



**HIDDEN
HURTS
HEALING
HEARTS**

LCA PREVENTION OF
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HANDBOOK

FOR PASTORAL WORKERS



*'I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).*

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This handbook is intended to provide general information only.
Readers are encouraged to consult the agencies listed for advice on specific situations.
This handbook is available online at www.preventDFV.lca.org.au

PREFACE

Adapted from the original preface by Tanya Wittwer

This third edition of the *Domestic Violence Handbook* has been commissioned especially for Lutheran pastors and other pastoral care workers. It is a 'field manual' to support you when you are confronted with one of the more difficult issues in your pastoral ministry – domestic violence.

This handbook provides basic information on the nature of domestic and family violence and appropriate pastoral responses. While I hope that you find it useful in your pastoral ministry, I encourage you to seek further training to enhance the skills you already have to deal with pastoral situations where violence is an issue.

While domestic violence occurs across all types of relationships, the majority is male to female violence, so for simplicity of wording this booklet uses 'she'/'the woman' to refer to the victim-survivor of violence, and 'he'/'the man' to refer to the user of violence. However, the principles apply regardless of gender, so are relevant to intimate relationships where violence is female to male, male to male, or female to female.

This topic is sensitive because it can touch us so closely. As we read about or deal with domestic violence, most of us recall times when we have been victimised or when others have hurtfully exercised their power over us. If recalling that pain motivates you to exercise compassion and take appropriate action, you will be helping to create a safer society for all people, including within your own congregations.

Finding the courage to tell someone they are being abused is one of the most difficult things for a victim-survivor to do. If it is you she chooses to disclose to, it is vital that you listen without judgement and that you believe her. As you offer her support, be guided by what she wants, not by what you think she needs, and demonstrate respect for her decisions even if you do not personally agree with them.

I commend the *Domestic Violence Handbook* to you and pray that it will help you in supporting victim-survivors and their families, and in working appropriately with users of violence. God bless you in your ministry as you share Jesus' love with all God's people.

Pastor John Henderson

Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia



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Editor: Tanya Wittwer

SECOND REVISION

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INTRODUCTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A story of hope

The day my life changed ...

Four years ago I left a relationship of domestic violence and abuse.

During the 10-year marriage I experienced many forms of violence and abuse such as physical assault, property damage, and emotional and verbal abuse.

I kept the secret for many years until it became unbearable and I knew I was faced with making a decision to leave the marriage for the sake of my two children.

I spoke with my pastor a few times. I felt stuck, afraid, and guilty. I had believed my marriage would be forever.

The turning point for me, which gave me the freedom to think about my marriage differently, was when the pastor talked with me about the violence. He said that the violence was my husband's responsibility and that he chooses to behave and think this way.

The pastor said that no matter what I said or did I was not the cause of him using violence and abuse. After a few more chats I felt strong enough and supported to leave with the children.

I will never forget the chats with the pastor that helped me get stronger and understand what was happening; especially that one day he told me it was not my fault.

During your ministry it is likely that you will be approached by somebody who is experiencing domestic violence. Domestic violence and abuse are issues that affect many people and occur both in church communities and in the wider community.

This handbook is an introduction to increase your understanding and to support you in responding to individuals and families who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse. We also encourage you to engage with the resources offered by domestic violence services.

Domestic violence and abuse have devastating long-term impacts on the lives of women and children, and the fallout extends beyond those who are directly affected – into families, congregations and the wider community.

Domestic violence is a social, criminal, human rights, spiritual, child protection, physical health, mental health, and housing issue. Domestic violence harms families across generations and communities, and reinforces other violence throughout societies (United Nations, 2006).

In 2009 VicHealth advised that domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known preventable risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.

Domestic violence exists in church communities, and for many families the church can be a first point of contact for noticing and responding to domestic violence situations. This means that the support people receive from their church is integral to their healing.

Therefore, it is crucial that churches are equipped with knowledge and training, specifically in domestic violence, so they are able to respond in ways that promote the safety of women and children.

The gospel message invites the nurturing of respectful relationships between men, women and children. Living respectfully includes feeling safe. When the handbook refers to 'safe' or 'safety', it is important to understand that this means to be physically, emotionally and spiritually safe and free from fear of threats, intimidation and injury.

Similarly, when the handbook refers to domestic violence this must be understood as extending much further than only physical abuse, as domestic violence includes many forms of abuse.

It must also be recognised that the overwhelming majority of abuse is perpetrated by men against their female partners. For this reason the handbook deliberately focuses on the safety of women and children and refers to 'the woman' or 'women' as those experiencing violence and abuse and the 'man' or 'men' as those who use violence and abuse.

We hope this resource will be a helpful tool as you offer pastoral care in your community.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Power and control

Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling and abusive behaviour used by an intimate partner during a relationship or after separation.

Domestic violence and abuse takes many forms. Some are clearly violent, and others are more difficult to recognise. Whatever form domestic violence takes, fear, control and power are always components.

Domestic violence occurs in all walks of life, regardless of socio-economic status, race, age, religion, culture and sexual orientation. The term domestic violence also refers to intimate partner homicide.

Family violence is a broader term than domestic violence, as it refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members. This includes, for example, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents. Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful. In Indigenous communities, family violence is often the preferred term as it encapsulates the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships, as well as intergenerational issues.

Domestic violence is a crime, and violence against women and children is a violation of basic human rights. It is a gender issue with roots in unequal power relations between men and women.

In the Christian sphere, Scripture is sometimes used to justify the use of power and control over women and, therefore the use of violence towards women. This is a complete misuse of Scripture, as the section on Scriptural and Theological Foundations in this handbook makes clear.

We know that on average one woman a week is killed by a current or former husband or partner in Australia. We know that around one in three women in Australia has experienced physical violence, and almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. Of the women who have experienced some form of violence, 36% experienced that violence from someone they knew and 15% had experienced that violence at the hands of an ex-partner (ABS, 2012). We also know that some groups of women are more vulnerable – namely indigenous women (both in Australia and New Zealand) and women with disabilities.

The statistics in New Zealand are similar. One in three women experience physical and/or sexual violence as a partner in their lifetime and, in the four years from 2009 to 2012, 76% of intimate partner deaths were perpetrated by men (NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse).

Domestic violence directly affects women, children, family, friends, and co-workers, and there are also far-reaching financial, social and health related consequences.

Women who experience domestic violence and abuse suffer a range of health problems and therefore their capacity to participate in daily life is diminished. Similarly, whether or not children are subjected to or witness domestic violence and abuse, their cognitive, emotional and social development can be adversely affected.

Are only women subjected to domestic violence?

There are occasions when women can be violent towards men, but according to ABS data, 87% of all domestic violence involves men being abusive towards their female partners. The remaining 13% includes domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships (10%) and women being violent toward their male partners (3%).

“ We know that on average one woman a week is killed by a current or former husband or partner in Australia. We know that around one in three women in Australia has experienced physical violence, and almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. Of the women who have experienced some form of violence, 36% experienced that violence from someone they knew and 15% had experienced that violence at the hands of an ex-partner (ABS, 2012). We also know that some groups of women are more vulnerable – namely indigenous women (both in Australia and New Zealand) and women with disabilities.

“ God created the church to continue his work on earth. Its task is to celebrate love and life, and be the vehicle for God’s continued work of bringing love to life in the world. The church lives on the gifts of God – God’s forgiveness, God’s love, God’s own life ...

SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This handbook has been written to help you, as pastors and church workers, to provide appropriate support to both victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. In undertaking this testing work, it is important to be reminded of the scriptural and theological foundations for rejecting violence and embracing peace, agape love, mutual servanthood and equality.

It is true that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, contains many references to violence, including violent abuse of women and children. The Old Testament prophets, however, also warned of wars and violence, particularly when the Israelites rebelled against God. They also acknowledged the peace and justice that would come when the people were in harmony with God’s plan for them.

The coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into the world revealed God’s real intent for his creation. Through the reconciling love of Jesus Christ, we are free to be nonviolent, to turn the other cheek, and to love our neighbours and even our enemies. We are also enjoined to take on the virtues of humility, compassion, gentleness, peace and love. Both Christian men and women will take on these virtues.

Turning the other cheek and showing love and forgiveness, however, does not mean that one must continue to live in a continually violent relationship. Nor does forgive mean to forget; it is important for the survivor to remember so that she can tend to her own safety.

Repentance, moreover, is much more than saying sorry. True repentance will be shown in changes in attitude and behaviour. Sadly, the evidence tells us that the user of violence will often say sorry, but will soon return to abuse and violence if the behaviour is unchallenged or even condoned.

Too often past practices in church communities were built on false myths of male domination and control. And, too often, this meant that men were excused for their violent and abusive behaviour, and women were blamed and/or forced to return to very unsafe relationships. It is therefore imperative that we re-examine the ways in which we provide support to victims of abuse and challenge the values and behaviours of those who perpetrate it.

What better way to begin our re-examination of male attitudes to women than by considering Jesus’ relationship with women.

In his ‘Heartland’ eNews (November 2016), Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) Bishop John Henderson wrote:

In a society and time when women were regarded as the property of men, Jesus treated women with equality and dignity. He numbered them among his followers; when women were not allowed to speak with men in public Jesus spoke freely with them; when women were not allowed to be educated Jesus let them sit at his feet and learn. In his kingdom women are equal citizens. ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’ (Mark 3:35). As Jesus fully accepts women into his kingdom, without distinction, we will also seek to give all women and girls that same acceptance, respect, dignity and love, beginning with the members of our families, our partners, and members of our church, work and social communities.

One of the New Testament texts that has often been used to support male headship, and therefore male dominance, in marriage is Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:21–25).

There are two observations that can be made about this text. Firstly, Jesus’ understanding of headship has nothing whatsoever to do with dominance. Rather, it is the complete inverse. Jesus instructs his disciples ‘... the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves ... But I am among you as one who serves’ (Luke 22:26,27).

Secondly, the Ephesians text is circumscribed by verse 21: ‘Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’. There is no notion of headship here in the way the world may understand it’.

The Lutheran Church’s Statement on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage states:

The purpose of marriage is ... ‘to unite one man and one woman (that is, husband and wife) so that they become “one flesh”. In this relationship the one person is the complement of the other (Matthew 19:5)’.

This statement is clear. There is no reference to male headship or subordination. The inference is that the marriage relationship is one of mutuality and the honouring of what each brings to the relationship. It is these values of mutual love and service that will inform the way we support women, who are most often the victims of domestic abuse, and confront men, who are most often the perpetrators.

In 2017 the LCA released its Standards of Ethical Behaviour across the entire church. It is worth quoting at some length from this document, as it builds on the mission of Jesus Christ to bring love to life in God’s creation:

God created the church to continue his work on earth. Its task is to celebrate love and life, and be the vehicle for God’s continued work of bringing love to life in the world. The church lives on the gifts of God – God’s forgiveness, God’s love, God’s own life ...

The life of a Christian is a life of faith active in love, empowered by the love of Christ himself. Indeed we have no other obligation, except to participate in this world transforming gift of God’s love.

Love changes people. The experience of being loved brings with it a kind of newness that brings out the best in us. We become more open to the gifts of life and the needs of others, and we live in a new way. Love brings life.

In our personal behaviour we demonstrate God’s love by:

- setting a good example of Christian living
- treating each other with dignity and respect
- being courteous, kind and compassionate in our words and actions
- not abusing people (including members of our own family), verbally, physically, emotionally, sexually or ‘spiritually’ ...

In our pastoral caring we demonstrate God’s love by:

- ensuring that our caring ministry is for the benefit of the other and not for ourselves
- undertaking relevant training on a regular basis
- considering the needs of vulnerable people.

The LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour concludes:

Life in the church is a preparation and empowerment for a life of love in the world. Our families and our communities, our workplaces and cultural settings might well experience through us something of God’s love as it comes to life again in us.

So we pastors and church workers should be mindful of how we reflect how God’s love comes to life for those who have been abused, or have perpetrated abuse, and have come to us for confession, support and healing.

Ian Rentsch

Coordinator, LCA Campaign for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, 2017

FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Does domestic violence always involve physical violence?

No. Domestic violence may involve any type of abusive behaviour, each having an emotional and psychological impact on the person experiencing the abuse and their children.

These impacts can include feelings of fear, shame, confusion, helplessness, hopelessness, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, anger, a sense of entrapment, low self-esteem, loneliness and a sense of failure.

Physical violence

Physical abuse – any physical force or object against a woman whether it leaves a mark or not. It can include pushing, holding, shoving, shaking, twisting limbs, restraining, punching, preventing sleep, slapping, choking or grabbing the neck, pulling the hair, or drugging.

Object damage – throwing crockery, breaking furniture or household goods, damaging doors or walls, smashing windows, destroying treasured possessions.

Pet abuse – hitting, kicking, punching, throwing, choking, neglecting, sexually abusing, starving, killing or threatening to kill pets.

Psychological abuse

Threats, intimidation and ‘mind games’ – making threats, stalking, or looking, acting or speaking in ways which are frightening or intimidating. This can include yelling, screaming, threatening punishment, ignoring her and acting like she is invisible, driving dangerously with her or the children in the car, threatening suicide or to hurt or kill her, the children, family or friends.

Put-downs – using put-downs regarding her body shape, grooming, intelligence, mothering ability, home management skills etc. Telling her or making her think she is crazy, stupid, useless, worthless, and good for nothing. This can be in front of others or when she is alone.

Maternal alienation – deliberately trying to destroy the relationship between children and their mother. This can include telling the children cruel, abusive and angry things about the mother when she is not there or sometimes when she is, or telling the children that the mother is incompetent, stupid or a bad parent.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse – forcing or coercing the woman into sexual acts against her will, physically attacking the sexual parts of her body, demanding sex, raping her, using bondage and/or objects against her will, treating her as a sexual object and not as a person.

Social abuse

Isolation – constantly criticising and being suspicious of her family and friends. It can include using tactics that make friends and family feel uncomfortable about visiting or spending time with the woman; not allowing her to have her own friends and keeping her isolated from social contact other than with him; and moving the family to an isolated area away from family and friends. Social isolation can also include restricting the use of a car, keeping her reliant on him for transport, and not letting her use the phone or computer.

Smothering, controlling and monitoring – controlling what she does, who she talks to and where she goes. This can include keeping in contact with her to ‘see how she’s going’ when it is really to check up on what she is doing; insisting on doing everything together so that she has no life of her own; and insisting on knowing her whereabouts at all times.

Put-downs – making hurtful, humiliating or embarrassing remarks about her in front of company, or blatant verbal attacks on her in public.

