



A guide **FOR CHURCHES** to address domestic abuse

Foreword



“*We must speak up and do something*”. These are the words of the people of God as they gathered together in horror after an act of unspeakable violence against a nameless woman, who was neglected and rejected by a husband who valued his own life above hers (Judges 19:30).

What happened in the time of the Judges, to a woman whose name we never get to know, galvanised a society that had drifted further and further from God. That drift is documented, horrifically, in the lives of the women of Israel. The book of Judges recounts the treatment of women spiralling into a Godless abyss with this woman’s abuse and death at the very bottom.

As God’s people today, it’s easy to distance ourselves from that story in Judges 19. It happened 3,000 years ago in a time with people who ‘weren’t like us’. We like to think we would never do something like that, that it couldn’t happen in today’s world, to women and girls we know.

But it does. According to UN statistics, 1 in 3 women around the world will be subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate during their lifetime.¹ Many whose names, like the woman in Judges 19, we’ll never know.

Every day, around the world, 137 women are killed by men who were meant to love them - fathers, husbands, brothers.²

In the UK, that translates to two women a week being killed by an intimate partner.³ One in four women will be subjected to domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime.⁴

It’s happening on the streets around our churches, and it’s happening in our churches. Our own research has shown that one in four churchgoers have experienced domestic abuse.⁵

It’s time to speak up and do something. Restored has a mission to speak up about violence against women, to equip the church to stand against domestic abuse and support victims/survivors, and we’d love you to join us.

Bekah Legg

CEO

Find out more about making your church a beacon of hope for those who have been subjected to domestic abuse by visiting restored-uk.org/beacon.

Guide for churches to address domestic abuse

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¹ UN: Facts and Figures, Ending Violence Against Women (2021)

² UN: [Global Study On Homicide](#) Gender-related killing of women and girls

³ [Femicide Census](#)

⁴ [Violence against Women and Girls and Male Position Factsheets](#) (2019)

⁵ Aune, K. & Barnes, R. (2018) In Churches Too: Church Responses to Domestic Abuse – A case study of Cumbria, Coventry: Coventry University and Leicester: University of Leicester

A word from Québec...

In 2020, while the world had turned its attention to the Covid-19 pandemic, a “second pandemic” was taking place in many households across the province of Québec (as was the case in several other countries across the globe). This second pandemic was the increase of domestic violence cases and an alarming spike in femicides.

Christian Direction, since its founding in 1964, has always been concerned by the intersection of faith and social issues. So, in the autumn of 2021, when a domestic violence survivor came to our offices and asked us, “What will Christian Direction do for the victims of domestic violence?” we felt compelled to respond.

What ensued were three beautiful years of work during which a community of more than 30 practitioners, pastors, nurses, researchers and survivors led an inquiry and launched Rapha⁶, a study that reveals the experiences of domestic violence and its prevalence within the Christian church in Québec.

The Rapha Project reports its findings on a survey completed by 500 practicing Christians, on qualitative interviews with 13 survivors who were members of Catholic, Protestant or Evangelical churches at the time of their abuse, and on focus groups with 39 Christian church leaders and clergy in Québec.

The results are sometimes comforting, other times troubling. The Church in Québec has a long way to go in its response to domestic violence if it wants to be preventative, supportive and safe for families dealing with this issue. There is much work to be done in terms of the Church’s comprehension of the issue of gender-based violence, in the area of training its leaders, in its capacity or will to openly discuss the issue and in the development of protocols and procedures when intervening or responding to a case of domestic violence. One thing is certain: Christians in Quebec WANT to be sensitized and equipped to better respond to intimate partner violence.

In light of these needs, we turned to Restored UK. These pioneers have been active for the last twenty years, working amongst Christian communities, parishes and Churches. Their mission is to speak up about the realities of violence against women and girls, and to equip the Church to stand against domestic abuse and support survivors⁷.

Every Church seeking to become a place of prevention, of safety and of justice in the area of domestic violence should read this guide and apply its council. We are grateful to Restored UK for their wisdom, their expertise and their generosity towards the Body of Christ in Québec. We are not alone in this work. Together we will make a difference.

Jenna Smith, Coordinator of the Rapha Project

Christian Direction
Autumn 2024

⁶ www.fr.direction.ca/rapha

⁷ www.restored-uk.org/about/our-vision

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Introduction

Domestic abuse is an issue that affects all sections of society. To end it, the whole community needs to work together. A vital part of any community is the Church.

The Church, both as an institution and a group of individuals that congregate regularly, has a vital role in responding well to this issue and fostering the change required to stop it from happening.

We are called to be *‘the salt and the light of the earth’*. Domestic abuse pollutes the very fibre of relationships. Shining a light in the darkness behind closed doors and bringing clarity to this issue is crucial to our testimony to the communities we serve.

In the fall of 2023, Christian Direction published its first reports from the Rapha Project, a study on domestic violence within the Church in Québec. The first phase surveyed Christians in Québec and asked them about their perceptions or concerns around the issue of intimate partner violence. The report found that while 64% of persons surveyed considered that domestic violence is a problem in our society, less than 31% of respondents thought it was an actual problem in their own church. Despite this, 37% of respondents consider themselves to be victims of domestic violence, presently or in the past, (or “occasionally victims of domestic violence”). More concerning is the fact that 38.5% of self-identifying victims thought that the response they received from their church was either not helpful or even harmful.^a

These statistics show just how much needs to be done to ensure that victims/survivors of domestic abuse in our churches receive the support they need, not just to be safe but to have lives restored to the fullness that God intended.

“ Lire ma Bible, mettre ça dans les mains du Seigneur, pis si t’es plus proche du Seigneur, ça va aller mieux, faut être proche du Seigneur. Fait que tu te sens coupable, tu penses que t’es pas assez proche du Seigneur, c’est pour ça que ça va mal chez vous. C’est tout un cercle vicieux, de maintien, je dirai même... honnêtement, je dirai que l’Église m’a maintenue dans ça. Non seulement ils n’ont pas été une aide, mais ils m’ont maintenue.”^b

Citation d’une survivante, Projet Rapha

This guide is designed to:

- increase awareness and understanding about domestic abuse and its effects, (p. 9-26),
- offer clear and concise information about the legal framework (p. 27-29),
- propose ways to handle disclosures and support victims/survivors (p. 38-43),
- provide ways to respond well when the abuser is in the congregation (p. 46-49)
- provide material for theological reflection (p. 52-60)
- provide valuable referral information (p. 61-64)

Domestic abuse and demographic

This guide focuses on abuse by an intimate partner. It highlights the Churches’ role in challenging how our theology, liturgy, and pastoral care may have reinforced beliefs that uphold abusive behaviours.

This resource is meant to introduce the topic and how to respond appropriately when a disclosure is made. It is not meant to be a fully comprehensive resource and is not designed to fully equip someone to respond to a domestic abuse situation or work with an abuser alone. We always recommend that churches refer to and work alongside local specialist domestic violence services whilst providing informed, pastoral care.

Safety comes first

Safety must be the fundamental guiding principle in any effort to support a victim/survivor of domestic abuse. It is essential to be aware that victims/survivors are at the greatest risk of harm during any disclosure or seeking help (more info can be found on p. 41-42).

The reality of domestic abuse means the risk of danger is greater when the victim/survivor is thinking about or in the process of leaving their abuser. The risk for those subjected to domestic abuse and any children in the relationship is also heightened after disclosing and separating from the abuser.

“ Pis euh, ma fille elle allait se cacher en dessous de son lit, mon mari faisait des colères t’sais y se fâchait pour des riens. Pis t’sais c’était, mes filles ont été très très abîmées par ça, à reproduire des relations toxiques elles aussi.”¹⁰

Citation d’une survivante, Projet Rapha

There can be unintended negative and dangerous consequences for the victim/survivor if the support provided is not based on assessing her safety and listening to her own assessment of her situation.

A community-based response

The Church is one of the actors that need to play its role in responding to this issue, but it is not the only participant. A whole sector of organisations holds the expertise to support victims/survivors and work with abusers.

We encourage the Church to consistently engage with these organisations and walk alongside victims/survivors as they engage with specialised services. This engagement provides the best response for the victim/survivor while building bridges with services within the local community.

Characteristics

According to the Canadian government, any person aged 12 years or older can be the victim of intimate partner violence¹¹. Evidence shows that women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse and that most abusers are male. This was corroborated in Restored’s baseline study, where 90% of the abusers were male.

According to the INSPQ (*Institut national de la santé publique du Québec*), in 2021, amongst all partner-related crimes or infractions declared by the police, 76.8% of the accused or charged were male. Men were the predominant authors of infractions across all categories related to partner-violence.¹²

Domestic abuse takes place at all levels in society. It doesn’t distinguish between race, educational level, ethnic background, or religious affiliation. It happens in marriages, partnerships with and without children.

^a Direction Chrétienne et collab., Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l’Église au Québec Partie 1: enquête auprès des chrétiens du Québec, du Projet Rapha, Montréal, automne 2023. www.fr.direction.ca/_files/ugd/df71a2_0b27bfa05da1482eb819fe8e1b628d4e.pdf

^b Direction Chrétienne et collab., Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l’Église au Québec Partie 2: présentation des entrevues qualitatives, du Projet Rapha, Montréal, automne 2023, p. 63. www.fr.direction.ca/_files/ugd/df71a2_ed0ec500772b4a3f9b9a271e3c71fddeb.pdf Translation: “Read my bible, put it in the Lord’s hands, and if you’re closer to the Lord, you’ll feel better, you have to be closer to the Lord. It makes you feel guilty, you think you’re not close enough to the Lord, and that’s why things are bad at home. It’s a whole vicious circle of maintenance, I’ll even say... honestly I’d say the church kept me in it. Not only were they not helpful but they held me in it.”

