

# **Family Interventions for Cult-Affected Loved Ones**

Carol Giambalvo

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## Preface

This book was written to dispel the myths and the aura of magical solution surrounding the process of cult-related family interventions.

Family intervention specialists knowledgeable about cults and thought reform had inherited the label “exit counselors” from the network of individuals and organizations providing information on cults. The term *exit counselor* originally came into favor in order to distinguish voluntary interventions with cult members from “deprogramming,” which was associated with physical restraint (for example, refusing to let the cult member leave the family’s home or location until he or she had listened to a deprogrammer). Exit counseling, however, does not adequately describe most voluntary interventions today. Counseling often connotes a systematic attempt to help clients change their behavior. Most exit counselors, on the other hand, focus on sharing information rather than changing behavior, although clients may change their behavior as a result of the information they receive.

I believe that the term *thought reform consultant* better describes what most exit counselors do. Those individuals who call themselves Thought Reform Consultants are members in an informal organization formed to develop ethical standards and professionalize the work that we do.

The cult-related family intervention process is one in which the family of a cult member, along with the cult member, participates in educational sessions. The family has as much responsibility to be educated about the issues of thought reform and cult involvement as does the professional intervention team.

The approach taken here is *one way* to implement an intervention; it is not the *only* way. The important issue is the thoughtful and thorough preparation of the family that is necessary to undertake an intervention. Family members should work closely with their selected consultant(s) in order to determine the best approach for their situation. The goal of a family intervention is to help a loved one evaluate his or her involvement in a cultic group.

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## Introduction

In the mid-1970s increasing numbers of parents began to consult mental health professionals and clergy about their children's involvements in new religious groups that many called cults. Parents reported that formerly well-adjusted and engaged young adults (many were college students) changed radically, sometimes over a short period of time. These young adults typically dropped out of school, shunned their families and friends, and devoted themselves full time to working for these strange new groups to which they had pledged their total allegiance. Many parents concluded that their children had undergone a type of brainwashing.

Unfortunately for these parents, few helping professionals took their concerns seriously. Most assumed that these parents were over-protective or that their children were merely "going through a phase." But a handful of professionals, including Dr. John Clark on the East Coast and Dr. Margaret Singer on the West Coast, listened to the parents and began to speak out publicly. Soon, small and loosely organized groups of parents began to form in different parts of the country.

Several of these groups joined together to form the Citizens Freedom Foundation, later renamed the Cult Awareness Network (CAN). CAN became the leading grassroots organization for this movement. One informal group in Massachusetts gave birth, so to speak, to the American Family Foundation (AFF), now known as the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), which has become the leading professional organization concerned with cults and psychological manipulation. Both AFF and CAN were chartered in 1979.

While these groups were developing, parents were doing what they could to rescue their children from what the parents considered very dangerous situations. Through trial and error the controversial process of "deprogramming" developed. In the 1970s, for many parents deprogramming became the preferred means of rescuing a cult member. Indeed, some parents mistakenly believed that no one left a cult unless he or she was deprogrammed.

Deprogramming was controversial because it involved forcing a cult member to listen to people relate information not available in the cults. Cult members were sometimes abducted from the street; although more commonly they were simply prevented from leaving their homes, a vacation cabin, a motel room, or whatever location was chosen for the deprogramming process. Even though deprogrammings usually succeeded in extricating the family member from the cult, they failed more often than many persons realized; and sometimes lawsuits were filed against parents and deprogrammers.

Deprogrammings were arranged through informal, quasi-underground means. Much secrecy surrounded the process for many years. Mental health professionals like myself were almost always "out of the loop" – in part because most of us did not want to become involved for ethical and legal reasons and in part because our expertise was to a large extent irrelevant to the deprogramming itself. Our main role was to help families cope with their alarm about a family member in a cult and to help former cult members and their families cope with the many problems that accompanied reentry into mainstream society. However, sometimes mental health professionals or clergy were able to persuade those still in a cult to talk voluntarily

about their cult involvements. Sometimes these conversations resulted in a decision to leave the cult.

Because of these successes, the legal risks entailed in deprogramming, and the ethical discomfort most parents and some deprogrammers felt, noncoercive means of helping cult members reevaluate their cult affiliations began to get more attention. By the mid-1980s it had become clear to many persons that what had come to be called exit counseling was at least as effective as deprogramming and certainly was much less risky—psychologically as well as legally. A few individuals committed themselves to doing exit counseling and refused to do “involuntaries.”

Even within the exit counseling field, further branching off has occurred. Some exit counselors tend to be technique-oriented and/or advance a particular religious perspective. Others, such as Carol Giambalvo, are information-oriented. They introduce themselves as individuals with important information. Although they may have a preference regarding how the cult member chooses to respond to that information, they take pains to avoid manipulating the person. They simply present the information in an understandable format and at a pace that is comfortable for the cult member.

During the past few years some exit counselors have been trying to professionalize their field by establishing ethical and competency criteria. They formed an informal organization, the Association of Thought Reform Consultants. One of the first steps in this direction was the establishment of Ethical Standards for Thought Reform Consultants, published in Chapter Four and publishing in AFF’s *Cultic Studies Journal*, Volume 13, Number 1, 1996 and appearing in this book.

Although this process of professionalization had not reached closure at the time of writing, much progress has been made.

One of the most important achievements to date is this book, in which Carol Giambalvo succinctly and clearly describes what a family intervention involves. She gives families practical advice and hope and she relieves their anxiety by lifting the veil from a process that has been viewed with much more awe than it deserves. This newly revised edition also includes chapters that provide more detail on the process of exit counseling, the distinctions between exit counseling and deprogramming, and the differences among approaches to interventions.

A family intervention is not mysterious. At heart it is simply respectful communication. In a way it is analogous to Radio Free Europe or the Voice of America transmitting information “through” the Iron Curtain to the people living in the closed societies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. There is no magic. There is merely the patient, persistent communication of that which ultimately shatters all walls: truth, honesty, respect and love.

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# **Family Interventions for Cult-Affected Loved Ones**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Pre-intervention**

#### ***Why Consult an Exit Counselor or Thought Reform Consultant?***

Helping a cult member re-evaluate his or her commitment to a cult calls for specialized information, knowledge, experience, and skills. It also requires a certain amount of objectivity that most families do not have regarding the life of their relative. For example, a parent, who is a physician, was consulting me about his son's cult involvement. He said he wanted an experienced consultant. Even though he had done considerable research into the cult in question, he used the analogy that he would not attempt to do surgery on his son. He realized that he lacked objectivity and the in-depth knowledge of thought reform that thought reform consultants offered.

One of the first things a cult does is undermine the outside relationships of a new recruit. The primary attack is on the parents and family. For this reason, approaching the cult member armed with negative information about the cult, no matter how credible it seems, will not work. It is important to remember that because of the cultic pressures and manipulations, the cult member's family of origin has lost its credibility. Similarly, cults are known to attack the credibility of clergy, religions, and belief systems other than their own.

Thought reform consultants and exit counselors are usually former cult members themselves. They have firsthand experience with thought-reform systems and techniques. They have knowledge of cult mind-sets, the dynamics of cult membership, and, in most instances, the history of the particular cult in question and its leader(s). They also have the ability to bypass the closed thinking brought about by the cult's thought-reform processes and therefore are able to reaccess the cult member's critical thinking abilities. These are vital areas of expertise. Families often say that they want the best chance for their loved ones in the cult and that is why they choose to use a professional.

#### ***How to find and evaluate Thought Reform Consultants or Exit Counselors***

Referrals to consultants or exit counselors can come through some of the helping organizations and through searching the Internet. Often parents are referred to a consultant or exit counselor by a former member of their relative's cult or by a family who has participated in a family intervention.

Before consulting with an exit counselor or a thought reform consultant, families should make sure that their reasons for doing so are valid. Sometimes mental health professionals or clergy who are knowledgeable about cults and cult-

related issues can help families clarify this issue. They may also be able to provide information on interventions and intervention specialists.

Families who decide to work with a consultant should take their time in the selection process; they should interview several consultants to determine which team is best for their situation. During the interview process, there are a number of factors to keep in mind. Thought reform consultants and exit counselors can be evaluated by asking about and discussing the following:

- Ask yourself how your family member will relate to this person
- Ask yourself if the consultant seems knowledgeable about thought reform and cults in general. Do they present information clearly?
- Ask about the consultant(s)'s experience with interventions with the particular cult in question
- Ask for fee structures and other expenses that may be involved (in writing)
- Ask for references from other families for whom the consultant(s) have worked
- Ask for approximate percentages of people the consultant(s) have worked with in a full intervention who ultimately left a cult
- Ask the consultant(s) if they are willing to spend the time needed to adequately prepare the family for the intervention
- Ask the consultant if they work with other thought reform consultants and former members to implement an intervention

In searching for the best team for your family intervention, some red flags to watch for is if any intervention specialist pressures you to move quickly or discourages you from talking to other intervention specialists or to do a formal family preparation session. Remember, you may only have one shot at a successful intervention and you want to be your very best effort.

### ***Preparation of the family***

The family's initial contact with the consultants involves a lengthy conversation or series of conversations. During these discussions, the consultant needs to calm the family and take the panic out of the situation. This is particularly true if the family has just discovered that the group with which the relative is involved is a cult.

Thorough preparation of the family is crucial to the success of a family intervention. This preparation should not be omitted unless there is an extreme emergency. Family members need help in understanding the new culture the cult member has committed themselves to. They need help in learning how to keep communications open and trust in tact. They need help in dealing with a range of emotions so that they are able to inform themselves about thought reform, about cults in general, and about the particular group to which the person belongs.

The following sections contain material that should be covered before setting up an intervention.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY OR DO

- Don't say, "You're in a cult. You're brainwashed."
- Don't say, "You can't make any decisions for yourself."
- Don't argue with the cult member about the cult's beliefs.
- Don't criticize the group or the leaders
- Don't be confrontational
- Don't give large sums of money or relinquish trusts or bank accounts to cult members
- Don't turn over titles or deeds to cult members

## WHAT TO DO

It is important to the progress of an intervention that the family keeps open the lines of communication with the person in the cult. If the family is negative toward the group, the cult member becomes defensive and often feels personally attacked. Generally, this results in even further alienation from family and friends. It is best that parents, other family members and friends maintain a neutral position toward the group involvement. In order to prevent offending the cult member, you need to learn as much as possible about the beliefs and culture of the group. And it is extremely important that you learn that the cult member is not "at fault" for joining the group. People don't join cults, they get recruited. And they don't make fully informed decisions. They are deceived and manipulated by very sophisticated thought reform and social influence techniques. While they may have been in a vulnerable transition stage in life when they became involved, there is nothing "wrong" with their character or their intelligence. As a matter of fact, a cultic group is using the very best qualities in him or her as a means to their own ends. If the family does not fully accept this concept, the cult member will pick that up very clearly in their loved ones' attitudes. It is of utmost importance that the cult member is loved unconditionally and respected as a person.

Other suggested activities that can be important for the relating to cult members are:

- Maintain an interest in their activities
- Reaffirm your approval of their positive actions and motives, their good intentions, but do not approve of the group
- Attend group activities or services with them, if invited, but don't go to retreats or long seminars
- Negotiate with them: "I'll attend (church, Bible study, meditation class, or whatever) with you. Will you give me equal time in the future?"
- Take your time. Educate all those who will be involved in the intervention, talk to other parents who have gone through this process, talk to former members.

## EDUCATING THE FAMILY ABOUT CULTS

Family members must educate themselves about thought reform, cults in general, and the specific cult their family member has joined. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. Families can contact ICSA for information. In some towns, local cult-aware agencies are available to offer support.



Consult the Bibliography at the end of this book for a list of books and articles. It is highly recommended that you read books in three general areas: 1) cults (in general) and thought reform; 2) specific information about the group of concern; 3) information about the recovery process. Often, the consultants will recommend specific material. The most important materials in the Bibliography are highlighted with an asterisk. Everyone who will be involved in the intervention should read the recommended material.

ICSA sponsors Family Workshops for helping families evaluate and prepare for interventions and/or cope with long-term cult involvement. You can contact ICSA to learn about the next workshop.

Through ICSA or reFOCUS (a support and referral network for recovering former cult members), the family may be referred to former members of the group in question. If so, the family should ask former members about their experience in the group, why they left, if they had a family intervention, and, if so, what did their family say to them that caused them to be willing to listen and talk to the intervention specialists. You should also ask them what their recovery was like and what was most helpful to them during that time.

Also, through ICSA, the family may ask for referrals to parents of former members, especially parents who prepared themselves well for an intervention. This will help calm the family.

It is essential to have a thorough strategy and planning meeting with the thought reform consultants. This family preparation meeting can take three to five days, sometimes longer. Anyone the family is considering being part of the family team for the intervention and all of the professional team should be present for the family preparation. This formal preparation accomplishes the following:

- The family team experiences how they work together under pressure and how the thought reform consultants work together
- Enables the thought reform consulting team to observe how the family works together under pressure and who may or may not be appropriate for major roles in the intervention
- Improves family communication with the group member
- Enables the family to understand the culture of the group, its teachings and how thought reform techniques impact the group member
- Prepares the family for how to communicate in the intervention and what practical arrangements should be made
- Emphasizes the seriousness of an intervention and all its repercussions
- Facilitates the family in making a fully informed decision about doing an intervention
- Allows each family member an opportunity to express his or her feelings about an intervention and to ask about areas of concerns
- Enables each family member to see what his or her role in the intervention is

## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXIT COUNSELING AND THOUGHT REFORM CONSULTATION INTERVENTIONS?

In Thought Reform Consultation interventions, there is much more responsibility placed on the family during the intervention, which requires much more preparation. The biggest difference is that thought reform consultants require a formal family preparation mentioned above. Thought reform consultation involves more assessment. Since more responsibility is placed on the family, they realize that a team is not just going to come in and perform some magical process and things will forever be okay. More emphasis is placed on the recovery process.

In both exit counseling and thought reform consulting, the purpose of the intervention is **not** to get someone out of a cult. While that may be a desired outcome, the **purpose** is to give the group member the information that enables them to make a fully informed choice.

## INFORMATION GATHERING BY THOUGHT REFORM CONSULTANTS OR EXIT COUNSELORS

During the initial contact with the inquiring parents or family, consultants need to gather the following preliminary information: names(s) of inquirers and relationship to the cult member; name, age and sex of cult member; name and location of the cult; length of time the person has been involved and extent of involvement (for example, whether or not he or she is in a leadership position).

The family is sent an extensive intake form to fill out and return. A summary of the intervention specialists' fees and expenses is sent at this time. Prior to receiving the returned form, consultants can only give generic advice to the family.

Information from the family about the cult member's personal history, as well as family background, is crucial to help consultants and exit counselors understand the cult member, assess the procedure to be followed, and weigh the probably success of the intervention. Also it will help to determine particular areas of concern that the consultants need to identify—such as control issues between parents and offspring, possible hidden agendas of the parents or family, and special mental health and/or physical health issues.

A mental health professional should be consulted if certain areas of concern become obvious. These areas include, but are not limited to, serious defects in interpersonal skills, drug or alcohol abuse in the family or by the cult member, prior emotional or mental breakdowns, severely dysfunctional family situations, physical problems (pregnancy, diabetes, any illness affected by emotional stress), prior eating disorders, self-destructive behavior or suicidal tendencies.

If there are concerns about the cult member's emotional or psychological ability to deal with an intervention, the family needs to consult a mental health professional who is knowledgeable about cult issues. In these cases, the family needs to get an opinion on the timing of an intervention and should ask the mental health professional to be available during the intervention. In a severely

dysfunctional family situation, the family should be referred to a professional for pre-intervention counseling.

Note: if indications of problems such as those described above or other areas of concern regarding the cult member's state of mental health become evident during the intervention, a consultation with a mental health professional may be appropriate before proceeding with the intervention.

### ***Logistical Factors***

Once the family decides on the specific thought reform consultants or exit counselors to employ, details on logistical matters should be explored together.

