

PASTORAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GUIDE

Domestic Violence Is A Pattern Of Coercive Behaviors Perpetrated By One Person With The Goal Of Establishing Power And Control Over The Victim. The Coercive Behaviors May Include Physical Abuse, Psychological Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Progressive Social Isolation, Economic Deprivation, And Intimidation. (Definition used by Ohio Medical Association and the FBI)

WHY PASTORAL RESPONSE IS IMPORTANT

In addressing domestic violence, pastoral ministers have an important role both in prevention and intervention. Faith leaders have access to families in times of crisis and are often the only persons to maintain that access after a crisis has passed.

Those who live with violence in their home won't approach a religious leader unless that leader is worthy of their trust. Trust is tied to the idea of confidentiality. This means that not only is information kept in confidence, but times and places are created where it is safe for a victim of abuse to disclose the situation.

Religious beliefs play an important role in shaping a person's perspective and choices. It is important to explore the victim's belief systems in light of God's love and intent for human relationships.

WHEN A PERSON IS IN CRISIS

1. Be Pastoral and Supportive
 - a) Respect confidentiality
 - b) Believe and validate victim's experiences
 - c) Avoid physical contact (even supportive gestures can trigger painful memories)
 - d) Tell victim it is not their fault
 - e) Tell victim they are not alone
 - f) Affirm their faith (this is not the time to teach theological correctness)
 - g) Use freeing and affirming scripture
 - h) Avoid platitudes (i.e. "God will never give you more than you can bear")
2. Help Person Plan for Safety
 - a) Provide access to Domestic Violence Hotline (see inside)
 - b) Help provide access to community resources
 - c) Help the victim evaluate their safety
 - d) Help the victim evaluate their resources
 - e) Is the victim able to leave – have they left before? (average victim leaves 7 – 10 times)
3. Basic Safety Plan
 - a) Hide these items for easy access:
 - i. Cash
 - ii. Extra car & house keys
 - iii. Extra clothing for victim & children
 - iv. Copies of important documents (social security, bank accounts, insurance policies, prescriptions)
 - v. Sentimental valuables
 - b) Have a destination in mind
 - c) Tell a trusted friend about your plan
4. If They Choose Not to Leave
 - a) Provide the victim with ways to reach help
 - b) Let them know you care
 - c) Let them know they can count on the faith community
 - d) Ask "Where can you be safe for now?"
 - e) Offer practical suggestions for being safe if they choose to stay.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

HAVE A SAFETY PLAN

How do religious leaders begin to offer reassurance and hope? First, by encouraging those at risk, by letting them know that help is available, and we will help them find it. We do it by being good listeners and by being sensitive, encouraging, and patient.

When they first come to us, these are some of the things we can say:

1. I will listen to everything you have to tell me. I will believe what you say.
2. I will let you know where you can turn for help.
3. No one has to live in fear. No one deserves it.
4. There are alternatives.
5. I will not press you to act. I will encourage you and support you, but you are the one who knows best when and how to act.
6. I will talk to you about what you can do to be safe
7. Everyone deserves to be safe.
8. If you need time to think about choices or what you need, I will give you all the time you need.
9. If you need practical help, I will help you find it.
10. If you just someone to listen to you, I will do that.
11. Everything you tell me will be treated confidentially.
12. I will not become impatient, no matter how much time you need, no matter what you want to say. I will not lose hope for you. You deserve a life without fear.
13. God doesn't hate you or want you to live this way. The God we believe in is a God of life and hope.
14. Your job is to decide what will help you and when and how to act. I trust your judgment. Nobody knows what you need better than you. My job is to support you and encourage you and to point you toward the resources and people who can help you the best.
15. We will get through this.
16. I will not call you because that may cause you to be placed in harm's way, but please know I will be concerned and caring; and I will not forget about you.

