics may not hold the same meaning for each of you. For example, clergy and advocates may have different reporting requirements. It is important for everyone to know those requirements when acting collaboratively. A helpful tool can be found here: [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov).

To prepare for these conversations, read the free essay by Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, *Confidentiality and Mandated Reporting: A Clergy Dilemma?*<sup>1</sup> You can also offer this essay to faith leaders to read.

Beyond the legal and ethical issues related to mandated reporting, it is important to talk with faith leaders about the importance of confidentiality. They may have no training in this area, and may have no idea how important confidentiality is for survivor safety—physically, spiritually, and psychologically. In an attempt to help, they may cause great harm. It's helpful to explain why it's important to have the survivor's consent before discussing the abuse/assault with anyone else, especially the survivor's family. Some religious leaders may believe they have a religious obligation to intercede or counsel the family on behalf of the survivor, or may pressure the survivor to inform their spouse/family.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Confidentiality-and-Mandatory-Reporting2014.pdf>

## Suggestions for How Faith Communities Can Address Sexual Abuse and Violence

### Coordinated Community Response Team:

Many local communities bring members and leaders together in teams to prevent and address sexual violence. The names of these groups vary by city or county, but typically they are called coordinated community response teams, task forces, or community action teams. Invite supportive spiritual leaders or faith community members to participate. Through their participation, you will be able to learn about their outreach efforts and share with them the needs of survivors.

### Community Events:

Take advantage of community events to connect with religious leaders, particularly events sponsored by faith groups. Offer to provide relevant educational resources.

- What are the events in your area? Which organizations sponsor community-wide events?
- Do you have a county fair in which you might have a presence?
- Are there local back-to-school events, child safety events (such as car seat installations), or community food drives in which you can participate?
- Does your local medical center sponsor health fairs at which you could have a booth?
- Are there culturally-specific events occurring in your area in which you can show your support?

Participating in these events and sharing educational information not only connects you with faith leaders but with survivors as well. It demonstrates your openness to the important role that spirituality has in people's lives, which may make victims/survivors more willing to seek help.

### Prevention Activities:

Faith communities offer rich opportunities for prevention work, as the organization, structure, and often intimate nature of their communities may provide them access to every level of prevention, including:

- Individual Level: Providing education to their congregants—such as children's education programs, teen groups—through sermons or talks
- Relationship Level: Modeling healthy behaviors for families and encouraging respectful communication
- Community Level: Collaborating with other organizations to proactively address local social problems
- National Level: Working toward a national policy on sexual violence through the connections to national associations or networks that many religious and spiritual communities have
- Societal Level: Creating policies and procedures designed to prevent violence before it starts

Invite faith leaders to become involved in community meetings, educational opportunities with youth, social marketing campaigns, and trainings on safe policies and procedures. Offer to present educational programs at the place of worship on the topic of sexual assault and/or child sexual abuse. When possible, include a leader or member of the congregation in the presentation to discuss spiritual aspects related to abuse.

## How Spiritual Communities Can Help

Spiritual leaders may ask how they can help. Here are some suggestions to offer.