### **TIMING**

Find a time when it would be natural for the cult member to visit home: family celebrations, holidays, birthdays, semester breaks, perhaps a family vacation.

### **LOCATION**

There are many variables regarding location. It is preferable to consult with the professional intervention team concerning the best site for the intervention.

### **TEAM COMPOSITION**

Generally, a team consists of two thought reform consultants (or exit counselors). Sometimes a team of three is helpful – for example, in the case of a cult member who is in a position of leadership or where a cult member is married to another cult member.

Whenever possible, one of the team should be a former member of the cult in question. If the person is in a Bible-based cult, one of the team members needs to have knowledge of Scriptures and be sensitive to the issues involved.

It is preferable to have at least one member of the team be the same gender as the cult member.

The lead consultant should have the final say on the composition of the team.

### **TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

In most cases, the family makes the plane reservations, prepays the round-trip tickets. In the long run it is more economical to buy tickets without restrictions should the situation warrant last-minute changes. Some consultants and exit counselors prefer to make their own travel arrangements.

It is best for the consultants to have their own transportation – either the loan of a family car or a rental car.

The entire team should arrive at least a full day before the intervention so there is time for the family to meet with all the team members. This is necessary for final planning and consultation.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

Motel or hotel accommodations will be needed for the intervention team. It is necessary for there to be a restaurant close by that is open 24 hours a day. Separate accommodations give the cult member and family private time to interact and allows the team an opportunity to consult with each other about the progress of the case.

### **MEALS**

It is occasionally best for the team, cult member, and family to share meals and breaks so that they are able to socialize, relax, and interact together. However, some consultants prefer some separation time. Consult with the team for their preferences.

There may be special diet considerations and timing for meals. Consult with the team about this. Snacks and beverages should be accessible during the sessions.

### **BREAKS AND SCHEDULING**

The client/cult member should have the most control over this area. The team needs to monitor the stress factor and the person's ability to absorb and assimilate the information presented. There needs to be sensitivity toward information overload. It helps the process to take frequent breaks.

Encourage the client to go for walks, to play a sport or games with family members, or to take a nap – to have a break, some time away from the consultants on the second and ensuing days, if possible.

The more intense information requiring critical thinking should be reserved for mornings when everyone is fresh. During evening sessions, it is better to deal with lighter issues or to watch and discuss videos.

### **VIDEOS**

Educational videotapes are used during an intervention. The family should be encouraged to watch the videos so that all the participants are educated. A VCR or DVD will be needed for this purpose. A remote control is necessary so that the videotape can be paused for discussion.

During the showing of videos, remember to be sensitive: allow the cult member to "save face" with his or her family.

### **DURATION**

Usually an intervention lasts three to five days, sometimes longer. The amount of time depends entirely on the cult member's willingness to deal with issues and his or her ability to relate to and integrate the information.

## ***Family Matters***

### **THE FAMILY TEAM**

Confidentiality and sensitivity in planning the intervention are important. The family should tell no one other than those who need to know.

To ascertain the main participants on the family team, consider the following:

- Who is important to the cult member and to the workability of the intervention?
- Who was closest to the person before his or her cult involvement?
- Who had or still has the most influence on the person?
- Which non-family members may have influence, such as teachers, clergy, family friends, and school friends?

Only those who are particularly significant to the cult member should be called upon for the intervention.

Sometimes it is necessary to do a pre-intervention intervention with a family member who is reluctant to participate in the intervention or who does not understand the issues.

Family members should exercise caution not to reveal to the cult member how well informed they are about the group. Doing so may result in the cult's taking measures to counteract the family's influence. For example, the cult may order the cult member not to visit his or her family or to be accompanied by another cult member when going home.

### **FINAL FAMILY MEETING WITH THE INTERVENTION TEAM**

This meeting occurs the day or evening before the actual intervention. It takes place in the town where the intervention is to happen, usually somewhere nearby, such as in the hotel where the team is spending the night. It is important that all the steps previously outlined have been taken to educate all the family members taking part in the intervention.

All team members and all family participants should be included in this pre-intervention session.

The purpose of this session is to address any changes the family has seen and any anxieties the family may have. It serves as an opportunity to provide the intervention team with any additional pertinent information. It also helps to ensure that family members remember how to communicate to the cult member the following day in hopes that he or she will be willing to meet and work with the intervention team.

## Possible Scenarios

### SUGGESTIONS FOR PRESENTING THE PLAN TO THE CULT MEMBER

The following approaches have been used in interventions. Consider each one carefully while planning the best approach for your loved one or friend. Thought reform consultants will assist you in these kinds of communications during the family preparation.

- We've seen some changes in you since your involvement with \_\_\_\_\_. Some of the changes are very positive. At the same time, we've been concerned and we didn't know exactly why.
- We've tried to understand what is happening to you. We've even gone to some group events with you and what we saw concerned us even more. So we started looking further to try to understand our growing concern for your welfare. The more information we came across—and it took a long, hard search to find this information—the more our concerns for you grew because we don't think you have access to this information
- It's been an extremely upsetting and anxiety-producing time for us—because as we educated ourselves, we became aware that if we presented this information to you, you would become defensive and want to withdraw from us. We were afraid we were going to lose you.
- We had to find a way to present this information to you and that seemed to us like interfering in your life and you're an adult. We had to think long and hard about intervening in your life because we've always trusted your ability to make decisions for yourself. At the same time, we felt certain that if you had access to the information we saw, you would want to reevaluate your commitment to the group. So, we have searched for some people who have experience with this group. In talking to them, they made us feel much better, yet we still have some questions. We have asked them to talk to all of us so we can understand the group and each other.
- We ask you just to participate in this experience and be as objective as you can. What you do with this information is entirely up to you—it is your decision. We know we can count on you to make a good decision for yourself. But we couldn't live with ourselves unless we made sure we were responsible enough to give you the opportunity to make a fully informed decision. We will stand behind the decision you make. This will also help to clear up any misunderstanding we have about your association with this group.
- We asked you to talk to someone with us and you said you would (*use only if this applies*)
- We were able to find some information about the group but it only led us to have more concerns. Then we found (use first names only of consultant) and he/she made us feel so much better. We still have some questions, but we wanted you to be able to respond as well. We've invited (name) here to talk to all of us.
- This time we spend will affect the rest of our lives. You're changing your life goals around the group, so it is important that you know all there is to know and it is important to us as your family to know that it is *your* decision *alone*. So, we ask you to spend this time with us without input from the group.

- It's a win/win situation. If you hear all they have to say and, in the end, you still think it is irrelevant to your involvement with the group, then you're affirmed in your commitment and you win. If you listen and see that you need to reevaluate your commitment, you also win. We're all given the opportunity to hear this information and understand you better, so we all win.
- If your group has the truth, truth can always stand up to inspection

Bear in mind that the consultants and the family are attempting to present reality to a person who is out of touch with reality—due to a complex combination of emotional, psychological, and social manipulation. These manipulations are part of cultic group dynamics, taking place without the member's knowledge.

Remember, do not argue with the cult member. It will only trigger his or her cult mind-set. It is better to remain non-confrontational, nonjudgmental, and supportive. Let your warmth and concern shine through. The best point of view to take is to acknowledge that the intervention is about helping the whole family—and the cult member is an integral member of that whole.

### **POSSIBLE INTERCHANGES WITH THE CULT MEMBER**

Cult member: *What do these people know about my group? You have to experience the group to understand.*

Possible response: They have experienced the group; let them tell you their stories.

Cult member: *They're under Satan's influence. What church do they go to?*

Possible response: They're not here to represent any church's perspective. They will deal with the Bible with you and look at your church's teachings about the Bible with you.

Cult member: *You lied to me. You tricked me into being here. You set this whole thing up behind my back.*

Possible response: We felt if we asked you to come look at this information, you would have asked advice from the group and you would have been advised not to do it. We've tried to talk to you about it before but we seem to end up arguing. We feel like we're losing you—like we can't talk openly with you. It hurts us to do this, but what would you do if it were your son or daughter?

We have proof that your group hasn't been upfront with you either, but there was no way to deal with that without doing it this way. We're doing this so we can break the rule of silence and begin to talk with each other openly again. We're sorry it had to be this way, but we couldn't take a chance any other way.

We love you. We have tried our best to do what is best for you and for all of us, under the circumstances. Try to think of it this way": we've gone to much effort and have had to make a very difficult ethical decision to try to get all of us some help – out of our love.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE INTERVENTION**

Some things the family may see happening during the intervention:

**Vacillation:** It may appear that some progress is being made. Then following a nap or after a night's sleep, it seems like the cult member is back to the first step again.

**Anger:** Anger may be focused at the family or at the situation. Anger is usually expressed in body language, but sometimes it is expressed verbally or physically.

### **The Stages of an Intervention**

- Denial
- Resistance
- Interest
- Participation

These don't always follow a progression; the person may go in and out of the different stages.

## ***OPTIONS FOR PRESENTING THE PLAN TO THE CULT MEMBER***

There are three options for presenting a voluntary family intervention to the cult member:

- The family presents the plan to the person and obtains consent. The family then brings in the team.
- The family presents the plan to the person and obtains consent and whether consent as been obtained or not, the team arrives at a pre-arranged time.
- The team (or part of the team) is present to help the family members when they first talk to the person.

The first option is generally the better one because the person feels that she or he has more control, and feels less "ganged up on."

Since cults are doing more and more training and preparation to work against interventions, often it is helpful for a consultant to be present during the initial discussion to assure the cult member that he or she will be free to leave when desired and that no one is present with the intention of taking away the person's faith or commitment. The cult member is assured that the consultants are present simply to explore some information together and to help the family understand.

The family members should decide which option is best, based on how comfortable they are with the information and how they think the cult member will respond. The consultants may advise that one option is better than the other, depending on the family situation and the experience they have had with the specific cult in question.

The consultants should advise the family on the extent of involvement of specific family members and/or friends in the intervention. The more loving, open, and



honest the cult member's relationship is with a particular parent, loved one, or family member, the more that person should be involved.

If any relationship between the cult member and another family member is problematic, it may be best for the other person to be less involved. He or she can show support simply by being present. Occasionally it is preferable that the person not be there at all. A similar assessment should be made of all siblings, family members, and friends.

## ***Post-cult Counseling***

A growing body of research indicates that a cult's environmental pressures and psychological manipulations cause people to experience considerable psychological distress when they leave their group. Therefore, it is advisable that former cult members seriously think about getting professional assistance during their recovery period and transition into mainstream society. Some former cult members may require only a few hours of consultation to help clarify their needs and identify a strategy for coping with the problems they are likely to encounter. Others may require psychotherapy. Some may need or want a period of rehabilitation at a live-in facility.

Because the demands of day-to-day living can consume so much time, few former cult members pay as much attention as they should to their post-cult psychological needs. Therefore, even for those whose problems are not severe, a strategic retreat from the pressures of practical life can greatly facilitate a smooth transition.

## **REHABILITATION FACILITIES**

Not every former cult member needs to go to a rehabilitation facility. Those who are able to, however, seem to recover from their cult experience at a faster rate and with less difficulty than those who do not.

A stay at a rehab facility offers an opportunity to take time away from the pressures of immediate changes in the life of an exiting cult member—changes in school, job, and living arrangements. Here former cult members are given the time to relax, to continue to educate themselves about undue influence and thought reform, and to further integrate the information they received during the intervention.

Also, the former cult member may have issues about the intervention, his or her family, or pre-cult matters that were unresolved before cult involvement. These issues are likely to surface at this time. The rehab facility is an excellent place to sort through these concerns with professional help and begin to resolve them.

Having been involved in a cult and under the influence of thought-reform processes is a serious situation. The family may need to help evaluate the former cult member's job or school schedule. In some cases, the person might be better off leaving school for a semester. This may be necessary, in particular, if she or he had been deeply involved in the group. Families should be prepared to support such decisions if made by the former member.

Even though interventions give the ex-cult member tools for recovery, leaving a cult is a traumatic event in a person's life. Its seriousness should not be minimized. However, the former member may not realize the seriousness themselves. The person will be going through an intense identity crisis as well as a period of intense grief. At the same time they may be dealing with varying symptoms of post traumatic stress syndrome and vacillating between the cult beliefs and not knowing what they truly believe any longer. For these reasons, attending a rehabilitation facility is highly recommended if it is at all feasible.

I suggest that families contact the facility directly to evaluate its services.

## **OTHER HELPS ALONG THE WAY**

In some areas of the country there are support groups for former cult members. These offer a place to talk about one's cult experience with others who have been through the same experiences. It offers support of other former members who may be further along in the recovery process. And it offers a way to begin socializing in a trustful environment. There is a list of support groups on the reFOCUS web site at <http://www.refocus.org>

ICSA sponsors recovery workshops for former cult members. The workshops are held over a weekend and, consist of sessions on coping with triggers, grief, "after the cult—who am I?", overview of the recovery process, anger, re-establishing trust and relationships, re-establishing healthy boundaries and others. They are facilitated, for the most part, by former cult members, many of whom have gone on and gotten their degree in the mental health field. These weekend workshops have been invaluable to many former members.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

Most former members who seek professional psychological assistance and/or attend a rehab facility will devote considerable time to thinking about future plans. Those who don't seek help must also address this at some point. Families should avoid putting pressure on the former cult member.

Below are listed some important concerns that family and friends can help the person identify and think about.

1. Was he or she living with other group members? How can the family help the ex-cult member move out, retrieve belongings, and deal with the other members of the group?
2. Is he or she employed by the cult or are there other members of the cult at the workplace? Will the person need some financial support before she or he becomes reemployed or financially independent?
3. Did the former cult member choose the school he or she is attending because the cult wanted recruitment done on that particular campus? Or were they

recruited on campus and active in the group there? He or she may want to transfer schools. There may be a loss of tuition or school time.

4. Is there a need for counseling or therapy with a mental health professional?
5. Are there reFOCUS contacts or a support group in the area? Provide the person with a list of such contacts.
6. Does the person have family support? This is extremely important: the cult member needs to have something to come out to.

# **Family Interventions for Cult-Affected Loved Ones**

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Intervention**

#### ***The Author's Philosophy***

Thought Reform Consultants' family interventions are based on an educational model. The cult member has been a victim of a sophisticated set of manipulations. Once she or he becomes aware of these manipulations, basic integrity usually will not allow the person to remain a part of a system that victimizes others—no matter how lofty the goals. An intervention, for the most part, is a discourse on ethics, values, and integrity.

The material is to be presented in a manner that shows respect for the cult member's dignity. In particular, it is important to be sensitive to the emotional trauma the person may undergo while confronting these issues. Material is to be put forth at a pace that allows the cult member to assimilate the information and, simultaneously, deal with its emotional impact.

The goal is for the person to reevaluate his or her commitment to the group. Although parents and intervention specialists may hope that the cult member chooses to leave the group, leaving is not the goal. Informed choice is the goal.

It is important that the cult member leave the group with dignity and self-respect intact. Generally there are some positive aspects to a person's cult involvement. Encourage the person to be patient, to sort out the positive aspects from the negative ones, and to integrate the positive ones into his or her present and future life.

Once someone understands thought-reform techniques, that person has the basic tools with which to sort out these issues and deal with them. This process takes time. But there is much less time involved and much less stress on the individual if she or he has had the opportunity for a family intervention and rehabilitation. It is imperative that family members understand this whole process so they can be supportive.

# The Intervention Begins

## INTRODUCTIONS

At this point, it is assumed that the family has been successful in getting the cult member to agree to interact with the consultants. Now the consultant team should be introduced. Once the cult member agrees to speak with the consultants, she or he then becomes their "client," that is, the person whose welfare is the paramount concern of the consultants.

All the members of the consulting team should let the person know their names, where they are from, and their experience with the group in question.

