

MONTH 9: SEPTEMBER

When Family Doesn't Believe You: Navigating Difficult Relationships

[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse. Please take care of yourself. You can stop anytime.]

You told your family what happened. Instead of support, you got: "Are you sure?" "He's such a good man." "Why are you trying to destroy the church?" When your family chooses the church over you, it's devastating. Let me help you navigate this.

WHY FAMILIES DON'T BELIEVE SURVIVORS

Believing you requires them to: • Shatter their worldview (their pastor is a predator) • Lose their community • Confront their own failures (how did we miss this?) • Challenge gender/power norms It's easier to doubt YOU than face that reality.

COMMON RESPONSES & HOW TO HANDLE THEM

***"Are you sure you're remembering correctly?"** Response: "Yes, I'm sure. I need you to believe me, not question my memory." ***"But he's such a good person."** Response: "Abusers are often well-liked. That's how they get away with it." ***"Why didn't you say something sooner?"** Response: "Shame, fear, and trauma keep survivors silent. I'm telling you now." ***"This will destroy the church."** Response: "He destroyed it when he chose to abuse me. I'm not responsible for fallout." ***"Can't you just forgive?"** Response: "Forgiveness is my choice, not your demand. I need support, not spiritual platitudes."

SETTING BOUNDARIES

• Limit contact if needed • No church talk: "I won't discuss the church with you." • No forced interactions: "I will not attend church events." • Consequences: "Since you can't respect my boundaries, I'm taking a break."

WHEN TO CUT CONTACT

If your family: • Openly sides with the abuser • Pressures you to drop legal action • Blames you publicly • Refuses to respect boundaries You may need to limit or end contact. This is their choice, not yours.

BUILDING CHOSEN FAMILY

When blood family fails: • Trauma-informed therapist • Survivor support groups • Friends who believe you • Advocacy communities You don't need your family's belief to heal.

THE HARD TRUTH

Some families never come around. That's devastating. But it's also clarifying. You learn who will stand with you. Your worth isn't tied to their belief. You know your truth. That's enough.

RESOURCES: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | You deserve support. Take care. 