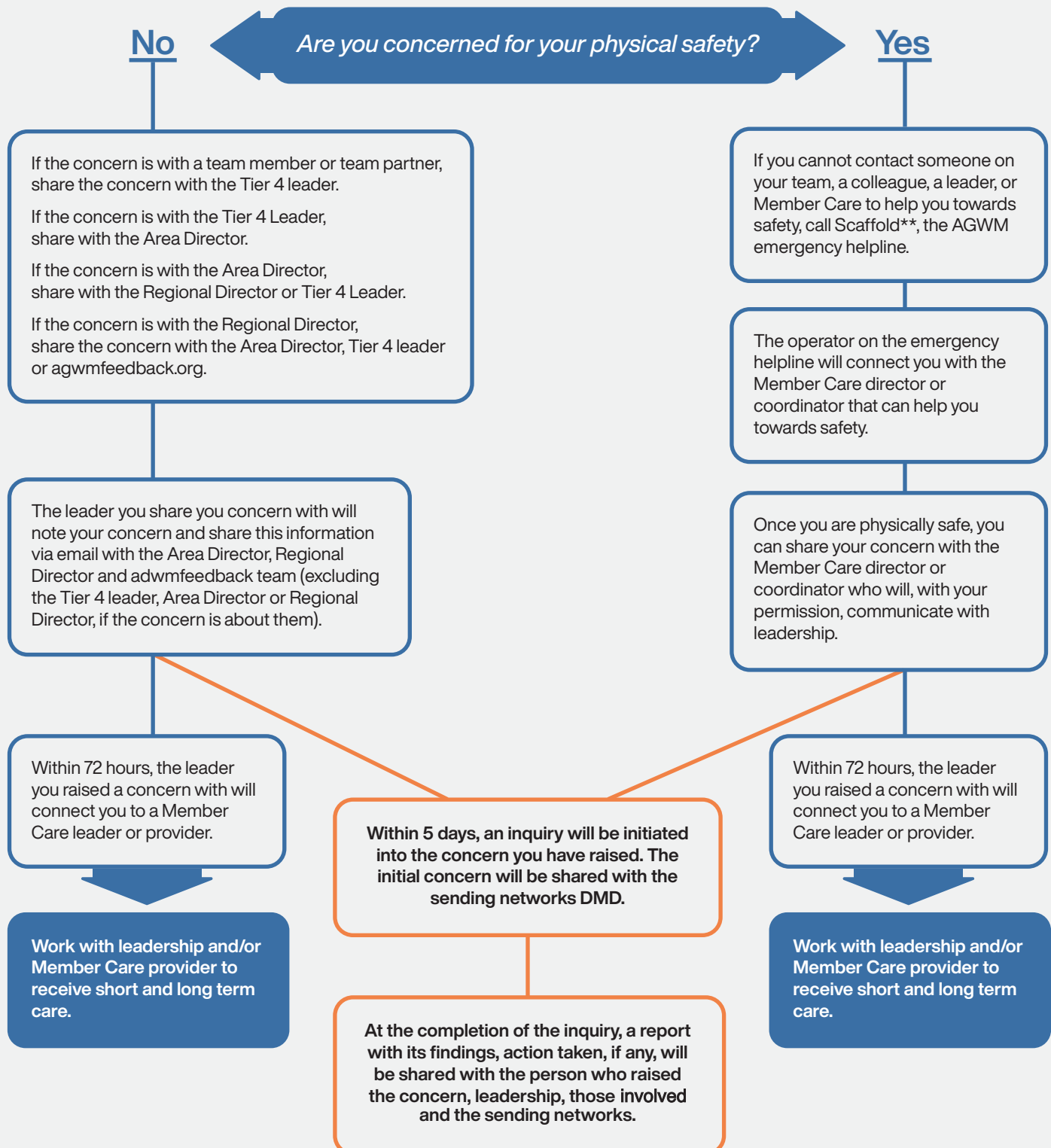


Spiritual Abuse Pathway: Sharing a Concern and Care

You or someone you care about is experiencing the use of spiritual authority (a position of authority, a community, Scripture, etc.) to control* an individual. Spiritual abuse (1) occurs in a spiritual context, (2) is exemplified by a desire to lord one's authority over others (Matthew 20:25–26, 1 Peter 5:3), (3) is often marked by persistent behavior, and (4) causes harm whether intended or not. (Assemblies of God, 2025)



* See list of terms at the end of this document.

** The Scaffold phone line is AGWM's emergency helpline. The operator will receive your call and then connect you with a U.S.-based Member Care representative.

Sharing a Concern

Reporting Person's Name: _____

Reporting for Self or Other: _____

Relationship to person: _____

Did the other person give permission to report: YES / NO

Details of Your Concern

Answer the following questions. Provide specific, factual information.