Economic abuse

Financial dependence – requiring her to ask him for money all the time, keeping her ignorant of available funds, excluding her from financial decisions, providing inadequate funds for household expenses, threatening or coercing her to sign legally binding financial contracts, opposing her getting or keeping a job, and making her account for every dollar spent. It can also include deliberately spending bill money to sabotage her efforts to keep on top of the household expenses; putting accounts in her name; urging her to abuse the system, such as making false claims to Centrelink; or making her pay for his business expenses.

Gambling – gambling the family income, selling or pawning things to pay debts, using credit cards to gamble, emptying the bank account, putting the family at financial risk.

FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Legal abuse

Threatening legal outcomes – threatening her with court or any legal action, telling her she is mad and could be committed, telling her she has committed crimes which will send her to jail, threatening to give evidence against her and threatening that she will lose her children

Forcing legal involvement – using the Family Court against her. It can include lying about her mothering, calling her back to court over and over again, breaking legal agreements and blaming her.

Spiritual abuse – using Scripture, ideas about God, pastoral ‘care’ and the church to justify violence and further control and abuse. Spiritual abuse includes denying access to faith communities, using Scripture to claim God’s blessing on an abusive relationship, misusing spiritual beliefs and practices to justify other forms of abuse and violence, forcing a woman to act against her spiritual obligations, accusing a woman of being too religious or not religious enough, ridiculing or criticising a woman’s understanding of her spiritual beliefs and practices, and warning of damnation if she leaves the relationship.

Male power abuse

Privilege – thinking he is entitled to more: decisions, money and rights. He acts like ‘the master of the house’ and treats other family members like servants. He makes all the big decisions and demands that she complies.

The emotional effects of all of the above behaviours are feelings of fear, shame, confusion, helplessness, hopelessness, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, anger, a sense of entrapment, low self-esteem, loneliness and a sense of failure.



PATTERNS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

While every domestic violence situation is unique, there are also many similarities. The information below outlines some common patterns in domestic violence situations.

It may help you to identify where domestic violence is occurring, and it also provides useful information for women, by preparing them for what may happen or by showing them that they are not alone.

Few women who find themselves in an abusive relationship knew that the man would become violent and abusive.

Early in the relationship it all seems fine. He is attentive and charming.

As commitment develops he becomes more possessive, jealous and controlling.

Different forms of abuse may develop: physical, verbal, sexual, social and economic etc.

A physical and/or verbal incident of violence occurs. He believes it is deserved or appropriate and may not name it as abuse.

It happens again and again. It usually increases in severity and in frequency.

The woman realises that something is not right.

However, she may believe she is responsible for her partner's happiness and wellbeing and that she is responsible for the family's stability. The man believes that she 'provoked' the behaviour or that something else is responsible for his behaviour, such as stress, financial pressures or alcohol, drugs (prescription and illegal), a difficult childhood or past trauma (such as PTSD).

She may consider telling someone, but this is difficult because he is charming to others. She doubts her judgement (he tells her she is crazy, too sensitive, etc) and she has kept the secret so long that others might ask why she has not left him, or they might doubt her truthfulness.

She considers leaving him, but:

- she believes he and the children should have a relationship so she may not want to split the family
- people may not believe her or believe that the problem is as bad as she says
- he apologises and says that he will never abuse her again
- she may have no money and nowhere to go or fear loneliness and believe that she will not be able to cope on her own
- she may still love him, or she may have made a marriage vow or commitment that she feels is binding, despite the violence and abuse
- he may have threatened dire consequences if she leaves
- she may be ostracised from her family, friends and community.

She tries harder to please him, not to provoke him, to make things the way he wants and to work out what she or the children could do differently.

The violence and abuse continues or escalates, in spite of her efforts.

When she has done everything possible, and the violence and abuse continues, she might leave. Or some other incident might bring home the seriousness of the situation and prompt her to leave (eg he hits the children, or the police are involved).

Once she leaves she may experience:

- guilt from feeling that she has 'failed' as a partner and mother
- fear of being alone
- humiliation before family and friends or her church, who do not believe her or who blame her for the marriage/relationship break-up.

The man responds to her leaving by using various tactics to regain power and control, such as:

- pursuing her, buying presents, promising holidays, promising that he has changed, or by subtle 'buy-back', eg telling her he loves her, paying lots of attention and saying she looks nice
- getting angry about the fact that she is not there
- making her feel like his state of wellbeing is determined by her presence or absence; he may not eat, shower, sleep or go to work and may escalate claims of suicide if she does not return
- using the children to manipulate her into returning by telling her the children need them to be together as a family
- recruiting others to work with him and take sides with him
- becoming more violent and abusive.

She wants to believe his promises. She is feeling pressure to go home. This may be due to finances, housing, isolation, or pressure from the children and possibly from other family members or her church.

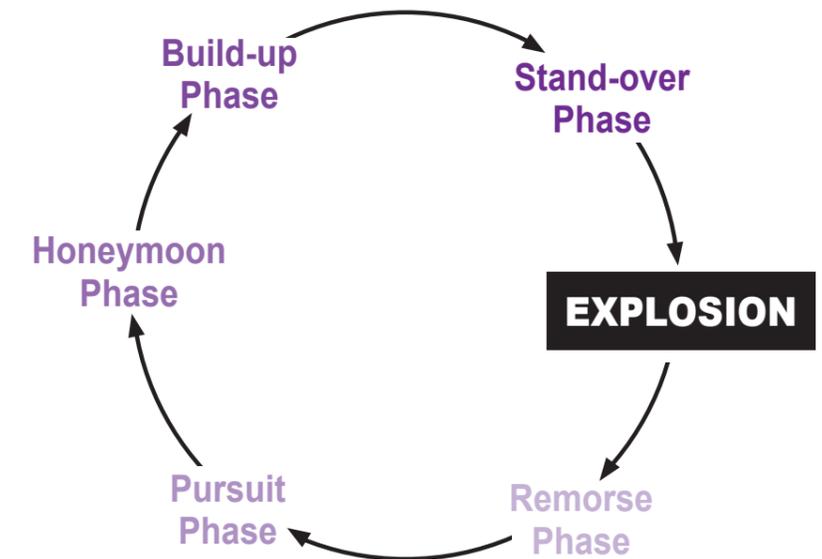
If she does not go home he may escalate his pursuit. He may threaten her or the children with bodily harm or death if they do not return. He may stalk her, watch her every move; visit and behave violently; threaten to destroy the house and belongings; and phone up regularly to check on her.

He also may try to extend the time for sorting out property settlement, residency, custody and contact of children and make the separation as difficult as possible – financially, legally and psychologically.

At this point she may go home. If she does, friends and family may think it is all sorted out, or criticise her for going back. The pattern starts again.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The experience of domestic violence and abuse can be thought of as occurring in a cycle of several phases. Not all situations follow this sequence; however, it is a useful way of understanding what is happening in a domestic violence situation.



Source: Dr Lenore Walker, 1979, USA

The theory that domestic violence occurs in a cycle was developed in 1979 by Lenore Walker as a result of a study conducted in the United States.

The cycle of violence theory explains how and why the behaviour of a person who commits domestic and family violence may change so dramatically over time.

The cycle of violence theory also provides an understanding as to why the person affected by domestic and family violence continues to face a violent situation.

The cycle goes through a number of stages.

It is not the same for everyone and some people may experience only some stages of the cycle (or not relate to it at all).

