

What You Need to Know about Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence refers to a pattern of violent and coercive behavior exercised by one adult over another in an intimate relationship. It may consist of repeated, severe beatings or more subtle forms of abuse, including threats and control. It is *not* “marital conflict,” “mutual abuse,” “a lovers’ quarrel,” or “a private family matter.”

95% of domestic violence victims are women

Four Basic Types of Domestic Violence

- **Physical Assault**—Includes shoving, pushing, restraining, hitting or kicking.
- **Sexual Assault**—Any time one partner forces sexual acts that are unwanted or declined by the other partner.
- **Psychological Assault**—Includes isolation from family and friends, forced financial dependence, verbal and emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, and control over where the partner can go and what she can do.
- **Attacks against Property and Pets**—Destruction of property, which may include household objects or treasured objects belonging to the victim, hitting the walls, or abusing or killing beloved pets.

Why does she stay?

She stays because she is terrified that he will become more violent if she leaves, that he will try to take the children, or that she can’t make it on her own.

What can I do to be helpful if an abusive situation is revealed?

Listen to the woman and believe her. Tell her that the abuse is not her fault and not God’s will for her.

- Tell her she is not alone and that help is available.
- Let her know that without intervention abuse often escalates in frequency and severity over time.
- Seek expert assistance. Refer her only to specialized domestic violence counseling programs, not to couples counseling. Help her find a shelter, safe home or advocacy resources to offer her protection. Suggesting that she merely return home places her and her children in real danger.
- Hold the abuser accountable. Don’t minimize his abusive behavior. Support him in seeking specialized batterers’ counseling to help change his behavior. Continue to hold him accountable and to support and protect the victim even after he has begun a counseling program.
- If restoration of the relationship is to occur, it can be considered only after the above steps have taken place.

Statistics reflect that 95% of domestic violence victims are women, although men may also be victims. But regardless of who is being victimized, domestic violence is a serious problem that needs to be addressed by religious communities. Surveys from the U.S. and Canada indicate that domestic violence occurs in 28% of all marriages.

*“Have pity on me, O God, for I am in distress
with sorrow my eye is consumed;
my soul also, and my body.
I am like a dish that is broken...
But my trust is in you, O God;
I say, ‘You are my God.’”*

(Psalm 31:10-15)

Religious teachings can serve either as a resource or a roadblock in addressing domestic violence. There is nothing in Christian or Jewish teaching that can rightly be used to justify abuse. However, there are teachings that can be misused and distorted to suggest that domestic violence may be acceptable, or even God’s will. When these teachings or interpretations of scripture are misused, they become roadblocks to ending the abuse.

As religious communities, our mandate is to minimize any roadblocks facing abused members of our congregations and to maximize the resources that exist within our religious traditions.

More Information

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-7233 (24 hours); 800-787-3224 (TTY); www.ndvh.org

Educational Materials Available through FaithTrust Institute

- *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse* (book)
- *Opening the Door: A Pastor’s Guide to Addressing Domestic Violence in Premarital Counseling* (book)
- *Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence* (DVD)
- *Promesas Quebrantadas: Perspectivas Religiosas acerca de la Violencia Doméstica* (DVD)
- *Domestic Violence: What Churches Can Do* (DVD)
- *Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman* (DVD)
- *Pastoral Care for Domestic Violence: Case Studies for Clergy* (DVD)
- *What Every Congregation Needs to Know about Domestic Violence* (brochure)

**For more information about educational materials,
call 877-860-2255 toll-free or visit www.faithtrustinstitute.org**