During the initial getting-acquainted session, it should be made clear to the client that the purpose is not to take the individual away from his or her beliefs or faith in God—no one is there to do that. Tell the person that there are many good things he or she has learned about himself or herself, such as how to relate to others. Point out there have been some good effects on his or her life while a member of the group. Go on to say that there are many truths found in this group, and probably it is the people and the "truth" found in the group that attracted the client to the group.

These facts need to be stated in the beginning because much of the information to be gone over in the ensuing sessions may seem negative.

It should also be stated at this time that the purpose of the process is to explore information together so that the whole family understands, not to argue or debate. The goal is to provide information that will enable the client to make a fully informed choice—the consultants are on the client's side. The information will speak for itself and will be well documented.

## SORTING OUT THE ISSUES

During this stage, the consultants try to elicit the following information from the client:

- Where and how did the person join the group?
- What attracted him or her to the group?
- What does she or he find positive about participating in the group?
- Has the person had some questions or serious doubts about the group? If so, how were those issues addressed by the group and leaders?
- What were the person's life goals before meeting the group? What are they at present? (Often here it becomes obvious that the goals have changed.)
- If goals have changed, can the person identify why, how, and when they changed, or if she or he was even aware that they had changed?

- When the person first met the group, what did she or he think the group was about? Has that changed?
- When he or she first met the group, what were his or her expectations of the group? Are those initial expectations being met, or has it been necessary to change those expectations?

Through the process of these exchanges, most often consultants can assess the area that has the person “hooked” into the group—emotionally or intellectually. Generally it is some of both, but one area tends to have a stronger influence. This assessment will determine which issues will need to be dealt with first.

In an intervention situation, the word *doctrine* refers to the beliefs and practices of the group. While the particular beliefs of a group are not at issue in an intervention, they must be addressed because the practices and techniques that are employed get twisted around the beliefs. The beliefs or doctrine are usually what “justify” the use of techniques of emotional and social manipulation.

The client’s positive motivations (wanting to do what God wants, wanting to change the world for the better) and good intentions are acknowledged and respected. Integrity is most important. Also the person’s sincerity is valued, as is the sincerity of other members in the group. Sincerity and good motives are not being called into question.

The issue that does get addressed is the process by which a person’s sincere desires may be channeled into something quite different, one step at a time, without the awareness of the individual. Examples are given that point to the sincerity of members of other cults, illustrating how those people are manipulated. Methods of manipulation—social, emotional, and psychological—are discussed at length and in detail so the client can begin to recognize what may apply in his or her experience.

This will lead into discussing the fact that many critics of the group have accused it of being a cult and using thought reform, which, of course, the group denies. Since this accusation has been made, the client is asked, “Don’t you think it’s important to look at what a cult is and why people use the word to describe your group? What is thought reform? We need to look at this carefully so you can decide for yourself whether it is present in your group.”

At this point in the intervention the person may flatly deny the problem, even saying that these issues are not important anyway because “I know this group has the truth.” If this happens, it is appropriate to ask whether the client is really saying “the ends justify the means.” Does truth really need certain techniques to get people to accept it? This focus should be dropped if the client becomes defensive.

If the person says that this particular issue is unimportant, then ask what information she or he thinks is important to explore at this time. The client should be asked what information would be important enough to cause a person to reevaluate his or her involvement? Usually a member of a Bible-based group will want to address doctrine, saying something like, “Show me where we’re not going by the Bible.”

Doctrinal problems (both beliefs and practices) can now be explored in an effort to engage the client's interest. The consultants should weave into this discussion how thought-reform methods get wrapped up in the doctrine because cult leaders need the scriptures or a particular philosophy to justify their methodology.

It should be pointed out that now it is important to begin to address thought reform so the client can better see for himself or herself how these methods get wrapped up in the group's beliefs and how they become justifiable. It's like putting together the pieces of a puzzle so one can see the whole picture. First, one has to be able to see each piece of the puzzle.

The models of thought reform are discussed, with a brief description of whose models they are and who the experts are: Dr. Margaret Thaler Singer and Dr. Robert Jay Lifton. It is best to start with Dr. Singer's model because at this point her model is easier to understand.

### ***Margaret Thaler Singer's Model:***

#### ***The Conditions for Thought Reform***

Clinical psychologist and renowned authority on cults, Dr. Singer points out that there are six conditions for thought reform:

1. *Keep the person unaware of what is going on and how she or he is being changed a step at a time.* Potential new members are led, step by step, through a behavioral-change program without being aware of the final agenda or full content of the group. The goal may be to make them deployable agents for the leadership, to get them to buy more courses, or get them to make a deeper commitment depending on the leader's aim and desires.
2. *Control the person's social and/or physical environment; especially control the person's time.* Through various methods, newer members are kept busy and led to think about the group and its content during as much of their waking time as possible.
3. *Systematically create a sense of powerlessness in the person.* This is accomplished by getting members away from the normal social support group for a period of time and into an environment where the majority of people are already group members. The members serve as models of the attitudes and behaviors of the group and speak an in-group language.
4. *Manipulate a system of rewards, punishments and experiences in such a way as to inhibit behavior that reflects the person's former social identity.* Manipulation of experiences can be accomplished through various methods of trance induction, including leaders using such techniques as paced speaking patterns, guided imagery, chanting, long prayer sessions or lectures, and/or lengthy meditation sessions.
5. *Manipulate a system of rewards, punishments and experiences in order to promote learning the group's ideology or belief system and group-approved behaviors.* Good behavior, demonstrating an understanding and acceptance of

the group's beliefs, and compliance are rewarded while questioning, expressing doubts or criticizing are met with disapproval, redress and possible rejection. If one expresses a question, he or she is made to feel that there is something inherently wrong with them to be questioning.

6. *Put forth a closed system of logic and an authoritarian structure that permits no feedback and refuses to be modified except by leadership approval or executive order.* The group has a top-down pyramid structure. The leaders must have verbal ways of never losing. (Singer, 1995)

Often at this stage, a videotape is shown of Dr. Singer addressing the Coercive Persuasion conference in 1988. Whenever videos are shown, they are paused to highlight an important issue. Each point is discussed at length, explaining how a particular technique is used on other groups, while drawing close parallels to how the client's cult uses it.

## ***The Intervention Continues***

At this time, ideological areas that were discussed previously can be reviewed and applied to Dr. Singer's model. Also discussed are the differences between thought reform and brainwashing and how the terms are often used interchangeably, even by experts. Other terms sometimes used are coercive persuasion and undue influence.

Through this discussion, consultants can demonstrate that they don't necessarily agree with everything the "experts" say. Consultants can state that they, too, have done some work on the matter and have come to their own conclusions. Basically, they want to put forth a model of critical thinking for the client. Remember, the team should be able to express some differences of opinion and should not demonstrate "groupthink" to the client.

## **USE OF VIDEO: THE WAVE**

A video called *The Wave* is usually shown early on. It describes a true story about a high school teacher who indoctrinated his social studies class, and ultimately most of the high school, by conducting an experiment in persuasion and thought reform.

This important video usually is used because it demonstrates in a non-threatening way how groups use thought-reform techniques. Generally Dr. Singer's model is presented before showing the video, thereby providing a basis for understanding the concept. The video is paused to interweave Dr. Singer's criteria with the story line. If a point from Dr. Lifton's theories is obvious, then his model of thought reform is introduced briefly.

It is a good idea for the consultants to generate a discussion on any reactions to or questions about *The Wave*. They should try to get the client to discuss how it applies to the group in question, asking if she or he could see any similarities. Rarely is the client willing to come up with any at this point, but it's important to see his or her response to the question.



Consultants need to be adept at picking up on body language. Be aware if a client is overloaded or tired, or is dissociating—that is, spacing out, losing concentration.

### ***Other Areas Covered During the Intervention***

The areas outlined below should be covered during the intervention. Depending on the group in question, there may be other pertinent information to go over, while certain other topics may not be discussed as thoroughly.

The order of topics varies in response to the client's desires or expressed interest.

- *Moonchild* (a video): a good example of Unification Church indoctrination. It is a non-threatening and good lead-in to Dr. Lifton's criteria.
- Dr. Robert Jay Lifton's criteria: These should be discussed at length, citing examples of the ways in which the group in question and/or other groups use the criteria.
  1. Milieu control
  2. Mystical manipulation
  3. Demand for purity
  4. Confession
  5. Sacred science
  6. Loading the language
  7. Doctrine over person
  8. Dispensing of existence
- The history of the group and the leader(s)
- Issues of deception and how the group uses it
- Cognitive dissonance
- Behavior modification/control
- Information control
- Phobia induction
- Thought-stopping techniques
- Trances/altered states of consciousness; vulnerability to suggestion
- Hypnosis: explanation of hypnosis (in-depth discussion)
  1. *Captive Minds* video
  2. Other videos on hypnosis

- Other videos: The use of videos depends on the type of group. If the client processes information more easily through videos and discussion, this medium can be relied upon more heavily.
  1. Videos of testimonies and panel discussions by former members
  2. *Thy Will Be Done* video (excellent documentary on cults)

Even if a client indicates in some way he or she is not returning to the group, the preceding information still needs to be covered to ensure that the person begins to understand his or her experience. The client will need these tools to unravel the ideas and behavior that she or he accepted while in the group due to the influence of the cult's thought-reform program. This process is important to the person's recovery from their cult experience.

### ***Things to Remember***

An intervention usually lasts from three to five days, sometimes longer, depending on the client's ability to process the information. It is important to direct questions to the client regularly to make sure she or he understands the information.

Remember, the client needs time to assimilate the information, reestablish relationships with the family, and allow his or her former identity to begin to resurface. Along with this, he or she must deal with all the related emotions.

No one can really set a schedule for how this will transpire. Each client is different.

### **DOCUMENTATION OF PRIMARY SOURCES**

When consultants are covering practices and teachings of the group, they should see that these teachings are documented. Use the cult's literature, books, letters, audiotapes, videos, web site material and so forth. The client needs to see that the team has done its homework; it will be apparent that extensive research has allowed the team to document each point that is being made.

When referencing the group's audiotapes, it is best to use transcripts of the tapes to prevent the client from dissociating and/or floating at the sound of the leader's voice. The actual audiotapes should be available, however, in case the client wants to verify the transcript's authenticity.

### **FAMILY ATTENDANCE**

It is important for the intervention team to watch for signs of floating (dissociation), fatigue, or information overload, all the while monitoring the client's emotional well-being.

Consultants need to be sensitive to the client's potential embarrassment over some (or all) issues when the family is present. At times, it is preferable to have most family members leave once the team begins to address deeper issues. In some

cases, the client may want the whole family to participate in the entire process. But most importantly, those times when the client wants to speak in privacy to the consultants must be respected.

Usually the client's parents remain in the premises the entire time to help with meals, errands, snacks, and so forth. At least one family member should always be on premises in case the client indicates a desire to terminate the discussions.

### ***Closing Issues***

If the person decides to leave the group, the parents should be on guard against creating a watchful atmosphere, known as the "fishbowl effect." Parents need to resist their natural instincts to pull the family member back under their wings. Instead, they need to give their loved one his or her wings. Parents should be there when needed, and they should not be afraid of every phone call from cult members, thinking they will be able to lure the former member back.

The intervention gives the client an education about group influence and thought-reform techniques. The usual outcome is for former cult members to remain wary of any group for some time to come, until they begin to trust their own ability to identify such techniques in a group, and to realize they can walk out of any situation if it is a manipulative environment.

## **RESOURCES**

The parents and the client should be told about several helpful resources:

### **BOOKS**

1. *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships* by Madeleine Tobias and Janja Lalich (Hunter House, 1994).
2. *Recovery from Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse*, edited by Michael D. Langone (W. W. Norton & Co., 1993).
3. *Cults In Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* by Margaret Thaler Singer with Janja Lalich (Jossey-Bass, 1995)
4. *Influence: The New Psychology of Modern Persuasion* by Robert B. Cialdini (Quill, 1984)
5. *Recovery from Abusive Groups* by Wendy Ford (AFF, 1993)

### **VIDEOS**

1. *After the Cult: Recovering Together* (produced by AFF: Project Recovery, 1995)

2. *Leaving a Cult: Exiting & Recovery Information for Ex-Members, Families and Friends*, featuring Dr. Margaret Singer (produced by M. T. Singer, Inc., 1995)

For further information on these and other resources, consult the Bibliography.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN THE CLIENT DECIDES TO RETURN TO THE CULT

If the client decides to return to the group, the consultants should cover the following points, if appropriate:

1. Remind the client that the purpose of the process was: to provide information not readily available from the group; to educate everyone present about thought-reform processes and undue influence; and to facilitate an open discussion with the family in which concerns could be expressed and understood.
2. Prepare the client for the likelihood that for a short time the group may hold him or her up as a hero, but also the group may distort what actually happened in the process. The consultants should ask the client to remember what *actually* happened and the way he or she was actually treated. Discuss the importance of keeping one's own integrity intact.
3. Reinforce the idea that the client now knows what thought reform is and will be aware of it in the future.
4. Discuss with the client how she or he thinks the leaders will handle the return to the group and how the client will respond to their questions about why their weren't called for advice when the client was faced with the intervention.

## WHEN THE CLIENT DECIDES TO LEAVE THE CULT

If the client decides to leave the group, the following areas may be important to address, depending on the person's needs:

- Whether, how and when to help friends to get out.
- Whether or not to talk to leadership.
- How to move out of the group's house.
- How to handle feelings of embarrassment.
- How to deal with the temporary loss of the power of concentration, a common post-cult problem.
- What to say to friends not in the group and how to rebuild relationships outside the group.
- How to evaluate the need for further education about cults and thought reform and/or spending time at a rehabilitation facility. (These should be strongly encouraged)
- What are the role and potential value of reFOCUS, support groups, individual contacts for support, and conferences and workshops on issues of cult recovery.

- How to recognize and deal with residuals and floating. What is it and how long might it last? How to help oneself cope with it, including identifying “triggers.”
- What to do about spirituality. (If the client will be going to a rehab facility, this issue should be addressed there rather than with consultants).

When the client raises issues and concerns such as those described above or asks members of the team for advice, it is important for the consultants *not to advise the client, rather they should merely explore options with the client.*

Consultants should always keep in mind the extreme vulnerability of those who have just left cultic groups and thought-reform environments. It takes some time to relearn how to make decisions for oneself, especially when a person has been dependent on a group or leaders. Foster independent decision making from the very beginning. This important matter should be explored with parents and family as well.

Under no circumstances should a consultant influence a client in any particular direction about his or her religious practice, faith, or any other beliefs. In all these areas, it is best to only explore options with the client. One option, for example, is for the client to talk to clergy about specific religious issues. The client need not be left hanging with regard to religion. But the consultants should not proselytize or evangelize the client.

## WRAP-UP TALK

At the end of an intervention, sometimes it is appropriate to make a personal recounting of what just happened. A brief summation, similar to the one that follows, may be helpful in certain situations.

Sometimes we hear the phrase, “I was deprogrammed,” or “I was exit-counseled.” I’d like to address that for a minute to let you know how I feel about it. It’s important to me that you know that I don’t think anyone did anything to you these last few days—except to provide you with additional information. When you joined the group, you made the best decision you could have made *given the information you received at the time*. Now, your family simply gave you the opportunity to receive some new information and with that you’ve reevaluated your initial decision based on full and complete information.

So, in the future, if you ever feel embarrassed about having been in a cult, remember that you left the group because you made a good decision, a decision based on your integrity. That took courage. Remember this, especially if and when you hear that the group leaders or members say you left because you’re sinning or because of something negative about you. That hurts. But remember, they have to say those things to justify the existence of the group and their continued commitment to it. You just remember *your* reasons for leaving are good ones.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Postintervention

### *Postintervention Precautions*

The consultants' involvement with the former cult member will diminish as the intervention comes to a close and the person begins to make plans for the future.

However, it is important to recognize that one of the residuals from a cultic experience is that former members are in the habit of having someone else advise them and make decisions for them. Sometimes a client transfers the loyalty he or she felt toward other cult members and cult leaders to a consultant or another member of the intervention team. Often following an intervention there are mutual feelings of affection between the client and consultants because of the amount of time spent together, the intensity of the intervention and the gratitude felt toward the consultants.