*If you are faced with an explosive incident, go to a room or area with an exit or phone. **Do not** go to an area without an exit or that has possible weapons (kitchen, bath, closet, garage, and bedroom).*

1. **Plan ahead of time how you will leave in an emergency. Identify where you can go, whom you can stay with and/or could lend you money – and how to get there.**
2. **Have the numbers of the local shelter, hotline, police, and emergency contacts easily accessible but hidden.**
3. **Pack a bag ahead of time with important documents, prescriptions, glasses/hearing aid, set of clothing, keys, money including change for a pay phone, for you and your children. Hide the emergency bag in a safe, accessible place or leave it with someone you trust. Include a list with important contact names and numbers and the social security number and license number of the abuser for the police.**
4. **Decide on a code word with children, neighbors, relatives, and friends to indicate that you need help from the police by having them call 911. Make sure they know the abuser is not to know about it.**
5. **If you have a restraining order or order of protection, keep it with you at all times, provide copies for your children's schools/day care providers.**
6. **once you are safe, you may contact relatives, but assure they cannot disclose your location.**

**ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS TO ASK A PERSON
YOU SUSPECT MAY BE ABUSED**

1. Who makes the rules in the family?
2. What happens when you don't follow these rules?
3. How are the responsibilities of household duties and/or child rearing shared.
4. Does your partner unduly worry or get mad when you're late?
5. Does your partner feel abandoned or behave jealously when you spend time with your friends and/or family?
6. Has your partner ever forbidden you to do something or to go somewhere?
7. Does your partner accuse you of not being supportive or loving enough?
8. Does your partner withdraw into silence or refuse to speak to you?
9. Does your partner threaten to harm or kill themselves?
10. Does your partner call you stupid, call you names, and degrade you?
11. Does your partner constantly correct you? Do they criticize you all the time? About your cooking, cleaning, child-care, financial support, job, mechanical ability?
12. Does your partner behave jealously or accuse you of seeing other men/women?
13. Does your partner blame you for problems at their job? For their drinking? For their cheating? For their temper?
14. Does your partner scare you when angry?
15. Have you ever left before?
16. Does our partner destroy or threaten to harm things or pets that are important to you?
17. Does your partner ever threaten to harm you (or the children) when you have arguments?
18. Does your partner push or slap you?
19. Has your partner ever threatened you with a weapon?
20. Do you feel safe?

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

**Direct national hotline for domestic violence
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) (TTY) 1-800-787-3224**

**24-HOUR HOTLINE FOR DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE EMERGENCY: 911**

The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD 1-800-422-4453 24/7
All calls are anonymous and confidential

California Department of Social Services:
800-952-8349 // www.cdss.ca.gov

**California State Elder Abuse Information
Hotline: 1-888-436-3600**

DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN AIDING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DO... Allow the victim the opportunity to make their own choices and to make them in their own time. Rushing someone to act may place them in great danger. No one knows when it will be safe to act better than the person in the situation.

DO... Help the victim discover and develop their own resources. Money, friends, relatives, making contact with a local shelter are all resources the victim can develop.

DO... Affirm their faith no matter where they stand theologically. At this time of crisis, their present faith stance may be the only thing they have to hold on to. It may not be “theologically correct” in your mind, but at the moment of crisis, this is all they have. Respond with positive statements about God (“God loves you and is with you in your suffering”). Respond with “I” statements (“I believe, however, that God does not want you to suffer or to be a victim of violence”).

DO... Give the victim time. It often takes a long time for a victim to act. This is not a short term issue. Be prepared to support the victim through periods of frustration and indecision.

DO... Confront what is happening to children in the home. The effects of battering on children are severe when they witness it or have to live with it in their home.

DO... Encourage the victim to get involved in a domestic violence program as soon as possible.

DO... Continue to support the victim and their family. No other institution has the opportunity that faith communities and pastoral ministers have to offer long-term support and encouragement.

DO... Refer, refer, refer. Know what resources are available in your community. Develop a relationship with them. Know what services they offer, if there is any cost involved, if there is a waiting list, etc.

DO... Help your congregation deal with the issue. Educate them about the nature of domestic violence, what resources are available for victims and abusers, and what your church is doing.

DON'T... Physically touch the victim while counseling them. Give comfort without putting your arm around their shoulder or holding their hand. If they have been sexually or physically abused, any touch may recall painful memories.

DON'T... Go beyond your limits. It is wise to know how well you are prepared to deal with domestic violence. Unless you are clinically trained on the issues of domestic violence, refer them to someone who can be a resource leading them toward healing.

DON'T... Break the rules of confidentiality. You will lose the trust of the victim and possibly endanger them.

This guide is the result of the effort of the Garfield Municipal Court District's Coordinated Community Response Team. The format was conceived and executed by Rev. Fr. Dohner of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese and Revs. Erickson and Ford of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, with input and approval by representatives of Pneuma Life Foundation, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, and Marymount hospital. It is intended that this document be applicable to clergy of all faith traditions.