

## CAN YOU WORK TOGETHER WITH AN ABUSER?

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 299 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm recording from a brand new office in my basement. I have been living in this house now for seven years and I've moved my office so many different times. I started out doing things in the kitchen, and then I started doing things in my bedroom, the bedroom that I share with my husband, Tom, and then I moved to the basement. It was kind of a walk-in storage closet—no windows or anything. I moved my whole office into that closet. That was interesting, and I was there for quite a while.

Then when my daughter got married, I moved up to the bedroom that she was in, and I thought that was going to be my final landing place, but it had a wooden floor and it was a fairly large room. It had a beautiful window with a cherry tree in the front and it's beautiful, but it wasn't very good for recording podcasts because there was a lot of echo in that room. It wasn't comfortable. I don't know—there was just something about it that, it didn't quite feel right.

Then my son came home from college—it's a long story—but I basically have five kids still living here this summer, and we had to kind of save a room for him because he was going to college and then coming back and going to college and then coming back, but he's graduating this year now. He's graduating this winter. And so when he comes back this next time, he's not going to be coming back to live with me. He's going to go live with his dad until he gets a full-time job and finds his own place. So that freed up the basement bedroom, and so that is where I moved my office.

And this room is it. This is it. It's a very small room, but it has a window looking out to the backyard. It has a sunken ceiling on one part of it, and because it's a small room with this sunken ceiling and it's all carpeted and it's got a big easy chair in it, it just has all the right places for my desk that I write at and work at, and then the desk where I podcast at and do other things at, and so it's a perfect place for me and I love it because it's got all this dead sound. So I think the podcast recording quality will be better down here.

This is my first time recording a podcast down here and I just feel so, so grateful and so happy. Obviously I'm going to miss my son, but he wasn't around that much anyway. When he's home, he's constantly working or he's out with his girlfriend or he's out with friends or doing other things. So he's still going to be doing all those things, and I have a feeling he's still going to be coming back for dinners and things like that. So I think I'll still see him quite a bit.

Okay, I want to share with you a question that came in from a listener. She kind of described the flavor of abuser that she has and wondered, “How do I work with this kind of person?” So I'm going to answer that question. But first, someone called in and left a review about a recent podcast that we did with... Well, actually not the most recent one. By the time you guys hear this, there's going to be an even more recent one that we did with Bob Hamp that I'm going to share with you, but she was referring to Episode 277. So I'm going to let you listen to what she says, and then I'm going to tell you how to find the four public podcast episodes where you can listen to my interviews with Bob Hamp.

And then of course, if you join the Flying Free Kaleidoscope—we have a new name for it—you will get to hear him in some workshops as well. So I love working with Bob Hamp. He just has a very, very fascinating way of explaining abuse that makes it so clear. He and I are on the same page when it comes to just about everything, and yet we both have a very different communication style. Our brains kind of work differently, so we present things a little bit differently. But when you put these different ways of explaining it together, you get this really well-rounded way of looking at abuse, and I think a lot of light bulbs go on for a lot of people.

So I feel like every time we collaborate together, I feel like it's always really powerful. And we do have four public-facing episodes that you can listen to without joining the program. But if you want more, of course, we have so much in the program, but we've got some more Bob Hamp in the program as well. So anyway, let's listen to what this listener had to say.

LISTENER: I wanted to say to you, Natalie, God bless you. First thing out of my mouth is this episode with Bob Hamp—I think it's 277—was not too long. He could have went on. Thank you for letting him share everything that he had to say. I was amazed. And what's really spectacular and one of those God things is that I had listened to Episode 1 probably last week, a few days ago or something, and I remember thinking I would love to hear from him again.

And I know you said there's another episode, but I don't know where it is. But God bless him and thank you for allowing him to share. I could have listened to him all night and all day. I got so much out of it. And as for you, my love, I thank you. I think I started off with your book, a free chapter or something that you gave. I know I have the book on audio, but I thank you for *Is It Me?* and then *All the Scary Little Gods*. Of course, when you dropped it, I got it. I thank you for consistently allowing me to feel safe.

NATALIE: So I just want to thank this listener for not writing in—I guess she recorded a

message. And by the way, anyone can record a message. You can record a question or you can record anything that you want to say about the podcast. Even if I don't decide to publish it, I love to listen to the things. Well, there are some things that people record and leave for me that I don't really enjoy listening to. But for the most part, I enjoy listening to them.

But what I really love is I love getting questions from you guys because then I can use that to create podcast episodes for you. So you can do that by just going to my website, [flyingfreenow.com](http://flyingfreenow.com), and clicking into any of the podcast episodes. And there's going to be a little widget where you can just press the play button and record your voice.