What happened – Describe the actions or behaviors.

When it happened – Include dates and timeframes.

Where it occurred – Physical setting or online context.

Who was involved – Names and roles of people present.

Steps Taken: _____

Type of Abuse Observed

Spiritual abuse can take many forms. Indicate what applies:

- ☐ Manipulation or control using religious language
- ☐ Shaming, fear, or threats of divine punishment
- ☐ Misuse of scripture to justify harm or control
- ☐ Isolation from family, friends, or outside counsel
- ☐ Suppression of dissent or questioning leadership
- ☐ Sexual, emotional, financial, or physical abuse tied to religious authority

AGWM Feedback

When a global worker attempts to share a concern with leadership and does not feel that their concern has been resolved or that they have been heard, the AGWM feedback email (agwmfeedback@ag.org) provides a confidential and safe space to share their concern so that further investigation can be conducted by the AGWM Field Activity Review Panel.

AGWM Field Activity Review Panel

The Review Panel has been established by the Executive Director of AGWM to represent the Office of the Executive Director in the review and Investigation of Reports, and at all times, the Executive Director will have the final authority to accept, reject, or modify any recommendation made by the Review Panel for the resolution of a Report. The decision of the Executive Director will be final.

Purpose of AGWM Feedback

- Provides a final review at the highest organizational level of credible claims of Inappropriate Conduct to ensure that they have been thoroughly and exhaustively examined in a manner that is designed to preserve the dignity, honor, and spiritual, emotional, and physical health and safety of all AGWM workers;
- Prevents, detects, and addresses Inappropriate Conduct;
- Identifies areas of improvement for AGWM's ministry and operations; and
- Is a valuable tool in equipping AGWM and its workers to be faithful stewards of a healthy culture and ministry environment.

Inappropriate Conduct

Inappropriate Conduct means wrongdoing, misconduct, ethical lapses, or other inappropriate behavior of any nature whatsoever by a Subject towards any person who serves as a missionary of any category whatsoever with AGWM, and whether on the overseas field or elsewhere, and may include, without limitation:

- (a) Discrimination;
- (b) Harassment (sexual and otherwise);
- (c) Violence or threats against others;
- (d) Physically or verbally abusive behavior;
- (e) Attitude problems;
- (f) Substance abuse;
- (g) Spiritual abuse;
- (h) Health and safety violations;
- (i) Violations of AGWM policies;

- (j) Vandalism and other sabotage;
- (k) Theft, fraud, or other dishonest behavior; or
- (l) Other criminal activity.

The foregoing list is not intended to be an exhaustive list of events that might constitute Inappropriate Conduct and is only a list representative of such events.

Composition of the Review Panel

Selection of Members of the Review Panel. The Executive Director shall select qualified persons to serve as members of the Review Panel.

Number of Members of the Review Panel. The initial number of members of the Review Panel is five (5) persons. That initial number may be increased or decreased by the Executive Director at any time and for any reason.

Qualifications for Membership of the Review Panel. Members of the Review Panel must, among other things:

- (a) Be persons of demonstrated Christian spiritual maturity and of good report;
- (b) Possess pastoral qualities and attitudes and hearts of compassion and reconciliation;
- (c) Be persons who are generally regarded as fair and impartial;
- (d) Be persons who are able to safeguard, preserve, and meet the strictest standards of confidentiality;
- (e) Be knowledgeable about AGWM policies and best practices in the workplace relationships, exercise of spiritual and other authority, conflict resolution, and all other matters relevant to the work of the Review Panel;
- (f) Be AGWM personnel who have served at least one full term overseas, be members of the World Missions Board, or otherwise, have unique and relevant skills that will advance the intent and purposes for which the Review Panel was established;
- (g) Satisfy such other requirements determined by the Executive Director to be relevant to the work of the Review Panel.

Misuses of Spiritual Authority

(Disciplinary Guidelines of the Misuse of Spiritual Authority, 2025)

<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Misuse-of-Spiritual-Leadership>

Misuse of spiritual authority may include:

- (1) Inappropriate appeals to God's authority (misusing Scripture, personal prophecy, etc.) to control others.

- (2) Excessive public or personal praise, sometimes known as love-bombing,* as a form of manipulation (e.g., making an example of someone as a form of manipulation).
- (3) Correcting publicly what should be done privately as a means to humiliate or shame someone.
- (4) Using intimidation tactics to create fear of being removed from the spiritual leader's favor or isolated from peers.
- (5) Misuse of accountability and excessive or controlling practices (e.g., overprogramming so people cannot choose how to spend their time or make their own life decisions).
- (6) Retaliation against a person for making a good-faith report or for participating in an investigation regarding a minister for alleged misconduct.
- (7) Manipulating or shaming a person to question their own value as an image-bearer of God and whether they can hear from God. Sometimes, the spiritual leader causes someone to question their own perception, memory, or sense of reality, commonly known as gaslighting.*

*See Terms section for definition.