- **Become a Safe Place.** Make your church, temple, sangha, mosque, or synagogue a safe place where survivors can come for help. Establish a Safe Community Policy and adopt procedures to protect vulnerable members. Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the certified sexual assault and domestic violence center in your area. Post brochures and information in public spaces, to increase awareness, as well as in more private spaces where people can read the information without being observed. Publicize the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673, [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org) in newsletters, websites, etc.
- **Educate the Community.** Provide ways for members of the community to learn about domestic and sexual violence. Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Sponsor educational events in your faith community on sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse. Talk about the ways trauma impacts individuals, families, and our society.
- **Speak Out.** Speak out about intimate partner violence and sexual assault in worship services or community gatherings. As a leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.
- **Lead by Example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local sexual assault resource center or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer. Model non-violent behaviors and healthy relationships in your home, congregation, and larger community.
- **Offer Space.** Offer safe, welcoming, and confidential meeting space for educational seminars, community meetings, or weekly support groups.
- **Partner with Existing Resources.** Include your local sexual assault resource center in donations and in community service projects.
- **Provide Financial Support for Survivors in Your Community.** In the aftermath of sexual assault, victims/survivors often have many unexpected needs as they rebuild their lives, such as counseling, housing, legal advice, or other services.
- **Prepare to Be a Resource.** Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to sexual and domestic violence. Receive training from professionals in the fields of intimate partner violence and sexual assault.
- **Respond.** If abuse is disclosed to you, prioritize survivor safety. This includes maintaining strict confidentiality. Let survivors know of the community resources available to assist them. Work with advocacy organizations to identify appropriate services.
- **Support Professional Training.** Encourage and support ongoing training and education for clergy and lay leaders, chaplains, paid staff, volunteers, and religious students to increase awareness about intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and abuse.
- **Address Internal Issues.** Encourage continued efforts by religious institutions (your denomination) to address allegations of abuse by clergy or lay leaders to insure that your leaders are a safe resource for victims and their children.
- **Be a Public Voice for Change.** As a spiritual leader, you can bring your position of respect to supporting victims and survivors. Participate in local, regional, and national discussions and responses to sexual violence and abuse.

# appendix

FAQs

Culturally-Specific & Community-Specific  
Resources for Survivors

Recommended Reading: Sexual Abuse and Violence

Information About Specific Spiritual Traditions

About Our Advisors





## FAQs

- **“We have federal funding. Can we even talk about religion?”**

You cannot proselytize or favor one religious tradition over another. As part of cultural competency, you can and should support the survivor’s effort to address their religious issues and connect with their spiritual community in a helpful way.

- **“I just don’t feel comfortable really engaging around questions of faith. This is way outside my expertise.”**

Be confident in your ability to learn from survivors and the other resources you have available to you. Take the time to develop the cultural competencies surrounding religion and spiritual beliefs.

- **“My workplace doesn’t allow us to talk about religion at all.”**

Advocates don’t need to talk about religion or spirituality—simply leave space for the survivor to bring up whatever is important to them as they make decisions, and seek support, connection, and healing. Invite the survivor to speak about the important influences and factors in their life. Your willingness to hear and accept the significance of spiritual beliefs and worship/practice is helpful.

- **“I’ve had negative experiences working with clergy who have been unhelpful, or given bad or dangerous advice to survivors. Why should I reach out to faith leaders and work collaboratively with spiritual communities?”**

Hopefully, after reading *Why Faith Matters*, you better understand the significance that religion and spirituality may have for victims/survivors with whom you work. For those people, their spiritual community may be where they turn for help and healing. The education, training, and information you provide to a religious leader may prevent future mistakes and harm. Also, it’s important to recognize that not all clergy share the same beliefs—even if they are from the same religion or the same denomination.

There are people actively working on behalf of victims/survivors in every religious and spiritual tradition through theological interpretation, the changing of institutional policy and procedure, and community education and awareness.

One of the challenges in collaboration is finding the spiritual leaders who understand the prevalence of sexual abuse, its impact on individuals and communities, and the important role of advocates and advocacy organizations in helping survivors.



## Culturally-Specific & Community-Specific Resources for Survivors

### American Indian/Alaska Native

- StrongHearts Native Helpline: 1-844-7NATIVE (844-762-8483); [www.strongheartshelpline.org](http://www.strongheartshelpline.org)
- Alaska Native Women's Resource Center: 907-328-3990; [www.AKNWRC.org](http://www.AKNWRC.org)
- National Indigenous Women's Resource Center: [www.niwrc.org](http://www.niwrc.org)
- Mending the Sacred Hoop: 888-305-1650; [www.mshoop.org](http://www.mshoop.org)
- Indian Law Resource Center: [www.indianlaw.org/safewomen](http://www.indianlaw.org/safewomen)
- Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center: [www.nativeshop.org](http://www.nativeshop.org)

