



strengthening
offender
accountability

improving
victim
safety

creating
a safer
community

fostering
holistic
solutions

**Responding to Domestic Violence:
A Toolkit for Faith Communities in
Whatcom County**

Developed by the Bellingham-Whatcom County
Commission Against Domestic Violence

BWCCADV

**Bellingham - Whatcom County
Commission Against Domestic Violence**



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Each year, more abuse victims, perpetrators, and family members seek help from clergy and religious leaders than all other helping professionals combined.¹

Note:

If you intend to utilize the information and resources in this Toolkit, please consider connecting with the [Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence](#) for support and training.

¹ Horton, Anne L. and Williamson, Judith A., Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough, p. xi, Lexington Books, 1988.

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Vision and Values

Domestic violence is not acceptable in Whatcom County.

We can end domestic violence through supporting survivors, including children, and educating perpetrators to change their behavior.

Everyone in our communities has a role to play in these efforts.

This toolkit is for faith leaders and congregations who believe:

Marriage is a sacred covenant. A survivor leaving a relationship with abuse does not break the covenant; perpetrators of domestic violence do.

Survivor and child safety are of primary importance.

The person who is abusive and the person who is being abused are both whole people. The faith community can provide support and healing opportunities for the whole person.

Faith communities can be a source of strength and support to families experiencing domestic violence.

Clergy do not need to be experts in domestic violence, but they do need to open doors to resources, and ensure that perpetrators stay on the path to long-term change.

The roles of clergy are to support healing and provide resources for expert, professional help for all who are impacted by domestic violence; and encourage real, long-term change in the beliefs and behaviors of the person who is abusive.

Note:

This Toolkit is intended to be adapted to meet the needs of individual faith communities.

Supporting Long-Term Change in Relationships with Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is not acceptable.

Domestic violence impacts all of us in the community. It is a complex, multi-faceted issue that requires a complex, multi-faceted response to eliminate from our society.

We can end domestic violence with the right community response. Clergy are an essential part of this response. Clergy can use their authority, knowledge, and connections to community resources to support long-term change in a relationship that has domestic violence.

Often our response to domestic violence is to ignore it. Ignoring it won't make it disappear, and will often allow the violence to escalate over time – without accountability, the abuser will continue their behavior.

To achieve long-term change, we have three goals, listed below in order of importance:

- *Safety for the survivor and children*
- *Accountability for and repentance by the abuser*
- *Mourning the loss of the relationship, or restoration of the relationship if possible*

To support change, we need to provide support and assistance to the survivor and children, and focus our efforts to change behavior on the abuser. The abuser is always responsible for the domestic violence in the relationship, and is the only one who can end the abuse. The roots of domestic violence are the behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs of the abuser.

A person who uses abuse is not a bad person; think of them as someone who is a drunk driver. They need to learn not to drive when they are under the influence. If someone is driving under the influence, it does not matter how much they are breaking the law. If they are above the legal limit at all, then they are liable for their actions. Similarly, a person who uses abuse is liable for their abusive actions, regardless of what those actions are. Someone who is driving under the influence is responsible for their actions, even if they believe that they are able to drive safely. Similarly, someone who is using abuse is responsible for their abusive actions, even if they believe those actions are not harmful. When working with people who have been driving under the influence, you cannot erase their past actions; but you can help them change their habits and beliefs, so that they do not drive under the influence anymore. When supporting someone who is abusive, you cannot erase their old habits of using abuse; but you can help them create new habits and beliefs, so that they are no longer abusive.

If a person is both engaging in substance abuse and domestic violence, it is important for the abusive person to treat both problems. Only treating the substance abuse problem will not solve the domestic violence problem and vice versa. Substance abuse does not cause domestic violence; it is like the brakes being off the car of someone who is already driving under the influence. The person needs to get help for their substance abuse problem and they need to get their brakes fixed.

Law enforcement intervention is an important option, especially for situations involving physical abuse. It also can be extremely effective: Studies have shown that an arrest is one of the leading inhibitors to abusers perpetrating physical violence. However, law enforcement cannot be our only option. The majority of the abusive tactics used, though against community norms and acceptable means of treating other people, are not against the law, and therefore an arrest cannot be made.

A Whatcom County Domestic Violence Fatality Review reviewed recent intimate partner homicides in our communities, and had three major findings. One was that “Many people knew about the abuse, but did or said nothing to stop it.” The fatality review panel found that in all of the cases reviewed, someone who knew the family had either a strong intuition or definite knowledge that something was very wrong, and didn’t take effective steps to stop the abuse.

Likewise, focus groups conducted with survivors of domestic violence in Whatcom County in the summer of 2013 showed that survivors often tell people about the abuse, in the hopes that those people will help the abuse to end. As stated by one survivor, “everyone knew but did not say anything.” Overwhelmingly, the survivors agreed that they wanted interventions from people who are intimate with the abuser, as well as from professionals in the criminal justice system. The survivors stated that abusers are not ever going to change if no one ever tells them that their behavior is unacceptable; by saying nothing, people are basically telling the abuser that their methods of power and control are “not a big deal.”

If you feel uncomfortable about intervening, or are concerned about being embarrassed, think about your risk of embarrassment versus the harm you can prevent and the help you can provide. People who are close to the abuser, such a family member, friend, neighbor, clergy, or coworker, often have the influence to change their behavior. By intervening with options for supporting long-term change, you are planting a seed with the intention to de-escalate or prevent the abuse. If you care about someone who uses abusive behaviors, the best thing you can do for them is to confront them about those behaviors, and help them get the support and education they need to stop being abusive. Remember, ending the abuse is not within your power – it is the responsibility and is within the power of the abuser. Providing support and

options is within your power; if the abuser chooses to accept the support and options you offer, then long-term change can happen.