¹⁰ Idem, p. 32. Translation: “And um, my daughter would hide under her bed, my husband would get angry for little nothings. And you know, my daughters are very damaged by all that, to the point of reproducing toxic relationships themselves.”

¹¹ www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241024/dq241024b-fra.htm

¹² Statistiques | Institut national de santé publique du Québec

However, faith does play a role. It has been documented that women of faith stay longer in relationships with an abuser due, in some instances, to their Christian beliefs.¹³

When domestic abuse occurs within the church, scriptures can be ‘weaponised’ by abusers and sometimes by church leaders to coerce women into staying and submitting to abuse.

Why it is vital to talk about domestic abuse

More positively, it has also been documented that faith has sustained victims/survivors who have been subjected to domestic abuse and played a critical role in recovery and restoration.¹⁴

Nevertheless, in our years of listening to victims/survivors, we have witnessed that, for many, abuse doesn’t stop after leaving the abusive partner. The tactics change, and any opportunity for contact, e.g. shared custody of children, can be used by the abuser to continue to coerce and control. The journey to recovery has just started but it doesn’t necessarily mean everything has been resolved. The church can walk with the victim/survivor on this road to recovery.

Abuse in churches

As the country’s biggest social institution, present in more communities than any other,¹⁵ churches have a crucial role in preventing domestic abuse. It can start with talking, across all age groups represented in our communities, about healthy relationships and how they look, reinforcing the creation principle that men and women were created with equal worth, capacity and responsibility as joint bearers of God’s image.

Churches should lead the way in raising awareness and breaking down the silence, shame and stigma that permeates this issue. We need to create supportive environments where victims/survivors can realise what is happening to them and safely disclose it, confident they will receive appropriate support.

Finally, we believe abuse is a sin as it goes against everything that Jesus taught about love and modelled in his relationships. It brings destruction to the lives of victims/survivors, their children and the lives of those who perpetrate abuse. Church leaders, need to help those who they lead to live life in the freedom that is to be found in Christ. We can’t do that if we choose to look the other way. Christ came to the world to give us life and life in abundance. Abuse stops us all from living in the fullness of that gift.

Terminology

We use the term victims/survivors to recognise that people suffer domestic abuse because of the actions of the abuser but also that they continue to live despite it.

This resource refers to ‘victims/survivors’ as female and ‘abusers/perpetrators’ as male because this is the most common presentation of domestic abuse.¹⁶ Restored’s mission is to speak up about violence against women, and domestic abuse is the form of gender-based violence a woman is most likely to be subjected to. It is also a recognition that many women face gender-specific, theological barriers to disclosing abuse within the Church.

We fully recognise that men can be ‘victims/survivors’ and that women can be ‘abusers/perpetrators’. We also recognise that men face gender-specific barriers to disclosing abuse.¹⁷ The information in this resource applies to any situation where there is domestic abuse.

Even though this resource focuses on intimate partner violence, we use this term and domestic abuse interchangeably. It is a common way to refer to the issue in the sector and broader society.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is not just about physical violence. It is about the control of a victim/survivor by an intimate partner. It is a complex issue inflicted in various ways and it is essential to recognise its profound effect on the lives of victims/survivors, any children in the household, and the perpetrator himself. It is a serious matter that can lead to a criminal conviction.

It’s important for churches to foster a safe and supportive environment where victims/survivors can talk openly about complex issues without fear of stigma or shame. Equally, it is crucial for churches to be aware of how to appropriately respond to abusers who genuinely seek to change and to know how to manage those that do not.

Definition

The UN definition says that “domestic abuse [...] is a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Incidents are rarely isolated and usually escalate in frequency and severity. Domestic abuse may culminate in serious physical injury or death.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, faith, class or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Victims of domestic abuse may also include a child or other relative, or any other household member.”¹⁸

In the vast majority of cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.¹⁹

¹³ Shannon-Lewy, C. and Dull, V. (2005) The response of Christian clergy to domestic violence: help or hindrance?, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10(6): 647–59.
¹⁴ Anderson, K.M. Renner, L. and Danis, F.S. (2012) Recovery: resilience and growth in the aftermath of domestic violence, *Violence Against Women*, 18(11): w1279–99
¹⁵ Brierley, P. (2014) UK Church Statistics No 2 2010–2020, Tonbridge ADBC
¹⁶ ONS Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019
¹⁷ WHO March 2021 Violence against women fact sheet

¹⁸ UN (2020) What Is Domestic Abuse? [online]. Available at: www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse (Accessed 23/09/21)
¹⁹ Women’s Aid (2020) What Is Domestic Abuse? [online]. Available at: www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse (Accessed 23/09/21)

Control and Coercion

The definition above uses the words: power, control and influence. In the UK we use the terms **control and coercion** to recognise that abuse is not always physical. They are used in tandem to ensure victims/survivors are trapped in a relationship with an abuser.

In Québec, we use the term coercive control to describe violence that isn't always physical. The Directeur des poursuites criminelles et pénales (DPCP) must now take into consideration coercive control in the application of the law.²⁰

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person **subordinate** and/or **dependent**.

When **subordination** occurs within an intimate relationship, it directly attacks the victim/survivor's sense of worth and value. Consequently, she may believe she has no agency or power over her own decisions or

is not allowed to have any independence or behave or act the way she might choose.

Dependency means needing the support of something or someone in order to continue existing or operating. Applying this to an intimate relationship in which one person seeks to gain control over the other - results in is a victim/survivor who may believe she cannot function outside this relationship.

Coercive behaviour creates invisible chains and a sense of fear that permeates all elements of a victim/survivor's life. It works to limit her human rights by depriving them of their liberty and reducing their ability for action.

Experts liken coercive control to being taken hostage. Evan Stark explains: *'the victim becomes captive in an unreal world created by the abuser, entrapped in a world of confusion, contradiction and fear.'*

“C’était de la manipulation là. C’était tout le temps de la manipulation. T’sais, “je vais me suicider, je vais faire ci, je vais faire ça si tu...” La violence était beaucoup, “si tu me voles mon leadership”... Fait que, t’sais c’était du contrôle. Toujours du contrôle, toujours du contrôle.”

Citation survivante du Projet Rapha²¹

“I think people don't understand that when you are in these situations you can't just order a book yourself or look something up online or use the phone even. My husband had cameras watching the whole of downstairs which he could access from anywhere in the world. He completely controlled the finances and every time I bought something it pinged up on his phone, telling him how much I'd spent and where I was.”

Survivor Quote

Types of abuse

Physical abuse:

Affects the victims/survivors' body. Examples are slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; shoving; burning; pinning you down, holding you by the neck, restraining, negligent exposure to sexually transmitted diseases.

Sexual abuse:

Using force, threats or intimidation to make the victims/survivors perform sexual acts when they don't want to; manipulating them to look at pornographic material; degrading treatment related to their sexuality.

Threatening behaviour:

Includes physical actions short of actual contact/injury, oral or written threats or implicit threats intended to cause harassment or distress to another person²² like using physical size to intimidate; shouting down; destroying possessions; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm the victim/survivor and children or harm family pets and threats of suicide.

Economic abuse:

Behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on the victim/survivor's ability to acquire, use or maintain money, property or obtain goods/services. For example, prevent them from earning or access their own money; spend or take money without consent; build up debts in their name or withhold child maintenance payments.

Psychological abuse:

Behaviour that affects a victim/survivor's perception of reality. The goal is to convince her that she is crazy or incompetent. Examples include questioning her memory, putting doubt on how others value her, isolating her and trivialising her needs or feelings.

Emotional abuse:

Behaviours that will affect how a victim/survivor feels about herself, and the goal is to destroy her sense of self-worth. Examples include blaming, belittling, constant judging and criticism, name-calling.

Spiritual abuse:

One of the areas that is not explicitly captured in the definition is spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse can have a profoundly damaging impact on Christian victims/survivors. It is not often spoken about but it has particular significance for those of us working in the church.

²⁰ maisons-femmes.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/RMFVVC-Napperon-policier-FINAL-8-DEC.pdf

²¹ Direction Chrétienne et collab., « Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l'Église au Québec Partie 2: Présentation des entrevues qualitatives », p. 25. Translation: "It was manipulation. Always manipulation, all the time. You know, 'I am going to commit suicide, I am going to do this, I am going to do that...' His violence was often expressed, 'if you steal my leadership'... So you know, it was control. Always control, always control."

²² Gustine, Joseph F. (2013) Workplace Violence and the Facility Manager, p 88. UK:River Publishers.

What is spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse that uses religion and faith systems to control and subjugate a victim.²³ It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.²⁴

Spiritual abuse may include the following but is not limited to:

- Requirements for secrecy and silence
- Enforced accountability and censorship of decision making
- Marital rape and the use of religious scripture to justify that
- The use of religious texts to coerce and control
- Causing harm, isolation and or neglect to get rid of an 'evil force', 'spirit' that is believed to have possessed the victim.
- Requirement of obedience to the perpetrator of domestic abuse, owing to religion, faith or theology
- Community isolation as a means of 'punishment'
- Forcing the victim to act or behave in ways that contradict her religious beliefs
- Preventing the victim from performing prayers and/or attending communal worship
- Forcing sexual acts which contradict religious observance and or religious law
- Forcing or limiting access to abortion, birth control or sterilisation when this will contravene religious observance.²⁵

“On entendait tout le temps des, des prêches sur la soumission... on ne parlait jamais de la violence, on ne parlait jamais du rôle de l'homme, comment exercer son leadership dans l'amour et non dans la contrainte et dans la prise de pouvoir et dans la colère. Donc c'est beaucoup le rôle que l'Église m'a donné.”

