

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

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## **What is sexual violence?**

Sexual violence is a broad term defined as any sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent.

## **Who are Spiritual Leaders?**

Spiritual Leaders are individuals who hold a position of power and influence within a spiritual or religious community. These individuals do not necessarily have a formal role or title within the community to be considered leaders; they may be attendees who hold clout and are seen as trustworthy individuals.

## **Sexual Violence Within Spiritual Communities**

Spiritual and faith communities can be a great source of healing, community, and support for survivors of sexual violence. Many communities promote values of peace and justice, which are integral in ending sexual violence. Unfortunately, as with all communities, sexual violence still exists. Leaders may misuse their spiritual influence to cause direct harm to their community or use their power to ignore instances of abuse. Survivors should be allowed to follow their spiritual journey without violence. When violence occurs they have the right to seek healing and justice.



**Iowa Victim Service Call Center**  
**1-800-770-1650**  
**or text "IOWAHELP" to 20121**

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You are not alone. What happened to you is not your fault. Help is available. Visit [www.iowacasa.org/help](http://www.iowacasa.org/help) to find a victim service program near you.

## Options for Survivors:

If you are a victim of sexual abuse by a leader within your spiritual community, you have a right to be believed. No matter when the assault happened, you have the right to receive support. Here are some options and resources that may interest you:

- Free and confidential support is available to you regardless of your age, race, gender identity, class status, sexual orientation, ability, religion, or physical appearance. Culturally specific programs and shelter services are also available for survivors of sexual violence. Services are available in all of Iowa's 99 counties. To connect with an advocate, contact the Iowa Victim Service Call Center at 800-770-1650 or find the nearest victim service program at [www.iowacasa.org/help](http://www.iowacasa.org/help).
- The Iowa Victim Service Call Center is available by phone 24/7 for crisis support. Call 1-800-770-1650 or text "IowaHELP" to 20121.
- Inquire about local or online support groups through your local rape crisis center.
- If you wish to make a complaint against a spiritual counselor, find out if they are a member of a counseling association that has a code of ethics and/or grievance policy. Several associations use the complaint process of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). You can find information about filing a ACPE complaint at: [www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu) under the resources tab.
- Find out if your congregation, synod, conference, etc. has a specific policy and procedure for dealing with complaints about misconduct (see page 3 for examples).
- Should you decide to speak to law enforcement, a local child protection agency, or others about an assault that happened recently or in the past, an advocate can be present during this process. If you decide to make a criminal report, know that the state of Iowa does have a statute of limitations.



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**You are not alone. [Advocates can support you](#) with whatever you decide.**

## **Additional Resources for Survivors on Spiritual Abuse:**

*Please note: These resources are not exhaustive. There is a great need for representation from all spiritual communities. Input to make this resource more inclusive of different communities is welcomed. Many local spiritual communities may have sexual misconduct policies that are not available online.*

### **Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) Ethics Code**

<https://www.ccarnet.org/about-us/ccar-ethics/>

### **Confronting Childhood Sexual abuse in the Black Church**

<http://childrenofcombahee.org/>

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Policies & Resources**

[https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Vocation-Become-a-Leader/Report-Misconduct?\\_ga=2.121476416.971735950.1538677218-896700647.1538677218](https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Vocation-Become-a-Leader/Report-Misconduct?_ga=2.121476416.971735950.1538677218-896700647.1538677218)

### **Facing Abuse in Community Environments (FACE) [Islam]**

<https://facetgether.org/>

### **Faith Trust Institute**

<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>

### **National Sexual Violence Resource Center**

<https://www.nsvrc.org/>

### **Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy**

<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/presbyterian-church-us-sexual-misconduct-policy-an/>

### **Sexual Assault Resources for Muslim American Women and Girls**

<http://heartwomenandgirls.org/>

### **United Church of Christ**

[http://www.ucc.org/justice\\_womens-issues](http://www.ucc.org/justice_womens-issues)

### **United Methodist Church Ethics & Complaint Process**

<http://umsexualethics.org/>

### **US. Conference of Catholic Bishops Child & Youth Protection**

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/>