

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Steven Hassan | Combating Cult Mind Control (Episode 237 & 238)

The Branch Davidians. The Manson Family. The People's Temple. Boko Haram. ISIS. Al-Qaeda. Heaven's Gate. NXIVM. Scientology. The Unification Church. The Children of God. The Rajneesh Movement. What do these organizations have in common? They're all destructive cults that have employed mind control, brainwashing, parental alienation, estrangement, unethical hypnosis, abusive relationships, human trafficking, multi-level marketing, violent extremism, and other forms of undue influence to recruit, subvert, and dominate their members.

On episodes 237 and 238 we talk to Steven Hassan, a licensed mental health counselor who has been helping people exit destructive cults since 1976 — following his own departure from Sun Myung Moon's infamous Unification Church. As a former insider, he understands how these cults captivate even society's smartest and most resilient using some of the oldest psychological tricks in the book — and he'll help us protect ourselves and others from their pervasive reach. Steven is the author of *Combating Cult Mind Control: The Guide to Protection, Rescue, and Recovery from Destructive Cults* and founder of the Freedom of Mind Resource Center.

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The BITE Model

Inspired by the work of Leon Festinger, Robert Jay Lifton, Margaret Singer, Edgar Schein, and Kurt Lewin related to the power of undue influence on cult recruits, Steven composed the **BITE model** to help discern between groups that promote healthy social interaction and destructive cults. BITE stands for Behavior, Information, Thought, and Emotional control that destructive cults have in their playbook, and from a place safely outside of such a cult's reach, it's often obvious when these tactics are being employed.

If you or someone you know are or have been involved with a suspected destructive cult, see if any of these look familiar.

Behavior Control

- Promote dependence and obedience
- Modify behavior with rewards and punishments
- Dictate where and with whom you live
- Restrict or control sexuality
- Control clothing and hairstyle
- Regulate what and how much you eat and drink
- Deprive you of seven to nine hours of sleep
- Exploit you financially
- Restrict leisure time and activities
- Require you to seek permission for major decisions

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Information Control

- Deliberately withhold and distort information
- Forbid you from speaking with ex-members and critics
- Discourage access to non-cult sources of information
- Divide information into Insider vs. Outsider doctrine
- Generate and use propaganda extensively
- Use information gained in confession sessions against you
- Gaslight to make you doubt your own memory
- Require you to report thoughts, feelings, and activities to superiors
- Encourage you to spy and report on others' "misconduct"

Thought Control

- Instill Black vs. White, Us vs. Them, and Good vs. Evil thinking
- Change your identity, possibly even your name
- Use loaded language and cliches to stop complex thought
- Induce hypnotic or trance states to indoctrinate
- Teach thought-stopping techniques to prevent critical thoughts
- Allow only positive thoughts
- Use excessive meditation, singing, prayer, and chanting to block thoughts
- Reject rational analysis, critical thinking, and doubt