So the four Bob Hamp episodes that you will be able to listen to, and here's how you can find them. You go to [flyingfreenow.com/1](http://flyingfreenow.com/1) because he actually did the very first podcast episode with me for Flying Free. He also did Episode 76. So in that case, you'd go to [flyingfreenow.com/76](http://flyingfreenow.com/76). He also did 277, which is the one that this listener is referring to. So you'd go to [flyingfreenow.com/277](http://flyingfreenow.com/277). And finally, he did one just two weeks ago, 297. So you'd go to [flyingfreenow.com/297](http://flyingfreenow.com/297). Okay, we love Bob Hamp. All right, let's listen to the question for today.

LISTENER: And also your book, *Is It Me?* I started reading it and listening to it earlier in my separation, but I had to stop because it was too painful because it was too real. I'm now almost eleven months into my separation and I have been able to listen to it further which has been very freeing because I've finally accepted that I have been in an abusive relationship and domestic violence for the last seventeen years. Now my four kids are getting greatly impacted because he's starting to relax in his perfect dad at the moment, and I need to get out completely because it's not safe for them or me.

My question though is around the type of abuse and person my husband is because he doesn't love bomb me. He doesn't shower me with affection or anything positive. It's always disappointment and disdain about things that I do. He doesn't always use words. He uses actions. He's very shy, very withdrawn, and it's very different to some of the experiences that are mentioned in your book.

So I'm just wondering if you could explain a bit about this type of situation, this person, and how to approach it and how to work forward with that because I want to make sure that my children still have their father in their life and that we can work together as best we can. Thank you so

NATALIE: So, thank you for this question. I actually hear this a lot. Women will either read my book, *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*, or they'll come into

the Kaleidoscope and read what others are writing about their experiences. And they will say, "Oh, but my experience is different, so now I'm confused again." And then they'll basically describe my ex-husband.

He was shy, withdrawn, not using words most of the time, but using passive-aggressive insults that sounded like they could almost be jokes or maybe even praise depending on how you would spin them—and there is so much spinning—word salad, questioning, confusion, silent treatment, disdainful looks, not looking at you when you're talking, not answering when you ask a question, that kind of thing.

Beautiful butterflies, if you are confused in your marriage, it's not healthy. Period. Normal marriages are not confusing, and they're not painful. I've talked to my friends who have been in healthy marriages with healthy men for decades. Because now we're in our 50s, and most of my friends have been in good, solid marriages.

And I've asked them, "So, have you ever been confused or emotionally distressed or feel like you hit a brick wall in your marriage or are you constantly asking people for help or to try to figure things out?" And they just laugh at me and they don't know what I'm talking about. "No, can't say that I have. Our relationship is pretty straightforward. If we have a fight, we talk about it and we come to a compromise. We listen to each other. We respect each other. We love each other. How is that confusing?"

So, in other words, my friends are not writing into podcasts like this one asking for help to understand what's going on in their marriage. They're not listening to podcasts like this and going, "Oh my gosh, I can so relate." They can't relate. They're not reading the kinds of books that you and I are reading or writing because it's not relevant to them.

So have you ever heard of two people being exactly the same? It's not possible. Even identical twins are not the same person. They have different personalities, they have different preferences, and so it is with abusers. There are all kinds of different flavors of abusers and all kinds of flavors of abuse on a big, wide spectrum.

So if you are talking to people and they're describing the abuse that they experience and it's different from the abuse that you experience, that does not mean that what you're experiencing is not abuse or whatever. It's all the same abuse, it's just a different flavor.

So these abusive people, they each have kind of their own way of showing a couple of things. Number one, they really don't cherish you, and number two, they really don't respect you. Some of these abusers will scream and yell. Some will get physical and hit,

punch. Some will give you the silent treatment. Some might love bomb you to get you back and others won't. Some like to say lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of words, and some don't say anything at all. Some are highly activated emotionally and very volatile, and others are just emotionally dead.

Did you ever have a child—I had a kid like this; I had a sister like this, too—who would pick through their food and pull out the tiny mushrooms or onions or little green herbs they found? It doesn't matter how hard I would try to chop them up super tiny, they'd find them. You'd see them digging around with their face up close to their plate of food, hyper-focused on all the oddities they could find, wondering and pondering at what each piece meant, sometimes even organizing them in categories on the side of the plate. Just disgusting.