The build-up phase

This phase may begin with normal relations between the people in the relationship, but involves escalating tension marked by increased verbal, emotional or financial abuse.

In nonviolent relationships these issues can normally be resolved between the people in the relationship.

The stand-over phase

This phase can be extremely frightening for people affected by domestic and family violence.

The behaviour of the person who uses violence in relationships escalates to the point that a release of tension is inevitable.

The person affected may feel that they are 'walking on egg shells' and fear that anything they do will cause the situation to deteriorate further.

Explosion

The explosion stage marks the peak of violence in the relationship. It is the height of abuse by the person who uses violence to control and have power over others.

The person who commits domestic and family violence experiences a release of tension during an explosion phase, which may become addictive. They may be unable to deal with their anger any other way.

The remorse phase

At the remorse stage the person who uses domestic and family violence in their relationship feels ashamed of their behaviour.

They retreat and become withdrawn from the relationship. They try to justify their actions to themselves and to others, unaware they are actually addicted to the release they have just experienced.

The pursuit phase

At this stage the person who uses domestic and family violence in relationships promises to the affected person never to be violent again.

They may try to make up for their past behaviour during this period and say that other factors have caused them to be violent, for example: work stress, drugs or alcohol. The violent offender may purchase gifts, and give the affected person attention.

Also, the violent offender may go through a dramatic personality change. The person affected by the violence will feel hurt, but possibly relieved that the violence is over.

The honeymoon phase

During the honeymoon phase of the cycle of violence, both people in the relationship may be in denial as to how bad the abuse and violence was.

Both people do not want the relationship to end, so are happy to ignore the possibility that the violence could occur again.

After some time, this stage will fade and the cycle may begin again.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MINORITY GROUPS

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over-represented in domestic violence statistics and are at far greater risk of hospitalisation and death due to violence.

Many Aboriginal women experience violence combined with issues such as legacies of loss and grief, historic trauma, white privilege, discrimination, poverty, alcohol, drugs and physical isolation.

Many have also found it difficult to break away from their families when violence affects their lives, due to cultural and traditional laws and beliefs. Leaving can result in alienation from the spiritual home and the family, and can mean a lifetime of never belonging. It is literally 'like dying'.

When Aboriginal women approach mainstream services for support they are often fearful that the services will not understand their circumstances or provide culturally appropriate support.

Aboriginal women can also be reluctant to seek support from their own community where there are strong networks but also a possible conflict of interest for potential allies.

'Family violence' can be a preferred term to refer violence in aboriginal communities, as many aboriginal people believe it suggests the need for a holistic understanding of violence.

“ Many have also found it difficult to break away from their families when violence affects their lives, due to cultural and traditional laws and beliefs.

Migrant women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)

For newly arrived women and women of NESB, the effects of violence and abuse are made worse by the isolation of moving to a new country where they may have no family or support networks, or do not know of any domestic violence support services.

Migrant women and women from NESB can face barriers such as language and literacy difficulties, lack of knowledge of Australian laws, racist community attitudes, culturally inappropriate services, physical and cultural isolation if they leave a violent relationship, lack of financial help from the government, and changes to immigration or residency status.

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities are more at-risk of experiencing domestic violence than other women and also more likely to experience sexual violence and to sustain injury.

For these women home can be a vulnerable environment in terms of physical, sexual and psychological violence, whether they reside in their own home, a boarding house or supported accommodation.

These women are vulnerable to violence and abuse from paid and unpaid carers and can have greater difficulty in accessing support services.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships

Domestic violence occurs in same-sex relationships.

What is different in gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships is the social context surrounding the relationship.

In same-sex relationships both partners may experience discrimination, rejection and isolation from the mainstream community because of their sexual preference. This acts as a barrier to accessing support.

They may also fear isolation from their own community if they end the relationship, or they may struggle to end a relationship that affirms their sexuality. One partner may use threats to 'out' the other partner to family, friends or work.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Myths are commonly held beliefs that are not factual. They give a false picture, and they shift the blame for domestic violence from the man who uses violence and abuse, to the woman who is being abused.

Myths are a way of blaming women for the violence that happens to them. Because of this, many women do not tell anyone about the hardship and fear they experience. They do not want to be blamed.

Myths hide the extent of and support the continuation of domestic violence and abuse in our community.

MYTH: A woman can easily leave an abusive relationship.

FACT: There are many factors that make it difficult for a woman to leave. These include:

- children who love the perpetrator
- she feels she should not deprive the children of their father
- financial reasons or uncertainty about resources and supports available
- pressure from friends and family to stay
- she feels paralysed by helplessness due to the violence and abuse
- loneliness and uncertainty, fear of change
- the fact that she still loves him and hopes that he will change
- fear of how he would react and what he would do
- stigma about being a single parent
- fear of not being believed
- fear that there is nowhere safe to go or no better option
- belief that she won't be able to cope on her own
- fear that he will follow her and hurt her and the kids.

MYTH: Domestic violence does not affect children.

FACT: Witnessing domestic violence and abuse is traumatic and impacts on children and young people's physical, social, psychological and spiritual development.

Protecting children means ensuring women are safe and inviting men to take responsibility for their use of violence and abuse.

MYTH: If a woman is subjected to violence and abuse, she must have done something to deserve it. He would not have done it without a reason.

FACT: There are no reasons that can justify a man's use of domestic violence and abuse. No-one deserves to be abused. The man may say 'You shouldn't have ...' or 'If only you hadn't ...' to justify his own behaviour, but using violence is a choice with a clear intention to exert power and control, and it is never appropriate.

MYTH: Only physical violence counts as domestic violence.

FACT: Psychological, social, spiritual abuses etc can be as destructive as physical violence. They can make a woman feel worthless and confused, and can erode her confidence and belief in her ability, skills and sanity.

MYTH: Men who use violence are unsuccessful, low achievers and unable to cope with the world.

FACT: Many men who use violence are educated, hold professional jobs and are highly successful. Poverty, alcoholism and drugs all add to stress, but violence happens throughout society – rich and poor, all ages, and all cultures.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

MYTH: Regret or remorse on the man's part means he has changed.

FACT: Many men feel regret or remorse and make promises after they use violence and abuse against their partner. Guilty feelings, apologies and promises to change are often part of the domestic violence cycle and do not necessarily signify a man's commitment to accept responsibility for his use of violence and abuse.

MYTH: Violence is part of our culture.

FACT: Domestic violence and abuse against women and children is a crime. It is never acceptable, and is a violation of basic human rights.

MYTH: The relationship will get better; everyone goes through 'rough patches'.

FACT: Violence and abuse does not go away. If ignored, the abuse often escalates. The man using violence and abuse needs to acknowledge that he has a problem and make specific changes to stop.

MYTH: It is because he is under a lot of pressure.

FACT: The problem is how the man deals with the pressure, not the pressure itself. Pressure is a condition which we all experience and is not an excuse for abuse.

MYTH: Domestic violence is private; 'outsiders' should not interfere.

FACT: Everyone has a right to live in safety and be free from violence and abuse, both inside and outside the home.

MYTH: Alcohol abuse is to blame for domestic violence.

FACT: Alcohol is often blamed for domestic violence; however, alcohol is an excuse, not a cause. Violence and abuse occurs without alcohol being present, and many people get drunk without becoming violent. Alcohol lowers inhibitions; however, a person who uses alcohol is still responsible both for their drinking and their behaviour.

MYTH: Men who use violence are mentally ill.