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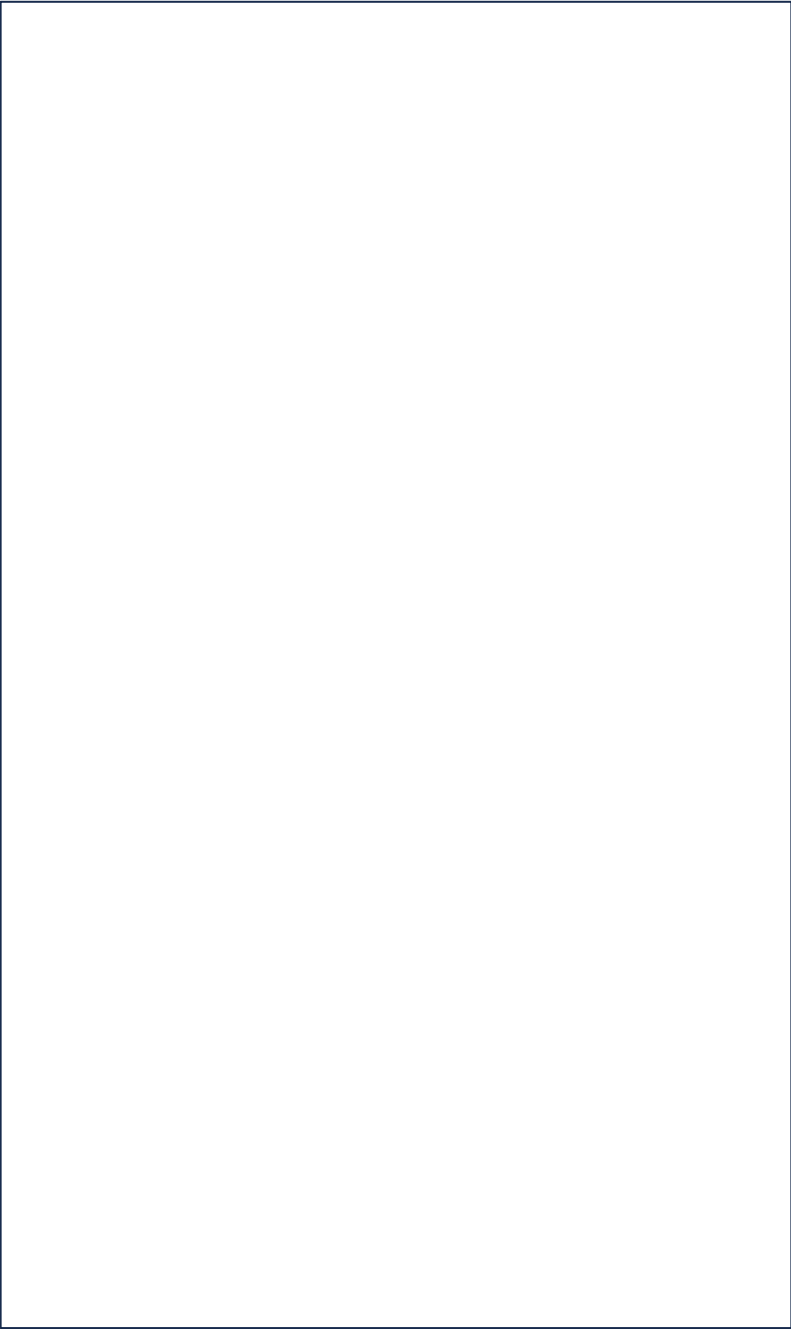
Emotional Control

- Instill irrational fears (phobias) of questioning or leaving the group
- Label some emotions as evil, worldly, sinful, or wrong
- Teach emotion-stopping techniques to prevent anger, homesickness
- Promote feelings of guilt, shame, and unworthiness
- Shower you with praise and attention ("love bombing")
- Threaten your friends and family
- Shun you if you disobey or disbelieve
- Teach that there is no happiness or peace outside the group

"Destructive mind control can be determined when the overall effect of these four components promotes dependency and obedience to some leader or cause," says Steven. "It is not necessary for every single item on the list to be present." **To see the BITE model in action, make sure to check out this video from Steven's Freedom of Mind Resource Center: [What is a Cult? Whiteboard Animation Explaining the BITE Model](#).**

For a look at how the mind control tactics of a destructive cult contrast with the healthy influences of a constructive social group, [take a look at The Influence Continuum here](#). Make sure to take notes below about how the BITE model applies if you have concerns that you or someone you know might be under the undue influence of a destructive cult.

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Are You Being Recruited?