### Muslim

- HEART (Health Education Advocacy Research Training) Women and Girls: [www.heartwomenandgirls.org](http://www.heartwomenandgirls.org)
- FACE (Facing Abuse in Community Environments): [www.facetogether.org](http://www.facetogether.org)
- Karamah (Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights): [www.karamah.org](http://www.karamah.org)
- Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence Resource Page: [www.api-gbv.org/culturally-specific-advocacy/community-and-systems-engagment/muslim-women/](http://www.api-gbv.org/culturally-specific-advocacy/community-and-systems-engagment/muslim-women/)
- Muslim Women's League: [www.mwlusa.org](http://www.mwlusa.org)
- Family & Youth Institute: [www.thefyi.org](http://www.thefyi.org)
- Peaceful Families Project: [www.peacefulfamilies.org](http://www.peacefulfamilies.org)

### Jewish

- Jewish Women International: [www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org)
- Survivors for Justice: [www.survivorsforjustice.org](http://www.survivorsforjustice.org) (Orthodox)
- Ritualwell: [www.ritualwell.org/healing-trauma-abuse](http://www.ritualwell.org/healing-trauma-abuse) (Reconstructionist)
- Jewish Family Services: [www.networkjhsa.org/agency-locator/](http://www.networkjhsa.org/agency-locator/)
- Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty Family Violence Services: [www.metcouncil.org/familyviolence](http://www.metcouncil.org/familyviolence)

### Christian

- GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment): [www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org)
- Into Account: [www.intoaccount.org](http://www.intoaccount.org)
- The RAVE Project: [www.theraveproject.org](http://www.theraveproject.org)
- PorchSwing Ministries: [www.porchswingministries.org](http://www.porchswingministries.org)
- Beauty for Ashes Ministry: [www.beaut4ashesmin.org](http://www.beaut4ashesmin.org)
- CBE (Christians for Biblical Equality) International: [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org)

### Culturally Specific Resources:

- API-Chaya, serving South Asian, Asian, Pacific Islander survivors: 1-877-922-4292; [www.apichaya.org](http://www.apichaya.org)
- The National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (NIWAP) offers a directory of programs with experience serving immigrant victims: <http://directory.niwap.org/>

### *Culturally Specific Resources Continued:*

- Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence: [www.api-gbv.org](http://www.api-gbv.org)
- Manavi, serving South Asian women: 1-732-435-1414; [www.manavi.org](http://www.manavi.org)
- National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA): [www.sisterslead.org](http://www.sisterslead.org)
- Arte Sana, serving Latina survivors of sexual assault: [www.arte-sana.com](http://www.arte-sana.com)
- INCITE!, feminists of color organizing to end violence: [www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)
- National Immigration Project, working for the rights of immigrants:  
[www.nationalimmigrationproject.org](http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org)
- ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services):  
[www.accesscommunity.org](http://www.accesscommunity.org)
- Alliance for Immigrant Survivors: [www.immigrantsurvivors.org](http://www.immigrantsurvivors.org)

### **LGBTQIA+**

- NW Network: 206-568-7777; [www.nwnetwork.org](http://www.nwnetwork.org)
- LGBT National Help Center: 1-888-843-4564; [www.glbthotline.org](http://www.glbthotline.org)
- Forge, for transgender survivors of violence: 414-559-2123; [www.forge-forward.org/anti-violence](http://www.forge-forward.org/anti-violence)
- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs Hotline: 212-714-1141; [www.avp.org](http://www.avp.org)
- Human Rights Campaign Faith Positions Page: [www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions](http://www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions)
- Gender Spectrum Gender & Faith Resource Page: [www.genderspectrum.org/resources/faith-2](http://www.genderspectrum.org/resources/faith-2)