Consultants must be sensitive to these residual effects and to the client's feelings. They should be especially careful not to promote any transference of loyalty from the cult leaders to themselves.

### *Some Options for the Ex-Cult Member*

#### **REHAB**

If the client goes to a rehab facility, it may be necessary for a member of the intervention team to accompany the client. This serves two purposes: (1) it will ease the transition; and (2) the team member can inform the facility staff on any issues the consultants feel the client needs to address. Also the consultant can let the staff know if the client is experiencing any episodes of floating.

If a member of the team does not accompany the client, the lead consultant should speak with the director of the facility to give some background.

The consultants should contact the client at least once during his or her stay at the rehab facility, and once again following rehab to touch base and let the client know they care. Any further contact should be initiated by the client, unless he or she indicates the desire to participate as a former member on future interventions.

#### **BEING PART OF AN INTERVENTION TEAM**

Some former cult members decide they'd like to work with consultants on intervention teams, serving as former members who can speak directly from experience about involvement in a cultic group.

It is recommended that this not be done for at least six months, preferably a year, after leaving a group so that the person has time to put things into perspective and sort out major life issues. Taking part in an intervention too soon can cause the former member to be triggered and may be upsetting.

Being on an intervention team at a later time, however, can aid the healing process. The person gains a sense of helping others exit the group. Also this work may relieve leftover guilt feelings about the people he or she recruited into the group while a member.

In addition, it serves to refresh the person's memory of why she or he left the cult. While working on an intervention team, the former member is asked to explain his or her reasons for leaving the group directly to the new client. This process allows the former cult member to make his or her understanding of the group and reasons for leaving very concrete. Often former clients say that they gained new insights that they were unable to grasp during their own intervention because there was so much to deal with at the time.

Helping on others' intervention can have a very positive effect. Nevertheless, doing so needs to be approached in a balanced way, making sure the timing is right. The former member should already have made a healthy adjustment to his or her post-cult situation.

## **ONGOING THERAPY OR COUNSELING**

Some former members may have issues that were present before joining the cult and these may resurface after leaving the group. Or they may have problems that arose during cult involvement that were not treated properly. For example, a person might have been experiencing addictive behavior, anxiety, or depression before cult involvement, or might have been dysfunctional because of illness, divorce, death in the family, or addictive behavior of a parent. Often such issues can be exacerbated in a cultic environment.

Clients with such difficulties should be encouraged to engage in ongoing therapy following the intervention and/or spend time at a rehab facility. When possible, refer them to appropriate resources.

At all times consultants must keep in mind that they are not mental health professionals. When in doubt in any situation, refer the client and/or family to appropriate mental health professionals. Having access to mental health professionals who are knowledgeable about cults and thought reform is, of course, the best situation.

# Assessment Tools

It is essential that the family and/or friends take the time and effort to assess the involved person's situation. The following questions can be used as an assessment tool to help the family understand what information is essential to intervention specialists and to themselves in looking at the prospects of doing a family intervention.

There are three aspects to the necessary information for assessment: 1) The Group; 2) The Individual Involved; 3) The Family/Situation. Make lists, lists, lists!

## 1. The Group

- Name of group
- Name of leaders and their backgrounds, including family background (check for criminal background, education, training in the capacity they serve, marriages, children, divorces, aliases used, etc., etc., etc.)
- Location of group headquarters
- Location of the individual's involvement with the group
- Immediate leaders over involved person
- What type of group is it?
  - ❑ Religious
    - Eastern/meditation
    - Christian/Bible-based
    - Eclectic
    - New Age
    - Jewish
    - Islamic
    - Native
    - Magick
    - Satanism
    - Other/Unknown
  - ❑ Self-Improvement
    - Psychotherapy
    - Large Group Awareness Training
    - Substance
    - Other/Unknown
  - ❑ Business/Commercial
    - Multi-Level Marketing
    - Magazine
    - Other/Unknown
  - ❑ UFO
  - ❑ Political
  - ❑ Martial Arts
  - ❑ 1 on 1

Does the group utilize altered states of consciousness such as chanting, meditation, guided visualization, long sessions of prayer, speaking in tongues.

Sources of information about the group/leaders:

- Cult education organizations (ICSA, etc.)
- Ex-members (reFOCUS)



- Web sites of groups
- Web sites of ex-members of the group
- Group newsletters/magazines/books
- Private detectives
- Investigate on your own – use the book, *Investigating Extremists: A Manual for Law Enforcement* by Larry Zilliox or *Get the Facts on Anyone* by Dennis King.

## **2. The Involved Individual**

### ***Before Involvement***

- Religious background
- Interests (make a list)
- Talents (make a list)
- What were his/her relationships like? (Include family, friends, colleagues)
- Activities (make lists)
  - a. High school
  - b. College
  - c. Post College
- Plans for career
- Hopes and dreams
- What was happening in his/her personal life when he/she joined?

### ***In the Group***

- Has he/she mentioned any doubts/critiques about the group? (list)
- Are they in a leadership position (explain in detail)
- Length of involvement in the group
- Do they live with other members of the group?
- Do they have a job?
  - Is it group owned/operated
  - Do they work with other members of the group?
- How often do they participate in group activities?
- How much time per week?
- Do they visit home? What are visits like?
- Do they communicate with family/prior friends?
- Have relationships changed? How? (be specific)
- Is he/she giving money to the group?
  - Is it a contribution/tithe?
  - Do they pay for courses?
  - Do they turn over their check to the group?
  - How much are they spending?
- How much time does the individual spend praying, chanting or in meditation/guided visualization?

## **3. Family/Friends/Situation**

- Exactly what are your concerns? (list, be specific)
- If the group was not a “cult” would you still be concerned?

- What changes do you see? (list, be specific and be sure to include positive changes)
- Do you have support in your concern from other family members/friends?
- Have you been critical of the group to the group member?
- Make a list of the ways you can improve communication with the group member
- Make a list of the ways you can **demonstrate** to the group member that you love him/her unconditionally
- Make a list of the possible ways you can gain support from other family members/friends who may not be supportive at this time

Some of this information will be difficult or impossible to supply. For example, you may not be able to find out how much time the individual spends in altered states of consciousness without probing and alarming the individual. Always err on the side of safety and do not probe. Try to create an atmosphere of trust and encouragement so that the individual will trust enough to supply this information without probing. To ask him/her "how much time to you spend in altered states of consciousness" would be a sure tip off.

## Exit Counseling: A Practical Overview

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Exit counseling is a voluntary, intensive, time-limited, contractual educational process that emphasizes the respectful sharing of information with members of exploitatively manipulative groups, commonly called cults. Exit counseling is distinguished from deprogramming, which received much media coverage in the late 1970s and 1980s, in that the former is a voluntary process, whereas the latter is currently associated with a temporary restraint of the cultist.

Many exit counselors, including those contributing to this chapter, when referring to their services, prefer terms such as "cult information consultant." At least for the time being, however, "exit counseling" is the term that most people use when referring to voluntary interventions designed to help cultists reevaluate their commitment to a group. Exit counselings are usually initiated by a cult member's parents or spouse.

What does an exit counseling entail? Briefly, a parent or spouse concerned about a loved one's cult involvement will arrange for a face-to-face or telephone consultation with an exit counselor or an exit counseling "team." If the exit counselor deems the case appropriate and the client agrees, they will proceed. First, the parents or spouse must learn about cultic manipulations (especially those employed by their loved one's group) and communication patterns that may interfere with their relationship with the cultist. If necessary, they may participate in family counseling with mental health professionals or, in some cases, in consultation with the exit counselor. Next, the exit counselor and client will decide on how to most effectively persuade the cultist to speak with the exit counselor.

When the family introduces the exit counselor to the cultist, the counselor will usually present the matter (of the cult involvement) as a family problem, which indeed it is. The exit counselor asks the cultist to participate in a review of information that may help him and his family better understand and cope with their problems. If the cultist agrees, which occurs in most cases, the exit counselor may spend one to several days discussing cults and psychological manipulation, reviewing written material, watching and discussing videos, and discussing the relevance of this information to the cultist and the family. The exit counselor, although not hiding his or her views about cults, takes care not to pressure or manipulate the cultist, who decides how to respond to this information. The exit counselor respects the cultist's final decision, whether that decision is to stay in the group or leave. If the cultist leaves the group, the exit counselor will provide information on how to continue the educational process begun in the exit counseling and where to get help coping with post-cult problems.

Although there are different approaches to exit counseling, they all respond to the family or loved one's needs, and seek to help cultists by providing them with information they are unaware of. The ultimate goal of the form of exit counseling described in this chapter is to restore cultists' individual judgment and enhance informed self-determination, the goal is *not* to pressure them to leave their group. This approach can be called information-focused exit counseling. It is related to but nevertheless distinct from process-focused exit counseling, or what Hassan (1991)

calls "strategic intervention therapy," and from approaches that advance a particular theological agenda.

The approach described in this chapter presumes that families and loved ones who seek an exit counselor's assistance have six general needs bearing on their desire to help the cult-involved person. These are:

1. Identifying information relevant to assessment, decision making, and implementation of the family's action options
2. Effectively relating to the cultist
3. Assessing the nature, extent, and degree of destructiveness of the cultist's behavioral and personality changes
4. Exploring and evaluating options regarding intervention
5. Making a decision
6. Implementing the decision

### **Responding to Family Needs**

Before discussing the family's needs, it is important to clarify to whom the exit counselor is responsible and when. Until the exit counseling proper begins, the family (we include spouses in this category) is the client. A family seeks the exit counselor's assistance in order to determine how to most effectively help a loved one whose well-being is believed to be in jeopardy. If, after consulting with an exit counselor or other experts, the family decides that the most appropriate course of action is to try to persuade the loved one to talk to an exit counselor, the counselor should make it clear that when the exit counseling proper begins it is the cultist's welfare that is of paramount concern, rather than the family's. Although exit counseling is at heart a family intervention, exit counselors are not family advocates or agents who implement a family's wishes. They are consultants who provide information to help cultists make informed evaluations of their cult involvement.

### **Identifying Information**

By virtue of their expertise regarding cultic manipulations and the practices and beliefs of specific groups, exit counselors are often able to provide families with substantial information pertinent to their deliberations. They also direct families to written information (books, articles, reports), audio- and videotapes, and people and organizations with relevant expertise. The basic goal of this information is to help clients evaluate the group in question and its impact on their loved one.

Sometimes exit counselors are called upon to help clients whose loved one is in an unknown or little-known group. In such cases, exit counselors will try to help their clients identify means of collecting information. If exit counselors and their clients are not able to obtain sufficient information about the group, the exit counseling cannot proceed. This does not mean, obviously, that an exit counselor will not talk to a cultist in a little-known group. The interaction, however, will initially focus on collecting information from the cultist in order to assess the nature of his or her involvement. It is not, strictly speaking, exit counseling, which presumes that a particular group's harmful impact on a particular member has been established with reasonable confidence.

## Relating to the Cultist

Families who consult exit counselors usually relate reasonably well to their loved one in the cult. This is because some screening, even if only informal, occurs. Screening may be performed by the exit counselor, by referral sources, including helping professionals (clergy, mental health workers), or by individuals who have had a cult involvement or a family member in a cult. Referral sources realize that a successful exit counseling requires that the cultist's family members communicate with each other reasonably well, have the resources (including psychological) to effect an intervention, and be willing to explore honestly the pros and cons of an intervention. Referral sources who have some familiarity with the family's background will tend not to refer individuals for whom exit counseling is an inappropriate option.

We by no means want to imply that the families who proceed with an exit counseling are exceptional. They are, for the most part, average families who communicate with their loved one reasonably well. They can, nevertheless, often benefit from a professional family evaluation and from communication skills training (Langone, 1985; Ross & Langone, 1988). Indeed, we believe that the ideal model is that practiced by the cult clinics associated with the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York and Los Angeles (Addis, Schulman-Miller, & Lightman, 1984; Markowitz, 1989). In this model, families are interviewed by professionals, participate in support groups, and (when appropriate) are referred to exit counselors. The added family preparation clearly facilitates the exit counseling process. Although such professional preparation of families does not appear to be necessary for a successful exit counseling (most exit counselings do not involve such a level of preparation), the family's added psychological sophistication may contribute to the cultist's coping more effectively with post-cult problems. This hypothesis awaits testing by psychological researchers.

One should keep in mind that families' assessment of exit counselors may also function as a screening mechanism. In their research, families may request opinions from individuals who know exit counselors, or families may question exit counselors directly. If, for example, a family wants a helper who will be very controlling and focused on getting the cultist out of the group no matter what, the family is not likely to choose an exit counselor who subscribes to the educational, respectful approach described here. (Research comparing families who choose different types of actions (exit counseling, mental health consultation, waiting, deprogramming) might produce interesting and useful findings.) Some families, upon learning what an exit counseling requires, may decide that they lack the financial or personal resources necessary to carry out the exit counseling (for example, a husband and wife locked in disagreement about whether an intervention's probability of success makes it worth the effort of pursuing). Other families, even after being educated about cults and mind control, may be emotionally averse to sponsoring an exit counseling intervention because, for example, they fear the consequences of even asking their loved one to talk to the exit counselor. Thus, those families who engage the services of exit counselors may be a distinct subgroup of the general population of families seeking help for cult-related problems.

Because of such informal and formal screening, most families who hire exit counselors are able to participate in the process. They will tend to employ what Ross and Langone (1988) call the "learner-helper" style of family relating, rather than the "authoritarian" or the "laissez-faire" styles. According to Ross and Langone:

Parents taking the learner-helper approach might say, "We think our daughter is in trouble. We want to help her, if that's what's best for her. But first we need information, we need to learn, and we are willing to change our own views and behavior, if necessary, so that we can help. Whatever actions we take, we want to respect our child's integrity, autonomy, privacy, and ideals. We want to be as flexible and unimposing as possible." In essence, these parents want to help their daughter help herself. (1988, p. 46)

Those families who want to pursue an exit counseling but are not prepared to follow the learner-helper model will usually require special preparatory assistance, which can be provided by exit counselors or other professionals knowledgeable about cult issues. However, even those whose communication skills are not clearly deficient can also benefit from training in this area.

### Assessment

As noted earlier, exit counselors help families collect information pertinent to evaluating the group in question and its impact on the family's loved one. Exit counselors examine the following types of questions with the family. The family members answer these questions to the best of their ability.

- What is the name of the group?
- What information do you have about the group?
- What is the nature of your current relationship with your loved one?
- What specific behavioral, medical, or personality changes trouble you, for example, decreased frequency of contact, deterioration in school performance, decrease in sense of humor or warmth, changes in personal habits, marked changes in appearance?
- What actions have you taken thus far to try to help your loved one, for example, consulted with clergy or mental health professionals, attended family support group meetings, read relevant material?
- How do other members of the family feel about this problem?
- What can you tell me about significant aspects of your loved one's background, personality, and relationships with other family members, friends, authority figures, and so forth?
- What were the circumstances under which your loved one joined the group, including his or her psychological state?
- How deeply involved is the cultist?
- What is his or her status in the group?
- What is the nature and level of contact between family members and the cultist?
- What, if any, relationship have you had with members of the group, including the leader?
- What is the nature and level of the group's efforts to obstruct communication with the cultist?
- What aspects of the mainstream environment appeal to and repel the cultist?
- What aspects of the cult environment appeal to and repel the cultist?
- How do family members relate to the cultist?
- What role does the group play in producing the disturbing changes you have observed?

Some exit counselors (and mental health professionals who work with families) use questionnaires to collect specific information pertinent to the general questions listed above (Giambalvo, 1992; Hassan, 1988; Langone, 1983).