FACT: The majority of men who use violence are not suffering from a mental illness and have normal behaviour outside of their relationship. Similarly, abuse towards women and children is too widespread to be explained by mental illness.

Most men who assault their partners confine their violence to the privacy of their home and direct it toward particular parts of the woman's body so that she will not visibly bruise.

This ability to use restraint and forethought does not fit with the excuse of 'lack of control due to a mental illness'. Whatever the perpetrator's mental state, there is no excuse for using violence and abuse.

“ Myths are a way of blaming women for the violence that happens to them. Because of this, many women do not tell anyone about the hardship and fear they experience. They do not want to be blamed.

RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“ Be guided by what she wants, not by what you think she needs. She is the expert on her life as she is the only one who knows the full circumstances of her situation.

YOU ARE THE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR A WOMAN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

It is important that you create a safe, respectful and supportive environment where a woman can trust you with her experience. A woman may feel fear, shame, embarrassment, confusion and guilt when she tells someone that she is living with domestic violence and abuse. She risks being judged, blamed or discounted.

It is unlikely that you will be told in a direct manner that a woman is being abused. She may refer to relationship problems, her partner being angry with her, or present with 'spiritual' problems around forgiveness or commitment.

Pick up the small clues and ask the direct questions: 'How does he behave when he is angry?', 'Do you become frightened?', 'Are you worried about your safety or that of the children?' and 'Does this happen often?'

Asking the questions may be the beginning of a new life that is safe and free from violence and abuse for the woman and her children.

A woman may approach you at very different stages of thinking and/or planning about her relationship. She may be weighing up the risks for the children and herself, and the implications for her partner, when considering whether to leave or remain.

Conversations with women who have experienced violence require a range of responses which are briefly outlined below.

Believe her

One of her fears is that she will not be believed, particularly when her partner is well-respected. She is likely to be minimising what is happening rather than exaggerating and may not yet have the understanding that she is living with domestic violence.

To believe her is to begin a process of empowering her. It is particularly important to take her assessment of the situation seriously and never downplay her experience.

Her partner will usually have broken her confidence and self-esteem, and she may feel stupid or responsible for the abuse. Do not blame or judge her; criticism is already a part of the abusive relationship, so do not contribute to it further.

Listen to her

That means being patient and allowing her to share with you the pain that has probably been going on for many years. In listening, find out what it is that she is asking of you.

Validate her feelings and her responses and show compassion for her. Do not spiritualise the situation or the process. You can ask simple questions for clarification, but the less said the better.

Unequivocally challenge the violence

Domestic violence and abuse cannot be excused or justified. Assure the woman that she does not deserve the abuse, and that the violence is not her fault: 'No-one deserves to be abused'; 'I do not believe God wants you to live in fear.'

It is not her responsibility to stop him being violent, nor is she responsible for his choice to use violence. She needs to know she can trust you, so reassure her that confidentiality will be maintained, but also explain its limitations. Let her know she has your continuing support.

Confront the seriousness of the situation

Raise her awareness about the abuse: 'Are you afraid to go home tonight?', 'I'm concerned for your safety'. Encourage consideration for the wellbeing and safety of her, and her children, as the first priority: 'I'm afraid for the safety of your children'.

Emphasise that violence towards women usually gets worse, and highlight the effects of domestic violence on children – but do so in a way that will ensure that she does not feel blamed for the effects. While sharing your concerns, acknowledge her strength, resilience and wisdom.

Explore options

Be guided by what she wants, not by what you think she needs. She is the expert on her life as she is the only one who knows the full circumstances of her situation.

You can demonstrate through your questions and responses that you not only believe that she is in a precarious position, but that she has the strength, resourcefulness and ability to make her own decisions.

Safety

Have a conversation about safety planning and explore other possible options that would keep her and her children safe. Offer her information about domestic violence services and encourage or support her to access them if necessary.

Respect her decisions

Whether she chooses to stay or leave the abusive relationship, respect her decisions. She needs your support. She may surprise you and return to the relationship, and sometimes she will leave and return many times before making a complete break or before arranging a safe reconciliation. Offer your continuing support in whatever decision she makes.

YOU ARE THE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR A WOMAN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Referrals

Recognise your own limitations in this difficult area and make appropriate referrals to professional people and organisations, such as individual counselling, support groups, a shelter or other accommodation, legal and financial assistance, or counselling and support for children.

Do your best to encourage her to be the one who makes the appointment or contact. Making the appointment or contact may seem an insignificant act, but for those whose confidence has been destroyed it can be an important first step in the healing process. In some states, the woman herself may need to request the service, in which case it is important to support her as she takes the necessary action.

If she is considering marriage/relationship counselling, have a discussion with her about what evidence of change the man has demonstrated. Remember that this type of counselling may not be appropriate until the issue of violence in the relationship has been professionally addressed.

Until he stops his use of violence and abuse, no other relationship issues can be addressed.

Ongoing support

Your initial response is vital for her wellbeing. If she feels supported and encouraged, she may feel stronger and able to make decisions. On the other hand, if she feels judged or criticised, she could be afraid to tell anyone else about the abuse again.

Offer genuine ongoing support alongside an appropriate domestic violence service.

Maintain contact in a way that does not place her at increased risk, see how she is going, and offer further information.

Ensure you offer support, whether or not separation occurs.

Be aware of your own safety at all times. If necessary, call the police.

Never attempt to intervene in a violent episode. Ring the police immediately.

“ Until he stops his use of violence and abuse, no other relationship issues can be addressed.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not ask 'What did you do or say to provoke him?'

The man cannot blame the woman for his use of violence.

Do not suggest she try to be a better partner and not make him angry.

Remember the issue is the man's choice to use violence and abuse.

Do not ask 'Why do you stay?'

Leaving a violent and abusive situation is dangerous and a very difficult decision to make, emotionally and practically.

Do not advise the woman to return to a violent relationship.

The safety of women and children must always take priority.

Do not ask for proof of the violence.

This is disempowering for the woman and she will likely feel that you do not believe her or support her.

Do not attempt to mediate with a couple or challenge the abusive partner.

This can place you and the woman at serious risk.

WHEN SHE PLANS TO LEAVE

Women make decisions about staying or leaving relationships in their own time. Some women have practice runs at leaving the relationship.

Every time this happens she is gathering information and getting clearer and stronger in making decisions about the relationship.

We know that after separation is a particularly high-risk time for women and children. A safety plan is essential in identifying risks to women and children and informing decision-making.

No-one knows the cycle of violence and abuse she is living in better than the woman herself. You can add to her knowledge to enhance her safety plan by exploring options such as:

- storing in a safe place at home or elsewhere: identification, birth certificate, marriage certificate, passport, driver's licence, relevant paperwork relating to the house, car, other property and investments, recent bank statements, Medicare card, credit cards, personal telephone directory, any medication and significant photographs and treasures
- seeking alternative accommodation through a domestic violence service or family and friends
- contacting a domestic violence service to help her become financially independent, exploring housing options and/or dealing with Family Court or property-related matters, or accessing the criminal justice system (eg so she can proceed with charges or seek a restraining order). Domestic violence agencies can also assist with arranging counselling and accessing women's support groups and services for children
- providing a list of available resources; she may take this with her or leave it with you as part of her safety planning
- accessing an interpreter to assist the woman and children. It is preferable to do so rather than asking the children or other family members to assist with interpretation.

