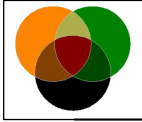


You can help!

Helping people who experience attacks of witchcraft

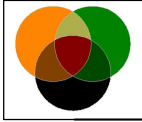
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A person usually accepts help in the lines that correspond with his/her own experiences. Many people see their lives marked by a realm of non-ordinary reality that stands in link with the person through powerful symbols. Also forces of witchcraft affect a person through such symbols: some of them are taken from nature (night-animals like owls or cats, hyenas, snakes) others are taken from social life (rituals practised at the crossroads) or from domestic life (rituals practised at the rubbish heap before the house). Most powerful however are symbols taken from people's own bodies (hair, finger-nails, body fluids...). While witchcraft forces are experienced to work through symbols and potencies to link up with certain realms of human existence, also meaningful symbols and rituals can be used for the purpose of prayer and healing, within a Christ-centred worldview. Healing from witchcraft attacks proceeds not in the intellect, but through rituals and symbols.
- Experiences of witchcraft attacks stand in relation with a person's worldview & understanding of the human body, with his/her family- and social life, conflicts, ambitions, fears, and future plans. Given the multi-level reality that witchcraft represents, the interventions should embrace all levels of human experience. Each level bears its own dynamics for healing and/or restructuring of meaning for growing in faith. Christian faith & healing seeks to take part in all levels. At the same time Christian healing also challenges a person's worldview, self-understanding, and understanding of relationships.
- While many people in Zambia expect from prayers protection from harm and some forms of instant relief from suffering, Christian healing presupposes that the mystery of evil and suffering is not outside the reality of God, as the canticle of Job so eloquently portrayed. While not attaching a false value to suffering, and encouraging the afflicted to seek all legitimate means of remedying their situation, we may learn a lot from the spirituality of the desert fathers, where demons and attacks were part of the economy of salvation.
- While not denying the reality of witchcraft, the pre-eminence of Christ and his power to liberate us must be emphasized. Notions of evil in the witchcraft discourse tend towards a proliferation of concrete concepts of witchcraft which becomes a world of its own. An equal belief in the powers of witchcraft and Jesus Christ is incompatible with sound Christian teaching. Witchcraft cannot negate the powers of life.

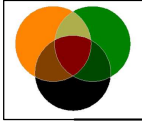


- The Christian healing process from witchcraft attacks is often a process of liberations: from being a mere victim, to becoming an agent of reconciliation, forgiveness, and building a new tomorrow.

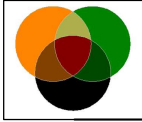
Helpful	Not helpful
1. listening	
Listening attentively, compassionately and with empathy to the stories/experiences of the victims of attacks. Be aware that it is difficult for the victim to find the right words and that the symbols of witchcraft touch very intimate layers of life.	Overt skepticism or brushing away experiences with easy answers (“Don’t worry... its just a dream ... “).
Whatever your attitude about witchcraft, value the story as a true experience.	Outright denial of the experience as a frill on the edge of human imagination, as illogical, or subtly explaining it away (“its just psychological”).
2. working with the symbols of witchcraft (as experienced in dreams or in the body) while reshaping the worldview	
Encouraging the afflicted not to see themselves as victims, but as subjects / actors with willpower, intellect, emotions, and faith. Emphasis their own strength that in fact has enabled them to cope so far with such difficult experiences.	Statements and ways of interacting which reinforce a “victim mentality”.
While doing everything possible to get better, there should be a lot of freedom to see the experience as part of a greater development process.	Wishing / praying the experience or dream away as a purely negative experience without a seed for personal growth.
Holding the symbols of witchcraft in a healthy balance with the symbols of life.	Opposing or over-emphasizing the symbols of witchcraft to the symbols of life.
Recall the areas of life which give the victim strength during the attacks (faith, family, church, friends, own strong points that have helped) and become more aware of the helping forces in life.	Being focused through the witchcraft symbols only on negative experiences or weaknesses (lack of faith, anxieties, broken relationship, injustice in the family, jealousy...)