The most important question to discuss and answer is how the cultist has changed since joining the group, for concern about destructive changes is the family's ethical justification for considering an exit counseling (see Langone, 1985, and Langone & Martin, 1993, for a discussion of the ethics of a family intervention). Langone (1990) suggests using the following question to focus the assessment and distinguish valid from imagined or misunderstood concerns: "If your child (spouse) were not in a cult, what if anything would bother you about his or her changed behavior?" (p. 196).

After disturbing changes are identified, then the clients and the exit counselor can examine the group's role in producing these changes. The following is an example of the types of changes that trigger a family's alarm:

The cultist is a 22-year-old male attending an Ivy League school. He needs two more semesters in order to complete a degree in architecture and art. Prior to his involvement with a cultic "Christian" group he had a good relationship with his family, including a very close relationship with his older brother, was very friendly and outgoing with many friends, and had a fine sense of humor (a family characteristic). He had dated regularly in high school and early college. He had been raised in the Presbyterian Church and was a leader in his church youth group. He was very talented in art and music, and he practiced his music daily. Drawing and playing his musical instrument were his favorite leisure activities.

He had become involved with the group 14 months prior to the family's consulting the exit counselor. The family was struck by the following changes:

- His decreased sense of humor
- His judgmental attitude toward family members, especially his older brother
- His self-imposed isolation when visiting the family
- His lack of interest in music; he no longer played his musical instrument
- His talk centered around the Bible; he seemed constantly to be trying to convert his family
- He pressured the family to provide money for him to go on a "mission" to another continent
- He planned to drop out of school before completing his degree
- He had dropped most of his current courses and was barely passing the two remaining courses on his schedule
- He broke contact with all of his former friends
- He had stopped creating his artwork completely
- He no longer showed an interest in going to museums and plays
- He no longer attended Christmas services with his family, which had always been a family tradition
- He had moved out of the dormitory into an apartment with "brothers," where he slept on the floor
- He had lost weight

The changes the family observed in this case would be disturbing even if the young man were not in a cult. The case becomes appropriate for exit counseling when there is reason to believe that the disturbing changes result to a large degree from the group's unethical influence on the family member. Sometimes psychological or psychiatric consultation with a cult-aware mental health professional may be called for if there is reason to suspect that a psychological disorder may contribute significantly to the troubling behavior.

It is interesting to note that in this particular case the background information revealed a significant fact to the exit counselor, who was familiar with this particular group: Because the cultist had to pay for his own mission trip, he was not in a leadership position. Such facts, which require an exit counselor's specialized knowledge to discern, can sometimes have important implications in planning the exit counseling.

### Exploring Options

The assessment process is designed to help families make an informed evaluation of their options, which can be broken down into three categories:

1. The family may conclude that an exit counseling will not be appropriate, at least for the foreseeable future, for example, because the family has little hope of arranging a meeting between the cultist and the exit counselor, or because serious psychological issues must be addressed first. The family may, however, try to identify and pursue a strategy of gradually improving communication and rapport with the cultist. Or in some instances the family may have to accept and cope with a static, though unacceptable, situation. Those families who are unable to pursue an exit counseling will often benefit from consultation with mental health professionals familiar with cult issues.
2. The family may conclude that an exit counseling will not be appropriate in the near future but may become appropriate sometime down the road. In such cases the exit counselor will help the family prepare over time for an unscheduled, though planned, exit counseling. The exit counselor and the family may work on improving communication and building rapport (or the exit counselor may refer the family to a mental health professional for communication training). They may continue to collect information in order to refine their assessment. And they may regularly discuss changes in the cultist's situation and factor these changes into their assessment and preliminary plan.
3. The family may decide to pursue an intervention. Sometimes interventions can be set up quickly; sometimes several months may have to elapse. Reasons for delays are diverse: The cultist may be in another state and will not be able to come home for several months. The exit counselor's schedule may require a long wait. A key family member may not agree with or may have strong doubts about the planned intervention. Or the family may require more time than usual to prepare for the intervention.



## **Making a Decision**

The exit counselor stresses to families that no matter what choice they make, there are simply no guarantees with regard to the outcome. Many cultists ultimately leave their groups voluntarily, so even if the family does nothing, the cultist may at some point leave the group, although he or she may have many cult-related problems to contend with after departure. Sometimes exit counselings must be aborted for various reasons, for example, the cult suddenly forbids the cultist from visiting the family.

Although some relevant statistical estimates are available regarding the outcome of exit counselings, such statistics must be applied cautiously when estimating the probability of success for a particular exit counseling at a particular time. Generally speaking, most exit counselors believe that when the cultist gives exit counselors sufficient time to present their information (usually about three days) the person will decide to leave the cult about 90% of the time. If the cultist does not give the exit counselors sufficient time but does listen to their information to some extent, informal estimates indicate that about 60% will decide to eventually leave the group. However, there is no way of confidently predicting in advance whether or not a particular cultist (1) will give the exit counselor sufficient time, and (2) if so, whether or not he or she will be among the 90% who leave or the 10% who remain in the group.

Langone (1984) conducted a study of the outcomes of deprogrammings. In his sample of 62 deprogrammings, 63% of the cases resulted in the cultist leaving the group. Of the 37% who returned to the cult, 25% later left on their own. Although such formally collected data do not exist for exit counselings, the informal estimates noted above suggest that the overall probability of success is somewhat higher. It should be kept in mind, however, that the two populations may not be identical. Families who decide to pursue a deprogramming and the cult-involved loved one of such families may differ in important respects from those families and cultists who participate in an exit counseling. Further study is needed.

## **Effecting the Intervention**

Giambalvo (1992) provides detailed, practical guidelines for families contemplating an exit counseling. She discusses the following preintervention issues:

- What not to say or do
- What to do
- Information gathering
- Readings
- Identifying the exit counseling team
- Family Preparation Session
- Timing and location
- Travel arrangements, accommodations, and meals
- Identifying the family team
- The pre-intervention family meeting
- Suggestions for presenting the plan to the cultist
- What to expect during the intervention
- Breaks/time schedule
- Possible exchanges that may occur
- Length of intervention

- Rehabilitation/reentry facilities
- Future plans

Giambalvo's philosophy of the family intervention holds for the point of view advanced in this chapter as well:

Family interventions are based on an educational model. The cultist has been a victim of a sophisticated set of manipulations. Once she or he becomes aware of these manipulations, basic integrity will usually not allow the cultist to remain a part of a system that victimizes others -- no matter how lofty the goals.

The material is to be presented in a manner that shows respect for the cultist's dignity. In particular, it is important to be sensitive to the emotional trauma the cultist may undergo while confronting these issues. Material is to be put forth at a pace that allows the cultist to assimilate the information and, simultaneously, deal with its emotional impact.

The goal is for the client to reevaluate his or her commitment to the group. Although parents and exit counselors may hope that [the cultist] chooses to leave [the group], leaving is not the goal. *Informed* choice is the goal.

Once a person understands mind-control techniques, that person has the basic tools with which to sort out these issues and deal with them. But there is much less time involved and much less stress on the individual if she or he has had the opportunity for exit counseling and rehabilitation. It is imperative that family [members] understand this whole process so they can be supportive to the cultist. (1992, pp. 29-30)

### Phases of the Intervention

The phases discussed below are not sequential, clear-cut steps or stages. They are aspects of a long and involved give-and-take in which movement is largely a function of the cultist's comfort level. Exit counselors share information (such as personal knowledge, published information, internal documents from the group, video- and audiotapes, personal reports of ex-members of the group), and cultists process this information as they are able and willing. Although the specific content of the information exit counselors share will vary from case to case and from exit counselor to exit counselor, it usually involves the following:

- The family concerns that led to the exit counseling
- The nature of mind control, for understanding mind control is relevant to understanding the factors that gave rise to the loved one's behaviors that concern the family
- Doctrinal, ideological, and organizational issues that relate to mind control, including information not generally available to the cultist, such as an analysis of internal documents of the group
- Common post-cult difficulties and helping resources

Presentation of this information is not mechanical or didactic. Exit counselors understand how cultic manipulations can distort the interpretive functions of cultists and, therefore, know how to present the information with sensitivity and tact.

## The Exit Counselor's Introduction

At the beginning of the intervention proper the family introduces the exit counselor(s) to the cultist. Exit counselors will try to put the cultist at ease by explaining their purposes. Exit counselors stress that they are there to respond to a family-wide concern resulting from the person's cult involvement. Exit counselors' specialized knowledge enables them to communicate and explain this concern. They do not deny that there may be many genuinely good points about the cultist's group involvement. In order to establish rapport, which is vital, exit counselors must communicate that they are honest and willing to listen. From the exit counselor's perspective, however, a cultist does not have enough information to make an informed evaluation of the group. Moreover, prolonged contact with the group may have diminished the cultist's capacity to think critically and make genuinely autonomous decisions. The exit counselor's main objective is to review pertinent information *with* the cultist and the family, not to argue or "persuade." The information will speak for itself. The cultist will decide what impact this information will have on his or her life.

Although some exit counselors are more willing than others to engage in debate or rational argument, they (if they are behaving ethically) do not harangue or denigrate the cultist. In other words, ethical exit counselors do not engage in the kinds of assaultive "confrontation" sometimes associated with certain intense forms of drug "counseling" and some cultic groups. Some confrontation may be used, however, in response to the cultist's attacking the family or the exit counselors with confrontational techniques learned in the cult.

## Hostility, Denial, and Dissociation

Although a cultist may exhibit hostility, denial, and dissociation at any point during the exit counseling, these reactions are most commonly observed during the early stage of the intervention. Despite exit counselors' sincerest attempts to be respectful and open-minded, a cultist will typically display at least a muted hostility. Cultists may, for example, demand more information about the backgrounds of the exit counselors, which they will provide.

During these give-and-take discussions, a cultist will often deny or dissociate certain facts or memories (saying, for example, "I keep in touch with my family just as often as I always did"). In denial, the fact or memory is suppressed or reinterpreted in a way that makes for a tacit suppression. A dim awareness remains. Later, when the cultist no longer feels a need to deny, he or she can "take back" what was said earlier. Dubrow-Eichel (1989), for example, notes in his discussion of a Hare Krishna deprogramming that the cultist initially denied lying to get money from people but later openly acknowledged it. Similarly, in the film *Moonchild*, the cultist initially responds to a claim that he lied to people by saying, "You cannot tell the truth to people who are not prepared to hear it." Later he acknowledged that what he did was indeed lying.

At the time of denial, cultists are not *consciously* lying, even though what they say is a lie. Denial, as we use the term, is an unconscious deception; lying is a conscious deception.

The fundamental denial which must be dealt with in an exit counseling is the tendency for a cultist to deny, through repression or extreme reinterpretations of experience, that lies occur at all. Cultists are so indoctrinated with the belief that the end justifies the means that they will tend not to see lies as lies but will rationalize them as "heavenly deception," "transcendental trickery," or whatever. Helping the cultist acknowledge one lie, however small, can set the stage for questioning the fundamental assumption that neither the group nor the individual member lies. Once the cultist begins to question this assumption, the person is much more capable of recognizing the countless deceptions upon which cultic groups depend.

In dissociation cultists don't suppress facts or memories; they simply do not have access to them -- even if only temporarily -- because these facts or memories are "split off" from consciousness. Although dissociation has causes, these causes are not typically motivational in character, as is the case in denial and lying. During rituals that utilize hypnotic practices, for example, cultists may not register -- may not "encode" -- certain experiences or aspects of the experience, for example, that a leader's intoning "You and I are one" during a training session may subtly cause the cultist to unknowingly take on the leader's identity. The cultist's saying, during an exit counseling, that the leader was not being manipulative during a particular event under discussion may indeed be absolutely honest from the cultist's perspective. There is no denial of an unpleasant truth. There simply was never any awareness of manipulation inherent in the event.

Cultists can often, in retrospect, begin to "put things together" and see how the cult's trance-inducing practices and denigration of reflective, critical thinking reduced their awareness. This leads to many former cultists' not being able to describe precisely when and how they came to accept certain aspects of the group's doctrines or ideology. These processes are dissociated, are split off from their consciousness.

Although distinguishing denial from dissociation is sometimes difficult, it is important to keep the distinction in mind because each requires a different approach if the person's critical thinking skills are to be awakened. Patience is probably the most effective way to deal with denial. Exit counselors tend to tolerate the cultist's denial and simply continue to share information. At some point when the cultist begins to make connections, the exit counselor can return to the initially denied item and review it again. As the cultist's understanding grows, his or her need to deny diminishes. With regard to dissociation, the process is similar in that patient presentation of information is required. In dissociation, however, a special type of information -- that is, mind-control tactics related to hypnotic practices -- must often be discussed before the cultist can begin to understand why his or her awareness was diminished. The point under discussion when the dissociation initially took place is reviewed in order to analyze and possibly reinterpret the remembered experience, not to confront it more honestly.

## **Resistance**

The cultist's demonstrating resistance to the exit counselor's information is a positive sign for it is weaker than denial in that the person simply tries to avoid the subject, rather than deny it. Signs of resistance typically include changing the subject or nitpicking.

Exit counselors respect the emotional message of resistance: "This information makes me uncomfortable." They don't push the client because (1) their approach is premised upon respect for the client, and (2) pushing is likely to raise the client's fear level and increase the likelihood that the client will resort to denial as a means of dealing with emotional discomfort. Instead, the exit counselor will simply make a mental note of the resistance and proceed with the discussion of the information. When a return to the subject is appropriate, it can be discussed again. When the cultist is no longer threatened by the information, the resistance will evaporate.

## Interest

When the cultist begins to ask questions about the information and request additional information, that person is exhibiting interest, which is definitely a sign of further progress. Other signs of interest include a change in the quality of the relationship--for example, muted hostility changing to warmth, appreciation, friendliness; examining literature without being asked; staying awake to read materials after the exit counselors have retired.

## Participation

Participation is, in a sense, interest compounded. In addition to requesting information, the cultist who is "participating" *gives* information, for example, discussing concern for a friend in the group or revealing things about the group that heretofore had been denied. Although the cultist may still disagree with the exit counselor (who seeks an open, questioning mind, and does not require agreement), the disagreement tends not to be hostile. At this point the cultist is participating in the *search* for truth, not simply responding positively or negatively to the exit counselor's information.

When truly participating in the exit counseling, cultists begin to stop seeing the world in black and white. They show a capacity to look at events from multiple points of view. They begin to see the internal logic to be found in alternate points of view, including those with which they disagree. This is a critical change, for the cult typically presents its view as the only one with merit. When cultists realize that the cult view is merely one point of view, they are able to begin seeing the pros *and* cons of that point of view. The exit counselor's goal during this phase is not to push a particular point of view on the cultist. Rather, it is to help the person see the positives and negatives of different points of view in order to lay the groundwork for a coherent, self-chosen, and informed perspective.

## Making Connections

When the cultist spontaneously begins to make connections between bits of information, participation has reached a very positive level. The person not only begins to see the pros and cons of different perspectives but also begins to evaluate and compare them and at least begins to create the coherent, self-chosen, and informed point of view that is the sign of an exit counseling's success. The cultist begins to *think* independently.

Ironically, longer-term members often tend to respond more quickly to the exit counselor's information because they have had some opportunity to see the cult's "dark side." Recent joiners who are still in the "honeymoon phase" will often

have more difficulty attributing credibility to the exit counselor's information because it seems so incompatible with their own experience.

Signs that clients are making connections include the following:

- They begin to see the outside world in a way that reveals an appreciation, as well as a recognition, of different perspectives. For example, rather than seeing the family's setting up the exit counseling as an evil desire to control (the "black" view of the cult), they will recognize it as a multifaceted act of love and will begin to feel some appreciation, some gratitude even, for the family's actions.
- They begin to truly recognize that they were victimized and, as a consequence, come to understand how they had been manipulated into misinterpreting their family's past actions.
- They spontaneously relate new information to the subtle influence techniques associated with mind control, saying, for example, "That's an example of a message within a metaphor."
- They spontaneously volunteer examples of how their group used mind-control techniques.
- They begin to recognize and acknowledge instances of denial, resistance, and dissociation.
- They begin to see alternatives to the group, not only as intellectual alternatives, but as *real choices* that they have the capacity to make.

