



# Religious Power & Control

and the

# Cycle of Religious Abuse

Religious Trauma Institute

**HONEYMOON/  
RECOMMITMENT  
PHASE**

**TENSION  
BUILDING  
PHASE**

**CYCLE OF ABUSE**

**EXPLOSION  
PHASE**

## HONEYMOON/ RECOMMITMENT PHASE

## LOVEBOMBING

- Intense feelings of belonging and connection
- Increased understanding from others
- Romanticized version of a relationship with a savior figure
- Group camaraderie
- Celebration of how others were saved from evil
- Increased sense of acceptance
- Presentation of the church family
- Celebration of eternity in heaven
- Presentation of glamorized idea of giving up control and having someone else to guide them
- Once the person commits to the group or savior figure they may feel a rush of emotions or physiologically feel different (perhaps lighter or more connected) like they have tapped into a source greater than themselves

## TENSION BUILDING PHASE

## EXPLOSION PHASE

**HONEYMOON/  
RECOMMITMENT  
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**CYCLE OF ABUSE**

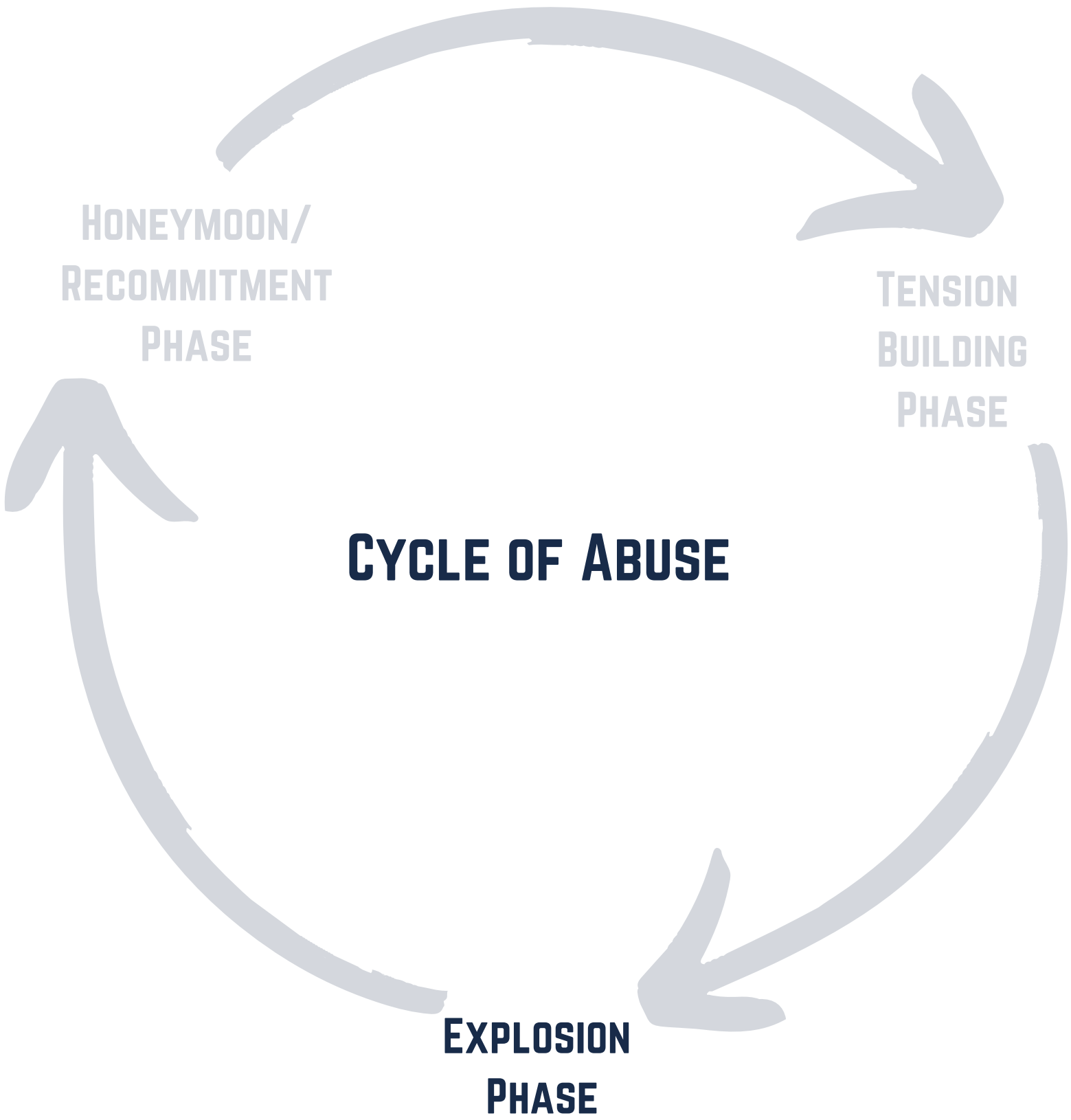
**EXPLOSION  
PHASE**

## HONEYMOON/ RECOMMITMENT PHASE

- Decreased patience & understanding
- Decreased tolerance for not learning/applying religious teachings
- Increased rule following
- Decreased explanations for why certain rules apply ("because god said so")
- Decreased reasoning and logic
- Decreased sense of self
- Villianizing of critical thinking skills
- Increase of submission to authority
- Increased self-blame and shame of incorrect actions
- Required compliance
