

Signs of a Cult

A friend of mine has been really changing and getting into some new weird religion, and personally, I think he's going over board. I'm really concerned for him and I'm afraid it's some kind of cult.

There are a lot of strange belief systems out there, and many of them are leading thousands of people astray and ruining families and friendships. Very often when we think of the word *cult*, we think of those tragedies in history where leaders like David Koresh or Jim Jones mislead their followers and even convinced them to do horrible acts, including mass suicide. However, there are many cults in society, while not promoting awful and depraved things, that are extremely destructive to individuals, families, friends and loved ones because of the control they hold on members and the twisted teachings they promote.

It's difficult to address specific cults in this short article, so we suggest that you do some research on the group you are concerned about. It's important that friends and family members of cult victims learn as much as possible about cults and mind control before deciding what action, if any, to take. We'll try to cover some brief tips here that generally apply to *most* cults.

To help determine if your friend is involved in cultic activity, consider the following:

- Personality changes: Do you find yourself saying, "He's a different person," or, "I don't know her anymore?"
- Dramatic shifts of values or beliefs: Research has shown that beliefs and values are highly resistant to dramatic short-term change.
- Changes in diet or sleep patterns: Cults often restrict the diet and sleep of members, possibly in an effort to hamper normal, rational thought processing.
- Refusal to attend family events: Family members pose a strong threat to the influence of the cult.
- New vocabulary: Is the person suddenly using complex jargon to obscure irrational or simplistic thinking?

Here are some do's and don'ts when speaking with your friend:

- DON'T debate ideology, methods or theology with him. Try to reach the person on an emotional level.
- DO tell the person that you love them and let them know that your door is always open to them.
- DON'T use a confrontational or condescending approach. Don't use the word "cult."
- DO keep the contact with the person alive in any way possible.
- DON'T ever tell the cult member that his views are ridiculous, absurd or wrong.
- DO listen respectfully and ask questions to help clarify or explain what was just said.
- DON'T ever give up. There is always hope.

Ask some of the following questions to understand how deeply they are involved:

- Do you feel that no matter how hard you try, your 'good deeds' for your group are never quite enough?
- What are you motivated by? Is it genuine love for God and the group, or is it fear of not meeting standards.
- Is questioning the group, or the group leaders, discouraged or frowned upon?
- Does the group you belong to believe it is an elite and exclusive organization which alone has 'the truth'?
- Is reading any literature critical of the group discouraged?
- Does the group discourage association with non-members (except for attempts to convert them)?
- Does the group tend to be evasive or withhold certain information from the potential convert? Are the more unusual doctrines of the group not discussed until an individual is more deeply involved in the movement?

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers or 10 easy steps to follow. Pray for your friend and be patient. Above all, love your friend and continue to let him know you care for him and are concerned. Love is the only thing that has ever made a difference in the world, or in someone's life. Talk to your pastor. He may have some suggestions of books or other advice that will help. Also, check out some of these resources. They helped us in providing some of the information included in this article:

www.watchman.org

www.spotlightministries.org.uk

www.rickcross.com

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