

You've met someone who is very friendly and has invited you to a party or meeting. How would you know if it could be harmful to you to attend?

Questions to ask:

- Is the group registered with the Student Activities office?
- What is the exact name of the group and if you can't find out, why won't he or she tell you it's name?
- Does the group allow or encourage questions and discussions about its beliefs?
- Does the group try to isolate you from friends and family?
- What is the purpose of the group?

What can you do?

- Walk away
- Be firm with them
- Call Public Safety if you are being harassed.
- Ask the opinion of someone you trust.
- Contact a university official

For More Help Contact:

FIU Counseling and Psychological
Services Center

University Park, GC 211
Dr. Patricia Telles-Irvin
348-2434

North Campus, WUC 139
Ms. Kathy Trionfo
919-5305

FIU Judicial and Mediation
Services
GC 214B
348-3939

FIU Campus Ministry
GC 340
Mr. Jerry Beverly
348-2215

FIU Student Affairs
GC 219
Vice President for University
Advancement and Student Affairs
Dr. Paul Gallagher
348-2797

Cult Awareness Network
800-556-3051

Material Adapted from
The International Cult Education Program
and The American Family
Foundation

Cults

"When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you've ever encountered...and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true!"

Jeannie Mills, former member of the People's Temple of Guyana

*Florida International University
Counseling and Psychological
Services Center*

Division of Student Affairs

What is a cult?

A cult is a highly manipulative group that exploits its members and can cause psychological, financial and physical harm. It dictates, in an absolute manner, the behavior, thoughts and emotions of its followers. Manipulation techniques are used to transform the new recruit into a loyal, obedient and subservient member.

Characteristics of Destructive Cults

- Close allegiance to a charismatic leader
- Preoccupation with the attainment of money
- Uses deceptive and high pressure practices in recruiting new members
- Uses mind altering or behavior modification techniques
- Cult lifestyle becomes the most important aspect of an individual's life
- Uses deception in recruiting and/or fundraising
- Isolates members from friends and families

Tactics of recruiters

- ◇ **Isolation:** you are physically isolated from other influences.
- ◇ **Fear:** Loyalty to the group is held through warnings of serious spiritual or physical repercussions for not conforming to group norms.
- ◇ **Peer group pressure:** your natural need to belong is exploited and leads to the suppression of your doubts about the group.
- ◇ **Love Bombing:** using kissing, hugging, touching and flattery to make you feel like you belong with them.
- ◇ **Guilt:** teachings of salvation are reinforced by exaggerating the "sins" of your former lifestyle.

Cult memberships often causes the loss of free will and reduces the capacity to form flexible and intimate relationships.

Symptoms of cult involvement

- A sudden change in normal behavior
- Recent development of new friends, often off campus
- Increased defensiveness about activities
- Talks about a conversion
- Increasingly talks about the dogma of a particular group
- May try to recruit their friends into the new group

You are most vulnerable when:

- * You are in a transition state
- * You are lonely
- * You are hurting
- * You are having a tough time socially
- * You are having academic problems
- * You are feeling overwhelmed or confused