- Decrease in being able to ask questions/share doubts and confusion
- Increased dependence on external people and sources (e.g. clergy, religious texts)
- Decrease trust in self

## TENSION BUILDING PHASE

## EXPLOSION PHASE



## HONEYMOON/ RECOMMITMENT PHASE

- Punishment for sins or un-condoned behaviors (e.g. going outside the group for help, going against group rules, sins)
- Threats of excommunication or disfellowship
- Actual removal from the religious system
- Public humiliation (e.g. required public repentance, disclosure of "sinful" behaviors to the larger religious group)
- Required repentance
- Requirement to take ownership for things that have been done to you with severe consequences for not taking personal responsibility
- Threats of what will happen to an individual if they are out from the protection of the religious system
- Physical violence
- Sexual violence

## TENSION BUILDING PHASE

## EXPLOSION PHASE

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**EXPLOSION  
PHASE**



## **HONEYMOON/ RECOMMITMENT PHASE**

- Reconciliation
- Repentance
- Apologies
- Promises that this will not happen again
- Some concerns addressed
- Placating statements ("this was for your own good" or "you're a baby-believer, you wouldn't know any different")
- Requirement of the victim to take partial or full ownership in what happened
- Restoration plans
- Promises of connection and relationship
- Reminiscing on how good it used to be (in the love-bombing phase)
- Reminder that the religious system is looking out for you/knows what is best for you