If you care about someone who is a survivor of domestic violence, you need to remember that survivors usually love the abusers and just want the abuse to stop. And even if the survivor no longer wants to be with the abuser, leaving the relationship often does not stop the violence. Finally, if the survivor does leave the relationship safely, the abuser will use the same behaviors in a future relationship. The best way to keep survivors safe is to help the abuser recognize and stop their use of domestic violence.

Why is it important for the faith community to support long-term change in relationship with domestic violence?

A faith community is one of the few places where you may have the abuser, survivor, and their children all in the same place, hearing the same message, and connecting to the same belief system.

For many survivors, they don't make a call for help to 911 – they call their clergy, or the leader of a study group.

Attendees at domestic violence perpetrator treatment who are “clergy-mandated” are often more involved and committed to change, and more successful in creating change, than those abusers who are court-mandated.

Other clergy throughout the United States are addressing domestic violence as a key concern for their congregation. These clergy have stated that:



What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is the use of abusive behaviors that can be physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal; they include behaviors that are controlling and manipulative.

Domestic violence happens when one person believes they have the right to control another person. Domestic violence is a pattern. A person uses the abusive behaviors in order to have power and control.

Domestic violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and sometimes death. The effect of domestic violence is that people may feel afraid, threatened, depressed, and anxious; people may also be physically or sexually harmed. The consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and truly last a lifetime.

Domestic violence is...

a pattern of behavior that one person in a relationship uses to control and dominate the other. The behavior may include stalking along with being verbally, emotionally, physically, financially, or sexually abusive.

Financial abuse can be very subtle — telling someone what they can and cannot buy or requiring them to share control of bank accounts.

- Giving someone an allowance and closely watching what they buy.
- Placing someone's paycheck in your own account and denying them access to it.
- Keeping someone from seeing shared bank accounts or records.
- Forbidding someone to work or limiting the hours they do.
- Preventing someone from going to work by taking their car or keys.
- Refusing to give someone money, food, rent, medicine or clothing.
- Using funds from children's tuition or a joint savings account without knowledge.
- Spending money on themselves but not allowing someone to do the same.
- Using money to hold power over someone because of knowing they are not in the same financial situation.

Stalking is when a person repeatedly watches, follows or harasses someone and makes that person feel afraid or unsafe.

- Showing up at the home, place of work, or other known places unannounced or uninvited.
- Sending unwanted text messages, letters, emails and voicemails.
- Leaving unwanted items, gifts or flowers.
- Using other people as resources to investigate your partner's life.

Sexual abuse refers to any action that pressures or coerces someone to do something sexually they don't want to do. It can also refer to behavior that impacts a person's ability to control their sexual activity or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs, including oral sex, rape or restricting access to birth control and condoms.

Emotional abuse includes non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring or "checking in," excessive texting, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking.

- Calling someone names and putting them down.
- Yelling and screaming.
- Intentionally embarrassing someone in public.
- Preventing someone from seeing or talking with friends and family.
- Telling someone what to do and what to wear.
- Using online communities or cell phones to control, intimidate or humiliate.
- Blaming someone's actions for abusive or unhealthy behavior.
- Stalking someone.
- Threatening to commit suicide to keep someone from leaving.
- Threatening to harm a pet or people.
- Making someone feel guilty or immature when they don't consent to sexual activity.
- Threatening to expose secrets such as sexual orientation or immigration status.
- Threatening to have children taken away.

Technology dating abuse is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. Often this behavior is a form of verbal or emotional abuse perpetrated online.

Physical abuse is any intentional and unwanted contact with you or something close to your body. Sometimes abusive behavior does not cause pain or even leave a bruise, but it's still unhealthy.

- Scratching, punching, biting, strangling or kicking.
- Using a gun, knife, box cutter, bat, mace or other weapon.
- Grabbing someone's face to make them look at you.
- Pushing, pulling or grabbing clothing.
- Grabbing to prevent someone from leaving or to force someone to go somewhere.

Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, race, religion, nationality or educational background.

- More than **1 in 4 men (28.5%)** and **1 in 3 women (35.6%)** in the U.S. have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- **33 percent gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender men and women** experience intimate partner violence
- **Females who are 20 – 24 years of age** are at most risk for non-fatal domestic violence.
- **Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police.**
- It takes most survivors an average of **seven times to permanently leave an abusive relationship.**
- The process of leaving an abusive relationship takes **an average of five years.**
- Survivors who leave their abusers are at a **75 percent greater chance of being killed** by the abuser than those who stay.
- There is a **60 percent reduction in risk of severe assault** when survivors utilize domestic violence services.

Local Data

- There were more than **3,100 domestic-violence related calls** or service in 2015 to law enforcement in Whatcom County.
- **More than 150 people** filed for a civil domestic violence protection order in Whatcom County during 2015.
- **More than 1,700 survivors** sought services from a domestic violence advocacy agency in Whatcom County during 2015.
- **More than 40 survivors of domestic violence** received services at Consultation and Sexual Assault Support Services (CASAS) at Western Washington University in 2015.
- **29 percent of those counted as homeless** during the 2014 Whatcom County Homeless Count listed domestic violence as a cause of homelessness.
- **52 percent** of domestic violence victims, interviewed by Whatcom County law enforcement in 2016 using a validated risk assessment tool, were found to be at high risk for lethality. Of this risk group, **55 percent** spoke to an advocate for safety planning while law enforcement was on the scene of a domestic violence call.
- Of the 210 murders that occurred in Washington State in 2015, **55 were domestic violence.**

Common Myths Dispelled

Myth:

Abusers are angry, violent human beings who no one likes; survivors are sweet, meek, and likeable.