And an hour later—because they wanted some ice cream afterward—you'd still see them an hour later sitting there glued to their obsession. Now, I had other kids who just pick up a spoonful of food and shove it in their mouths and eat it, and then they were out the door to go play and move on with their lives.

So, abuse victims can be like that first child where they're analyzing their abuser. They know all his idiosyncrasies and facial expressions and body language. They are studying their abuser copiously. They're digging into all their past experiences with him to try to figure out what the solution might be to fix their problem, to end the confusion, to make the relationship be the way they thought it would be when they first got married.

Now, in many ways, they have to do this because victims who are living with their abusers have to be able to anticipate his next move so they can try to get to a place of safety either by shutting down or numbing out or fighting back or running away or fawning. This is just our knee-jerk reaction when we're living in an unsafe environment.

But here's the problem. When we are hyper-focused on this other person, we're not able to focus on the person who really matters in this story, and that's the victim. We would never do that. If we saw a bully hurting a victim, we would never go, "Oh, let me go talk to the bully and take him out for lunch and try to reason with him and give him some help." I mean, I know some churches will do that, but most of us, our heart is going out to the victim. And so we're going to go over to the victim, we're going to get them to a place of safety, and we're going to talk to them and we're going to find out how they're doing and we're going to get them some help. The bully can go on his merry way, but let's help the victim.

But when it comes to us being the victim, we don't often do that. So in other words, all

of our attention and love and problem-solving skills go into this abusive person who's really like a black hole of a person who's just going to suck it all in, and it's going to disappear into this black hole, and you're not going to get anything in return other than maybe some breadcrumbs or some scraps of attention, if that.

My life's mission is to help victims to stop doing that. Stop focusing on the abuser because it doesn't work anyway. It's like being on a hamster wheel and thinking that you're getting somewhere and all you're doing is going around and around in a circle because you're just hyper-focused on something on the wall on the other side of the wheel, and you think you're going to get there if you keep spinning on this wheel.

It doesn't work and that's why I want to help you get off that wheel. I don't want you to spend the rest of your life on that wheel. I want you to get off that wheel, and that means you need to start focusing on the woman who has your name. She's the one who needs you and you're ignoring her. It's time to stop that. You are never going to get out of that chair if you stay there picking at the food.

Now, this particular listener said that her children—these are her words—are being “greatly impacted” by their dad's behavior. And she also used the words where she said, “It's not safe for them.” And yet, notice that she also said she wants them to have a father in their life. Now, this is very, very common language that we see. This is where I was at when I was in my abusive relationship with my nine kids, and this is where I see women are at a lot of times.

But I want to challenge us to think about what our definition is of a father. Do we believe that a father is just someone who spreads his semen around? Is that all that is required in order to have the title of “father”? And beyond that, he can be an abuser, he can be a molester, he can be a murderer, he can be whatever horrible person he wants to be, but he is the father, right? Why? Because his semen fertilized one of my eggs, and so therefore, the child that came of that union, he's that child's father.

I don't believe that, you guys. I think we need to redefine what a father is. Because I know men who have never been biological fathers, including my husband, Tom, and yet, they are fathers in every sense of the word, as I now define it. And I know men who are biological fathers... What does it take to be a biological father? Stop and think about it. A rapist can be a biological father. They are not fathers at all. I would never call them a father.

Now, we would all like to have a father in the lives of our children. In an ideal world, every child would have a loving, caring, involved father. But the reality on this planet, at



least at this time in history, is that many children on Earth do not have a true earthly father. They do have a Father, though. God is their Father and God is their Mother. And I personally believe that that is more than enough at the end of the day.

Do we want our children to have a father in their life so badly that we will settle for an abuser to be that father and gaslight them into believing that this is good? Now, this is no shame on this person. No shame on this woman who wrote in. How many of us are there? I think most of us can raise our hands and say that we understand this kind of thinking because that is how we're programmed, and there's no shame in that. Is there shame on a child for being programmed to believe that by her being molested that it's her fault? Of course not. So we don't shame each other for our programming that we have. However, we do talk about our programming so that now as adults, if we decide to change it, we have the opportunity to do that.

Now, I recently heard someone say that when those of us who are divorced pick up our kids from their dad's house and we say, "Oh, did you have fun at dad's house this weekend?" What's the motivation behind that? I'll tell you what mine is because I say that every time. Yeah, I was convicted when I heard this, but I say that every time, and you know why I say that? Because I just want things to be happy for my kids. I just want things to be happy. So I go into this thing where we kind of go into a pretend world together. "Oh, did you have fun at dad's house this weekend?" And the boys say, "Yeah, we did." And then they move on, and then it's like I can feel good, and I don't know if they feel good or not, but we've moved on.