When a client begins to exhibit these behaviors and insights, departure from the group becomes very likely. If the exit counseling was based on a correct assumption -- that is, that the cultist was adversely affected by a highly manipulative group -- rarely will the cultist freely decide to return to the group. Usually those who do go back to the cult do so because of very strong interpersonal bonds with other members, a belief that they will be able to use their knowledge of mind control to maintain a reasonable level of autonomy even in a powerful group, or a profound discouragement about their capacity to build a new life outside the group.

Although they obviously have a preference, exit counselors respect whatever choices clients make. If a person chooses to remain in the group, the exit counselor will remind him or her -- and the family -- that the cultist now has knowledge that can be used to strengthen his or her autonomy and improve family relationships. If the client chooses to leave the group, which occurs in the great majority of cases that reach the "making connections" phase, the exit counselor will provide information about what lies ahead and which resources can help.

### **A Note on Fees**

Exit counselors typically charge between \$500 and \$1000 a day, plus expenses -- a fee schedule similar to that of many other consultants. Individuals unfamiliar with consulting fees are sometimes taken aback by these figures. Several points, however, should be kept in mind in evaluating these fees. First, exit counselors -- even more than most consultants -- must put in long hours keeping abreast of developments pertaining to cults. They are not paid for this time. Second, many exit counselors do not charge for preliminary phone time. Third, many offer free consultations or workshops for former cultists. Fourth, their typical paid workday is 12 to 16 hours in length, and they are often "on call." Fifth, most exit counselors

annually devote hundreds of hours to public and professional educational activities. Sixth, exit counselors are frequently targets of verbal abuse, harassment, and, at minimum, the threat of spurious lawsuits. Lastly, exit counselors have specialized knowledge and skills that require years of study and preparation, including, in most cases, a personal cult experience. One does not become a competent exit counselor merely by "taking courses."

### Exit Counseling and Deprogramming

The only necessary distinction between exit counseling and deprogramming is that the latter physically confines the cultist, at least initially, in the home, a hotel room, a cabin, or some other convenient and private location. This distinction, however, tends to cause three further differences between exit counseling and deprogramming.

First, exit counselors *must* be capable of quickly establishing a rapport with the cultist; otherwise the person would simply leave. Even though some deprogrammers are as respectful and polite as exit counselors, the deprogramming situation does not *require* that they behave this way. Therefore, some deprogrammers may be unnecessarily confrontational.

Second, because of the physical confinement, cultists involved in a deprogramming are much more likely to become enraged than they would during an exit counseling. They may curse and insult the deprogrammers and their parents. They may threaten revenge. They may become physically violent. They may even attempt suicide or physically harm themselves in order to get to a hospital, from where they can call their cult leaders. Such behavior can test the patience of even the most mild-mannered deprogrammer, and in cases with a confrontational deprogrammer may lead to a destructive escalation of harsh words and behavior. Indeed, even though most deprogrammings may be successful in that the cultist leaves the group (Langone, 1984), psychotherapists who work with ex-cultists have noted many instances in which a "successful" deprogramming had harmful aftereffects.

Third, some, but not all, deprogrammers act as though cultists are so deeply under the "spell" of cults that physical confinement is necessary in order to persuade them to listen to information not available in the cult. Although this point of view may sometimes be true, the success of exit counseling suggests that often this is not the case. One may conclude, therefore, that the deprogramming situation tends to exaggerate the power and malevolence of cults. This, especially in combination with the emotions engendered by a deprogramming, results in a tendency for deprogrammers to focus on attacking the group and the group leader much more than exit counselors do. It also results in a tendency for deprogrammers to require, for all intents and purposes, that the cultist come to accept the deprogrammer's assumption of powerful mind control; otherwise the cultist's physical confinement would not have been justified. Although this process may resemble in some ways the mind control it seeks to undo, it differs in two very important respects: Deprogrammers do not seek to persuade cultists to adopt the deprogrammer's personal belief systems, nor do they seek to control the cultist's behavior after the deprogramming is over. As one deprogrammer put it, "I don't believe in vegetarianism, but I'm not out to make [the cultist] eat meat" (Dubrow-Eichel, 1989, p. 25).



Although most exit counselors reject deprogramming because of ethical and practical concerns, many recognize that in certain special cases deprogramming may be an ethical last resort for parents. Sometimes families may not believe that an exit counseling will work and feel that deprogramming is their only viable option for helping a loved one whom they believe to be in imminent physical danger. Sometimes groups may send members to foreign countries or refuse to tell families where they are, in which case families may opt for a deprogramming when they do finally locate their loved one. Sometimes cultists may exhibit psychotic behavior or become medically ill as a result of their group involvement, in which case deprogramming may be ethically and legally defensible.

If parents believe that deprogramming is their only viable option, they should realize that should legal entanglements arise (for example, the deprogramming fails and the child or the cult sues and/or files criminal charges), the burden of justification will fall upon the parents and the deprogrammers. Often parents and deprogrammers who are sued or arrested will rely on variations of the necessity defense, which maintains that the harm resulting from the cult involvement justifies the extreme action of deprogramming. Sometimes this or other defenses are accepted by the legal system, but sometimes they are rejected. Parents should also keep in mind that even successful legal defenses can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Langone and Martin (1993), who discuss ethical and legal implications of deprogramming and exit counseling, suggest that the greater the danger to the cultist and the lower the probability of success of less-restrictive alternatives, the greater will be the ethical defensibility of a deprogramming. Ethical defensibility, however, does not guarantee legal leniency.

Part of the controversial nature of deprogramming stems from actual abuses of the process. Although cult propaganda about deprogramming is often ridiculously hysterical (e.g., comparing deprogramming to the tortures of the inquisition!), instances of sexual or physical abuse are not unknown.

### **Varied Approaches Within the Exit Counseling Field**

All exit counseling approaches depend upon building rapport with cultists in order to help them make a more informed evaluation about their cult involvement, which exit counselors view as an exploitatively manipulative situation (otherwise they wouldn't conduct the exit counseling). Hassan (1988) contends that cultists are in a trap that (1) they did not choose (we would qualify this statement by saying that their choice was not informed and was manipulated), (2) is similar to traps experienced by cultists in other groups, and (3) is possible to get out of. For Hassan the exit counselor's job is to bring about behavior change in cultists in order to lead them out of their traps. In a paper distributed at the Cult Awareness Network's 1991 National Conference, Hassan (1991) said that exit counselors, in contrast to deprogrammers, "effect change with finesse not force."

This statement includes the three key variables that not only distinguish deprogramming from exit counseling but also distinguish varieties of exit counseling. As noted above exit counseling is distinguished from deprogramming by the lack of force and all that it entails. Exit counseling approaches differ among themselves



according to the degree to which they seek to *effect* change, versus *invite* change, and the degree to which they rely on the deliberate use of *technique*, that is, "finesse," versus the degree to which they rely on *information*. Our approach differs from others in that we believe that the exit counselor's approach ought to be to invite change by sharing information, rather than to effect change through the skillful use of technique.

The word *ought* in the preceding sentence was chosen deliberately. Our concerns result from ethical judgments, not judgments about the efficacy of approaches that stress effecting change. We do not claim that our approach is more effective. No scientific data exist to support the efficacy of one form of exit counseling compared to another. Nor do we suggest that other approaches are unethical. In some respects, however, approaches emphasizing the effecting of change do trouble us.

Our disagreement with change-oriented approaches parallels disagreements among Christians who have examined the ethics of evangelization. In a special issue of the *Cultic Studies Journal* devoted to this subject ("Cults, Evangelicals," 1985), all contributors agreed that ethical considerations should restrain social influence, regardless of its efficacy -- that is, the end does not justify the means. They disagreed, however, on where the ethical boundary should be drawn. Mark McCloskey of Campus Crusade emphasized persuasion: "The Christian communicator, then, is an unashamed and conscientious persuader -- unashamed because of the good news of our message and conscientious because of the urgency of our message" (1985, p. 308).

Father James LeBar (1985), on the other hand, emphasized "invitation," rather than "persuasion," as did Rev. A. Duane Litfin of Dallas Seminary: "As the appointed messenger he [the preacher] is responsible for seeing that all hear and that, to the best of his ability, all understand. But the response of the hearers is not the messenger's affair. He is not called upon to persuade the hearers to respond" (1985, p. 272).

Because cultists have been victimized by groups that rely on high-pressure persuasion, we feel that, although exit counselors cannot absolutely avoid persuasive communications, they should not center the exit counseling on persuasion. The exit counselors should not feel obligated to "effect change." Nor, as a consequence, should they feel obligated to master the skills of persuasive communication in order to achieve the requisite "finesse" to effect change. Exit counselors should focus on presenting pertinent information in a way that makes it comprehensible to the cultist. Being honest human beings they should not, and cannot, hide their preference -- that the cultist decide to leave the group. However, their preference should be communicated as an open invitation, rather than function as a hidden agenda.

Hassan is the most prominent exit counselor with whose approach we disagree in some ways. Calling his approach "strategic intervention therapy," Hassan (1988) stresses that, although he too tries to communicate a body of information to cultists and to help them think independently, he also does formal counseling: "For me, encouraging the person to think for himself was paramount and that I was careful not to impose my own belief system on a client. My role was to present information, to do individual and family counseling as needed, and to facilitate family communication" (p. 115). He further states that his approach focuses "on the

process of change" (p. 123), is family-centered, and rests on four core beliefs about people: (1) "people need and want to grow," (2) "people focus on the here and now," (3) "people will always choose what they think is best for them at any given time," and (4) "everyone is unique and every situation is different" (pp. 121-122).

These four core beliefs are vague and rather standard fare for counseling approaches within the field of humanistic psychology. As with many humanistic counseling approaches, Hassan's runs the risk of imposing clarity, however subtly, on the framework's foundational ambiguity and thereby manipulating the client. Hassan says: "My approach depends on having faith that deep, deep down even the most committed member of a mind control group wants out" (1988, p. 122). This assumption may be true. But it also implies that the counselor knows better than the cultist what the latter *really* wants -- which also may be true. If not extremely careful, however, the counselor may in fact manipulate the cultist from point A ("I'll talk to you because my family requested it") to point B ("I want to leave the cult") while mistakenly believing that he or she is helping the cultist "grow" by effecting the changes that the cultist really wants deep, deep down. The ethical propriety of such manipulation is made even more dubious by the fact that the cultist has not *sought out* the exit counselor's assistance.

In information-focused exit counseling, we tell cultists that our goal is to share information and that our methods will include discussion, videos, and the examination of written documents. We intentionally avoid the use of counseling techniques designed to change the person's behavior because doing so entails pursuing an unstated goal to which the client has not given his or her approval. Whatever techniques we use are educational, designed to enhance the communication of information, not to change behavior.

Some might argue that our ethical restraints decrease the probability of getting the cultist out. This may be true, although our experience indicates otherwise and no scientific evidence exists that would argue one way or the other. But even if there were such evidence, we could not in good conscience *invite* cultists to return to a free society while violating one of its central tenets: that the end does not justify the means.

Hassan (personal communication with M. Langone, December 17, 1992) says that our critique exaggerates the manipulateness of his approach. He is aware of the danger of manipulation in strategic intervention therapy, or in any therapeutic approach for that matter, and tries to minimize this danger by taking a step-by-step approach to helping the cultist "grow." Instead of trying to move the cultist from point A to point B (a goal established by the counselor), Hassan tries first to identify the implicit goal the cultist has at point A (let us call this goal, "A.1"), then tries to help the person achieve this goal. He next identifies the next implicit goal (let us call this goal, "A.2"), and counsels the cultist to achieve that goal. And so on. The cultist may or may not arrive at point B ("I want to leave the cult"). By staying focused only on the immediate present, Hassan can take a change-oriented approach to exit counseling without necessarily becoming blatantly manipulative. Furthermore, to the extent possible, he tries to structure the exit counseling as a family counseling situation so that the cultist's goals and needs are inextricably connected to the goals and needs of other family members. This will necessarily illuminate conflict areas, for example, the cultist's desire for his or her family's love and approval versus the family's need for greater contact with the cultist. Working out these conflicts one at a time can lead the cultist farther and farther from the cult.

Despite these clarifications of Hassan's approach, we still have several concerns. First of all, Hassan's sensitivity to the potential for manipulation in his approach is not clearly communicated in his writings. We trust that this will be corrected in future writings. Second, exit counselors, would-be exit counselors, and mental health professionals who rely on Hassan's writings may not be sufficiently sensitive to the potential for manipulation. They may as a result depend more on effecting change than inviting change. Third, even when practiced in its most pure form, strategic intervention therapy is still overly intrusive. As Ofshe and Singer point out (1986), cults manipulate central elements of cultists' selves. Respecting the magnitude and pain of this "mind rape" requires, in our view, that exit counselors lean very heavily on the side of inviting, rather than effecting, change. Fourth, subordinating the exit counseling to a family counseling structure is usually not necessary for a successful exit counseling.

It is quite possible, however, that due to a self-selection process families who think they need a family counseling approach may be inclined to engage Hassan's services, while families who are not as interested in a family counseling approach may seek out information-focused exit counselors. To the extent families are making informed decisions -- and it is the responsibility of all exit counselors to help families make informed decisions -- the existence of different approaches to exit counseling is a plus for "consumers" because they have more choices.

We have been able to critique Hassan in such detail because he has written so clearly about his approach, for which we commend him. There is another change-focused approach to exit counseling that also troubles us in certain respects, but about which nothing has been written. This approach seeks not only to *effect* changes that bring cultists out of their cults but that also lead them toward a particular theological perspective or faith. Again, the distinction between "invitation" and "persuasion" is central, and again we come down on the side of "invitation."

Most of the information on which our concerns are based is anecdotal and unconfirmed. Therefore, we do not want to criticize anyone in particular. We would rather that our critique be used as a framework with which to evaluate certain approaches to exit counseling. We also want to make clear that these change-focused theological approaches can be Christian, Jewish, or even non-Western (several cultic groups, for example, have had programs aimed at helping people in cults, such as the Rajneesh group). We also want to stress that we are *not* criticizing evangelical ministries that focus on cultists (Enroth & Melton, 1985). Preaching the Gospel to cultists may sometimes result in their leaving their cults. Our concern is with persons who preach the Gospel (or push other theological agendas) in a manipulative way within the context of an exit counseling. We do not define exit counseling so broadly as to include any communications that may contribute to a person's deciding to leave a cult.

Admittedly, we are in a gray area. An evangelist may capture the interest of a cultist while talking on the street and may, as a hypothetical example, engage in a lengthy, intensive dialogue that might resemble the information-focused exit counseling described here. In a similar way, a good Samaritan of any faith may begin talking to a suicidal person on a street and wind up doing something resembling what mental health professionals would call a "crisis intervention." However, neither the evangelist nor the good Samaritan has a professional relationship with the person on the street. Exit counselors do have professional

relationships with their clients. This is a vital distinction because professional relationships have ethically grounded boundaries.

We believe that change-focused exit counselings with theological agendas are inappropriate because they contradict the assumption on which all exit counseling rests, that is, informed consent. A cultist who has followed a group for several years, for example, is asked to give the exit counselor several days to examine information that may affect his or her evaluation of the group in question. The family's appeal is that the cultist make an *informed* evaluation. How can an exit counselor advocate the vital importance of informed decisions and simultaneously suggest that the cultist move from one religious perspective (with which he has at least a one-sided understanding) -- however cultic -- to another -- however traditional -- on the basis of what may be no more than a few hours or at most a few days of discussion? This rhetorical question becomes even more pointed when one considers that most cultists remain psychologically vulnerable and suggestible for some time after leaving their groups. Cultists are accustomed to letting authority figures make major life decisions for them. Exit counselors, if they are to remain ethical, must not exploit this vulnerability by implicitly taking the place of cult authority figures and manipulating the cultist -- however subtly -- to follow such and such a faith.