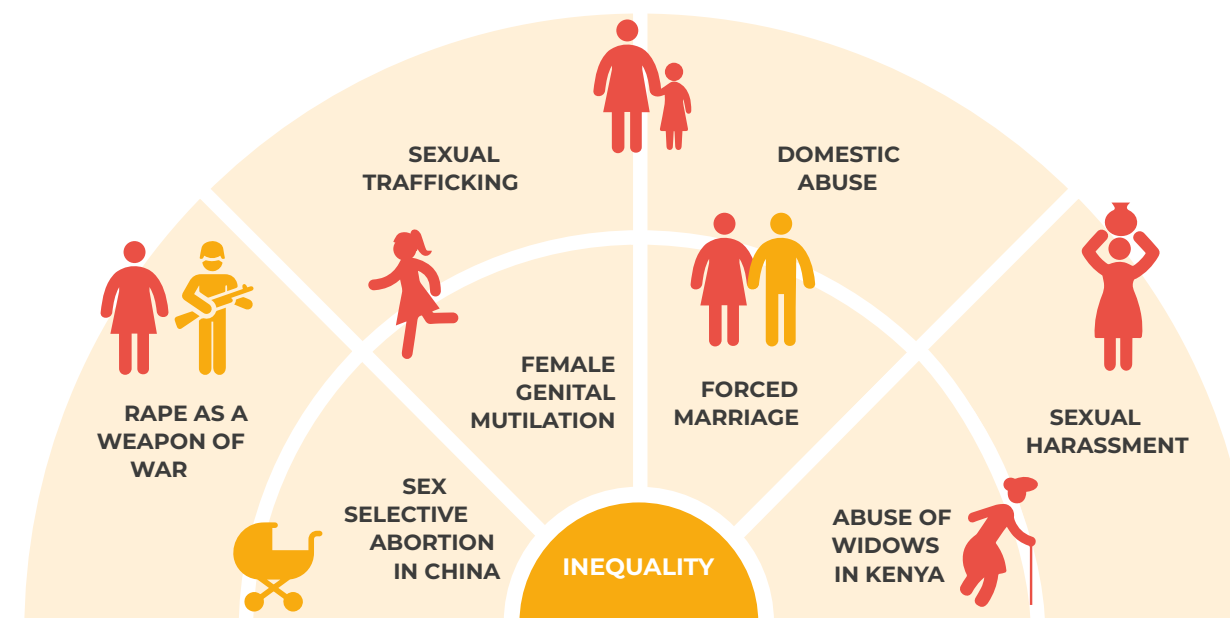
Survivor quote, Rapha Project²⁶

Why does domestic abuse happen?

Domestic abuse is a sin, and it can be traced back to the breaking of relationships in the fall.

This brokenness is expressed in the unequal power in the relationship between men and women. This can be seen in cultural norms worldwide. This inequality is the root cause of all violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic abuse.

When talking about domestic abuse, it is essential to talk about power²⁷. Domestic abuse results from unequal power relations between men and women. The abuse of power and control of another person stems from a choice underpinned by the belief that one is superior to the other. This attitude needs to be addressed to end all forms of violence against women, including domestic abuse.



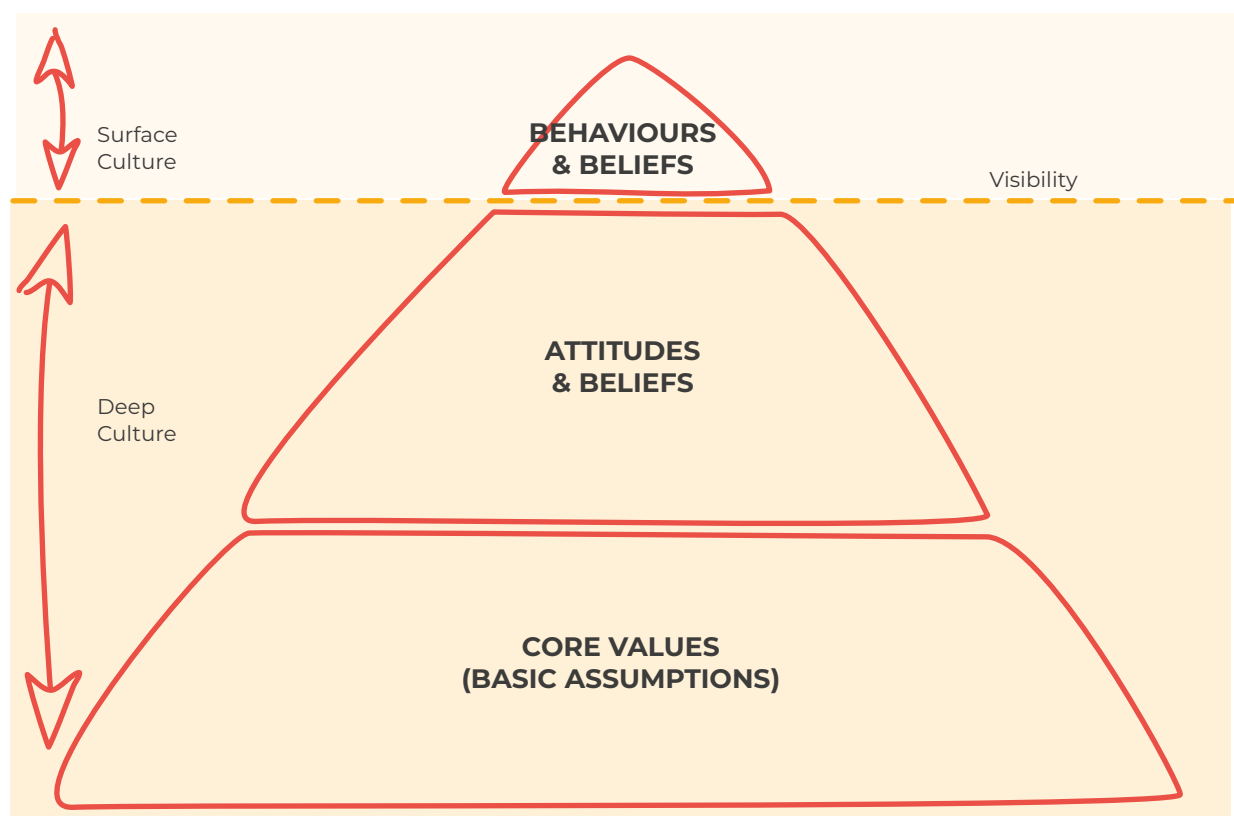
²³ Oakley, L; Kinmond, K; & Humphreys, J. (2018). Spiritual abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice guidance. Journal of Adult Protection, 20(3/4), 144-154

²⁴ Oakley, L; Kinmond, K; (2016). The relationship between spiritual abuse and domestic violence in faith-based communities in Hilder, S & Bettinson, V. (2016) Domestic violence: Interdisciplinary perspectives on protection, prevention and Intervention, Palgrave MacMillian

²⁵ Statutory Guidance Framework (England) 2021. Available at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/domestic-abuse-act-statutory-guidance (Accessed 31/08/21).

²⁶ Direction Chrétienne et collab., «Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l'Église au Québec Partie 2: Présentation des entrevues qualitatives», p.37. Translation: "We always heard sermons about submission. We never discussed violence, we never heard anything about the man's role, how to exercise his leadership in love and not in restrictions or in power grabbing or in anger. So that was the role that the Church gave me."

²⁷ Heise, L. (1998) Violence against women: an integrated, ecological framework. Violence Against Women, 4:262-90



Abusive behaviours are always rooted in beliefs and values. It is helpful to look at the image above, taken from *The Cultural Iceberg Model* developed by Edward T. Hall in the seventies. An iceberg has visible parts on the surface of the water and invisible parts that are underwater. Often, up to 90% of an iceberg's actual area remains hidden underwater. Similarly, culture and behaviours have both visible and invisible components.

In the visible part of a culture, we find our interactions with each other, our lifestyle and the expressions of our traditions and cultures. In the invisible part, we find our attitudes and beliefs and our core values.

The large part of the iceberg that exists underwater determines the behaviour that is visible above the surface.

As Christians, our core values and beliefs are cemented in the Bible, the teachings we have received and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to recognise that particular interpretations of bible passages and some teachings about the relationship between men and women can be and have been taken to condone²⁸, excuse or justify domestic abuse.

If we are to stand against abuse in our churches, we need to tackle these distorted beliefs. This can be done with good teaching that will dismantle their unhealthy impacts and instead confront abusers with their sin, encouraging them to repent and change their behaviours.

Other factors

Some factors can contribute to how domestic abuse is perpetrated, its frequency and its consequences for the victim/survivor. Amongst these are:

- addictions
- a background of family violence or abuse
- socio-economic issues like poverty and migration or mental health problems

Many of the support services available deal with some of these factors and some of the consequences of abuse. However, as they are not the root cause of domestic abuse, tackling them alone won't solve the issue.

How is domestic abuse displayed in an intimate relationship?