Fact:

The average abuser is more likeable than their survivors. This is because abusers are often very concerned with their public image, and can be very charming; whereas survivors are often operating under the stress and trauma of the abuse.

Myth:

Domestic violence can be solved by the police, jail, and the courts.

Fact:

Most abusers are never identified by the criminal justice system.

Myth:

Abusers act the way they do because of mental health problems.

Fact:

Many abusers do not have mental health problems; about the same proportion of abusers have mental health problems as in the general population.

Myth:

Domestic violence does not occur in the faith community, because it goes against the religious values.

Fact:

Domestic violence occurs at equal rates within the faith community as it does in secular society.

Myth:

Abusers are violent in all their relationships.

Fact:

Most abusers do not use violence to resolve conflict in other non-intimate relationships.

Myth:

When abusers are violent, it is because they “lost their temper,” and not because they meant to hurt their partner.

Fact:

Abusers use violence because it helps them gain and maintain power and control, not because they lose control of their emotions.

Myth:

Drinking and/or drug abuse cause domestic violence.

Fact:

There seems to be a correlation between alcohol and domestic violence. Alcohol and drugs may change or intensify how the violence is expressed, but it does not cause or excuse it.

Myth:

Survivors have done something to cause the abuse.

Fact:

Abusers choose their actions. Abuse is **NEVER** the fault of the survivor.

Myth:

The abuser is not a loving partner.

Fact:

The abuser does not always abuse; many have periods when they can be very generous with their affection. Sometimes the loving actions of an abuser are due to the desire to gain or maintain power and control.

Myth:

Once an abuser, always an abuser.

Fact:

The key to changing an abusive relationship is the abuser’s willingness to accept responsibility for their actions. About 20% of abusers are “intractable” and unlikely to change. That means that approximately 80% can change with the right motivation and support from the community. If the abuser admits to the inappropriateness of their actions, wants to change, and seeks individual or group counseling right away, then they have a chance to recover.

Who is most likely to be an abuser or survivor?

Both abusers and survivors come from all walks of life. They can be from any community, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, race, religion, nationality, or educational background.

Some abusers have learned and chosen to use tactics of domestic violence because of abuse they experienced or witnessed as a child; some have not experienced abuse as a child but learned and chose abusive behaviors elsewhere.

Similarly, some individuals who are survivors in abusive relationships may have witnessed or experience abuse as a child, but many others did not grow up in violent households.

Why doesn't the survivor just leave the relationship?

The most common questions asked about domestic violence are: Why does the survivor stay? Or why do they go back?

For someone who has never experienced domestic violence, the question of why a survivor stays with an abusive partner can be very difficult to understand. There are many reasons why it might be hard to leave an abusive relationship. The following list includes some (not all) of the reasons why survivors stay. The reasons for staying vary from one survivor to the next, and they usually involve several factors.

Emotional reasons:

- belief that the abusive partner will change because of their remorse and promises to stop battering
- lack of emotional support
- guilt over the failure of the relationship
- love for the abuser
- fear of making major life changes
- feeling responsible for the abuse
- feeling helpless, hopeless, and trapped
- belief that the survivor is the only one who can help the abuser with their problems
- fear of emotional damage to the children over the loss of a parent, even if that parent is abusive
- low self-esteem, which may be reinforced by the abuser
- shame over being a survivor

Safety reasons:

- fear of physical harm to self or children
- threats from the abuser to kill or harm the survivor or children if they leave
- increases in violence or threats after the survivor leaves

Economic reasons:

- economic dependence on the abuser
- lack of job skills
- lack of alternative housing
- fear of losing custody of the children because the abuser threatens to take the children if survivor tries to leave
- social isolation and lack of support because abuser is often the survivor's only support system
- lack of information regarding domestic violence resources
- belief that law enforcement will not take the survivor seriously
- cultural or religious constraints
- immigration status of the survivor, abuser, and/or children
- family pressure to stay in the relationship
- social status that comes with being with the abuser
- fear for harm to beloved family pets, or inability to leave with family pets
- physical or mental disability that limit the survivor's options

There is a problem with these questions of why the survivor stays or goes back. They put the blame for the on-going abuse in the relationship on the survivor. The questions imply that if the survivor would only leave and stay away, the abuse would stop. We know that abuse does not end when the relationship ends. Many abusers continue to stalk, harass, threaten, and harm their survivors after the relationship ends, and violence can even escalate. If children are involved, abusers may use the children to continue to have contact with and abuse the survivor.

The real questions should be: "Why does the abuser treat their partner that way? Why doesn't the abuser stop their use of violence and control?"

Refer a survivor of domestic violence to:

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS).....877.715.1563

Lummi Victims of Crime.....360.312.2015

For advocacy counseling, support groups, legal assistance, and other supportive services. All services are free and confidential

How does domestic violence impact children?

Children are exposed to domestic violence in many ways, including:

Exposure during pregnancy.

- Domestic violence may begin or escalate during pregnancy
- The abuse can have an effect in utero

Directly intervening to stop abuse.

A child may:

- plead with the abuser to stop
- call for help, such as 911
- attempt to distract the abuser
- block the abuser's access to the survivor
- physically assault the abuser

Directly being harmed by the abuse.