Some have criticized information-focused exit counselors because the information they share may contribute to a person's renouncing a cult, without embracing another religious belief system. This is a valid criticism, but it overlooks the vital fact that exit counseling, as a professional relationship, has boundaries. Exit counseling focuses on helping cultists make informed decisions regarding their relationship to a cult. It may also address their relationship to God when the cult has exploited, obscured, or distorted this relationship. This is not to say that cultists' relationship to God is unimportant. On the contrary, resolving spiritual issues is the most difficult and important task for many, if not most, former cultists. The depth and importance of this spiritual need, however, demands extensive study, dialogue, contemplation, and deliberation. It would be arrogantly simplistic for exit counselors to claim that in a few days they can help a cultist make an informed evaluation of a cult involvement *and* make an informed decision about post-cult religious commitments. Resolving these spiritual issues is part of the *recovery* process, not exit counseling. Clergy -- especially pastoral counselors -- should be the primary helpers for former cultists grappling with spiritual issues.

Similarly, substantial psychological change also takes time and effort. An exit counseling does not cause substantial psychological change. It merely provides information that is a catalyst for change, that *awakens* cultists, who are then able to make genuine choices originating from within rather than without. A reliance upon psychological "techniques" in exit counseling may ultimately make it more difficult for cultists to determine whether or not the choices they made in the exit counseling were indeed theirs, rather than the exit counselor's.

### Closing Comment

Information, especially that related to mind control, is the key that unlocks cultists' minds. Exit counseling as we conceive it is merely the means by which that information is made available. Exit counselors are not psychological alchemists. Nor are they spiritual wonder-workers. They are simply human beings sharing what they know with other human beings.

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# **Ethical Standards for Thought Reform Consultants**

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## **Abstract**

A group of thought reform consultants, popularly known as exit counselors, propose detailed ethical standards to guide this new profession. In addition to a preamble, these standards include sections on the responsibility of consultants toward professionalism, toward clients, and toward the public. The second section outlines standards pertaining to the consulting relationship, confidentiality and records, and financial matters. The third section is divided into subsections on educational programs and advertising and presentation to the public.

## **Editor's Preface**

In the mid-1970s increasing numbers of parents began to consult mental health professionals and clergy about their adult children's involvements in new religious groups that many called cults. Parents reported that formerly well-adjusted and engaged young adults (many were college students) changed radically, sometimes over a short period of time. These young adults typically dropped out of school, shunned their families and friends, and devoted themselves full time to working for these strange new groups to which they had pledged their total allegiance. Many parents concluded that their children had undergone a type of brainwashing.

Unfortunately for these parents, few helping professionals took their concerns seriously. Most assumed that these parents were overprotective or that their children were merely "going through a phase." But a handful of professionals, including Dr. John Clark on the East Coast and Dr. Margaret Thaler Singer on the West Coast, listened to the parents and began to speak out publicly. Soon, small and loosely organized groups of parents began to form in different parts of the country.

Several of these groups joined together to form the Citizens Freedom Foundation (CFF), later renamed the Cult Awareness Network (CAN). CAN became the leading grassroots organization for this movement. One informal group in Massachusetts gave birth, so to speak, to the American Family Foundation (AFF) [currently ICSA – International Cultic Studies Association], which has become the leading professional organization concerned with cults and psychological manipulation. Both AFF and CFF/CAN were chartered in 1979.

While these groups were developing, parents were doing what they could to rescue their children and sometimes other family members from what were perceived as dangerous situations. Through trial and error, the controversial process of deprogramming developed. In the 1970s, for many parents, deprogramming became the preferred means of rescuing a cult member. Although initially the term *deprogramming* encompassed interventions that were voluntary (the cult member

was free to leave at any time) and involuntary (restraint was used for at least part of the time), in time the term came to refer primarily to involuntary interventions. Much confusion occurs today when people mistakenly use deprogramming in its original sense because they unintentionally give the impression that they are talking about involuntary interventions when in fact they may be referring to voluntary interventions.

Even though incorrect, the widespread belief among many parents that (involuntary) deprogramming was their best, if not their only option was not as unreasonable at that time as it seems today. This belief was so widely held and so supported by media accounts that several state legislatures considered conservatorship legislation, which would have enabled the parents of a cult member to legally extricate him or her for psychiatric evaluation. Such legislation was tantamount to a legalization of deprogramming. Though arousing passionate opposition, this legislation garnered significant support. In New York state, for example, the legislature twice passed the legislation, only to have it vetoed by the governor. Ultimately, however, the opposition to deprogramming and the growing recognition of the effectiveness of less restrictive alternatives ended all legislative efforts for conservatorship bills.

Deprogramming was controversial because it involved forcing a cult member to listen to people relate information not available in the cults. Cult members were sometimes abducted from the street; although more commonly they were simply prevented from leaving their homes, a vacation cabin, a motel room, or whatever location was chosen for the deprogramming process. Deprogrammings often succeeded in extricating the family member from the cult; one study found a success rate of 63%.<sup>\*</sup> Nevertheless, deprogrammings failed more often than many persons realized; and sometimes lawsuits were filed against parents and deprogrammers.

Deprogrammings were arranged through informal, quasi-underground means. Much secrecy surrounded the process for many years. Mental health professionals were almost always "out of the loop"--in part because most did not want to become involved for ethical and legal reasons and in part because their expertise was to a large extent irrelevant to the deprogramming itself. The main role of the mental health professional was to help families cope with their alarm about a family member in a cult and to help former cult members and their families cope with the many problems that accompanied reentry into mainstream society. However, sometimes mental health professionals, clergy persons, or former cult members were able to persuade those still in a cult to talk voluntarily about their cult involvements. Sometimes these conversations resulted in a decision to leave the cult.

Because of these successes, the legal risks entailed in deprogramming, and the ethical discomfort many parents and deprogrammers felt, non-coercive means of helping cult members reevaluate their cult affiliations began to get more attention. By the mid-1980s it had become clear to many persons that what had come to be called exit counseling was at least as effective as deprogramming and certainly was much less risky--psychologically as well as legally. A few individuals committed themselves to doing exit counseling and refused to do "involuntaries."

Even within the exit counseling field, further branching off has occurred. Some tend to be technique oriented and/or advance a particular religious perspective. Others

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<sup>\*</sup> M.D. Langone. (1984). Deprogramming: An analysis of parental questionnaires. *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1(1), 63B78.

are information oriented. They introduce themselves as individuals with important information. Although they may have a preference regarding how the cult member chooses to respond to that information, they take pains to avoid manipulating the cult member.

During the past few years, some exit counselors, who prefer to be known as thought reform consultants, have been trying to professionalize their field by establishing ethical and competency criteria. Although this process of professionalization continues, the following set of ethical standards developed by a group of exit counselors demonstrates how much this field has developed during the past 20 years.

Comments are welcome.

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## Ethical Standards for Thought Reform Consultants

Thought reform includes the use of highly manipulative methods and processes such as undue social and psychological influence, behavioral modification techniques, disguised hypnosis and trance induction, and other physiological and psychological influence techniques. These techniques are used in a coordinated and systematic way without the informed consent of an individual. Thought reform is commonly associated with cults, but it can occur in other contexts. For our purposes here, cult refers to groups that tend to be deceptive, psychologically and/or physically abusive, and exploitatively manipulative.

Many different approaches have been applied to the problem of freeing people from the hold of thought reform programs. Early in the history of the problem, some concerned families resorted to methods which we in the 1990s, consider unethical. *Deprogramming* was the process of countering the cults' *programming*; the process often meant taking adult children off the street or detaining them until they listened to a detailed critique of the cultic group.

Later, as the techniques and process evolved, the term *exit counseling* was adopted, indicating a voluntary respectful approach. However, there was no universal consensus among those in the field about ethical criteria. This created some problems. First, anyone could declare him- or herself as an exit counselor. Second, the terms exit counseling and deprogramming were often confused and used interchangeably. The labels did not indicate what the individuals were doing or their competency, ethics, or approach.

The ethical standards presented here have been developed by a group of consultants who prefer the term *thought reform consultant* to describe their profession.

### Preamble

Consultation refers to a voluntary relationship between a professional helper and help-needing individual, family, group, or social unit in which the consultant is providing information that enables client(s) to more clearly define and solve the problem(s) for which they sought consultation.



Thought reform consultation is the presentation of information concerning the principles and practical applications of thought reform. This presentation is done in a manner that is legal and conforms to the following ethical standards.

The consultation involves a respectful dialogue in an open environment, supplemented by educational materials, such as pertinent literature, generic source materials, informational multi-media presentations, and personal testimonies.

As thought reform consultants, we voluntarily agree to subscribe to these ethical standards.

The existence of ethical standards also stimulates consultants to show greater concern for their own professional functioning and for the conduct of fellow professionals, such as educators, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, clergy, and others in the helping professions. As an ethical code, this document establishes principles that define the ethical behavior of those who have subscribed to it.

### **Section I. Responsibility of Consultants Toward Professionalism**

1. Each individual subscribing consultant influences the development of the profession through continuous efforts to improve professional practices, teaching, services, and research. Professional growth continues throughout the consultant's career and is exemplified by the development of a set of criteria that defines why and how a consultant functions in the helping relationship.
2. To ensure competent service, subscribing consultants recognize the need for continued sharing of information.
3. Subscribing consultants will obtain a minimum amount of continuing education credits agreed upon by the majority of consultants sub-scribing to these standards.
4. Each subscribing consultant has an obligation to continued professional growth, including active participation in the meetings of fellow consultants as well as participation in research and public education programs.
5. Subscribing consultants are encouraged to devote a portion of their time to related work for which there is little or no financial return.

### **Section II. Responsibility of Consultants Toward Clients**

This section refers to practices and procedures of individual and/or group consulting relationships.

The term "client" herein is defined as: the person(s) coming to a consultant for guidance or information in order to help an individual involved in a cultic relationship. If the client decides to pursue an intervention aimed at helping the involved person reevaluate his or her commitment to the group practicing thought reform, the involved person becomes the primary "client" when the intervention begins.

#### **A. General Standards for the Consulting Relationship**

1. The subscribing consultant's primary obligation is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of the client(s), whether the client(s) is (are) assisted individually or in a group relationship.

2. When working with clients, a subscribing consultant avoids discrimination due to race, religion, sex, political affiliation, social or economic status, or choice of lifestyle.
3. When a subscribing consultant cannot offer service for any reason, he or she will make appropriate referrals, when possible.
4. A subscribing consultant will not use his or her consulting relationship for personal needs or to further religious, political, or business interests.
5. A subscribing consultant will not employ methods or techniques such as neuro-linguistics programming, hypnosis or Ericksonian hypnosis or other techniques similar to those employed by cult groups without fully informed consent of the client.
6. Subscribing consultants recognize their boundaries of competence and provide only those services for which they are qualified by training or experience. Consultants should only accept those cases for which they are qualified.
7. The consulting relationship must be one in which client self-direction is encouraged and cultivated. The subscribing consultant must maintain this role consistently and not become a decision-maker for the client or create within the client a future dependency on the consultant.
8. The Human Services field is becoming increasingly complex and specialized. Few thought reform consultants are able to deal with every cult problem, and many potential clients have difficulty determining the competence of thought reform consultants. Selecting one is difficult because of the lack of knowledge about pertinent qualifications. In some cases, stress itself may impair judgment. Subscribing consultants should help potential clients make informed evaluations of consultants they are considering.
9. The subscribing consultant must inform the client of the purposes, goals, rules of procedure, and limitations that may affect the relationship at or before the time the consulting relationship is begun.
10. Before an intervention can be initiated, subscribing consultants and client(s) must agree on the definition of the problem, the goals of the intervention, and the range of possible consequences.
11. A subscribing consultant must inform the concerned party(ies) that should a client be prevented from leaving the site of the consultation or physically restrained in any manner (unless legally sanctioned permission has been obtained), the consultant will terminate the consultation immediately.
12. After obtaining the client's permission (if confidentiality is placed at risk), a subscribing consultant may choose to consult with any other professionally competent person about a client or aspects of the situation. If the client refuses to allow consultant to seek outside consultation when the consultant deems such consultation necessary, the consultant should consider terminating with that client.

13. When the subscribing consultant is engaged in individual or group consulting (e.g., group sessions with persons who have walked away from cultic relationships with individuals and/or groups), the consultant should be cognizant of mental health resources available.
14. Ethical behavior among professional associates, including consultants subscribing to these ethical standards and those not subscribing, must be expected at all times. When information is possessed that raises doubt as to the ethical behavior of professional colleagues, whether subscribing consultants or peer consultants, the member should take action to attempt to rectify such a condition. Such action shall use the procedures established by these ethical standards.
15. The subscribing consultant must have a high degree of self-awareness of his or her own values, knowledge, skills, limitations, and needs in entering a helping relationship that involves decision-making capacity and critical thinking skills, and that the focus of the relationship should be on the issues to be resolved and not on the person(s) presenting the problem.
16. Dual relationships with clients that might impair the consultant's objectivity and professional judgment (e.g., with close friends or relatives) should be avoided and/or the consulting relationship terminated through referral to another competent professional.
17. Subscribing consultants do not condone or engage in sexual harassment, which is defined as deliberate or repeated comments, gestures, or physical contacts of a sexual nature.
18. The subscribing consultant will avoid any type of sexual contact with clients. Sexual relationships with clients are unethical and are forbidden.
19. When the subscribing consultant concludes that he or she cannot be of professional assistance to the client, the consultant must terminate the relationship.
20. A subscribing consultant has an obligation to withdraw from a consulting relationship if it is believed that employment will result in violation of the Ethical Standards.
21. If subscribing consultants encounter situations in which appropriate ethical behavior is not clear, they should seek advice from knowledgeable persons.

#### **B. Confidentiality and Records**

1. Records of the consulting relationship, including interview notes, family intake information, correspondence, tape recordings, electronic data storage, and other documents are to be considered confidential information. Revelation to others of such material must occur only upon the expressed written consent of the client.
2. Use of data derived from a consulting relationship for purposes of consultant training or research shall be confined to content that can be disguised to protect the identity of the subject client unless written permission of the client is obtained.

#### **C. Financial Matters**

1. A subscribing consultant recognizes the importance of clear understandings on financial matters with clients. Arrangements for payments are settled at the beginning of the consultation relationship. Each consultant will provide a written and dated schedule of fees to potential clients.
2. In establishing fees for professional services, subscribing consultants must consider the financial status of clients and family. In the event that the established fee structure is inappropriate for a client, consultants are encouraged to assist families in finding appropriate and available services at an acceptable cost.
3. A subscribing consultant will neither offer nor accept payment for referrals, and will actively seek all significant information from the source of referral (with the permission of the client).

### **Section III. Responsibility Toward the Public**

#### **A. Educational Programs**

1. Products or services provided by the subscribing consultant in interventions, public lectures, demonstrations, written articles, radio or television programs, or other types of media must meet the criteria cited in these standards.
2. When subscribing consultants provide information to the public or to subordinates, peers, or colleagues, they have a responsibility to ensure that case-related information is sufficiently disguised to protect confidentiality and that other information is as unbiased and factual as possible.

#### **B. Advertising and Presentation to the Public**

1. A subscribing consultant shall not, on his or her own behalf or on behalf of a partner or associate or any other thought reform consultant subscribing to these ethical standards, use or participate in the use of any form of paid public advertising of services which:
  - a. Inappropriately uses statistical data or other information based on past performance or prediction of future success
  - b. Contains a testimonial about or endorsement of a thought reform consultant
  - c. Is intended or is likely to attract clients by use of self-praise
2. The subscribing consultant neither claims nor implies professional qualifications exceeding those possessed and is responsible for correcting any misrepresentations of these qualifications by others.
3. Subscribing consultants may not compensate another person for recommending him or her, or to encourage future recommendations. Advertisements and public communications, whether in directories, announcement cards, newspapers or on radio to television, should be formulated to convey information that is necessary to make an appropriate selection. Self-praising should be avoided.
4. In advertising services as a private consultant, the subscribing consultant must advertise the services in a manner that accurately informs the public of professional services, expense, and available techniques of consulting.
5. The subscribing consultant may list the following: highest relevant degree, type and level of certification and/or license, address, telephone number, and type

and/or description of services. Such information must not contain false, inaccurate, misleading, partial, out-of-context, or deceptive material or statements.