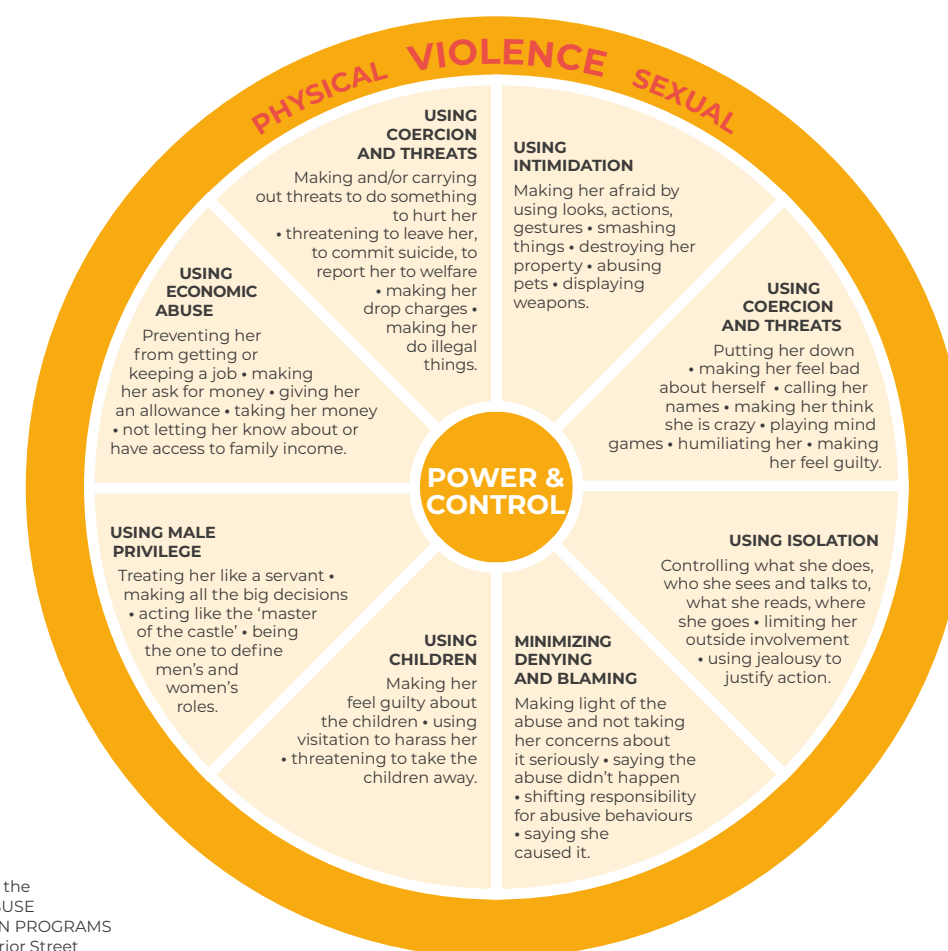
At the centre of domestic abuse is the use of power to exercise control. Abusers use a range of behaviours to control the victim/survivor, limiting her ability to really consider alternative ways of life and act on such ideals.²⁹

The Duluth Wheel of Power and Control was developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP) in the United States after extensive research with victims/survivors of domestic abuse. It is an excellent tool to gain insight into how abuse is displayed on a regular basis.

In the diagram, physical and sexual violence are on the outside of the cycle to show that, as abuse escalates, the abuser can use both types of abuse to ensure control.

When physical and sexual abuse are present, they are often the tip of the iceberg. A closer look at the situation will reveal that the abuser uses all or most other strategies to control the victim/survivor.

It is important to note that in some extreme cases, the use of pronounced physical and sexual violence could be the starting point.



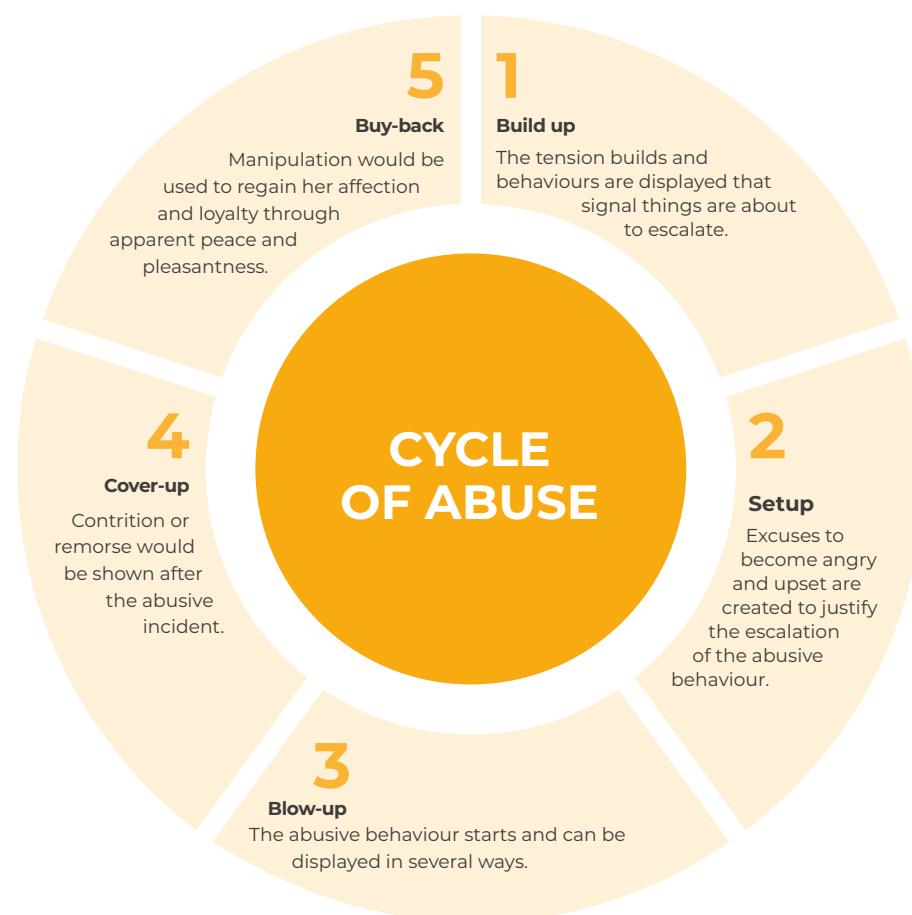
By courtesy of the
DOMESTIC ABUSE
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²⁸ T. Band-Winterstein & A. Freund (2018) "Walking Between the Raindrops": Intimate Partner Violence in the Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel from Social Workers' Perspective

²⁹ Ciurria, M.(2018) The Loss of Autonomy in Abused Persons: Psychological, Moral, and Legal Dimensions. Humanities. 7. 48 p15.

The cycle of abuse

Most relationships with an abuser display a distinct pattern, known as the 'Cycle of Abuse'.



At the beginning of the relationship, abusers tend to show a lot of interest in the victim/survivor with overt displays of loving behaviour. Some authors have described this as 'love bombing'. The intention is to overwhelm her and prevent her from having space to analyse the reality of the relationship.

Once the relationship has been established, certain phases can be identified. Following the work of J. Crippen and R. Davis (2015), the five phases are **the buildup, the setup, the blow-up, the cover-up and the buy-back**.

the blow-up, the cover-up and the buy-back.

The buildup: the abuser perceives what the victim/survivor is doing is a challenge to his power. The tension builds over time, and he starts to display behaviours that signal to her that things are about to escalate.

The setup: the abuser will bide and provoke and purposefully find an excuse to be angry and upset to justify the escalation of his abusive behaviour. By the time an abusive

incident occurs, he has convinced himself that his abusive acts are acceptable and even called for.

'Exhausted from the constant stress, she (the victim/survivor) usually withdraws from the abuser, fearing she will inadvertently set off an explosion. He begins to move more oppressively towards her as he observes her withdrawal... the tension becomes unbearable'.³⁰

The blow-up: a trigger, which can be insignificant, launches the abuse and can be displayed in several ways. His goal is to intimidate the victim/survivor and guarantee her compliance. She is severely damaged by this and is left reeling from the incident, often feeling she is entirely at fault for his abuse.

The cover-up: It is prevalent for the abuser to show contrition or remorse after an abusive incident. He might cry and apologise and even try to help the victim/survivor recover and 'fix' any damage caused. Often abusers will excuse their actions, generally by blaming the victim/survivor or a third party.

The abuser may probably believe at this point that he will never allow himself to do this again. The victim/survivor may be open to believing the remorse and intentions to change, particularly in the early episodes of abuse.

The buy-back: It's named like this to highlight the abuser's intention to manipulate the victim/survivor by 'buying back' her affection and loyalty through apparent peace and pleasantness. In some cases, many of the actions and behaviours displayed during the courtship period occur again here.

"J'ai l'impression que finalement, c'était que dans ma tête que les problèmes il y avait, parce que pour lui il y en avait pas, c'est ça. Donc, ça aussi ça a été violent parce que j'avais l'impression que mon vécu n'était pas réel, parce qu'il était toujours remis en question."

Survivor quote, Rapha Project³²

It is worth mentioning that sometimes this display of affection can happen with no relation to an abuse incident, and it can encourage a sense of hope, *'this will serve to confuse her and make her feel as if all the awfulness is worth it'*.³¹

As a result of this *buy-back* phase, Christian victims/survivors may decide to pray and submit more as they try to please their partners. She may see the *buy-back* behaviours displayed as her husband/boyfriend/partner's 'real' self and take on responsibility for his abusive behaviour.

Not all relationships follow the same cycle, and individual experiences vary. And some victims/survivors experience abuse as more like a continuum - constantly progressing. Some phases - especially the ones related to remorse, may shorten or be left out entirely, especially as the abuse intensifies over a period of time. Each phase of the cycle can last from a few minutes to several months.

The cyclical nature of the abuse can continue for years and leaves victims/survivors physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted, second-guessing what they should do next and full of confusion, guilt and fear.

³¹ L.E. Walker (2000) The Battered woman syndrome: 2nd Edition, p 59. US: Springer Publishing Company.

³² N. Collins, (2019). Out of Control: Couples, Conflict and the Capacity for Change, p18. UK: SPCK.

³³ Direction Chrétienne et collab., « Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l'Eglise au Québec Partie 2 : Présentation des entrevues qualitatives », p.25. Translation: "I got the impression that all those problems were just in my head, because for him there were no problems, and so that was that. So for me that was also violent because it was like my experiences were not real, everything I went through was second-guessed."

Characteristics of abuse

The key characteristics of abuse are that it is: **intentional, directional and incremental.**

Abuse is **intentional**. As an action, abuse is a choice. Abusers can choose not to act in an abusive way. Daily they choose not to act abusively to their boss or neighbour, for example. They can choose not to act abusively to their partners, but they don't. From a Christian perspective, this is very important. It gives space for abusers to recognise and own their abusive actions, seek to repent and turn away from them and be willing to put in place measures to stop themselves from perpetrating them.