As previously stated, domestic violence affects women from all walks of life. It is important that you have good knowledge of the domestic violence services in your local area. You are encouraged to build strong working relationships with your local domestic violence service.

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Living in a home where there is domestic violence and abuse has damaging and abusive impacts on children. Whether or not children and young people are physically abused themselves, domestic violence impacts on their psychological, social, behavioural, educational, emotional, spiritual, cognitive and physical development.

Witnessing episodes of violence and abuse from one parent toward the other can affect children as much as if they were experiencing the abuse themselves.

Some effects on children who live with violence and abuse are:

- feelings of responsibility for the violence, guilt, anger, fear, anxiety, depression, grief, shame, powerlessness, confusion, despair, neglect, unworthiness, low self-esteem, isolation, helplessness and distrust
- stress-related conditions, such as headache or stomach pain, sleeping and eating difficulties and frequent illness
- behavioural problems such as aggression, acting out, running away, lack of concentration, poor school performance, difficulty making friends, misuse of drugs and alcohol, self-harming, risk-taking behaviour, animal cruelty or bullying
- loss of a sense of personal safety. When children live with fear, trust is betrayed, and this may impact on the way they view themselves in the world and their ability to develop relationships with others. Their vulnerability may be increased as they are unable to make informed decisions about entering relationships, or they may think that living with violence and abuse is an acceptable way of having relationships with others

- developmental delay or regression into a certain developmental stage. For example, a child may have been able to feed themselves previously, but they no longer can, as trauma has impacted on development. This is often because children and young people are distracted by what is occurring in their lives. Children and young people can also develop speech difficulties, such as stuttering.

Women and pregnancy

Many women are subject to domestic violence and abuse while they are pregnant. Sometimes this is the first time they experience an incident of violence and abuse from their partner. He may display more controlling behaviours during the woman's pregnancy or after childbirth.

These may include making decisions about how she should parent, such as whether she should breastfeed.

Most women aim to create a safe haven and a secure base for their children to grow and develop. When there is domestic violence and abuse, this is often compromised.

Highly stressful domestic violence experiences over a period of time can impact on the cognitive, emotional and physical development of an infant. Babies are highly sensitive to their surroundings, even before birth, as they can hear what is happening and feel the aftermath. Babies are often in their mother's arms when a domestic violence incident occurs. This is a traumatic experience for the infant and the mother.

RESPONDING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

You are in a privileged position when conversing with a child or young person about their experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

Children will often have allegiances to both parents. However, there are times when some children, because of coercion and tactics of maternal alienation, may not be able to name that they are fearful of their father.

Similarly, children can take the stress of this situation out on their mother, as they know it is safe to do so, as their mother cares for them. *Children may blame their mother for the abuse, or be angry if she decides to leave. This may be because she has protected them from seeing the abuse and they have not been aware of it; or because they are loyal to their father.*

Below are some things to remember when responding to children who experience domestic violence:

- Tell them that the violence is not okay and it is not their fault.
- Give them permission to explore their feelings and thoughts and the confusion that they may be experiencing.
- Acknowledge their feelings and confusion.
- Listen to their experience and their understanding of what is happening in their world.
- Provide a safe space to talk about their fears and worries.
- Give them time to assess if you are a trustworthy person to speak with, and inform them about confidentiality and its limits, in a way that they can understand.

- Let them know that domestic violence occurs in many families.
- Explore how fearful they are. This then informs what actions you can take. For example, ask 'What happens when ...?'
- Develop a safety plan. How can the children be safer?
- A referral to a counselling or support service may be required. Remember that safety needs to be prioritised, so precautions must be considered to make sure that children are not put into riskier situations.
- Find out who else they trust and who could be approached for support.
- Social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future are attributes that can assist in a child's recovery.

Remember, if you are a mandated notifier you have a legal responsibility to report that a child is in danger to the child abuse report line. This includes children witnessing domestic violence and abuse.

“ Witnessing episodes of violence and abuse from one parent toward the other can affect children as much as if they were experiencing the abuse themselves.



“ Domestic violence and abuse is any action that results in women and children being physically injured, feeling scared or intimidated, and feeling limited in what they can do or say in order to feel safe.

RESPONDING TO A MAN WHO IS VIOLENT AND ABUSIVE

The first priority in your response to a man who has used violence is the safety of his partner/ former partner and/or children.

Some people's first reaction to hearing about women and children being subjected to violence and abuse is to feel compelled to confront the man.

However, to confront the man may endanger the woman and her children and also result in her being cut off from potential support networks.

For the woman and children's safety it is important that all information shared by them be kept absolutely confidential, and that you find out from the victim-survivor if/how/when it is safe for her to be contacted by you.

If a man who has used violence towards his partner and/or children approaches you he may deny, minimise, justify or blame others or other things for his use of violence, or he may claim to not remember using violence.

When listening to men it is important to keep in mind that there is often a lot not being said. Men often talk about their use of violence without naming the behaviour for what it is: violence.

Domestic violence and abuse is any action that results in women and children being physically injured, feeling scared or intimidated, and feeling limited in what they can do or say in order to feel safe.

Using violence and abuse is a choice.

Some men may talk about 'losing it' or 'snapping', and may locate responsibility for their choice to use violence and abuse outside of themselves; they may infer that they had no control over their actions.

Other men talk about their use of violence and abuse towards their partner and children as being a 'communication problem', a 'heated argument' or 'relationship difficulties'.

These explanations minimise the violent and abusive behaviours of the man and make invisible the experiences of women and children, while suggesting that there is a shared responsibility for the man's use of violence and abuse.

Other men talk about feelings of provocation – 'she pushed my buttons' – which again makes women and children responsible for ensuring their own safety in the presence of the man.

Some men may talk about their use of violence and abuse as being a 'once-off' or 'not like me', and may try to search for an inherent problem to explain their behaviour and thus avoid taking responsibility.

Other men may blame alcohol consumption, loss of employment, financial difficulties, mental health issues or other factors.

However, it has been well established that these issues do not 'cause' men to use violence and abuse; men can make clear decisions not to use violence and abuse, regardless of what other issues are impacting on their lives.

The problem is the man's use of violence and abuse.

Men may talk about their belief that they have an anger problem, and say they want to access anger management courses to stop their use of violence and abuse. But anger is not an action – it is an emotion, which all people experience. What is important is how a man chooses to act when feeling angry.

Some choose to behave respectfully, while others choose to use violence and abuse. For this reason anger management is not seen as appropriate intervention when the problem is violence and abuse.

It is important to note that violence and abuse can occur without a man necessarily feeling angry. Men's use of violence and abuse towards women and children is understood in the context of an abuse of power, where men use violence and abuse as a tactic to gain or maintain power and control over their partner and children.

Violence and abuse is a choice and not the result of a 'loss of control'; rather, it is a deliberate use of power and control. When men are being completely honest with themselves they often talk about having used violence to get what they wanted at the time.

You may be able to ask questions that invite the man to take responsibility for his use of violence and abuse and accept a referral for a domestic violence intervention program. For example:

- What are your hopes for your relationships with your partner and children?
- Have there been times you've handled yourself in ways that don't fit with your hopes?
- What's it like to face that?
- What sorts of things have you done?
- What would it take to name these actions for what they are [violence]?
- What might it mean if you were willing to address your use of violence and make a commitment to more respectful ways of being with your family?

Throughout your conversations with the man it is important that you keep your focus on him and his behaviour and not get caught up in talking about what others could have done differently at a time when he used violence.

