HOW FAITH COMMUNITIES CAN SUPPORT SURVIVORS

Create a culture of support
• **Educate your community:** invite staff from local domestic violence agencies to speak about resources and train staff and volunteers to recognize and respond to abuse; host awareness events.
• **Use your voice:** use the values of your tradition to speak out during services, prayers, events, and classes. Let people know that relationship violence and sexual violence are not acceptable or tolerated in your community and that help is available.
• **Make the message visible:** display articles, flyers, books, and materials with community resources in bulletins, bathrooms, emails, newsletters, website, etc.

Responding to Survivors
What should you do if you suspect someone is experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault, if they disclose concerns of abuse, or they’re interested in more information or resources?

Validate
*Use statements that validate wherever the person is right now*
- “I believe you”
- “It’s not your fault”
- “I’m sorry this happened to you”
- “That’s totally normal”
- “It takes a lot of courage to reach out”
- “You’re being so strong”
- “You don’t have to go through this alone. Support is available”

Connect
*Connect people with a 24-hour hotline and professionally trained advocates, who can assist with safety planning, crisis intervention, shelter, housing, relocation, connection with community resources, and assistance with courts, police, and legal options.*

- YWCA Greater Cincinnati: 513-872-9259
- Women Helping Women: 513-381-5610
- Women’s Crisis Center (NKY): 800-928-3335

Things to Avoid
• Never discuss potential abuse in the presence of a spouse/partner or children.
• Avoid judging, blaming, or shaming
  o “Why didn’t you...?” “Why don’t you just leave?” “You/your partner is bad”
• Avoid giving advice
  o “I think you should...” “If it were me, I would....”
• Avoid demanding to know their story
  o The survivor is in charge of what/how much they want to share and should not be pressured
• Don’t forget to clearly explain what you will do with the information they share
  o What is your confidentiality policy? Will you tell other people, police, child protective services, etc.?

Avoid Spiritual and Religious Abuse
• Avoid using scripture, tradition, cultural norms, or religious authority to justify abuse or prolong an abusive relationship
• Avoid pressuring a survivor to remain in a harmful relationship or tolerate the abuse
• Avoid working through religious or lay leaders or friends or family from the faith community to coerce the survivor or make pleas on the abusive partner’s behalf

*Remember: Each situation of abuse is extremely complex and could have many unforeseen or dangerous consequences. All decisions are ultimately the survivor’s. It’s important to connect the survivor with trained victim advocates. Your supportive, non-judgmental, informative response will help them understand that you’re there if/when they are ready to seek help.*

Online Resources:
• FaithTrust Institute (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Multifaith Resources): [https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/](https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/)
• National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (Multifaith): [http://ncdsv.org/publications_religion.html](http://ncdsv.org/publications_religion.html)
• Jewish Women International (JWI) (Jewish) [http://www.jewishwomen.org/](http://www.jewishwomen.org/)
• Peaceful Families Project (Muslim): [https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/](https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/)
Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman’s life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.