### **Clergy Abuse**

- SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests)—not only Catholic, despite the name  
<https://www.snapnetwork.org>
- Adults Abused by Clergy: [www.adultsabusedbyclergy.org](http://www.adultsabusedbyclergy.org)
- Bishop Accountability: [www.bishopaccountability.org](http://www.bishopaccountability.org)
- Road to Recovery: [www.road-to-recovery.org](http://www.road-to-recovery.org)
- In Shaykh's Clothing: [www.inshaykhsclothing.com](http://www.inshaykhsclothing.com)
- FACE (Facing Abuse in Community Environments): [www.facetogether.org](http://www.facetogether.org)

### **Recommended Reading: Sexual Abuse and Violence**

*Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion* by Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune and Rabbi Cindy G. Enger from FaithTrust Institute (PDF)

*Removing Roadblocks: Examining Barriers to Justice and Healing to Build More Victim-Centric Services for Muslim Survivors of Sexual Assault* from HEART Women and Girls (PDF)

*Spotlight: A Multi-Faith Guide to Discussing the Film* by FaithTrust Institute (PDF)

*Abuse By Clergy: FAQs* by FaithTrust Institute

*Confidentiality and Mandated Reporting: A Clergy Dilemma?* by Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune from FaithTrust Institute (PDF)

*Annotated Bibliography on Sexuality & Sexual Violence in Religious Texts* from National Sexual Violence Resource Center (PDF)

*What to Do When You're Raped: An ABC Handbook for Native Girls* from Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center (PDF)

### *Recommended Reading Continued:*

*The Principles of Advocacy—A Guide for Sexual Assault Advocates* from Mending the Sacred Hoop (PDF)

*It Takes A Village, People: Advocacy, Friends and Family, and LGBT Survivors of Abuse* from NW Network (PDF)

*Transgender Sexual Violence Survivors: A Self-Help Guide to Healing and Understanding* from Forge (PDF)

“Reading the Rabbis in the Age of #MeToo” by Professor Mika Ahuvia

“What Hinduism Says About Virginity: Kanya to Kanyadaan” by Sarika Persaud

*Priya’s Shakti*, an online comic book series by Ram Devineni and Vikas K. Menon with art by Dan Goldman

*Latinas and Sexual Violence* from Office for Victims of Crimes, US Department of Justice (PDF)

Andy J Johnson, Editor, *Religion and Men’s Violence Against Women* Andy J. Johnson, Editor (New York: Springer, 2015) (book)

*Walking Together: Working with Women from Diverse Religious and Spiritual Traditions—A Guide for Advocates* Jean Anton, Editor (Seattle: FaithTrust Institute, 2005) (book)

### Information About Specific Spiritual Traditions

#### Multi-Faith

- *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* Stephen Prothero (New York, Harper Collins, 2010) (book)
- ING. “Shared Values Among Faiths: Multi-faith Curriculum” (website)

#### American Indian/ Alaska Native

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Native Peoples’ Traditions” (website)
- Encyclopedia Britannica. “Native American religions” (website)
- NativeReligion.org (website)
- Smithsonian. “Native Perspectives on the 40th Anniversary of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act” (website)

#### Buddhism

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Buddhism” (website)
- Princeton. “Buddhism Religious Basics” (website)
- History. “Buddhism” (website)
- CNN. “Buddhism Fast Facts” (website)
- BBC Religions. “Buddhism at a glance” (website)

## Christianity

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Christianity” (website)
- History. “Christianity” (website)
- CNN. “Christianity Fast Facts” (website)
- BBC Religions. “Christianity at a glance” (website)

## Hinduism

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Hinduism” (website)
- University of Oxford: Oxford Center for Hindu Studies (website)
- Hindu American Foundation. “Hinduism 101: Learning about Hinduism Inside and Out” (website)
- History. “Hinduism” (website)
- CNN. “Hinduism Fast Facts” (website)
- BBC Religions. “Hinduism at a Glance” (website)

