

Some General Guidelines:

1. Follow state laws related to reporting child abuse and domestic violence.
2. Remember that it is your Christian duty to help save a soul rather than the church's image.
3. Provide ongoing education in your church and community. Break the code of silence by heightening awareness of the problem and its prevalence through brochures, articles, bulletin inserts, videos, sermons, educational programs for the church, community, etc.
4. Know the resources of the community and how to help victims and perpetrators avail themselves of these resources. Create a resource and referral list.
5. Address religious issues relating to domestic violence and child abuse to increase the understanding of the long term issues faced by abused children, victims, and perpetrators.
6. Re-examine teachings that predispose Christian homes to abuse and violence
7. Instead of relocating a family dealing with domestic violence, facilitate professional assistance for all its members. Without intervention, the problem will be transferred to a new location.
8. Financially support initiatives (resources) to assist families in crisis. For example, establish a fund that can be used at the discretion of the church for this purpose. Some of these initiatives include:
 - Counseling (individual and group)
 - Emergency Housing
 - Emergency Transportation
 - Food
 - Clothing
 - Legal Advocacy
 - Residence at Christian /Faith Based Healing Cener
9. Organize conferences, workshops, seminars, etc. to provide ongoing education and support for church leaders.
10. Develop a church protocol and or policy to protect victims as well as perpetrators.



P.O. Box 9637
Spokane, WA 99209
Tel. (509) 323-2123
E-mail: info@whennetwork.com
Website: www.whennetwork.com

Domestic Violence and the Church's Response

by
Mable Dunbar, Ph.D.

*When individuals are in crisis,
they turn to sources and resources they hope will help them.
Many of them will turn to the church.*

*If they do not find it helpful, they turn away from the church,
and we lose the opportunity to fulfill the mission of Christ:*

*"To preach the gospel to the poor, heal and bind up the
broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind
and set at liberty those who are bruised. "*
-Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18



CHURCH RESPONSE

The following suggestions are given as a basis for churches and religious organizations helping individuals dealing with domestic violence and abuse. Statistics indicate that 85% of victims are female. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001, February 2003*. Therefore for clarity victims are referred to as “she/her” and abusers/perpetrators are referred to as “he/his/him.” However keep in mind that ANYONE can be a victim or abuser.

Responding to the Victim:

1. Do not look away when you are aware of abuse occurring in the church. By doing so you are creating a climate for justification of abuse. Take the allegations seriously and take immediate action. The first responsibility of church leaders and members is to provide safety first and ask questions later. Help the victim find a safe place to stay.
2. Give her the opportunity to talk with you without the abuser present. Couple counseling or marriage counseling does not stop abuse. If the abuser pursues her and refuses to have her speak with you alone, call the police.
3. Let her know that in the event you learn that she is suicidal, is threatening to harm someone, or you feel that she is in danger, you will have to get help and inform the proper authorities.
4. Listen to her concerns, and be emotionally supportive without touching her, especially if you are male. If at all possible have someone else present, preferably a female, as you talk with the victim.
5. If you are not trained on the issues of domestic violence and abuse, refer her to someone who can help and be a healing resource. If you are not aware of any Christian helpers or programs, it is better to refer her to go to a secular program than to encourage her to return home.
6. Quote Scriptures that are liberating, affirming and full of hope. Do not misquote texts to suggest that the responsibility of “fixing” the marriage, “providing her children with a father” or “converting” her abuser rests on her. Do not re-victimize her by alluding that she must have done something “to make him act that way” or “push his buttons.”
7. Refrain from cliché statements, “Just pray about it”, “God will give you the strength to endure.”, “God will make a way of escape for you.” They are not practical. If she is not able to endure the abuse does that mean that God is not with her?
8. Examine your own beliefs before giving advice:
 - Your history or experience of violence in your family of origin
 - Your concept of and female roles, submission and headship
 - Your perception about domestic violence and abuse
 - Your Scriptural interpretation or beliefs of separation, and divorce

9. Be willing to help her find support as well as appropriate help for herself and her children (if applicable) If she decides to stay in the abusive situation encourage her to develop a safety plan to protect herself and her children. Help her think through the steps she should take if her partner becomes abusive again: Make a list of people she can call in an emergency. She can also hide a suitcase of clothing, personal items, money, social security cards, band books, the children’s birth certificates school information , etc and have someone keep for her in the event she has to leave an abusive situation.

Responding to the Abuser:

1. When a crisis occurs in your church, be honest. Secrecy only plays into the hand of the perpetrator. If there is knowledge of family violence, credence should not be given to individuals who exhibit violent behaviors, present themselves as victims, and are skillful in soliciting sympathies from the church.
2. Speak directly and clearly to abusers and let them know that you do not approve of their abusive behavior. Body language, nodding or agreeing and helping batterers to deny their abusive behavior is dangerous.
3. Regardless what the position of the abuser is, our primary obligation should be with the safety and welfare of the victim.
4. Hold the abuser accountable for his actions. Refer to programs designed to assist perpetrators. Do not assist him in:
 - Minimizing his behavior: “I only gave her a love tap” (You see her swollen eye or split lip)
 - Lying about his behavior: “I have never abused my wife” (You visited her in the hospital a few months ago after he attacked her)
 - Rationalizing his behavior, “I was stressed out”
 - Blaming others: job, wife, children “She pushed my buttons” or “She has a mental problem.”
 - Going to court and be a character witness
5. If he is a church officer, suspend all leadership activities until he deals with his abusive behavior.
6. Do not perpetuate beliefs relating to stereotype. Anyone can be abusive or abused. Regardless of how wonderful he is in certain areas of his life, if he is abusive he must be held accountable.
7. Be willing to be supportive and offer necessary services.
8. Acknowledge your limits. It is wise to know how well you are prepared to deal with domestic violence and abuse issues. If you are not trained refer the abuser to someone else who can be a healing resource.
9. Let him know that he is not locked into his abusive behaviors. He can change if he wants to and you will support him as you are able to do so.