I'm essentially gaslighting them into thinking that it's supposed to be fun there. That's what this woman made the point of saying and I was like, "She's right." I was convicted by this. I'm never saying that again. I don't have to pretend that my kids had fun at their dad's house. Now, maybe they did. Maybe they did and maybe they didn't, but I'm not going to ask that question anymore because I also know from longtime experience that they don't always have fun there, and they a lot of times experience a lot of gaslighting and lies and abuse over there. And so I don't want to be part of that anymore. I'm not going to pretend that it's fun at dad's house. And I'm not going to pressure them by my asking that question to pretend along with me. Not anymore.

So this listener is wondering, she used the words, "How to work forward with my husband," her flavor of abuser that she's got because she wants to, "Work together as best we can." So I just want to ask, is this possible? Can we work together with abusers? If we could, we wouldn't have to divorce them because we can work together with them. If that was possible, we wouldn't need to divorce them. They probably wouldn't be abusers. The very nature of an abuser is that you can't work with them.

That's like having poison ivy in the backyard and saying, "Hmm, I wonder how I could work with this poison ivy so that we can both thrive in the same backyard?" Or it's like your house being on fire and saying, "How do I work together with this fire so that we can both thrive?" Or having cancer and saying, "How do I work with my cancer so that we can both thrive? How do we work together?" Only one is going to thrive, my beautiful butterflies. Either the poison ivy, the fire, the cancer, or you. We don't work with dangerous people or things, and we don't teach our kids how to play with fire and not get burned either. We all know that playing with fire is just plain old a bad idea.

So my answer to this question of how do we work together as best we can is simply this: You don't. You can't work with an abuser. That's not the universe they live in. They're not living in a mutual universe where you're working together, where there's interdependence. That's the universe you live in, but that's not the universe he lives in, and therefore, because those two universes are not the same, you're not going to be able to work with him.

So my suggestion is that you stop trying to work with someone who's incapable of that and start working with your core self. She needs some attention now. She needs some healing. She needs some help, and you're the only one that can help her. So what are you waiting for?

If you start working with her, you're going to see some major progress because you're not going to be on the hamster wheel anymore. You're going to be running towards something that actually gets you somewhere. Now, if you want to learn how to help set that woman inside of you free, I encourage you to join the Kaleidoscope community. We've been around for eight years now, but we recently changed our name to the Kaleidoscope. I just recently learned that a flock of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope, and it just dawned on me, that is the name I've been looking for all these years.

We were called the Flying Free Sisterhood for a long time, and it was kind of like this office. Each little space where I tried moving my office to, it did not feel right. There was something off about it, didn't feel like home. And when I moved down here and got everything set up, I felt like I had finally found my office home. And when I heard that a kaleidoscope was a block of butterflies, I knew I finally found the home, the name. of our community. It's the Kaleidoscope.

So inside of the Kaleidoscope, you are going to have access to hundreds of classes and workshops, Q&As, group coaching, and of course, hundreds of other Christian women. We call you beautiful butterflies, and they're just like you. They're Christian women struggling in emotionally and spiritually abusive marriages.



Some of them are struggling to figure out how to stay and change their thinking while they're staying in their relationship. Some are struggling through separating. Some are contemplating divorce. Some are actually in the middle of divorce, and some are actually divorced now. But they are all working together in the same Kaleidoscope community.

You will be seen, heard, and celebrated in the Kaleidoscope, and we will make sure that you make progress. In one year, you will not be the same person you are today. You will not be analyzing your husband anymore. You'll be flying free internally. So if you feel like a caterpillar that can't see further than the milkweed you're stuck on, let me show you your destiny because your destiny is so much higher than that. You can go to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com) to learn more and join today. That's [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com).

And listeners, we are so close to hitting 1,000 five-star ratings on Apple Podcasts. That's so close. If you haven't left a rating yet, it would truly mean so much to me if you would. On the Apple Podcast app, all you have to do is click on the five stars and bam—your rating is registered. And these ratings are how Apple decides who to put our podcast in front of. So if you're someone who found this podcast because Apple suggested our podcast for you, that's exactly how it works. Organic ratings.

Now, next week is our 300th episode. That's right—I've been doing this every single week for six solid years. I have never missed a single week. Why? Because I am passionate about helping Christian women who are dealing with emotionally and spiritually abusive marriages and also religious communities. So give the Flying Free Podcast your rating if it's been helpful to you at all. And I look forward to hanging out here again with you next week when we celebrate our 300th episode.