A child may:

- be injured, either intentionally or accidentally
- be punished for intervening
- be blamed for the abuse
- be ridiculed for crying
- be used to spy on, harass, or intimidate the survivor (even after separation)
- be ordered to abuse the survivor

Witnessing the abuse.

A child may see or hear:

- the abuser using tactics of abuse and coercive control over the survivor
- threats or screams, including pleas for help or mercy
- injuries
- damages to property
- a parent being arrested or restrained

Experiencing the aftermath of the abuse.

A child may experience:

- parental anxiety and depression
- disrupted visits or exchanges with parents
- housing and economic instability
- not wanting divorce or separation
- self-blame

Domestic Violence Prevention and Response Preparedness in Faith Communities

Does your congregation talk about domestic violence? Do you know what your faith community will do if you or another family in your congregation experiences domestic violence?

Since domestic violence affects individuals in every community, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, race, religion, nationality, or educational background, it is important for faith communities to actively prepare to respond to and to prevent domestic violence.

Prevention and response preparedness enables congregations to effectively serve the safety and accountability needs of their members and visitors.

Give voice to the issue of domestic violence – prevent it, and become prepared to appropriately respond, through the action items listed below. Start by committing to at least one action item from each level, and then challenge yourself to more actions from there. All resource links can be accessed in the electronic version of this toolkit located at:

www.dvcommission.org/projects/toolkitforfaithcommunities

Contact the Commission Against Domestic Violence
for implementation support, training, resources, and questions
360.312.5700 or mail@dvcommission.org

Gold Level Actions

- Join in the national observance of Domestic Violence Action Month (DVAM) each October.
 - ✓ Dedicate at least one gathering in October to educate your faith community about domestic violence.
 - ✓ Announce Domestic Violence Action Month in your October bulletin. Share information about events, opportunities, and resources with congregation members to raise their awareness about domestic violence and support them to take action.
 - ✓ During October, include links on your website and bulletin to the [31 Days of Action Calendar](#), as well as other resources found at dvcommission.org/take-action. Encourage members to commit to taking at least three actions for DVAM.

- [Give faith talks on domestic violence](#), clarifying interpretations of religious texts that are often used by abusers to maintain power and control. [Clearly describe what abuse is](#) so that people can begin to name and recognize domestic violence.

- Provide opportunity for congregation members to move from faith talks about domestic violence to small group discussions, with specific outcomes identified. Click [here](#) for a list of discussion topics.

- Post your faith talk on domestic violence to your website for others to see and hear. Also, share it with the [Commission Against Domestic Violence](#).
- Work to see a balance in gender representation among leadership positions in the faith community.
- Don't allow abusers to have leadership positions within the congregation. Include regular, thorough background checks for all staff and other designated leadership positions. With new staff or volunteer leaders, ask questions about the candidate's history of abuse and reasons for leaving past positions.
- Provide mandatory reporter training for all adults in the faith community who have contact with children.
- Document abusive and criminal actions of faith community leaders, including staff and volunteers.

Note: Some congregations have failed to accurately document or share reasons for dismissing leaders who have used abuse, on the condition that the abuser leaves the congregation and their leadership position. Although this can be a well-intended response, it serves to endanger the next faith community who unknowingly trusts the abuser with a leadership position. You have the opportunity, and responsibility, to document abuse and/or report it to authorities. This will demonstrate support for current and former victims, increase safety for future victims and faith communities, and increase accountability for the abuser.

- Include protocols for responding to leaders and lay people who use domestic violence and other forms of abuse in faith community [policies and protocols](#) related to discipline.
- Identify several people from the congregation, including clergy, staff, and other leaders, to receive training on domestic violence.
- Include information about domestic violence in human sexuality, family life, and marriage classes.
- Organize a conference or inter-faith event for youth about healthy relationships. Encourage youth to learn and talk about healthy relationships to prepare and support them as they navigate relationships and social experiences.
- Include education on healthy relationships and dating violence in curricula for youth groups. Provide education to youth of all genders. Educate on healthy boundaries in relationships, dating violence, and what to do if you find yourself in an abusive relationship.

- Empower youth to provide leadership within the faith community about what they have learned about healthy relationships. Arrange for youth to lead an educational forum for other members of the congregation.
- Work with leadership and governing bodies in your congregation to create plans for implementation and institutionalization of this domestic violence toolkit in your faith community.

Silver Level Actions

- In reconciliation services, identify domestic violence as a sin.
- Include intercessions for people who are experiencing domestic violence; that they may find freedom from abuse and support from the faith community to be safe, loved and respected.
- Include intercessions for abusers that they stop abusing forever and become whole through journeys of professional help, transparency, and accountability.
- As a pastor or faith leader, learn about and commit to a Wheel of Support.
- Hold a panel discussion and/or small group discussion about domestic violence.
- Invite experts to speak at special events or at a regular service to educate the faith community about domestic violence.
- Create care packages and/or solicit donations for those in your congregation, in shelters, or elsewhere in the community who are experiencing domestic violence.
- Discuss the dynamics of domestic violence, including the faith community's stance on abuse, as part of marriage preparation activities. Check couples' patterns for handling disagreements and their families' patterns. Suggest postponing marriage if you identify signs of abuse or potential abuse.
- In baptismal preparation classes, be clear that the arrival of a child and its attendant stress may trigger or increase abusive behavior. Provide extra support for new parents who may be vulnerable or stressed.
- Dedicate funds to provide for emergency housing, food, transportation, etc. for survivors of domestic violence. Have a procedure in place to make those funds immediately available for victims and children fleeing abuse.