Regardless of what others were doing at the time, there is no excuse for the man's use of violence and abuse.

“ Violence and abuse is a choice and not the result of a 'loss of control'; rather, it is a deliberate use of power and control. When men are being completely honest with themselves they often talk about having used violence to get what they wanted at the time.

RESPONDING TO A MAN WHO IS VIOLENT AND ABUSIVE

The responsibility of the man is to address his use of violence and abuse.

It is not the responsibility of the woman and her children to stay with him to support him in this. The man is the only one who can make a commitment to choosing safe and more respectful ways of being with his partner and/or children.

If a man is not committed to handling himself in ways that are safe for his family, then he may need to consider finding alternative accommodation options to ensure their safety.

If the man's partner has left the relationship, and you are asked for help to 'get her back' or for information about her whereabouts, be clear that you will not give that information.

Instead, offer him assistance in connecting with a service to address his use of violence and abuse and make a commitment to alternative ways of being that prioritise the safety of his partner and children.

It is important that the man is invited to consider the impact his use of violence and abuse may have had on his partner and children.

It also may be useful to invite the man to consider what it might mean for his partner and children if he does not address his use of violence and abuse. Violence and abuse have significant impacts for women and children.

It is imperative that the man work towards gaining a greater appreciation of what it's been like for his partner and children to be on the receiving end of his violence and abuse. Women and children who have experienced violence and abuse often talk about the impact of this behaviour on their sense of safety and their ability to trust the man.

Women and children often talk about wanting to see 'evidence of change' in a man when he makes a commitment to nonviolence. If there is no evidence of change in the way he is choosing to behave, then his commitment is nothing more than words.

Men need to make a commitment to nonviolence and continue to find ways – every single day – of reminding themselves of the importance of prioritising the safety of their partner and children.

Marriage or couple counselling is not appropriate when violence has occurred.

While they may have many issues that they need to deal with together, these cannot be addressed until the violence has stopped. Joint counselling is likely to escalate the violence and the danger to women and children.

The immediate goal of intervention is for the woman and her children to be safe and for the man to stop his use of violence and abuse. The long-term future of the relationship can only be considered when the violence has stopped.

Men can and do make changes and choose alternative ways of being that prioritise the safety of their partners and children.

However, this will not happen by itself. It requires a man to step into a space of taking full responsibility for his use of violence and abuse.

This means stepping away from explanations of feeling provoked, or that he 'lost control', and into a space of acknowledging his behaviour as a choice and making an ongoing commitment not to use violence and abuse.

Without making this ongoing commitment some men can get caught up in making empty promises to change, as a way of winning back their partners and children and as a way of easing their own guilt. The focus must always be on the key issue: his use of violence and abuse.

Acknowledging that there is a problem is the first step towards addressing it. For a man to stop using violence and abuse in his relationships, it is paramount that the man accepts that:

- he has used violence and abuse
- he is responsible for his own use of violence and abuse
- he needs to make changes to prioritise the safety of his partner and children and make this an everyday commitment.

Pastorally caring for and challenging a man who is violent and abusive

Men will at times turn to their pastor or other church worker for help, having recognised their abusive behaviour. Once the woman's safety is assured, you may be able to assist him to get professional help. Assessing if he genuinely wants to change is not your role and is better left to professionals experienced in this work. You can be a conduit, however, to assist him to gain access to individual counselling or a men's behaviour change program (men's domestic violence group, which is different from an anger management group) at a recognised counselling agency. In some states/territories, funded men's domestic violence programs will have links with a 'partner advocate', who is a female counsellor who will confidentially contact the man's partner and children while he attends the program. Your support at this crisis time may lead the man to significant changes. Men can change and, even if not for his current relationship, it may help him in future relationships.

RESPONDING TO A MAN WHO IS VIOLENT AND ABUSIVE

Available services

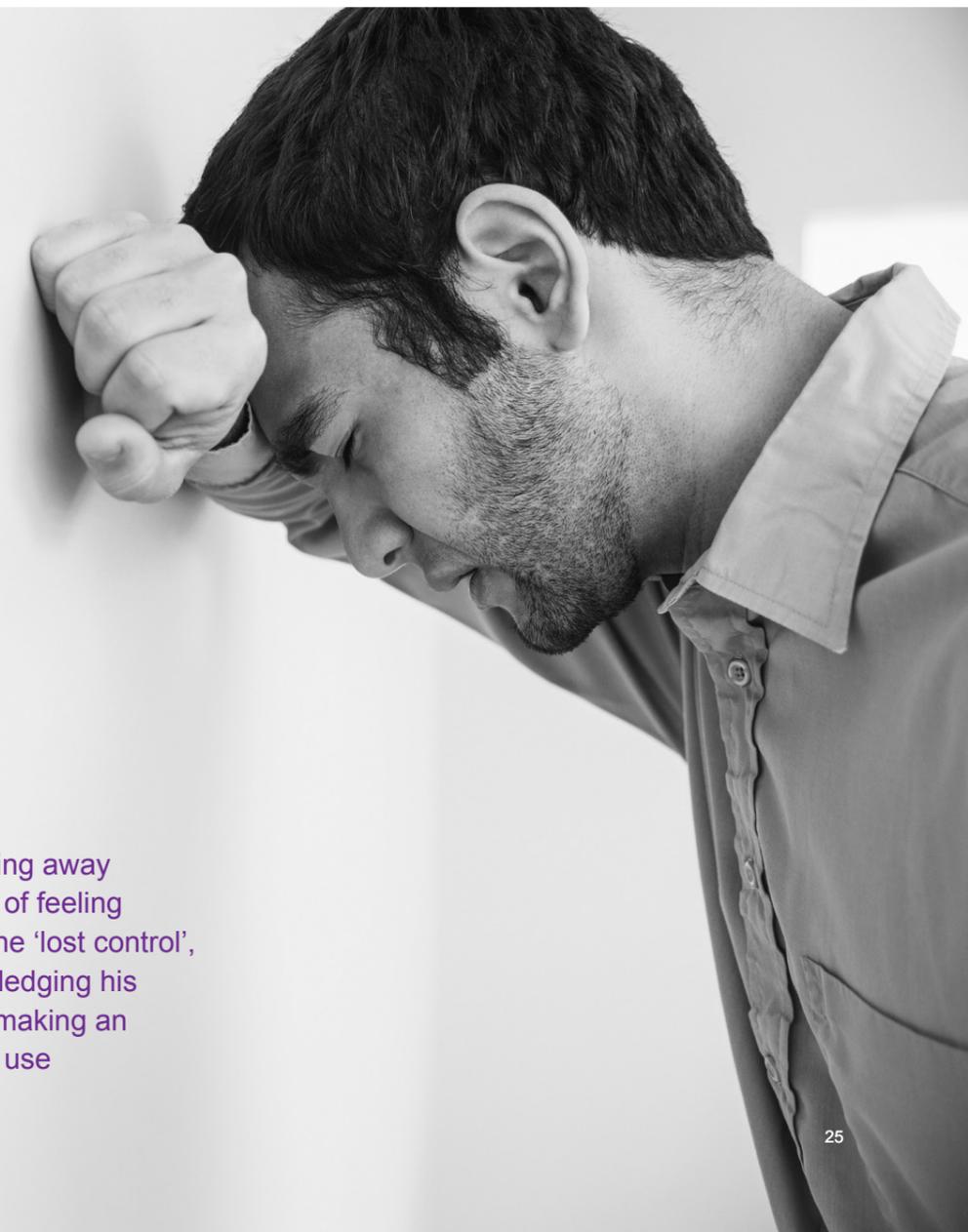
There are services available to support men in their commitments to addressing their use of violence and abuse. These include individual counselling and group work interventions. It is critical that the services offered to men are guided by the following principles of intervention:

- safety of women and children as priority; men are responsible for their use of violence
- all intervention is accountable to those women and children who have experienced violence and abuse
- all intervention is conducted in a context of respect (Colley et al, 1997).