Abuse is **directional**. An abuser is in complete control of his abusive actions and can choose where to display them. In some cases, the abuser may present himself in the church or work environment as a perfect Christian: gentle, wise, understanding, forgiving, generous, respectful and committed to many activities and even ministries, gaining love and respect from the congregation.

The abuser at home is a different person, behaving in almost the exact opposite way. Therefore, the victim/survivor thinks it would be challenging for people to believe that the person who abuses her is the same person they regularly see in church, and she is often correct.

Abuse is **incremental**. Sadly, abuse tends to increase with time. As the relationship progresses and life events occur, e.g. childbirth, career progression, retirement,

“The first year of our marriage was the best year of our relationship. We were happy and things were going really well, so we decided to start a family. It was while I was pregnant with our first child that I noticed a change in him. He started having angry outbursts and shouted a lot. If we were in the car and I annoyed him, he would put his foot down and drive really fast, which terrified me. If I asked him to slow down, he would just drive faster. I stopped saying how I felt about things and about his behaviour because it just made things worse.”

Survivor Quote

etc. The abuser will seek to further his control over the victim/survivor's whole life. This means the tactics used to exercise this control will increase in intensity or severity.³³

Pregnancy is a particular danger point. According to *l'Institut national de santé publique du Québec* (INSPQ), pregnancy is a period during which certain women are exposed to domestic violence. One woman in every ten declared having experienced one or several acts of partner violence during her pregnancy. In the majority of cases, violence persists after the birth of the child.³⁴

Prevalence of domestic abuse

In churches too

It is hard to come to terms with the reality that domestic abuse can happen in our churches at the hands of fellow Christians. Yet abuse is perpetrated by Christian men, and women in our congregations can suffer in silence because of the shame and stigma surrounding abuse.

At Restored, we believe the Church can be a crucial source of help and healing for all who are affected by domestic abuse. But, unfortunately, this has not often been the case, and churches have either justified domestic abuse, failed to challenge it or have too readily believed the apparent repentance of an abuser. They have shied away from showing the care and love that Jesus, the good shepherd, models and have failed to keep their sheep safe from the wolf.

Research in North America³⁵ indicated that church leaders and members might unintentionally jeopardise the safety of victims/survivors through the perpetuation of some religious teachings that justify abuse and coercive control as part of the doctrine of male headship and female submission. These teachings do not inherently condone abuse, but they do create a culture in which it can flourish.

In the preface, we mentioned that a study was conducted in 2023 by Christian Direction on the topic of domestic violence experienced within church-going Québécois (Rapha Project). There was a survey answered by 500 Christian church-going Québécois, qualitative interviews conducted with 13 survivors and focus groups conducted with 39 clergy and ecclesiastical leaders. It is the most extensive study of its kind in Québec. Here are some of the highlights:

Prevalence and Impact

In the Rapha study:

- 37% of respondents self-identified as being or having been victims of domestic violence (or « occasionally victim of domestic violence »).
- 49 % of respondents stated that they had experienced at least one act of violence (amongst all its various forms) in an intimate relationship with a partner.
- The most common forms of violence that victims experience are verbal (42%), coercive control (31%) and sexual (28%).
- 67 % of respondents know at least one person within their faith community who is a victim of domestic violence.
- 73 % of self-identified victims in the Rapha study confirmed that their violent partners are Christian, and the majority (61%) go to church.
- As for clergy or church leaders, 17% of the self-identified victims in the Rapha study said their violent partners are in leadership roles at their church.³⁶

Participants (of the Rapha study) “named residual feelings of intense anger, disappointment and hurt due to the failure of church leaders or fellow Christians to believe them, or to act when they knew that they or their children were being abused or in danger. Some participants described feeling torn after being given conflicting advice from different pastors within the same church. Participants said they felt they had to hide the abuse because of fear of judgment, feelings of shame, pressure to remain married, and pressure to protect their partner if the partner (or they themselves) were in a leadership position in church.”³⁷

³³ J, McFarlane. (2002) Abuse during pregnancy and femicide: urgent implications for women's health

³⁴ www.inspq.qc.ca/mieux-vivre/grossesse/sante-pendant-grossesse/violence-conjugale-pendant-grossesse

³⁵ Fisher-Townsend, B., Nason-Clark, N., Holtmann, C., McMullin, S. (2018). Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions. p 39. United States: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ Direction Chrétienne et collab., Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l'Église au Québec Partie 1 : Enquête...

³⁷ Direction Chrétienne et collab., A study on domestic violence and the Church in Quebec Part 2...p.41.

As for their faith journeys, “several participants described how their faith had grown and evolved, and how it had been an important element in their healing journey. Some described how they felt that being connected to a supportive church had been helpful for them, and how over time, they had themselves become advocates for change. Several described having undertaken deep theological reflections, either through readings, discussion or even formal education, and their research, lived experiences and critical reflections created an evolution in their belief systems”.³⁸

Awareness of domestic abuse in churches

Several questions in the Rapha survey³⁹ concerned the level of awareness of domestic violence in churches as opposed to people’s awareness or perceptions of its prevalence within general society in Québec.

To the statement: “Domestic violence is a problem in Québec” 64% were in agreement to the statement, 5,5% were in disagreement and 22% were unsure. The majority of respondents recognized that this is a problem facing Québec society.

To the statement: “Domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon in Christian churches in Québec”, 43% were in agreement, 10% were in disagreement and 39,5% were unsure. We can see that once people began reflecting on the issue of domestic violence, awareness of its prevalence in churches began to diminish, and uncertainties grew.

To the statement: “Domestic violence is a problem within my church or parish” 31% were in agreement, 26% were in disagreement and 34% were unsure. What does this tell us? The more that people were called on to reflect on the situation within their own church or parishes, the more their awareness or knowledge diminishes.

Finally, to the question: “Do you think your church or parish should do more to sensitize their members on the issue of domestic violence?” 73% answered yes. There is therefore a majority of respondents who want the topic of domestic violence discussed openly at church.

Interesting fact, these results align pretty well with similar research conducted in Great Britain by Restored UK!⁴⁰

The national picture

According to the INSPQ, in Quebec in 2021, police recorded 24,292 offences committed against an intimate partner or ex-intimate partner aged 15 and over, corresponding to a rate of 334.8 offences per 100,000 people. Across Canada that same year, 114,132 people aged 12 and over were victims of violence by an intimate partner or ex-intimate partner, representing a rate of 344 offences per 100,000 people.

Surveys also reveal a significant prevalence of intimate partner violence. According to the 2018 Survey “*Enquête sur la sécurité dans les espaces publics et privés*”⁴¹ (ESEPP), 12% of women and 11% of men who had been in a relationship reported experiencing at least one form of psychological, physical or sexual violence in the year preceding the survey. If we take into consideration intimate partner violence experienced since the age of 15, these proportions reach 44% for women and 36% for men.

Women remain the main victims of this kind of violence. In Quebec, in 2021, they accounted for 76.4% of victims of intimate partner violence, compared with 23.6% for men. In Canada, the victimization rate for women and girls was almost four times higher than for men and boys (537 versus 147 offences per 100,000 people).

The data also highlights a higher frequency of violence among women, particularly with regard to physical or sexual violence. In 2019, according to the General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization, 4.2% of women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the past year, compared with 2.7% of men. Moreover, young adults are particularly vulnerable to this form of violence.

Finally, a major challenge remains: only one in five people in Canada who have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner report these acts to the police. Intimate partner violence is still an under-reported crime.

Who experiences domestic abuse?

Anybody can be affected by domestic abuse, regardless of age, social background, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity.

Domestic abuse affects people in our congregations, families, work, and neighbourhoods. In fact, the issue affects millions of families in the UK.

Whilst both men and women may experience incidents of intimate partner violence, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence. Women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are much more likely to be seriously hurt.⁴²

“We have an abundance of rape and violence against women in this country and on this Earth, though it’s almost never treated as a civil rights or human rights issue, or a crisis, or even a pattern. Violence doesn’t have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me*

Domestic abuse and young people

Young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group.⁴³

According to the ISNPQ, in Quebec in 2021, young adults are among the groups most affected by intimate partner violence. Nearly half (48.2%) of police-reported victims of intimate partner or ex-intimate partner

violence were between the ages of 25 and 39. The 25-29 age group had the highest victimization rate, with 725.3 offences per 100,000 people, followed by the 30-39 age group (682.4) and the 18-24 age group (599.6).

Surveys also confirm the vulnerability of young women and men to this form of violence. According to the 2018 *Enquête sur la sécurité dans les espaces publics et privés* (ESEPP):

- 29% of women aged 15 to 24 reported having experienced violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner in the previous 12 months.
- 14% of women aged 25 to 34 reported having experienced violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner in the previous 12 months, and 13% for women aged 35 to 44.
- Among men, the proportions were similar for those aged 15 to 24 (26%).

Meanwhile, according to data from the 2019 *Enquête sociale générale* (EGS) on victimization, the age groups most affected by physical or sexual violence were 15-24 year olds (4.4% reported experiencing such violence in the last 12 months), and 25-34 year olds (2.7%).

These data illustrate that young adults, especially women, are a particularly vulnerable population when it comes to intimate partner violence, underlining the importance of tailored interventions to prevent and counter this problem in this age group.

³⁸ Idem, p.42. ³⁹ Direction Chrétienne et collab., Une étude sur la violence conjugale et l’Église au Québec Partie 1 : Enquête...

⁴⁰ “In Churches too: Church responses to domestic abuse- a case study in Cumbria” [www.restored-uk.org/resource/in-churches-too-key-findings]

⁴¹ www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/statistiques/sources-et-considerations-methodologiques

⁴² Walby, S & Towers, K. (2017) The concept and measurement of violence against women and men. Policy Press, Bristol: University of Bristol.

⁴³ Office for National Statistics (2016), Crime Survey England and Wales year ending March 2016.