## **TENSION BUILDING PHASE**

## **EXPLOSION PHASE**

**HONEYMOON/  
RECOMMITMENT  
PHASE**

**TENSION  
BUILDING  
PHASE**

**WHY DOES  
SOMEONE STAY?**

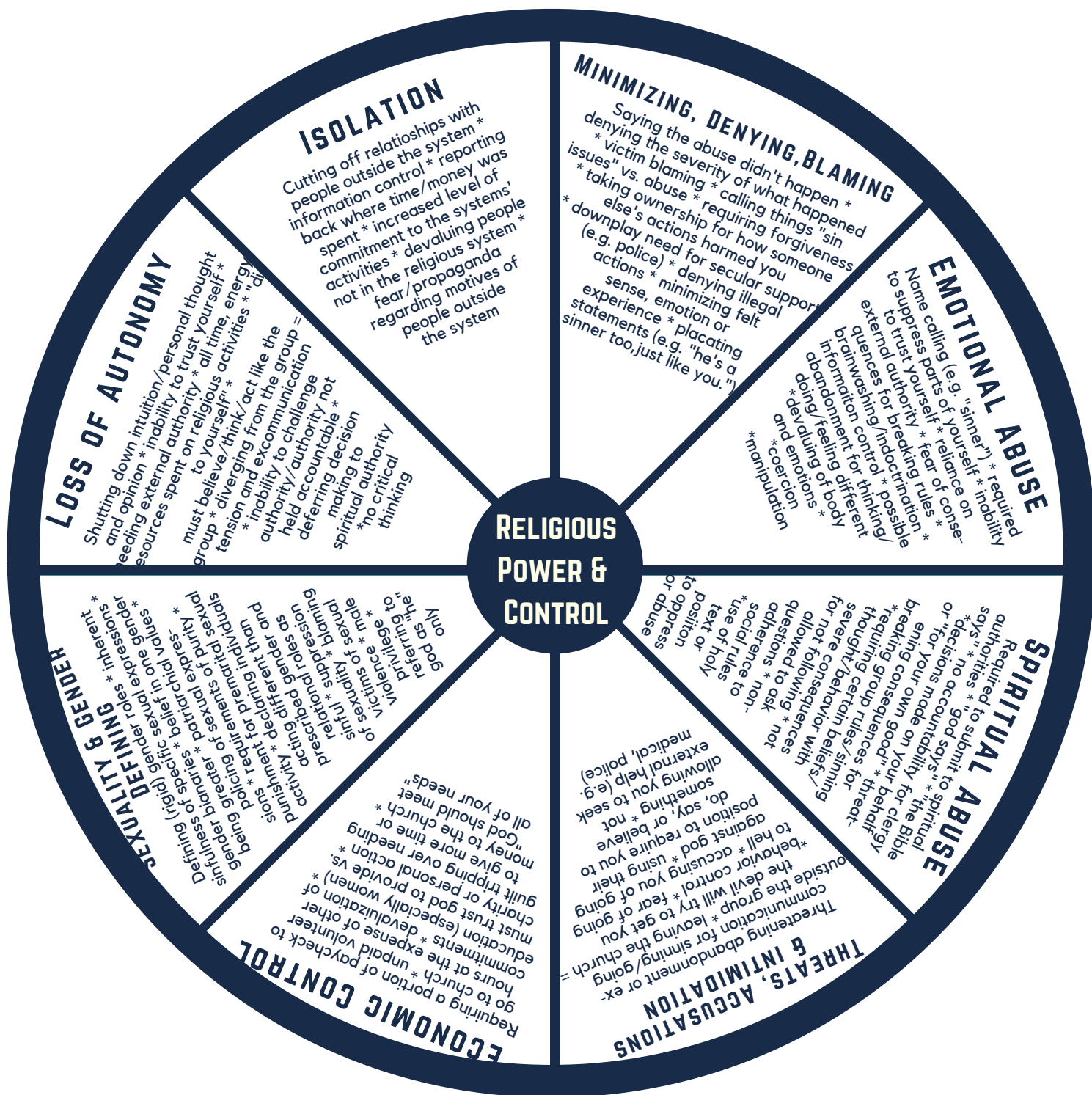
**EXPLOSION  
PHASE**

**HONEYMOON/  
RECOMMITMENT  
PHASE**

**TENSION  
BUILDING  
PHASE**

**BRAINWASHING/INDOCTRINATION  
HOPES, DREAMS & POSSIBILITIES  
DENIAL  
FEAR AND TERROR  
FAMILY, FRIENDS & RELATIONSHIPS  
LOVE  
CULTURE'S POSITIVE VIEW OF RELIGION**

**EXPLOSION  
PHASE**



The dynamics of a system of power and control are often confusing and subtle. Each individual dynamic in and of itself may not feel particularly abusive, controlling or even "that bad". However, when these are combined with and added to one another we begin to see a system that is designed and intended to exert power and control over others by their rules, requirements, punishments and consequences for not adhering to the specific requirements of the group. A system of power and control requires an individual to believe, think and act on specific rules and dynamics to be a part of the group. Failure to adhere to this can result in severe consequence including being excommunicated from the group.