Appropriate assistance is provided only when counsellors and intervention workers have an understanding of domestic violence.

Part of taking responsibility for using violence and abuse involves men taking the initiative in:

- accessing services
- keeping the safety of their partner and children the priority
- stopping their violence and abuse toward their partner and children
- monitoring their own thinking and behaviour and not expecting others to take on this responsibility
- acknowledging and working towards gaining a better understanding of what it has been like for their partner and children to have been subjected to his use of violence and abuse.



“ This means stepping away from explanations of feeling provoked, or that he 'lost control', and into a space of acknowledging his behaviour as a choice and making an ongoing commitment not to use violence and abuse.

“ There are three pastoral principles which arise from Jesus’ encounter with the haemorrhaging woman: that you make the effort to 1) stop, 2) listen and 3) believe those who come with critical pastoral issues.

PASTORALLY CARING FOR WOMEN TRAUMATISED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Pastoral theology – Jesus stops, turns and sees her.

As we pray with and ponder on this gospel story, let us reflect on the pattern of behaviour that seems to be present. How are we to respond to those who are suffering from violence?

The woman is living on the very edge of society – she is ‘invisible’ or ‘untouchable’ to those around her. She has been ostracised by the community and she feels diminished and almost defeated by her circumstances. The story tells of both her pain and her hope.

The crowds are surrounding Jesus – pushing in on him, calling on him and jostling for a place alongside him.

Jesus is in the centre of the crowd, feeling himself being pushed in various directions and struggling to move forward. In spite of the pressure around him, he is aware of the presence of the woman; he knows that someone is trying to reach him.

The crowd discourages him and behaves as if to say ‘It’s your imagination’; ‘There’s nothing there’; ‘Ignore it’. Deadlines to meet. Places to go.

But Jesus is not deterred in his response to the woman. He stops, he turns and he sees her.

And in that moment, the woman becomes ‘visible’ and at peace; her full dignity as a human being has been restored.

There are three pastoral principles which arise from Jesus’ encounter with the haemorrhaging woman: that you make the effort to 1) stop, 2) listen and 3) believe those who come with critical pastoral issues.

The next section provides you with specific advice on how to apply these principles for women experiencing domestic violence.

Some major initial observations

Domestic violence has been described as a pattern of controlling and abusive behaviour used by an intimate partner during a relationship or after separation.

The abuse or violence takes many forms including physical, psychological, sexual, social, economic, legal and spiritual. It is also a misuse of male power.

Consequently, women who have been disempowered are suffering from grief, trauma, a major loss of self-love and a difficulty in relating to the world.

The key tasks of a pastoral carer are addressed in the following questions:

- How can I empower this woman?
- How can I assist this woman to journey towards healing?

It is important to address these two questions in every dimension of the pastoral session.

It is important that you:

- provide a safe environment or a centre of hospitality, in which the woman is free to share her story in whatever way she chooses, and to disclose or not disclose aspects of her experience (Cf. Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman)
- be empathetic, compassionate (ie sharing and understanding her pain) and non-judgemental
- remember that the woman will not only have difficulty sharing her story with you, but also in articulating it aloud to herself
- after listening intently to her story, assist the woman to embrace her strengths, including the ability to survive and, often, an ability to hope for a better life
- assist the woman to understand abuse from the perspective of losses to personhood (which are enormous) and the many ways this abuse has damaged her ability to relate to the world
- share insights you have gained from her story, and from grief literature, that assist her to expand her understanding of grief. It is particularly important to help her to begin to discern the difference between love (the nurturing of a person) and control (taking away a person’s autonomy and integrity); love and violence; and love (building up self-worth) and intimidation (destruction of self-worth)
- find ways together for her to strengthen her damaged personhood and explore ways to re-engage with the world
- assist the woman with ways of ensuring her children are safe. Sometimes the partner has used fear and intimidation to turn the children against her, which adds further pain to her grief, and complicates it even more
- confront injustice (noting that abuse has physical, psychological, sexual, social, economic, legal and spiritual dimensions, and is a misuse of male power)
- assist her in understanding that domestic violence is not simply an individual issue or a relational issue but also a social, national and world issue
- assist her to slowly journey through her grief and trauma towards healing, by sharing encouragement, empathy, hope and wisdom
- remember once again that every dimension of the pastoral session should seek to empower this traumatised woman to journey towards healing and wholeness
- decide honestly when to refer her to skilled practitioners in this specialised area of counselling. Women can receive help by phoning 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or a state/territory domestic violence helpline, where they can be referred to support services.

THE CHURCH AND HEALING

Faith communities play an important role in supporting women who experience domestic violence and abuse. For many women, their trust in God and the support they receive from their faith community is integral to their healing.

The faith community can support women and children by providing, as far as is possible, safety for them within the church. For the user of violence, however, it may be necessary to make other provisions, for example referring him to another congregation. If a domestic violence restraining order is in place, women should feel safe to remain in the congregation and be clear that they are supported by the faith community to do so.

The church can also raise awareness about domestic violence through prayerful collaboration, education and interventions. It can do such things as:

- Create a policy and procedure for your congregation in relation to issues surrounding domestic violence. Your policy and procedure should be consistent with the LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour. The LCA Professional Standards Department will be able to guide you.

- Post literature, posters and brochures around the church office and bathrooms, etc.
- Have a list of domestic violence resources in the church office and give these to pastoral workers.
- Organise domestic violence training for pastors, staff, ministry leaders and volunteers on how to effectively address domestic violence issues.
- List the domestic violence helpline phone numbers in the church bulletin/newsletters.
- Speak about domestic violence at gatherings of pastoral workers and sessions.
- Provide teachings on domestic violence and respectful relationships in classes (adult, teen and children's Sunday school, Bible study, small groups and youth groups).
- Where possible incorporate teachings about respectful relationships in lessons and sermons.

SELF-CARE FOR PASTORAL WORKERS

Providing support to women and children who experience violence and to men or use violence can be difficult and frustrating work.

Do not blame yourself or feel responsible for any incident of domestic violence and abuse in your congregation, and remember it is not your job to 'fix' the violence and abuse.

The violence and abuse is the responsibility of the man, and the woman ultimately needs to make choices about her and her children's safety. Your task is to provide support and supply information.

Because it is not your role to 'fix' the situation, do not feel pressured to offer a solution. Your role is to offer genuine ongoing support alongside an appropriate domestic violence service.

You may need support yourself, so take great care in choosing someone to debrief with. It is important that the person giving you support understands the basic principles around domestic violence and abuse, and understands that breaches of confidentiality may be life-threatening.

It is very important that you continue to develop your knowledge and skills in responding to domestic violence and abuse by seeking out training when available.

“ Because it is not your role to 'fix' the situation, do not feel pressured to offer a solution. Your role is to offer genuine ongoing support alongside an appropriate domestic violence service.

MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES
www.preventDFV.lca.org.au



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