Domestic abuse and children

In Québec, when a child is exposed to domestic abuse, there is sufficient motive to apply article 38, c.1, of the “Youth protection act” - *Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse* (this new application entered into effect on April 26th 2023).

“exposure to domestic violence” refers to a situation in which a child is directly or indirectly exposed to violence between the child’s parents or between one of his parents and a person with whom the parent has an intimate relationship, including in a post-separation context, among other things if the child witnesses such violence or develops in an atmosphere of fear or tension, and where such exposure could cause harm to the child;”⁴⁴

The law recognizes that children are victims of domestic violence if they have seen, heard or experienced its impacts. The law recognizes that the effects of domestic violence go well beyond individual incidents. Children can experience emotional, behavioural and cognitive short-term and long-term consequences when they witness violence in the home.

Unfortunately, children stuck in the cycle of violence are the last members of their families to have their voices heard. They see people they love fight and harm one another in a never ending cycle and they feel lost, resourceless and in danger.

It’s important to remember that a baby in its mother’s womb can be harmed if the mother is physically assaulted and is also affected by the stress and anguish caused by violence.

The end of a relationship will not necessarily entail the end of abuse, and visitation rights may be a source of tension and fear for children. Children, when moving from one address to another, often find themselves being used as pawns in their parents’ conflict. Domination and control may be an ongoing dynamic. Many children’s observations and statements are often not taken into consideration.

Some statistics:

According to the INSPQ,⁴⁵ violence within intimate partners can frequently occur in the presence of children, entailing harmful consequences on their well-being. In 2019, the *Enquête sociale générale* on victimisation stated that 50% of victims of physical or sexual violence reported that their children had witnessed at least one violent act.

In Québec, according to the study *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec de 2018*, about 7% of children in our province have been exposed to domestic violence acts committed against their mother, and 4,3% of children in our province have been exposed to domestic violence acts committed against their father over the course of the last 12 months. The most common forms of violence were psychological and verbal, followed by coercive control, physical violence and economic violence.

When a parent is a victim of domestic violence, rates of exposure within children are significant: 57% of their children witnessed or took knowledge of their victimisation when it was the mother, and 39% when it was their father.

What are the signs of domestic abuse?

It is challenging to create a definitive list of signs of domestic abuse because:

- Abusers are very good at lying to hide their behaviour.
- Victims/survivors of abuse will be very skilled at hiding whatever abuse is happening owing to fear, shame and the desire to protect themselves and their children.
- Some abuse victims don’t realise that it is abuse, as some believe that it’s abuse only if it’s physical or sexual.
- Domestic abuse can occur on many levels and at opposite extremes. For example, a woman may never be allowed to work or leave the house or, instead, may be forced to work long hours. A woman may never be allowed to leave the children alone, or she may never be allowed to touch the children or go near them.

If you have concerns about someone you know, it is best not to ignore or minimise what you may have observed. **Call SOS Violence Conjugale at 1 800 363-9010** or send a text message at 438-601-1211. If it’s an emergency call the police at **911**.

Despite this, warning signs will include behaviours in which power and control over a partner are the motivation. The list below is not exhaustive or conclusive but can give some insight into how power and control can play out in a relationship:

- A woman may never be seen alone; her partner always accompanies her.
- She may become more and more isolated, possibly moving a long way from family. She may not have any friends or may gradually stop seeing them – she may withdraw from the church.
- Her partner may talk over her or for her, and she may be reluctant to speak. Her partner may appear controlling or may regularly make disparaging comments about her or mock her in front of others.
- Her partner may ring her numerous times when she is out or limit the amount of time she can be out of the house.
- She may have unexplained injuries. However, most perpetrators are skilled in ensuring that the injuries they inflict on their partners are in places that can easily be covered up. When approached about any injuries, she may make excuses about how they happened.
- If her partner behaves inappropriately in public, she may justify and excuse his behaviour.
- She may have no access to money or lose her job, have regular unexplained absences from work or often be late for work.
- Her partner may tell people she is abusing him and that he is a victim of domestic abuse.
- If she has children, she may find it very difficult to control them, and they may call her names and ignore her. Her children may be extremely clingy and not want to leave her.
- She may not want people to visit her at home or may not be comfortable giving out her address or contact details.

⁴⁴ www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/p-34.1

⁴⁵ www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/statistiques

Signs of domestic abuse in children

Living in a home where domestic abuse is perpetrated is harmful to everyone involved, and it can have a severe impact on a child's behaviour and wellbeing. Parents or carers may underestimate the effects of the abuse on their children because they don't see what's happening. Indeed, a child who witnesses domestic abuse could be the subject of a care or supervision order.⁴⁶

Domestic abuse can also be a sign that children are suffering another type of abuse or neglect.⁴⁷ The effects can last into adulthood. However, with the correct support, it is possible for children to work through what they have experienced and start the process of recovery.

Younger children who experience and witness domestic abuse may:

- Become aggressive.
- Display anti-social behaviour.
- Become anxious.
- Complain of tummy aches and start to wet the bed.
- They may find it difficult to sleep, have temper tantrums and start to behave as if they are much younger than they are.
- They may also find it difficult to separate from their abused parent when they start nursery or school.
- Children may be clingy, have behavioural difficulties, may be tired and lethargic, and struggle in social settings and at school.

Older children/young people who experience and witness domestic abuse react differently:

- Boys seem to express their distress much more outwardly, for example, by becoming aggressive and disobedient. Sometimes they start to use violence to try and solve problems and may copy the behaviour they see within the family.
- Older boys may play truant and begin to use alcohol or drugs (both common ways of blocking out disturbing experiences and memories).
- Girls are more likely to keep their distress inside. They may become withdrawn from other people and become anxious or depressed.
- Girls may think poorly of themselves and complain of vague physical symptoms. They are more likely to have an eating disorder or harm themselves by taking overdoses or cutting themselves.
- Girls are also more likely to be targeted by an abuser.

Common misconceptions

We all have attitudes, beliefs or ideas about domestic abuse. Many are incorrect and can be based on myths about domestic abuse and who is most affected. The aim of the list below is to challenge our common misconceptions.

Why doesn't she leave? – When a woman is in a relationship with an abuser, there is an assumption that she has the choice and the means to leave. This is often not the case. An abuser will have established a pattern of coercive control, which severely affects her self-esteem and self-confidence to make her believe she cannot cope alone or that no one will believe her or support her. Leaving an abuser who happens to be your intimate partner is a complex decision. It involves breaking emotional, physical, financial and spiritual links and it can be harder when there are children in the relationship. Statistically, the time a woman is most at risk of being murdered is when she is trying to leave an abusive person; therefore, leaving is dangerous. A more helpful question might be, '*Why doesn't he stop?*'

“ There was no actual hostility at the church, but I just felt that it was too much to try to talk about the abuse as I really felt that nobody would understand but would be wanting to know details or would think that I was exaggerating the severity”

Survivor Quote

It doesn't happen in our church –

Domestic abuse also happens within the church community, as shown by our baseline research on p. 19. Often, Christian victims/survivors, in addition to the abuse they are suffering, can also feel a responsibility to uphold their marriage vows or the church's reputation and feel compelled to stay quiet and continue to suffer.

It happened because he was drunk/angry/made redundant –

Domestic abuse is commonly thought to be caused by alcohol or drug misuse, unemployment, mental or physical health problems, stress, or having lived through abuse as a child. Whilst any or all of these may be contributing factors, they are not the underlying cause of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is not about being angry or '*losing control*'. In fact, it is about being in control. Women are often bruised on parts of their body that are generally not visible or are abused in private, this tells us that he is making a conscious choice and very much in control. Abuse happens because a person chooses to behave in a way that will enable them to have control and power over another person.

She must have provoked him – Often an abuser will tell his partner that she '*made*' him do it, and many victims/survivors have been asked, '*What did you do to set him off?*' This myth dangerously places the blame for the abuse on the victim/survivor rather than on the person responsible for the abuse. Abuse is a choice. A woman is never responsible if a man chooses to become abusive.

⁴⁶ In the United Kingdom, care and supervision orders are granted by the court to safeguard the welfare of a child. They are usually made on the application of a local authority. In Québec, similar practices apply. The minor could be supervised by the Direction de la Protection de la Jeunesse (DPJ) and a judge may choose to designate a lawyer to represent the minor in certain cases. See "13 frequently asked Family Law questions about situations of intimate partner violence" [www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca/fr/articles/13-questions-sur-le-droit-familial-en-contexte-de-violence-conjugale]

⁴⁷ Stanley, N. (2011) Children Experiencing Domestic Violence: A Research Review.

It can't really be that bad; she must be exaggerating

– It is essential to believe a victim/survivor when she discloses what is happening to her. It may be that they are speaking out for the first time. Expressing disbelief, minimising the situation or indicating that they might have exaggerated may prevent victims/survivors from seeking the help and support they need and risk their safety. Most women living in threatening and controlling situations are reluctant to admit what is happening to them for many reasons, including the shame of being abused. What they have told you is likely to have been downplayed and just the tip of the iceberg. Women can blame themselves for being 'too weak', despite having survived the abuse thus far.

He has become a Christian and is repentant, so it won't happen again

– Although abusers can change their abusive behaviour, this is a lengthy process that will require high levels of commitment and responsibility from the abuser and strong accountability structures. However, an abuser will often appear repentant or appear to become a Christian to keep outsiders happy and continue the abuse in private. If an abuser seems to come to faith in Christ or appears repentant or remorseful, this cannot be taken at face value. To ascertain whether repentance or conversion is genuine, it should be measured over a long period of time. It will require high levels of accountability and the involvement of the victim/survivor, (if she agrees), in a way that guarantees her safety and free and honest participation.⁴⁸

Marriage is 'for better or worse'

– Marriage vows that endorse the idea that you are committed to staying with each other 'for better or worse' are often used to further pressurise victims/survivors into staying with the abuser. Some women think that if they took a vow to love him, they need to stay with him even when things go from bad to worse – and even when their or their children's life is in danger. To dismiss or ignore a woman's suffering because she is married to an abuser and say that she must 'suffer' through it not only lacks compassion but underestimates the severe nature of abuse. It is dangerous to dismiss abuse as a 'normal marital problem'. In fact, by encouraging a woman to stay with an abuser, you are encouraging and enabling him to sin and become complicit in the abuse.