Helpful	Not helpful
Finding also a positive value in the witchcraft symbol. Encourage a playfulness of imagination with the symbol rather than sheer avoidance. Find many associations with the symbol, even conflicting ones, and thus create a wider space of interpretation.	To have one single and fixed negative interpretation of the witchcraft symbol. "To see an owl means that something terrible is going to happen." Or to discourage to think about it at all.
Finding an alternative explanation of the experience within the witchcraft discourse. "The person who visited you in the dream may not be the actual witch." But also leave room for the possibility of an explanation outside the witchcraft discourse.	Being trapped in only one way of interpreting the witchcraft experience.
Gently helping the victims work through their negative emotions, mental images, self-image, ideas, and bring them in touch in a playful way with the witchcraft symbol, so it can become a symbol of potential growth and not remain a symbol of pure destruction.	Quick diagnosis and aggressively casting away the problems, this causes the victim to unconsciously act according to group expectations.
God is supreme. Encourage the person to rebuild the worldview where such an experience can be seen through the eyes of faith, hope, love and humour.	Being trapped in a dualistic worldview (good fighting against evil).
Encourage the victim to see the alleged witches in a new way: as creatures also in need of love and healing.	Seeing witches as creatures of pure darkness, incapable of love and unloved by God.
Being sensitive to cultural discernments of the experience (witchcraft? A cibanda? A curse?) without being trapped in them. Such discernment by the families often show where the lines of tensions and conflicts can be discovered and can set us on the right track.	Brushing away cultural discernments that the family has undergone as "un-Christian" or not valid.
Discourage the victim to engage herself/himself with forces of witchcraft . People who use occult forces/medicines to manipulate others or protect themselves, make themselves also more vulnerable to attacks by others.	Deny the existence of witchcraft and its practice from the outset.
3. looking at the life context	



Helpful	Not helpful
Working with the victim's family and restoring the victims to vital healthy relationships.	Dealing with individuals isolated from their life context.
Distinguish inner and outer worlds. Discourage any accusations based on experiences in the inner world of a person. But encourage addressing issues of the outer world (aggressiveness of the supposed witch, frightening words, etc.)	Basing your judgment on the inner world of the victim or of a "prophet". Neglecting events of the outer world.
As helper try to remain detached from the events and from accusations. When accusations have been openly pressed, listen to all sides, not only to one side. Maintain healthy boundaries. Don't use words which may come across as pointing a finger at a witch (you yourself may end up in court!)	Getting trapped in the story yourself. Blending out what other family members (and the suspected witch) may want to say. Speaking of a person as if he/she is already a proven witch.
Encourage victims to continue interacting with the alleged aggressors and giving them their due.	Avoiding the suspected witch.
Look at the reasons why the witch would attack the person. Are some of them valid? Are there issues which the victim should address? Challenge the attacked person not to see himself/herself as a pure victim but to take the opportunity to reform one's life / ways of dealing with others where necessary.	Buy easily into the "victim-story": the witch is absolute evil and the attacked person has never done anything wrong and is a pure victim.
Point out family issues or injustices that need to be spoken out in the family (even if people are reluctant to speak about them).	Ignore injustices and imbalances within the families or between the people accusing each other.
4. bringing the experiences into prayer	
Bringing the experiences of the victim into prayer, in which you as helper feel comfortable and where you can radiate confidence, while being yourself.	Refer the prayers to so-called "specialists" or copying the prayer-styles from others.
Praying with a whole range feelings, emotions, mental states, attitudes. (like in the psalms...)	Having fixed images of God that remain unchanged by this experience.
Praying with the materials of people's experience and at times creatively presenting them in poetic and dramatic / or any other literary devices for the victims to experience them in a new way.	Praying "away" (exorcising) the inner experiences without giving room for transformation. This may entrench victims in their conditions, or cause relapse with greater severity.



Helpful	Not helpful
<p>Some people are in need of a ritual through which they can experience a transformation, coming out as new creatures ready for new relationships. The use of material symbols/ sacramentals should be done in such a way as to develop and encourage faith, hope and love, as well as other virtues: patience, fortitude, humility, etc.</p>	<p>Purely magical understandig of the material symbols/ sacramentals and ritual prayer should be avoided.</p>
<p>5. aftercare</p>	
<p>The experience of the victims should be allowed to be integrated into their life story in a natural way: the experiences can be allowed to fade like a dream, or may be retold in different ways. While retelling an experience, one can often gain new insides.</p>	<p>Avoiding fixed testimony-telling which often traps the victims in their worldviews and closes the experience onto one single interpretation. The victim should not narrate his/her experiences under group pressure. Retelling a story when no new insights are emerging is rarely helpful.</p>
<p>Help with a sympathetic support group & helpful materials (for children films like Kirikou, etc) to restructure the symbolic world.</p>	<p>Thinking that a once-off prayer meeting does the deal.</p>
<p>Help the person to be grounded in the Christian faith & at home in the church.</p>	<p>Hopping from one powerful pastor / priest / prayer-group to another.</p>
<p>Each witchcraft experience is different. Some may fade away like a dream after some time, others are remembered for life. Allow for openness and reinterpretation with new insights. Forgiveness & healing are sometimes a life-process.</p>	<p>Remain stuck in only one way of looking at witchcraft.</p>