- Dedicate funds for indigent abusers to participate in certified domestic violence treatment.
- Insist that teachings and texts used by the faith community be free of sexual stereotyping. Abuse thrives on sexism. Promote gender equality in all educational activities and share scripture through a gender-equality lens.
- Ensure all teachers, catechists, staff, and volunteers receive regular training in how to recognize and respond to abuse.
- Review and update faith community policies pertaining to confidentiality in disclosures to clergy and staff. Make policies accessible to all.
- Meet with domestic violence advocates to learn about the empowerment model and considerations with victim consent in reporting domestic violence to authorities.

Bronze Level Actions

- Build a relationship with law enforcement and domestic violence advocacy agencies. Connect with these agencies to learn about: domestic violence in your community; the experiences of domestic violence survivors; what the law says about domestic violence; what response needs exist in your community, and other insights that could help inform your prevention and response actions.
- Watch Leslie Morgan Steiner’s You Tube video, *Why Domestic Violence Victims Don’t Leave*.
- Learn more from this toolkit about why victims of domestic violence don't leave.
- Post an article on your website or bulletin that identifies and educates on victim blaming.
- Fundraise for programs that support the needs of domestic violence survivors and their children, such as local victim advocacy agencies.
- Organize a fun walk/run (i.e. 5k) to promote domestic violence awareness. Donate any proceeds to domestic violence prevention, advocacy, and housing programs.
- Arrange for groups within your congregation to take action against domestic violence.
- Connect with or join the “Let Love Be Our Legacy” campaign.
- Offer free meeting space for support groups for survivors or treatment groups for abusers.

- Be a model of transparency and authenticity. Make it clear that people are welcome to talk about and resolve their problems with the support of the congregation.
 - Post contact information for community victim advocacy groups, including Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) and Lummi Victims of Crime (LVOC) in bathrooms and other public areas. Translate the information to any languages spoken by your faith community. Regularly repost and update the information as needed.
 - Post contact information for certified domestic violence perpetrator treatment providers in bathrooms and other public areas. Regularly repost and update the information as needed.
 - Include domestic violence related messaging, awareness, resources, and web links in your bulletin.
 - Make education materials (books, handouts) available in the foyer/entry way and library.
 - Invite speakers to present about domestic violence issues.
 - Learn more about how to identify and understand risk factors for serious and/or lethal violence.
 - Select a book about domestic violence to read and discuss in a congregation book group.
 - Donate a domestic violence related book club kit to the Whatcom County Public Library to help raise awareness in our community about this complex issue.
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How to Support a Survivor of Domestic Violence

Tips for Offering Support

- Talk to the survivor confidentially and in a safe setting, but not in isolation.
- Affirm all of the feelings of the survivor about the abuse. Recognize that the survivor may be fearful and vulnerable. Let the survivor express all their fears and other feelings.
- Listen to the survivor's story without judgment for their own actions.
- Tell the survivor that IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT. Many survivors blame themselves so it is crucial to remind them that the abuser is ultimately responsible for their own actions and behaviors.
- Ask them what they think will make them feel safer, and if they feel comfortable telling friends or family what is going on.
- Respect their privacy. Only tell people who need to know about the situation. If there is immediate danger, call 911. If there has been child abuse or neglect, make a report to Child Protective Services at 866.829.2153.
- Be supportive without giving specific directions.
- Provide crisis services that you offer to those in need in your congregation, such as financial support, housing assistance, meals, childcare, and others. Offer these and other options, and ask them what they need and want. Check in about this more than once.
- Offer an open door to talk again in the future. Help the survivor break out of the isolation the abuser has put them in. Keep in contact with them.
- Be patient. Self-empowerment may take longer than you want. Go at the survivor's pace, not yours. Remember that it takes an average of seven attempts for a survivor to leave a domestic violence relationship.
- If the survivor asks about forgiveness, remind the survivor that the abuser has broken the trust and covenant of the relationship. They do not have to forgive the abuser; and if they do choose to forgive the abuser, they don't have to work to restore the relationship if they don't want to. They can mourn the loss of the relationship, and work on their own healing.

Statements of Support and Validation for Survivors of Domestic Violence

- “This sounds like a difficult experience.”
- “I’m really sorry to hear this has happened to you.”
- “This was not your fault.”
- “Are there things we can do to help you feel safe?”
- “Are you okay? Do you need medical attention?”
- “I know this must be uncomfortable.”
- “If you want to talk about this again, you can talk to me.”

AVOID

Downplaying the situation. Don’t pretend that the abuse isn’t happening or that it isn’t that bad; pretending it’s no big deal doesn’t make it go away.

Attacking the abuser. Bad-mouthing the abuser may make the survivor feel responsible to defend them.

Involving or sharing information with others who do not need to know. On top of breaking the survivor’s trust, it could put them in danger.

Meeting with the survivor and abuser together, or conducting couples counseling or mediation. This may not be safe for the survivor, and the survivor may not be able to be open (See *Couples Counseling and Domestic Violence* article under “Further Information and Education” tab in the **Resources** section.)

Blaming the survivor for or lecturing them about the abuse, or for what you consider poor choices, judgement or decisions.

Telling the survivor that they must stay in the relationship (whether or not the abuser agrees to change.) Restoration of the relationship may not be possible, even if the abuser agrees to change, because of the harm and trauma that the abuse may have already caused.

Giving up hope. Because of the complex dynamics and traumatic effects of domestic violence, supporting a survivor to achieve safety and heal can be a long-term effort.

Understanding and Identifying Risk Factors for Serious and/or Lethal Violence

Domestic violence can include serious assaults and injuries and even homicide.