## Islam

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Islam” (website)
- ING. “Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Muslims” (website)
- History. “Islam” (website)
- CNN. “Islam Fast Facts” (website)
- BBC Religions. “Islam at a glance” (website)

## Judaism

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University. “Introduction to Judaism” (website)
- History. “Judaism” (website)
- My Jewish Learning (website)
- CNN. “Judaism Fast Facts” (website)
- BBC Religions. “Judaism at a glance” (website)

## About Our Advisors

### Salma Abugideiri

Salma Elkadi Abugideiri is a licensed professional counselor in private practice in northern Virginia. She is the Director of Training for Peaceful Families Project, an organization dedicated to domestic violence prevention. She provides educational workshops and develops resources related to domestic and sexual violence as well as mental health issues among Muslims. She has authored many articles and co-authored several books on these topics.

### Mika Ahuvia

Mika Ahuvia, Ph.D., is the Marsha and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies and assistant professor in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. She researches the formative history of Jewish and Christian communities in the ancient Mediterranean world. Specializing in Late Antique Jewish history, she works with rabbinic sources, liturgical poetry, magical texts, early mystical literature, and archaeological evidence. She teaches courses in Jewish Studies, Comparative Religion, and Global Studies.

### Jan Chozen Bays

Jan Chozen Bays, Roshi, MD, has studied and practiced Zen Buddhism since 1973. She is the co-abbot of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon and a pediatrician with twenty-five years of experience treating and educating about child abuse and domestic violence. She has written three books on Buddhism, articles for *Tricycle* and *Buddhadharma* magazines, including “What the Buddha Taught About Sexual Harassment.”

### Anindita Bhaumik

Anindita Bhaumik, MSW, LICSW, is Licensed Clinical Social Worker, trauma specialist, and certified domestic violence advocate and trainer. She is an advocate and educator who has worked with survivors of domestic and sexual violence for more than twenty years.

### Antonia Clemente

Antonia Clemente is the Founder and Executive Director of The Healing Center, also known as Trinity Healing Center, Inc., a nonprofit organization committed to the intervention and prevention of family violence, abuse, and sexual assault. The center provides direct services to victims/survivors of intimate partner violence, as well as services for teens, children, and elders. People of diverse faiths, cultures, and personal experiences are served by the center.

### Emily Cohen

Emily Cohen, MDiv, serves as the Statewide Training Director at Sexual Assault Center in Nashville, Tennessee. She was previously the Director of Residential Services at the YWCA's Weaver Domestic Violence Center, the largest domestic violence shelter in the state of Tennessee. For seven years, she served as a Program Manager at FaithTrust Institute, developing trainings and curriculum for a diverse range of faith traditions and denominations. She is rooted in Buddhist practice and teachings and brings an interfaith approach to training and consulting about healthy boundaries in communities of faith.

### **Marie M. Fortune**

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune is the founder of FaithTrust Institute. She is a pastor in the United Church of Christ and has spent her career addressing the faith issues that relate to sexual and domestic violence. She has been recognized internationally for her multi-faith work to support victims/survivors and educate communities about their role in ending gender-based violence.

### **Lisa Gelber**

Rabbi Lisa Gelber serves as the spiritual leader of Congregation Habonim in New York City. She was previously the Associate Dean of the Rabbinical School at Jewish Theological Seminary and Associate Rabbi at Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation in Mercer Island, Washington. A nationally-recognized lecturer on domestic and sexual violence, Rabbi Gelber is the co-editor of numerous works on domestic violence in the Jewish community, including *A Journey Towards Freedom: A Haggadah for Women Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence* (FaithTrust Institute, 2003).

### **Elena Giacci**

Elena Giacci is a Diné woman who has worked as an advocate and trainer with many diverse communities for more than twenty-nine years. She is currently Chair of the Albuquerque Mayor's Anti-Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force. Elena has served as the Executive Director of the State Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women and Chair of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women and Children. She also has served as President of the Board of Directors for Rape Crisis Center of Central New Mexico and Chair of American Indian Death Review Team. Her training and consulting organization is Wiya Luta.