Disciplinary Levels and Guidelines

Level 0: No Misuse of Spiritual Authority

The complaint does not qualify as misuse of spiritual authority but falls under the category of "What Misuse of Spiritual Authority Is Not" listed above. While the complainant may feel hurt or upset, it is determined that the minister was simply bringing correction in a biblically appropriate manner.

Recommended Action: No action recommended.

Level 1: Conduct That Could Lead to Spiritual Abuse if Not Confronted

After looking into the matter, the complaint appears to be an isolated incident and is not abusive in nature. Harmful mistakes in ministry may reflect immaturity or growth areas rather than rising to the level of a chargeable offense. However, this is an opportunity to correct and mitigate the chance of this occurring in the future.

Recommended Action: No suspension required; minimum of three months consultation with an experienced pastoral mentor approved by the district.

Level 2: Spiritual Abuse

Level 2 is characterized as a misuse of spiritual authority rising to the level of spiritual abuse. It is determined that the spiritual abuse is persistent or involves multiple spiritually abusive practices bundled together.

Recommended Action: Minimum of a one-year restoration program, with six months suspension, and a minimum of six sessions of counseling with a licensed professional counselor trained and skilled in the area of spiritual abuse.

Level 3: Spiritual Abuse

This category is similar to Level 2 but is more severe. The abuse has been persistent, involves multiple complaints, and incorporates multiple spiritually abusive practices. The minister has a history of not being accountable to the appropriate leadership and not taking ownership for his/her behavior but blaming others and gaslighting.*

Recommended Action: Minimum of a two-year restoration program, with one year suspension, and twelve sessions of counseling with an approved clinician (licensed professional counselor skilled in this area). The district may choose to recommend dismissal if the minister is unrepentant or if there is a factor that rises to the level of dismissal.

The following factors should be considered in determining between Levels 2 and 3:

- Gravity of abuse
- Isolation/persistence/pattern
- Extent of harm to person
- Extent of harm to the Fellowship/body
- Level of repentance
- Number of substantiated complaints
- Number of abusive practices
- Prior disciplinary action
- Resistance to accountability

Level 4: Mandatory Dismissal

The minister is spiritually abusive and unrepentant or completely unaware of his/her personal behavior patterns in a way that makes restoration unlikely. This could involve highly narcissistic or psychopathic behavior patterns.

Non-Retaliation Policy

AGWM is committed to fostering a positive, Christ-like ministry environment for all workers, including employees and missionary contractors ("Workers"). You are encouraged to raise any good faith concerns regarding the AGWM culture or allegations of misconduct by AGWM Workers to your Area or Regional Director or by contacting the Executive Office directly using the secured email address agwmfeedback@ag.org.

A small group of individuals has access to and oversees this secured email box to review properly, maintain confidentiality to the greatest extent possible and take necessary action.

Retaliation against individuals who report violations of AGWM policies or misconduct of AGWM Workers is strictly prohibited by AGWM. This policy applies to Workers who make a

direct report in good faith, help someone else make a report in good faith, or participate in an investigation of such reports. An employee who violates this Non-Retaliation Policy is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination, and a missionary contractor who violates this policy is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of missionary appointment and support. Nothing herein shall limit The General Council from taking any action related to a Worker's AG credentials.

Terms

Control. This goes beyond pastoral guidance and biblical correction. It includes using power or influence over another person to conform to the controlling person's needs or desires. The leader uses manipulation and coercion in a way that does not empower the believer to hear from God directly. Examples include overprogramming so people cannot choose how to spend their time or make their own life decisions.

Love-Bombing. Love-bombing is a manipulative tactic often used at the beginning of relationships to gain control and dependence from a person. It involves overwhelming someone with excessive attention, affection, flattery, and gifts. While initially feeling like genuine affection, it's a calculated strategy to quickly establish a strong emotional bond and make the other person reliant on the love bomber. This tactic can be emotionally damaging and is frequently associated with individuals exhibiting narcissistic traits or other controlling behaviors.

Gaslighting. Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation where someone tries to make another person doubt their own perception of reality, memories, or feelings. It's a tactic used to gain control over a victim, often leading them to question their sanity and become overly dependent on the abuser.

Fake-Good Profile. A fake-good profile refers to a persona or representation of oneself that is intentionally presented in a positive and favorable light, often by endorsing desirable traits and rejecting undesirable ones. This sometimes occurs when a person is taking an assessment, and there are scales on the MMPI-2 and Millon assessments that will pick this up on the validity scales.