Research indicates that there are certain risk factors that indicate the potential for serious and/or lethal violence. As you talk and listen to someone's stories about the abuse they experience, pay attention to clues that could indicate they are at high risk for serious assault or even homicide. Below is a list of those risk factors.

If someone shares with you that they are experiencing any **ONE** of the following risk factors, they are at **HIGH RISK** for serious or lethal violence:

- The abusive person has used a weapon against them, or has threatened to use a weapon against them.
- The abusive person has threatened to kill them and/or children.
- They think the abusive person might try to kill them and/or their children.
- The abusive person has tried to choke (strangle) them.

If someone shares with you that they are experiencing **SEVERAL** of the following risk factors, they are at **HIGH RISK** for serious/lethal violence:

- The abusive person has a gun or can get one easily.
- The abusive person is violently or constantly jealous, or tries to control most of their daily activities.
- They have left the abusive person, or separated after living together or being married.
- The abusive person is unemployed.
- The abusive person has tried to kill themselves.
- A child in their home is not the abusive person's child.
- The abusive person follows or spies on them, or leaves them threatening messages.

If someone is experiencing the above risk factors, please do the following:

- Let them know you are very concerned about their safety, and people who experience these risks have been seriously hurt or even killed by their abusive partners.
- Refer them to Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) at 360.715.1563 or Lummi Victims of Crime (LVOC) at 360.312.2015 for advocacy services. Offer to make the phone call together, or go with them to the office to seek help.
- Refer them to contact law enforcement if they are threatened or feel unsafe. Offer to assist them in making a report to law enforcement.
- Respect their confidentiality. DO NOT confront the abusive or share information that the victim has told you; this can lead to increased danger for them and/or their children.

How to Support Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

If a child is being abused or is in danger of being harmed . . .

Call 911 or make a report to Child Protective Services at 866.829.2153

For a child, witnessing parental violence, similar to any form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, can result in poor school performance, discipline problems, difficulty getting along with other children, and substance abuse. These children may manifest high levels of fear, anxiety, loneliness, and depression. A child from this environment may display suicidal tendencies, have low self-esteem, and act out sexually. Conversely, some children exposed to domestic violence may exhibit no signs.

Children’s emotional recovery from exposure to domestic violence depends more on the quality of their relationship with the non-abusive parent than any other single factor. An additional critical factor is the presence of at least ONE loving and supportive adult in their life. Finally, knowledgeable and skilled professionals who understand and respond effectively can play an important role in how a child is impacted.

Tips for Supporting a Child Exposed to Domestic Violence

Tell the child:

- “Violence isn’t okay.”
- “It isn’t your fault.”
- “I will do everything I can to help you be safe.” (Note: Don’t make any promises or commitments you can’t keep.)
- “It’s not your job to fix what is wrong in your family.”
- If you want to tell me about your feelings, I can handle it.”
- “It’s okay to have mixed feelings about either or both of your parents.” (Note: Don’t make angry or critical comments about the abuser. The child often cares about the abuser.)

Teach the child:

- How to call 911 in an emergency.
- Names and phone numbers of trusted relatives, neighbors, or friends they can call or go to for help, day or night.
- Hiding places and exits in the home.
- To stay out of the middle of their parents’ fights or arguments.

Give the child ideas for positive coping skills; encourage them to:

- Engage in physical play or activities.
- Listen, sing along with, and/or dance to music.
- Visit friends or family.
- Carry something positive (e.g. stuffed animal, poem, picture) for difficult moments.
- Eat healthy snacks and meals.
- Be positive and gentle in their self-talk.
- Sleep or rest.
- Create a mental picture to feel different (e.g. remember a safe place, think of the beach).
- Read, or ask to be read to.
- Be creative and draw, play music, do crafts, or write poetry.
- Spend time outside.

AVOID

- Asking a lot of questions, pressing for details, or investigating the abuse yourself.
- You do not need to prove abuse or neglect. Leave that to law enforcement or Child Protective Services.

How to Support Long-Term Change in a Person who is Abusive

Always call 911 if you are concerned about someone's immediate safety

Before you approach a person who is abusive to offer to support them in achieving long-term change, you first must:

- Make sure that you have the survivor's permission to talk to the abuser.

Keep in mind the following:

- **Always call 911 if you are concerned about someone's immediate safety.**
- Ensure you are in a safe setting any time you talk to the abuser. Set up a safety plan for yourself whenever you talk to the abuser; for example, make sure someone else is nearby and knows the situation, and meet in a room with a window.
- You will be most effective in supporting long-term change if you already have an on-going relationship with the abuser.
- Make referrals to experts, and hold the abuser accountable to those referrals.
- Keep paying attention for opportunities to intervene and offer support, and continue to follow up over time.
- If you also have a relationship with the survivor, ask the survivor about which interventions would be most helpful with changing the abuser's behavior.
- When you intervene, consider the impact that the consequences for the abuser may have on the survivor.
- Know your own strengths and limits, and intervene and offer support based on those.
- Provide financial assistance for the abuser to attend a state-certified perpetrator treatment program.

Make referrals to and ask for help from experts

Sometimes it may not be safe for you to intervene, or it may be more effective if you ask for help. You can:

- Call 911, especially if someone is in danger or if the situation is unsafe for the survivor, children, yourself, or anyone else.
- Ask another person who has a relationship with the abuser to help you.
- Refer the abuser to ***state-certified Domestic Violence Perpetrator Treatment***.

Be honest and direct

You can say things like:

- “What you are doing is not okay.”
- “I don’t agree with your words or actions.”
- “Your behavior is not acceptable in our congregation and faith tradition.”