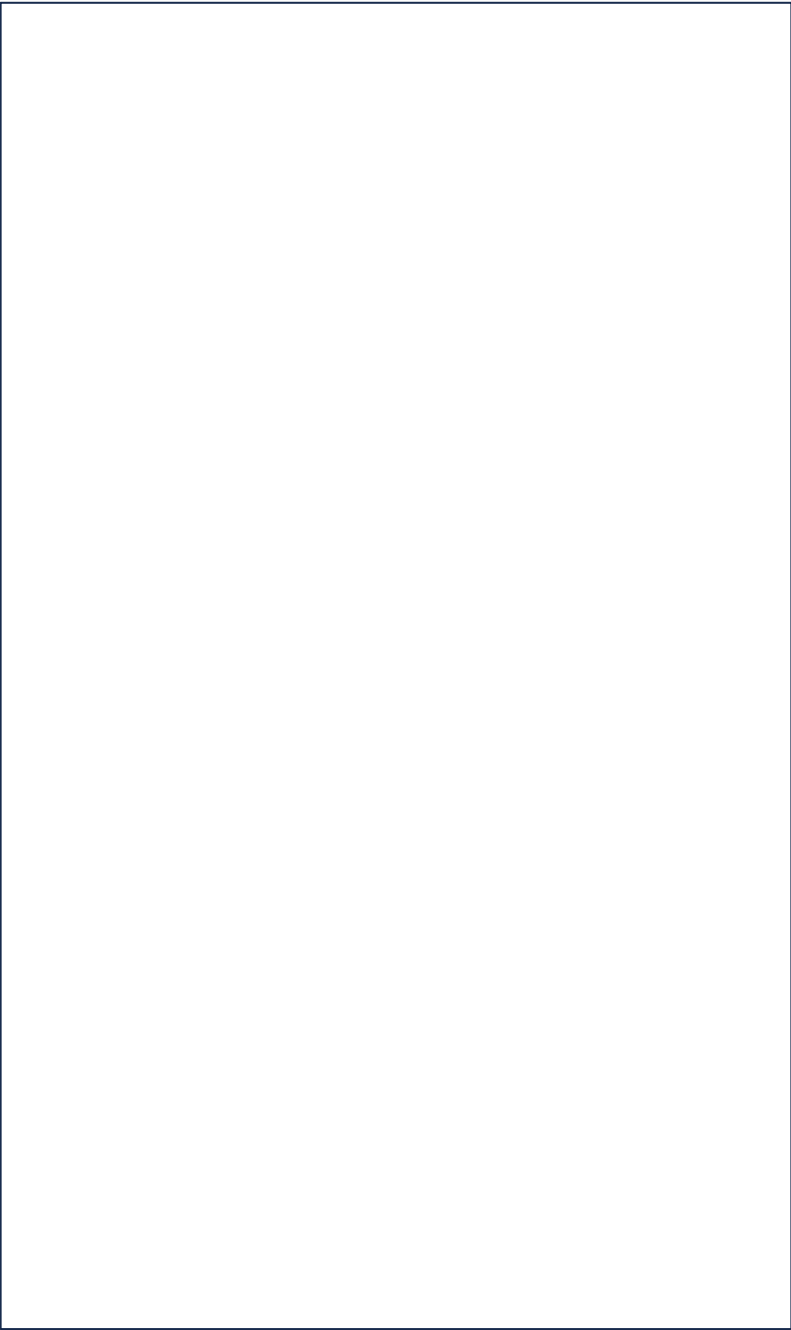
“A lot of people are recruited by family or friends, people who are coworkers, people they like and know,” says Steven. “So I say do your investigating up front. Ask questions, do independent research before you ever go and agree to do anything that involves your time, energy, or money. Recruiters are really good at developing rapport and trust. Many of them, like Nxivm, learned NLP techniques that involve mirroring and pacing and leading and breathing where people feel like, ‘Oh, my God! I feel like I’ve known them my whole life and I just met them 24 hours ago! Well, if you feel that way in 24 hours, it’s really important to remind yourself, ‘It’s only been 24 hours!’ And while it’s a cool feeling, and maybe they’re really good people, maybe there’s something else going on here.”

So if you have an inkling someone is trying to recruit you into a cult, or you want to get someone you know who’s already on the inside to give their situation a more critical look, ask questions like:

- Who founded it?
- What are its origins?
- What happens if people join?
- What happens if people want to leave?
- Have you ever talked to anyone who’s left?

If you find yourself asking these questions of someone, make sure to note their reactions below. If their group isn’t on the level, you’re more likely to get silence instead of real answers. “If this group is legitimate, it will stand up to scrutiny,” says Steven.

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Getting Someone Out of a Cult

Steve says: “If my family, when I first came back from the Moonies, had said, ‘Steve, if this group is legitimate, it will stand up to scrutiny; do us a favor: promise us you won’t go back for the next two weeks, and let’s research it together, I would have done that. That was a reasonable request!’”

Instead, Steve’s dad made one of the biggest mistakes you can do when you’re trying to reach someone who’s been indoctrinated by a cult: direct confrontation. He read in the newspaper that the Moonies owned a factory that manufactured guns, so he pointed this out to Steven as proof that the good Reverend Moon couldn’t possibly be the messiah. “Steve! How could a messiah have an M-16 gun factory?”