Domestic abuse is a personal/family matter, and we shouldn't interfere

– Many people think what happens in the home is private and not their problem. Domestic abuse – control and coercion, battering, assaulting or raping another person – is a criminal offence and, therefore, a public matter, with far-reaching social implications for everyone. It affects the victim/survivor, their children and those around them. As Christians, we are called to encourage and challenge each other to become more like Jesus, and we can't do this if we ignore what happens in the home.

What is the law on domestic abuse in Quebec?

According to the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions (DPCP), the term 'domestic violence' refers to any form of violence (whether physical, sexual, psychological, verbal or economic) against an intimate partner within the meaning of section 2 of the Criminal Code (e.g. a person's current or former spouse, common-law partner or romantic partner), or against that partner's family, property or pets. It also covers cases where the intimate partner is the target of a criminal offence committed by the offender, even if he or she is not the direct victim (e.g. an offence committed against the new spouse of the offender's former partner).⁴⁹

Domestic violence is the subject of a number of criminal and civil laws. That said, 'spousal violence' is not an offence in itself under the Criminal Code; it is the criminal offences committed in the context of spousal violence that are subject to various sanctions that can lead to a sentence.⁵⁰

Some highlights within the legal and judicial framework:

Many acts of violence are considered offences under the Criminal Code. Here are some of the charges that may be laid in relation to domestic violence:

- assault
- kidnapping
- criminal negligence or harassment
- sexual assault
- false imprisonment
- mischief
- intimidation (threats)
- homicide
- attempted murder.⁵¹

The Code civil du Québec and the Divorce Act contain provisions on family violence that apply in the context of domestic violence:

- Judges must take domestic violence into account when determining the best interests of the child, for example when arranging parenting time.
- Judges must consider domestic violence when they are asked to withdraw parental authority from a parent.
- The Divorce Act contains a definition of domestic violence and suggests that this concept should be understood in a broader sense that includes coercive and controlling behaviour in addition to physical violence. In addition, this definition recognises and imposes consequences for coercive control.⁵²

A reminder: in Quebec, since 26 April 2023, a child's exposure to domestic violence has been recognised as a new ground for jeopardy under section 38 of the Youth Protection Act (Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse). This Act contains provisions on family violence that apply to the context of domestic violence:

- When the safety or development of a child is considered or may be considered to be compromised.
- When the child in turn is subjected to neglect, psychological mistreatment or physical abuse.
- Among the compromising situations that constitute grounds for reporting are exposure to domestic violence.⁵³

The situations described above constitute sufficient motive for reporting a case to Youth Protection Services (Direction de la protection de la jeunesse).⁵⁴

⁴⁸ There needs to be external evidence of an internal reality. At Restored we talk about the '5 Rs' of change for men who are abusive: recognise, repent, make restitution, reconcile, and restore; there is no shortcut, and the last 2 Rs – reconcile and restore – don't always happen.

⁴⁹ cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/dpcp/PDF/directives/DIR_VIO-1_DPCP.pdf?1655748347

⁵⁰ www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/loi

⁵¹ Dostie, Isabelle (2023) L'intervention à caractère social et les lois: Un guide pratique pour favoriser la multidisciplinarité, Fides Éducation, p.303.

⁵² www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/loi ⁵³ Dostie, p.302.

⁵⁴ quebec.ca/famille-et-soutien-aux-personnes/enfance/services-jeunes-difficulte-famille/protection-de-la-jeunesse/faire-un-signalment-au-dpj/coordonnees-du-dpj

How does the law support victims of domestic violence?

Protection and justice. Police forces and correctional services have greater resources to ensure better protection for victims and increased surveillance of aggressors. Victims can benefit from free legal services to facilitate their access to justice, particularly in terms of terminating a tenancy without penalty in the event of danger. (For more information, see the ‘Specialised services’ section of this guide)

Emergency services and immediate support.

SOS violence conjugale: 1 800 363-9010 (offers a 24/7 listening and referral line, as well as a chat and text system for free, confidential assistance. An application is also available to check availability in shelters in real time.

Emergency financial assistance. Financial assistance is available for victims who must leave a dangerous environment, covering expenses such as transport and accommodation. This measure is deployed in almost every region of Quebec. Applications are assessed by workers from the emergency financial assistance line (Ministère de la Justice du Québec.)⁵⁵

Compensation for victims for damages and costs incurred. L'IVAC⁵⁶ (*Indemnisation des victimes d'actes criminels*) is the entity responsible for applying the following measures:

- The *Loi visant à aider les personnes victimes d'infractions criminelles et à favoriser leur rétablissement* (LAPVIC) has the mandate to recognise the rights of people who have been the victims of a criminal offence and to put in place measures to meet their needs in order to promote their recovery.
- The *Loi visant à favoriser le civisme (LVFC)* which is designed to compensate people who have been injured or have suffered material loss as a result of giving voluntary assistance to someone whose life or physical integrity was in danger.

Front-line support, including listening, help, advice and referrals to the necessary services.

The CAVAC⁵⁷ Centres (Centres d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels) are organisations offering support, references and legal aid as an application of the *Loi sur l'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels*⁵⁸. They are financed by the *Fonds d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels* (FAVAC).

There are also several community organizations, non-profit organizations and health and social services funded by the Quebec government (Québec.ca) whose mission is to provide support and assistance to victims of domestic violence. Many of them are listed in the ‘Specialised services’ section of this guide.

Legal support measures

Imprisonment. If an offence is committed, a court judge may impose a prison sentence.

A civil protection order. In cases of violence, it is possible to apply to a Superior Court judge for a civil protection order, even if no criminal offence has been committed. The purpose of such an order is to protect a person whose life, health or safety is threatened. It may also be applied for by an organization or any other person on behalf of the victim (with his or her consent) if the court so authorizes. This order can prevent a perpetrator of violence from communicating or approaching a victim, as well as disseminating information without the victim's knowledge or communicating with the victim through a third party.⁵⁹

An Act to establish a specialized court to hear cases of sexual violence and spousal abuse. It provides for the creation of a specialised court within the Court of Quebec to hear these cases. The Act also provides that victims of these forms of violence will receive special support to improve their experience of the criminal justice process. The specialised court is currently being piloted in certain regions of Quebec and is due to be extended to the whole province by November 2026 at the latest.⁶⁰

Access to information for victims. Victims of crime can receive information about the eligibility and release dates of the person who harmed them when that person is incarcerated. In the case of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or an offence related to pedophilia, this information is sent to them automatically without their having to request it.⁶¹

Parole. The parole period for a person found guilty of violence may include conditions such as no contact or approaching the victim.⁶²

Electronic anti-approach devices. The court may require a perpetrator to wear an anti-tampering bracelet to increase the victim's safety.⁶³

Any other sentences deemed appropriate.

These include court-mandated treatment for perpetrators of violence, parental mediation and applications of parental rights and responsibilities.

Immigration and domestic violence in Québec

The Church in Quebec has a wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity. The increase in immigration to Quebec and Canada is having an impact on Christian communities and parishes in terms of the socio-demographic profiles of parishioners and their needs.

It's not surprising that many volunteers, workers and clergy are wondering about the rights and responsibilities of people from immigrant backgrounds and people without status, if they are faced with the issue of domestic violence. Below are a few highlights that might be useful to victims and those who support them.

The Government of Canada offers the Temporary Resident Permit (TRP):⁶⁴

- This permit is available to victims of domestic violence who are awaiting permanent residence, whose status has expired or who are awaiting a decision on their status.
- There is no fee for the TRP.
- If a TRP is granted for a victim of domestic violence, she can obtain coverage for trauma counselling and health care benefits.
- Once the TRP has been granted, the victim can then apply for a work permit free of charge.
- The TRP may also, in certain cases, enable the victim to obtain an accelerated eligibility decision for permanent residence status.

A domestic violence victim who is a newcomer to Canada may also apply for Permanent residency on humanitarian and compassionate grounds (H&C):

- This reduces delays.
- The aim is to remove people in vulnerable situations from situations of violence as quickly as possible.

Other helpful insights:

- A victim of domestic violence without status is not obliged to testify against her abuser to obtain immigration status.⁶⁵
- Several women's shelters offer multilingual external services (listening, accompaniment).
- SOS violence conjugale⁶⁶ and Athena's Shield⁶⁷ offer multilingual intervention materials and services.
- People can call 811 (Info Social) even if they do not have a health insurance card.
- Médecins du Monde⁶⁸ offers a clinic for migrants with precarious status.
- A non-status person who is a victim of criminal acts in the context of domestic violence (if the act took place in Quebec) can obtain compensation from IVAC and free psychosocial assistance from CAVAC.

⁵⁵ www.quebec.ca/justice-et-etat-civil/accompagnement-victimes-crime/aide-financiere-personnes-victimes/quitter-rapidement-milieu-dangereux#c195375. NB: You can also request information on this from SOS Violence Conjugale.

⁵⁶ www.ivac.qc.ca/a-propos/Pages/lois-reglements-politiques.aspx

⁵⁷ www.cavac.qc.ca/a-propos-du-cavac/qui-sommes-nous

⁵⁸ www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/lc/A-13.2

⁵⁹ www.quebec.ca/justice-et-etat-civil/accompagnement-victimes-crime/mesures-protection-securite/demander-ordonnance-protection-civile

⁶⁰ www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/loi

⁶¹ Gouvernement du Québec (2023). « Informations pour les victimes d'actes criminels », dans Gouvernement du Québec. [en ligne], www.quebec.ca/securite-situations-urgence/services-correctionnels/informations-victimes-dactes-criminels (consulté le 11 janvier 2023).