Focus on observations you have made, and use I statements

You can say things like:

- “I noticed that you control all of their money, movements, and social life.”
- “I noticed that you grabbed their arm very roughly when you were arguing.”
- “I heard you threaten to hurt them.”
- “I’ve seen that you expect them to respond to all of your texts and phone calls immediately.”
- “I know that you were arrested for assaulting them.”

Talk to the abuser about the impact the abuse has on children, if applicable

You can say things like:

- Domestic violence can have devastating effects on your family, including your children.”
- “For many children, exposure to domestic violence is just as traumatic as being abused themselves.”
- “The abuse you are using can impact your child even before they are born.”
- “The abuse you are using can harm your child. They might see you be physically abusive, or they might observe your use of control, or be impacted by the stress and trauma you are causing their other parent.”
- “You might not intend to hurt your children, but they might accidentally get caught in the middle of an incident.”
- “You cannot be a positive and healthy parent for your children if you are using abuse against your partner.”

Support healing for the abuser

Approach everyone with compassion: be non-confrontational, and non-shaming, so that the abuser doesn't feel defensive. Recognize the abuser as a complete human being, who uses abusive tactics. Remember that saying that someone has a problem with abusive behavior doesn't mean that the person is a completely bad person. The ideal outcome for everyone, including the abuser, survivor, children, and community, is for them to completely stop using abusive tactics.

You can say things like:

- “This situation is really complex, and you need expert help to resolve it.”
- “You may not realize the impact of your behaviors.”
- “Reaching out for help is the right thing to do for you and your family.”
- “You are not a bad person. You can learn and change. Abuse is a learned and chosen behavior, so it can be un-learned and un-chosen.”
- “If you have violent tendencies, you have deep issues that you need to get to the bottom of, to resolve, and to heal.”
- “You will never be free until you get help for yourself.”
- “Getting help will be a long process. There is no quick fix. We are in it for the long haul, and will support you to get help and change.”
- “It's up to you to change. This is your work.”
- “You may not even know what you are capable of. I don't want you to do something that you will regret.”

Address domestic violence within the context of your faith community

Connect to the belief systems of the faith community. Address any religious rationalizations the abuser may offer. You can say things like:

- “As you know, it is against the values of our faith to use these behaviors.”
- “As a person of faith, I know you don't want to be abusive.”
- “When you walk in the door, your problems are welcome here, too. Please tell me about what you do and say to your partner and why.”
- “**Forgiveness isn't quick or easy.** It will take true repentance, not just remorse, to achieve forgiveness, and that takes a lot of time. I will pray with you and provide you with spiritual care while you do your work to change.”
- “If your conversion experience is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource to you as you proceed with accountability.”
- “I will pray with you and for you. We can ask God to help you stop your use of violence, repent, and find a new way. Then you still need to accept accountability for your actions and work to change your behaviors in the future.”

Address the future of the relationship

Once there is domestic violence in a relationship, the trust and covenant of the relationship is broken. Even if the abuser agrees to change, the relationship may not be able to be restored, because of the trauma, pain, and broken trust that the abuser has caused the survivor and children. Let the abuser know that:

- “Forgiveness from the survivor may not be possible.”
- “If the survivor does forgive you, it will be on their timetable, not yours.”
- “Regardless of forgiveness, you should have no expectation of any degree of future relationship with the person you’ve harmed.”
- “Focus on reconciliation with God, not with the survivor.”
- “If you accept accountability, repent, and change, you may be able to restore your relationship with the survivor. If your relationship with the survivor cannot be restored, I can support you in mourning the loss of that relationship, and then you may be able to enter into another relationship as a healthy partner.”

When should I choose not to personally intervene in a relationship with domestic violence?

In all of the situations listed below, you can call 911 and/or ask for help with intervening and supporting long term change

If a situation is unsafe for you, your safety needs to be a priority, and you should not intervene. For example, if there are weapons involved in an incident, or if you are threatened, you should not intervene.

If the survivor tells you that an intervention will be unsafe for them, their children, and/or for you or others, listen, you should not intervene.

If you have a concern for someone else’s safety based on your intervention, such as children who are present, you should not intervene.

If your intervention would be overly traumatic for you, you should not intervene.

If your intervention will violate ethical guidelines from your faith tradition, or applicable laws regarding clergy and confidentiality, you should not intervene. You can connect the survivor, children, and/or abuser with community resources for the assistance they need.

Practical ways you can support a survivor of domestic violence and their children

- Bring over dinner
- Drop off packed lunches for the kids to take to school
- Pick kids up and bring them to activities including basketball, shopping, in the faith community, or visitation.
- Go with them to an appointment
- Help them find resources for housing, utilities, etc.
- Take the kids out to do something fun so the survivor has time to do something for themselves
- Take their place volunteering at school, in the congregation, etc.
- Clean their house for them
- Take them out for coffee so they can talk about their stress
- Don't say, "Call me if you need anything" – think of something you can do to help and then do it. Survivors, like most of us, are not likely to seek out the help they need.

