

Domestic Violence Background Reading

Pastoral Guidelines for Ministering to Victims of Domestic Violence

- Have a healthy suspicion that every woman seeking assistance or wanting to speak to a priest or minister may be a victim of domestic violence.
- Respond with compassion for whatever problem she might bring, e.g., lack of faith, depression, anxiety, confusion, anorexia, “family problems,” etc.
- When you suspect abuse, speak with the victim alone.
- Affirm the person’s courage in coming for assistance. Build up her self esteem.
- Listen carefully and patiently. She needs to talk and be heard. She may want you to hear all about the abuse but likely she will dissimulate, minimizing it.
- If she is hesitant to be specific, ask questions to get more information.
 - Has he hit you? How did he hit you? When was the last time?
 - Does he use bad words with you? What does he say?
 - Is he jealous? Does he try to control you? How?
 - Are you afraid? What makes you afraid?
 - Do you have anyone to talk to, anyone to support you?
- Believe the victim. She is not exaggerating.
- Reassure her repeatedly, “You do not deserve to be treated this way.” “It is not your fault.” Don’t ever think or say that she might have caused the violence.
- Don’t make maintaining the family together a goal.
- Don’t encourage her to return to the abuser. It’s her choice. Don’t take over for her.
- Don’t encourage her to leave the abuser either but rather seek help in making a decision.
- Don’t pressure her to make a decision but urge her to take steps to be safe and get help.
- Assure yourself she will be safe if she returns; make a safety plan with her.
 - Prepare steps to take when abuse occurs again, call 911.
 - Make a list of people to call in emergency and have it with you.
 - Know where knives and guns are in the house.
 - Keep important documents in a safe place, including cash, birth certificates, insurance cards, important phone numbers
 - Pack and hide a suitcase with clothing and personal items.
- Don’t assume that if she is more assertive, he will change; he may become more violent.
- Ask about drug and alcohol abuse, but remember they do not cause the violence; they only aggravate it.
- Ask about his treatment of the children. Remember you are a mandated reporter of child abuse, though if there is abuse, the best option is for her to report it with you supporting.
- Do not meet or talk with the abuser unless she arranges it. Her safety comes first.
- If she comes with her abuser, ask her permission and opinion about the consequences.
- Abusers always minimize their violence and offer excuses.
- Do not advise marriage counseling; first she needs DV counseling and he needs counseling for his violent behavior.
- Do not belittle the abuser but denounce his violent behavior as not justified.
- Do not get involved with the abuser’s legal defense.
- Don’t try to assess his degree of conversion or remorse. He needs DV counseling for and not simply anger management or religious conversion.
- Be careful about recommending prayer for the abuser’s conversion; it may distract her from seeking help, and, in the end, she may blame God or her lack of faith if he doesn’t change.
- Do not talk about forgiveness until she is free of DV and has received counseling.
- Ask her if she feels weak or strong; remind her she is facing a major challenge and for that she needs to gain strength; for that reason she needs counseling and a support group.

- Do not try to be the counselor yourself, unless professionally qualified.
- Provide her with resources: phone numbers for emergencies; offer to make calls to counseling services or a shelter with her.
- Victims usually need at least a few individual counseling sessions and then a support group in which to share their experiences and receive affirmation, guidance and support.
- If she wants an order of protection, accompany her to the police station.
- Promise your continued support; give her your phone number.
- Pray with her.
- Keep everything confidential or ask her permission to share her information.
- Do not meet with her or him at their home, rather in your office or a neutral, safe place.
- Motivate her to take steps toward a solution might by asking and/or noting:
 - How is this affecting your children?
 - While they love their father, the boys are learning how to be abusive and the girls how to be victims.
 - This mistreatment will probably get worse.
 - I'm concerned for your safety.
 - You do not deserve to be abused.
 - If you ever decide to leave, I am here to support you.
 - Assure her that God and the Church do not want anyone to stay in a violent relationship. He has broken the marriage covenant.

Resources

- ◆ Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007.
- ◆ USCCB, *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*. USCCB: Washington DC, revised 2007.
- ◆ Susan Grossman / Marta Lundy, "Domestic Violence Across Race and Ethnicity". *Violence Against Women*. Vol 13, Num 10, Oct 2007, 1029-1052.
- ◆ Bishops Ricardo Ramirez, *Speaking the Unspeakable: A Pastoral Letter on Domestic Violence*, 5050-523-7577, www.dioceseoflascruces.org
- ◆ Charles W. Dahm, "Let's Stop Ignoring Domestic Violence," *U.S. Catholic* Oct 2011.
- ◆ Archdiocese of Chicago website (archchicago.org), click on domestic violence on bottom right of home page for sermon, videos, extensive manual.
- ◆ Google PBS Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, April 2013, Churches Respond to Domestic Violence, based on Chicago experience.
- ◆ Kristin Carmichael, A Hospital-Based Domestic Violence Program Is Crucial to Keeping Women Safe," *Health Progress*, Sept-Oct 2013, 33-36.
- ◆ Susan Weitzman, *Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse of Upscale Women*.
- ◆ Heidi Schlumpf, "Parishes take on domestic violence ministry," *National Catholic Reporter*, Sept 26, 2015.

Videos/DVDs

- ◆ *Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence*, Center for the Prevention of Sexual and domestic Violence: 206-634-1903, cpsdv@cpsdv.org
- ◆ *Broken Promises; Fireproof; Sleeping with the Enemy; Cicatrices, Burning Bed, What's Love Got to Do with It*, Google: Leslie Morgan Steiner, *Crazy Love*, #PrivateViolence

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