Steven’s response was to thought-stop with Moonie-approved chants to ward off evil — the equivalent to what you did when you were confronted with something unpleasant at seven years of age: you stuck your fingers in your ears and shouted “LALALALA!”

“My father’s intention was to wake me up and get me to critically think, but the way he delivered the message forced me to do this mind control technique on myself that propelled me deeper into the involvement and made me more alienated against him.”

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A better approach would have been to ask questions like the ones detailed above in **Are You Being Recruited?** Other good choices:

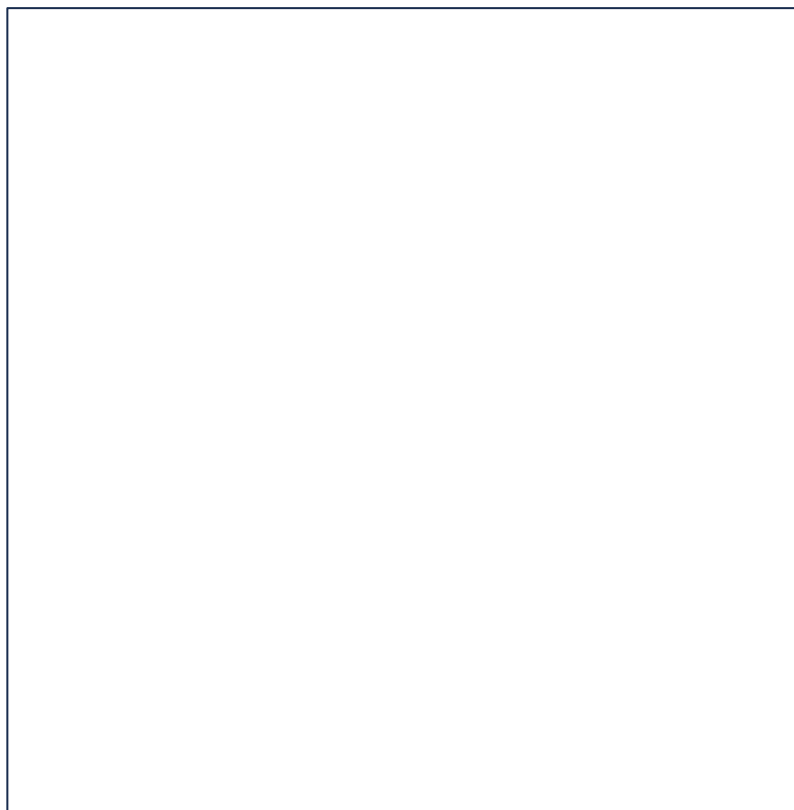
- Wow, you seem really into this! Tell me more!
- Tell me when you first met this group! Tell me what you liked about it. Tell me what you didn't like about it. Oh, there's nothing you didn't like about it? That's odd, because there's always something in life that you don't like about something.

“Don't overestimate your capacity to infiltrate a cult group,” says Steven, “because a lot of people go in trying to help a friend or a relative, they go to the meetings, and they get co-opted by the indoctrination and they forget. They didn't do their homework up front and it got to them. Have some humility. Don't think you're invulnerable. Get coaching. Talk to former members (especially former leaders).” Have someone on the outside act as your ground base to reality test and debrief — maybe even have a code word for “send the police and get me out of here!”

A word of caution to anyone doing research on a potential destructive cult: just because you don't see anything controversial about it online doesn't necessarily mean it's legit. A lot of destructive cults are tech savvy enough to bury negative press in search engines. You can't just take the first 10 pages of Google at face value if nothing suspicious shows up — you may have to dig deeper. “In some cases go on the Web Archive itself — [the Wayback Machine](#) — to find the really juicy articles and important information.”

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If you're making plans to rescue someone (perhaps yourself) from the grips of a destructive cult -- whether it's a compound-dwelling apocalypse sect or a wallet-draining pyramid scheme MLM, detail your plan of attack below. If you want a second opinion, make sure to drop me a line at jordan@jordanharbinger.com and I'll give you my honest opinion and advice if I see room for improvement. Good on you for giving reason and critical thinking a chance!



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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About



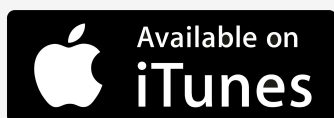
Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers — from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth — and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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