Resources

Books:

- [The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics by Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman](#)
- [Domestic Abuse and the Jewish Community: Perspectives from the First International Conference, Edited by Rabbi Cindy Enger and Diane Gardsbane](#)
- [Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know by Reverend Al Miles](#)
- [Family Violence and Religion An Interfaith Resource Guide](#)
- [When Love Hurts by Jill Cory and Karen McAndless-Davis](#)
- [A Cry for Justice by Jeff Crippen and Anna Wood](#)
- [No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence by Catherine Clark Kroeger & Nancy Nason-Clark](#)
- [Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough by Anne L. Horton & Judith A. Williams](#)
- [Why Does He Do That? by Lundy Bancroft](#)
- [The Verbally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans](#)
- [Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home by James and Phyllis Alsdurf](#)
- [Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman by Marie Fortune](#)
- [Healing the Trauma of Domestic Violence: A Workbook for Women by Edward Kubany, PH.D. Mari McCaig, MSCP, & Janet Laconsay, MA](#)
- [Setting the Captives Free by Pastor Ron Clark](#)

Book club resources:

- [Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness Literature List and Book Club Discussion Questions](#)
- [Bellingham Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence, Book Club List and Discussion Questions](#)

Tools for conversations about healthy and unhealthy relationships:

- [How's Your Relationship? Chat about Love with Those You Love](#)
- [What Makes a Relationship Unhealthy?](#)
- [Love is Respect, Types of Abuse](#)
- [Faith talk discussion questions](#)

Education and training tools:

- [Children Exposed to Domestic Violence 101](#)
- [Darkness to Light: Ending Childhood Sexual Abuse](#)

- [In Her Shoes: Living with Domestic Violence](#)
- [In Their Shoes: Teen Dating Violence, Training Edition](#)
- [In Their Shoes: Teens and Dating Violence, Classroom Edition](#)
- [Love is Not Abuse, High School Edition](#)
- [Love is Not Abuse, College Edition](#)
- Empowerment Project – *Coming Soon*
- Hands and Words – *Coming Soon*
- [Helping Children Through Family Changes Seminar](#)

Sample sermons and faith talks:

- [Christ the King Bellingham, Taboo, Part 2: Domestic Violence](#)
- [Christ the King Bellingham, Stuck, Park 3: Domestic Violence](#)
- [Pastor Jana Schofield: Sermon on Domestic Violence](#)
- [Sister Vera Alice Bagneris: Help is Closer Than you Think!](#)
- [Stephanie Shute Kelsch: Reaching Out](#)
- [The Rev. Robert A. Moore: Susana: Dealing with Sexual Violence](#)
- [Karrie Whipple: Walk With Her](#)
- [Charles W. Dahm, OP: Homily on Domestic Violence](#)
- [Sample Sermon Topics and Small Group Discussion Questions](#)

Survivor stories:

- [TED Talk: Leslie Morgan Steiner, Why domestic violence victims don't leave](#)
- ["I Can Explain," a real story of adolescent relationship abuse on the This American Life podcast](#)
- [The National Domestic Violence Hotline Survivor Stories](#)
- ["Why Didn't You Just Leave": Six Survivors Explain Why It's Not That Simple](#)

Interpretations of religious texts:

- [A Brief Guide to Honor Based Violence](#)
- [Domestic Violence: What Congregations Need to Know](#)
- [For Christian victims, Bible can be a barrier or resource](#)
- [For Jewish victims, religious teachings can be a barrier or resource](#)
- [Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion](#)
- [Untwisting Scriptures Used Against Abuse Victims](#)

Wheels of Support and Wheels of Power & Control:

- [Religious Community Response](#)
- [Muslim Community Response](#)

- [Pastoral Response](#)
- [Cycle of Violence, adapted from Lenore Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979](#)
- [Teen Relationship Equality Wheel](#)
- [Same Gender Power and Control Wheel](#)
- [Teenage Power & Control Wheel](#)
- [Sikh Feminist Research Institute \(SAFAR\) On Family Violence](#)

Sample policy:

- [Christ the King Bellingham Sample Policy: Staff Expectations and Domestic Violence](#)
- [Creating Congregational Policies to Address Domestic Violence](#)
- [A Policy Statement on Domestic Violence Couples Counseling](#)
- [Denominational Statements and Declarations](#)
- [When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women](#)
- [DV in the Workplace Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines](#)

Posters:

- [Posters with local resources for victims and perpetrators](#)

Websites:

- [Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [FaithTrust Institute](#)
- [Safe havens: interfaith partnership against domestic violence](#)
- [Changing Men, Changing Lives: A Christ-centered approach for ending men's violence against women](#)
- [Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs](#)
- [The Northwest Network](#)
- [National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence](#)
- [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#)
- [DSHS WA Certified State Domestic Violence Treatment Providers](#)
- [Center For Relationship Abuse Awareness](#)

Further information and education:

- [Twelve Reasons Why Couple's Counseling is Not Recommended When Domestic Violence is Present](#)
- [Archdiocese of Chicago Domestic Violence Resource Manual](#)
- [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social messages on Gender Based Violence](#)
- [Muslim Women's League: Islamic Perspective on Violence Against Women](#)
- [Muslim Women's League: Gender Equality in Islam](#)

- [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2010 Summary Report](#)
- [Outing sexual violence disparities: New data show high rates of sexual assault in LGBT community](#)
- [Responding to Domestic Violence: An Interfaith Guide to Prevention and Intervention](#)
- [Special Collections: Domestic Violence and Religion](#)
- [What Islam Says About Domestic Violence](#)
- [Cycle of Violence](#)
- [Domestic Violence Continuum](#)
- [Myths and Facts on Domestic and Dating Violence Quiz with Answer Guide](#)

Videos:

- [The Story of Rachel](#)
- [Broken Vows](#)
- [Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman](#)
- [To Save a Life: Ending Domestic Violence in Jewish Families](#)
- [Domestic Violence: What Churches Can Do](#)

<http://dvcommission.org/projects/toolkitforfaithcommunities>