6. Subscribing consultants do not present their affiliation with any organization in such a way that would imply inaccurate sponsorship or certification by that organization.
7. A subscribing consultant shall not knowingly make a representation about his or her ability, background, or experience, or that of a partner or associate, or about the fee or any other aspect of a proposed professional engagement, that is false, fraudulent, misleading, or deceptive, and that might reasonably be expected to induce reliance by a member of the public.
8. A false, fraudulent, misleading or deceptive statement or claim in this context includes a statement or claim which:
  - a. Contains a material misrepresentation of fact
  - b. Omits any material fact that is necessary to make the statement, in light of all circumstances, from being misleading
  - c. Is intended or is likely to create an unqualified expectation
  - d. Relates to professional fees other than
    - (1) A statement of the fee for an initial consultation; a statement of the fee charged for a specific service and any refund policy
    - (2) A statement of the range of fees for specifically described services, provided there is a reasonable disclosure of relevant variables and considerations so that the statement is not likely to be misunderstood
    - (3) A statement of specified hourly or daily rates, provided the statement makes clear that the total charge will vary according to the number of hours or days devoted to the matter

# From Deprogramming to Thought Reform Consultation

Presentation by Carol Giambalvo, Thought Reform Consultant

AFF Conference,  
Minneapolis, MN  
May 1999

Panel of Discussants: David Clark, Thought Reform Consultant, Joseph Kelly, Thought Reform Consultant; Patrick Ryan, Thought Reform Consultant; Hana Whitfield, Thought Reform Consultant and Jerry Whitfield, Thought Reform Consultant

## *Deprogramming*

Early on, according to what some "old-timers" have told us, groups such as the Children of God allowed parental access -- even visits to the group -- until a number of parents were successful at convincing their adult children to leave the group. Then the Groups began severely restricting parental access.

In the mid-1970s parents began reporting their adult children's involvement in new religious (and some non-religious) groups that many call cults. They reported rapid personality changes and concerns that their loved ones were dropping out of school, shunning previous friends and family and devoting themselves full time to working for these strange new groups to which they pledged their total allegiance. Many parents concluded that their children had been brainwashed.

Parents were doing what they could to rescue their children from what were perceived as dangerous situations. Through trial and error, the controversial process of deprogramming developed. In the 1970s it became the preferred means of rescuing a cult member, as to many it was perceived as the only way a cult member could leave a cult. As we witness today, this is a misperception as thousands of cult members walk away from cults annually. In fact, in very unofficial polls taken at conferences and AFF recovery workshops, the majority of people attending are walkaways. But at the time, families based their decisions on the prevailing information. And a good part of that decision was based on the fact that in some groups, members were zealously protected from parents, often having their names changed and moved from location to location.

We must add here that not all deprogrammings were "rescue and hold" situations. There were some where the group member was free to leave at any time and there were some where ex-members sought voluntary deprogramming.

But for our purpose today, and in our thinking, we will use the term deprogramming to mean an involuntary situation, exit counseling to mean a voluntary situation, and thought reform consultation to mean a different approach and we will seek to explain the differences and the history.

Media coverage -- even to some extent today -- hyped the drastic deprogramming approach and further spread the concept that it was parents' best, if not only, option.

Deprogramming was controversial because it involved forcing a group member to listen to people relate information not available in the cults. Some state legislatures passed conservatorship legislation to legalize the process, one of which was vetoed by the governor. Later the opposition to deprogramming and the recognition of the effectiveness of less restrictive alternatives grew.

In deprogramming, group members were sometimes abducted from the street; although more commonly they were simply prevented from leaving their homes or a vacation cabin or motel. Deprogramming often succeeded in extricating the family member from the cult; nevertheless it failed more often than many realized and sometimes lawsuits were filed against parents and deprogrammers. In a few cases arrests and prosecution resulted.

The actual process of a deprogramming, as we see it, differs a great deal from voluntary exit counseling. Some of the ideas about cults and brainwashing prevalent at the time contributed to that process. It was believed that the hold of the brainwashing over the cognitive processes of a cult member needed to be broken -- or "**snapped**" as some termed it -- by means that would shock or frighten the cultist into thinking again. For that reason in some cases cult leader's pictures were burned or there were highly confrontational interactions between deprogrammers and cultist. What was often sought was an **emotional** response to the information, the shock, the fear, and the confrontation. There are horror stories -- promoted most vehemently by the cults themselves -- about restraint, beatings, and even rape. And we have to admit that we have met former members who have related to us their deprogramming experience -- several of handcuffs, weapons wielded and sexual abuse. But thankfully, these are in the minority -- and in our minds, never justified. Nevertheless, deprogramming helped to free many individuals held captive to destructive cults at a time when other alternatives did not seem viable.

### **Exit Counseling**

Gradually, not only did the understanding of the process of thought reform grow, but the voluntary approach of exit counseling proved to be effective -- and less risky psychologically as well as legally. A few individuals committed themselves to doing exit counseling and refused to do "involuntaries."

Even within the exit counseling field, further branching off has occurred. Some tend to be technique-oriented and/or advance a particular religious perspective. Others are information oriented. They introduce themselves as individuals with important information. Although they may have a preference regarding how the group member chooses to respond to that information, they take pains to avoid manipulating the group member.

One model for the process is described in the book *Exit Counseling: A Family Intervention*. The primary difference in exit counseling is its voluntary nature but there are other differences as well. Much more emphasis is placed on assessment, using a pre-intervention interview and information form that enables the exit counselor to determine the concerns specific to the family and the group member and to weed out interventions wanted by families for an agenda not appropriate to the undertaking of a serious intervention in an individual's life; for example, Johnny

is about to marry someone in the group of a different race or culture or Johnny isn't attending xyz church any longer. These examples, by the way, are few and far between. For the majority of the time we see responsible families seeking help for legitimate concerns. We need, however, to be careful that we are not placing those concerns there or exaggerating them. There are some situations where an intervention is not possible under the present conditions, for example the family has **no** access to the group member. Some families are referred to knowledgeable mental health professionals for some work prior to planning an intervention. Emphasis is placed on family communications with the group member and education about the specific group, what it teaches, what thought reform is and how it works, and the recovery process.

The process itself differs from deprogramming, in our opinion, because it is a much more respectful approach, it is non-confrontational, the exit counselors have to prove their credibility, there is much more **interaction** with the information and it seeks a **primary cognitive** rather than a primary emotional response. Very seldom is a visible "**snapping**" moment seen -- but a gradual increase in interest, interaction, and feedback with the information -- often accompanied with an increase of interest in and interaction with the family.

Let me also say here that exit counselors realize that an intervention is only the first step. If the person decides to leave the group there is a long road to recovery, that can take leaps and bounds if the individual is afforded the opportunity to attend Wellspring, but they need much more emotional, psychological and cognitive support and if there is no system set up for that support, it **may** be unethical to do an intervention.

### **Thought Reform Consultation**

In the 1980s many attempts were made by individuals doing interventions to get together to find ways to improve our profession and ourselves. But a difficulty arose in the definition of exit counseling and deprogramming. Some helping organizations at the time contributed to that confusion by maintaining a position that there were voluntary and involuntary exit counseling and voluntary and involuntary deprogramming. As a result, without the ability to establish a clear-cut definition, at those meetings people who called themselves exit counselors but were doing involuntary deprogramming could not be excluded and our work to establish ethical guidelines and a more professional approach spun its wheels, so to speak. A group of individuals who had committed themselves to voluntary interventions only began to meet regularly to share ideas and information and to develop Ethical Standards. We formed an organization of Thought Reform Consultants and eventually published our Ethical Standards. Those Ethical Standards were patterned after the Ethical Codes or Standards of the following organizations:

- American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy
- National Association of Social Workers
- Standards for the Private Practice of Clinical Social Work
- American Psychiatric Association
- National Academy of Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselors

We worked diligently to combine those standards with some uniquely necessary to our profession. And we owe our gratitude to the following advisors for their professional support and encouragement:



- Margaret Singer, Ph. D.
- Michael Langone, Ph. D.
- Herbert Rosedale, Esq.
- David Bardin, Esq. and Livia Bardin, M.S.W.
- Bill Goldberg, M.S.W. & Lorna Goldberg, M.S.W.
- Paul Martin, Ph. D.

Thought reform consultation involves much, much more family preparation. It is necessary for a 2-3 day, sometimes more, formal family preparation involving all members of the family team and all thought reform consultant team members. This formal preparation accomplishes the following:

- The family team experiences how they work together under pressure and how the thought reform consultants work together
- Enables the thought reform consulting team to observe how the family works together under pressure and who may or may not be appropriate for major roles in the intervention
- Improves family communication with the group member
- Enables the family to understand the culture of the group, its teachings and how thought reform techniques impact the group member
- Prepares the family for how to communicate in the intervention and what practical arrangements should be made
- Emphasizes the recovery process and their responsibility in it
- Emphasizes the seriousness of an intervention and all its repercussions
- Facilitates the family in making a fully informed decision about doing an intervention

Thought reform consultation involves even more assessment, as you see -- and places much more responsibility on the family. They realize that a team is not just going to come in and perform some magical process and things will forever be okay.

In both exit counseling and thought reform consulting, the purpose of the intervention is **not** to get someone out of a cult. While that may be a desired outcome, the **purpose** is to give the group member the information that enables them to make a fully informed choice.

## Resources

### Organizations

ICSA (International Cultic Studies Association, formerly American Family Foundation)  
P.O. Box 413005, Ste. 313  
Naples, FL 34101-3005  
Tel: (239) 514-3081  
Email: [mail@icsamail.com](mailto:mail@icsamail.com)  
Web site: <http://www.csj.org>

reFOCUS (Recovering Former Cultist' Support Network)  
P.O. Box 2180  
Flagler Beach, FL 32136-2180  
Tel: (904) 439-7541  
Email: [refocuscarol@att.net](mailto:refocuscarol@att.net)  
Web site: <http://www.refocus.org>

### Counseling Services

Cult Clinic & Hotline  
Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services  
120 W. 57<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (212) 632-4640

### Rehabilitation Facility

Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center  
P.O. Box 67  
Albany, OH 45710  
Dr. Paul Martin, Director  
Tel: (740) 698-6277  
Email: [liz@wellspringretreat.org](mailto:liz@wellspringretreat.org)  
Web site: <http://wellspringretreat.org>

## Bibliography

The resources listed here can help families and former cult members who are seeking to advance their understanding of the cult phenomenon. Those items highlighted with an asterisk (\*) are highly recommended for families considering a family intervention. When an item is available from ICSA, it is noted in parentheses at the end of the listing, along with ICSA's current price, which includes postage and handling. For your convenience an order form is included at the back of this book. You may also place an order on ICSA's web site. Or you may order by sending a list of requested items to ICSA Information Service, Dept. EC, P.O. Box 2265, Bonita Springs, FL 34133. Be sure to include your name, address, and phone number and enclose a check or money order in U.S. dollars for the total amount. For orders outside the United States, send for a price list.

Some of the books noted here are out of print. Because they are such excellent resources, they have been included with the hope that readers may still be able to find them in a library, used bookstore, or through another network. These books are available for order on AFF's book store: <http://www.cultinfobooks.com>

**Boston Movement: Critical Perspectives on the ICC** By Carol Giambalvo and Herbert L. Rosedale, Esq. The International Churches of Christ, formerly known as the Boston Church of Christ and often referred to as the Boston Movement, is often said to be the fastest growing cultic group in the world. **Price:** \$17.00

**Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults** By Janja Lalic. University of California Press, 2004. Provides a needed and important bridge between autobiographical accounts written by former cult members and research-oriented analyses of cultic groups written by scholars. Price: \$22.00

**Captive Hearts Captive Minds** By Madeleine Tobias, and Janja Lalic, Ph.D. a former member of a political cult and an author/editor, this book is an informative and useful introduction to the cult phenomenon. Temporarily Unavailable; soon to be republished.

**Combatting Cult Mind Control** By Steve Hassan *Combating Cult Mind Control* offers a general overview and presents the author's views on counseling persons affected by cultic groups. Price: \$15.00

**Coping with Cult Involvement** By Livia Bardin, M.S.W. Essential reading for families concerned about a group-involved loved one. Price: \$15.00

**"Crazy" Therapies** By Dr. Margaret Singer, Ph.D. and Janja Lalic, Ph.D. This book is a startling expose of the alternative philosophies and practices that can be found in today's ever-growing psychotherapeutic marketplace. Price: \$23.00

**Cults In Our Midst: Hidden Menace in Our Lives** By Margaret Thaler Singer, Ph.D., one of the leading authorities on cults, with author and former cult member, Janja Lalic, Ph.D. Book explains what cults are and how they work and offers vital information on how to help people leave cults. **Price:** \$20.00

**Cults on Campus: Continuing Challenge** By Marcia R. Rudin, M.A.

A collection of essays by college administrators, counselors, clergy, and others. Price: \$10.00

**Damaged Disciples** By Ron & Vicki Burks. This book is an account of the years the authors spent in the shepherding movement and their struggle to break free and rebuild their lives. Price: \$12.00

**From Dean's List to Dumpsters: Why I Left Harvard to Join a Cult** (Paperback) by Jim Guerra. Price \$17.00

**Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion** By Robert Cialdini. The result of years of study into the reasons that people comply with requests in business settings. It has sold over a quarter million copies. Price: \$15.00

**Recovery From Abusive Groups** By former cult member Wendy Ford, with a preface by social workers Bill and Lorna Goldberg; *provides practical advice for former cult members and their families.* **Price:** \$13.00

**Recovery From Cults** Edited by Michael Langone, Ph.D., Executive Director, AFF and Editor, *Cultic Studies Journal*. Behavioral Science Book Service selection; preface by Margaret Singer, Ph.D. Sale Price: \$15.00

**Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves** By Steven Hassan. Price: \$15.00

**Thought Reform & the Psychology of Totalism** By Robert J. Lifton *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* is the classic work that describes Dr. Robert J. Lifton's work with Korean-War POWs and Chinese civilians subjected to thought reform programs in the early 1950s. Price: \$25.00

**Women Under The Influence** By Janja Lalich, Ph.D., this special issue of *Cultic Studies Journal* explores issues of dominance, control, and exploitation of women in groups. Chapters examine why women are attracted to totalist groups and how they are manipulated. Price: \$10.00

## About the Author

Carol Giambalvo has been an exit counselor from 1983-1992 and a Thought Reform Consultant 1992 until her retirement in 2001, after five years' involvement in est and The Hunger Project. She served on the national Board of Directors of the Cult Awareness Network from 1988 to 1991 and as National Coordinator of FOCUS for four years. She currently is a director and President of reFOCUS (Recovering Former Cultists' Support Network), as well as the Board of Directors of ICSA, and is their Director of Recovery Programs. She has appeared on many national and local TV and radio programs to discuss and debate the cult issue in our society. She has written numerous articles, including her personal story. She lives with her husband, Noel, in Florida.

## About the Publisher

The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) is an interdisciplinary network of academicians, professionals, former group members, and families who study and educate the public about social-psychological influence and control, authoritarianism, and zealotry in cultic groups, alternative movements, and other environments. Founded in 1979 as AFF (American Family Foundation), ICSA took on its current name in late 2004 to better reflect the organization's focus and increasingly international and scholarly dimensions.

ICSA, the leading professional organization concerned about cultic groups and psychological manipulation, is known for its professionalism and capacity to respond effectively to families, former and current group members, helping professionals, and scholars.

For more information, write or call

ICSA  
P.O. Box 2265  
Bonita Springs, FL 34133  
(239) 514-3081

or visit our web site: <http://www.csj.org>