### **Sally N. MacNichol**

Rev. Sally N. MacNichol, PhD, is Co-Executive Director of CONNECT NYC, a New York City nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing interpersonal violence and promoting gender justice. She has been an antiviolence activist, advocate, and educator for over three decades. In 2004, she created CONNECT Faith, a program that works in collaboration with New York City's diverse faith communities to help create and strengthen their response to intimate violence. She earned her Master's of Divinity and PhD in Systematic Theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

### **Mohamed Magid**

Imam Mohamed Magid is the Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, Virginia. He is the Chairman of International Interfaith Peace Corps (IIPC) and the former President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Imam Magid has a long history of commitment to public service through organizations, such as The Peaceful Families Project. He has co-authored three books: *Before You Tie the Knot: A Guide for Couples*, *Reflections on the Qur'an*, and *Change from Within*. He has helped in organizing training and workshops for imams and religious leaders, domestically and internationally, on the issue of violence against women.

### **Willa Miller**

Lama Willa B. Miller, PhD, is the founder and spiritual director of Natural Dharma Fellowship in Boston, and its retreat center, Wonderwell Mountain Refuge, in Springfield, New Hampshire. She is author, editor, and translator (respectively) of *Everyday Dharma*, *The Arts of Contemplative Care* and *Essence of Ambrosia*. She was an authorized teacher and lineage holder (lama) in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

### **Andrea Smith**

Andrea Smith, PhD, is Associate Professor of Media and Cultural Studies in the Department of Ethnic Studies at University of California, Riverside. She has written extensively on genocide, sexual violence, and the impact on women of color—specifically American Indian women. She is a co-founder of INCITE! and the Boarding School Healing Project.

### **Adrienne N. Spires**

Adrienne N. Spires, MS Ed, is the CALCASA Project Coordinator for the faith-rooted collaborative and Leadership, Education Advancement for Professional (LEAP). Adrienne has a decade of professional experience contributing to organizations that help empower and heal women and youth who have suffered sexual assault and trauma in the State of Illinois. She likes to foster collaborative relationships with a myriad of constituents, including: social services programs, countywide initiatives, faith rooted organizations, state and federal agencies.

### **Mary J. Streufert**

Mary Streufert, PhD, is the Director for Justice for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. With networks and individuals, she works to advance gender justice by helping people to see intersectional sexism as an issue of faith that needs theological discernment and pragmatic action. Among other things, she has written chapters and articles that share a feminist Lutheran theological perspective on laws, institutional policies, and practices related to gender-based violence, and is the editor of *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*.

### **Traci C. West**

Rev. Dr. Traci C. West, PhD, is James W. Pearsall Professor of Christian Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University Theological School. She is the author of many books on gender, racial, and sexual justice in religion and society, most recently *Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality: Africana Lessons on Religion, Racism, and Ending Gender Violence*.

### **Karri Whipple**

Karri Whipple, PhD is Faculty Fellow in Liberal Studies at New York University. Her work focuses on the intersection of religion and trauma, particularly with regards to race, gender, and sexuality. As an activist, she works locally with grassroots organizations, as well as on an international scale with the United Nations, to further gender equity and promote intimate justice.

*FaithTrust Institute is grateful to the spiritual leaders, educators, advocates, and survivors who have guided and advised us in the creation of this handbook.*





*FaithTrust Institute is a national multi-faith non-profit whose mission is to address the religious, spiritual, and cultural aspects related to domestic and sexual violence.*

*We provide training and consultation to spiritual communities and advocates, and offer resources, tools, and knowledge that support survivors and prevent future violence.*

*[www.FaithTrustInstitute.org](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org)*

FaithTrust   
INSTITUTE

Working together to end  
sexual & domestic violence

[www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)