⁶² Dostie, p.304.

⁶³ www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/loi/cadre-legal#ref

⁶⁴ www.canada.ca/fr/immigration-refugies-citoyennete/services/immigrer-canada/parrainer-membre-famille/frais-permis-victimes.html

⁶⁵ See the following: www.maisons-femmes.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Fiche-violence-conjugale-et-personnes-sans-statut-rmfvc-Francais.pdf

⁶⁶ www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca/fr/multilingue/es

⁶⁷ www.athenalegalinfo.com

⁶⁸ www.medecinsdumonde.ca/aide/clinique-migrante

How the Church can stand against domestic abuse

We believe the Church has a vital, God-given role in ending domestic abuse and supporting victims/survivors and restoring them to the person God made them to be. In recent years, secular organisations have increasingly recognised the need to work with faith organisations and churches to provide holistic support to victims/survivors.

A recent study⁶⁹ in Australia identified the unique role of faith and faith communities:

Faith and faith-based communities play an integral role in people's lives. Faith leaders provide a source of social, moral, and ethical guidance and support for their community members, and many provide invaluable support to women experiencing domestic abuse. Faith settings are also an important environment where social networks and social norms are formed. Such networks and norms have the potential to protect against violence against women and family violence (domestic abuse) and foster relationships based on equality and respect.

In the same way, we need to recognize that some interpretations of biblical texts can reinforce beliefs that give men more power and value than women.

Interpretations that focus on women's submission rather than love allow inequality between men and women to continue and are often used to justify or condone domestic abuse and shame victims/survivors.

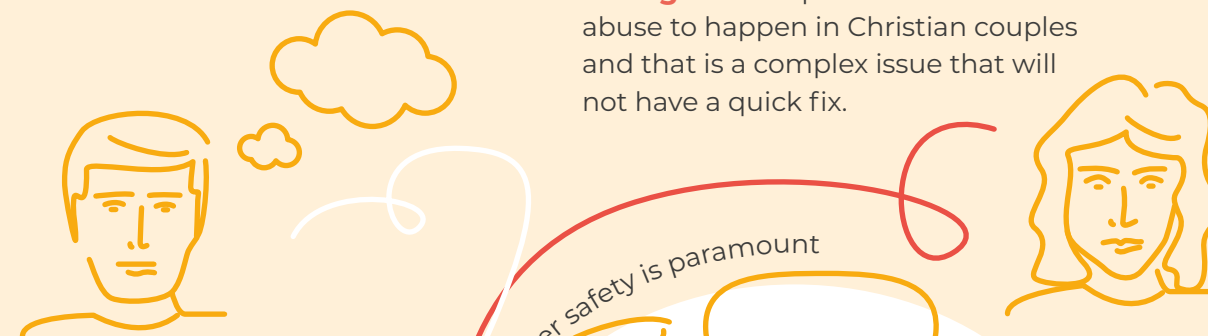
Christianity is the largest faith in the UK and worldwide: one-third of the world's population is Christian.⁷⁰ We cannot underestimate the influence and responsibility we have in being salt and light and transforming communities. Churches are often a place for many people to turn to in times of crisis, therefore as individuals and as a community of believers, we can choose to be part of the problem or part of the solution.

Sadly, many victims/survivors tell us that too often, Christian women do not feel free to speak about domestic abuse in their church communities. They can be reluctant to and are sometimes dissuaded from approaching secular organisations that may not understand a Christian worldview, but, at the same time, they don't feel they can approach their church. This could be because of the silence, shame and stigma surrounding their situation or because their abusive partner may be part of the leadership or congregation.

RECOGNISE

Be **aware** of what domestic abuse is, key signs and key ways to respond.

Recognize it is possible for domestic abuse to happen in Christian couples and that is a complex issue that will not have a quick fix.



RESPOND

Respond by listening, believing and providing information relevant to what she is sharing. Speak truth to her, challenging any lies about her worth and value. Allow space to name what is happening.

Conversations that may lead to a disclosure may not involve the words abuse or violence.

Type and frequency of support will change with time.

SUPPORT

Support by assessing ways in which her practical, emotional, spiritual needs can be met by you or a support group (with her consent) and refer her to specialised services according to her needs.

Allow her to guide you on what she would like to do (be aware that after being in a relationship with an abuser, agency may be low and you may need to encourage her in this area).



⁶⁹ Vaughan, C., Sullivan, C., Chen, J., Vaid Sandhu, M. (2020). What works to address violence against women and family violence within faith settings: An evidence guide, Parkville: University of Melbourne.

⁷⁰ The World Factbook: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations (accessed online 7/6/21).

Responding well to the issue

In this section, we'll look at how a church can stand against domestic abuse through:

- Working on prevention
- Raising awareness
- Enabling safe spaces
- Providing support
- Establishing partnerships

Working on prevention

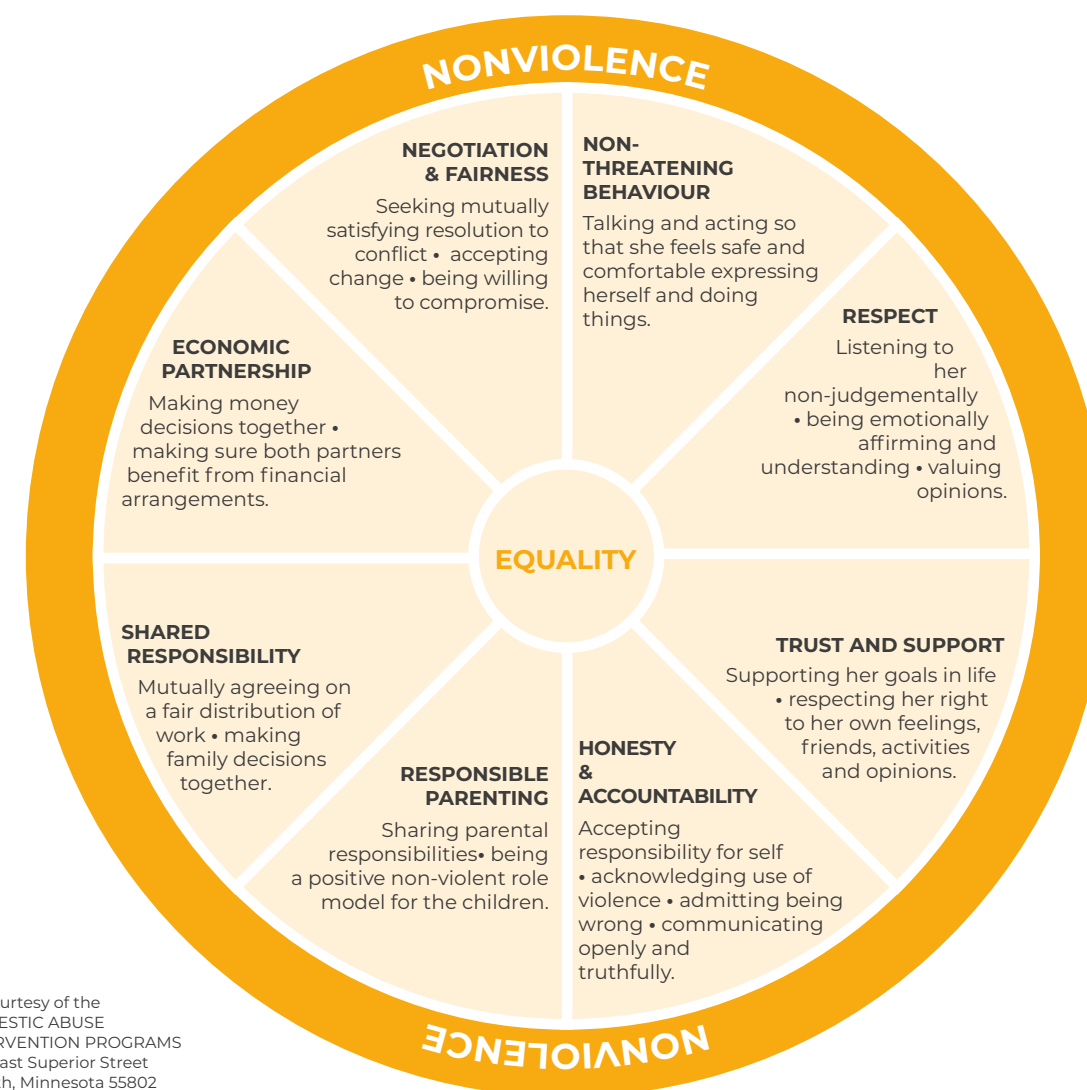
A church that works on prevention explicitly talks about healthy relationships across all age groups and teaches how to be Christ-like men and women helping in this way to prevent domestic abuse.

Speak about healthy relationships across all age groups in the church

The 1 in 5 children in England and Wales who witness domestic violence,⁷¹ often hold a normalised view of such damaging relationships.

Research indicates that both young men and women may not understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. The research project *Boys to Men* found that 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 – 14 thought that hitting a partner would be 'okay' in at least one of twelve scenarios they were presented with. There is evidence that educational programmes can help change the attitudes of young people towards domestic abuse.⁷²

As churches, we have a privileged position to have children and young people coming through our doors, whether for church-related activities or other activities taking place in them. It is essential to communicate what healthy relationships look like from an early age. What is acceptable and what is not, and who to turn to if they feel something is wrong.



By courtesy of the
DOMESTIC ABUSE
INTERVENTION PROGRAMS
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781
www.theduluthmodel.org

There are excellent resources to explore healthy relationships for children of school age and young people. The Restored Primary School resource⁷³ includes lesson plans and other tools. More information about organisations working in this area can be found on p. 64.

In general, we encourage churches to include, in the schedule of preaching and teaching, passages that explore healthy relationships and how God uses his power in relation to His Church. There are ideas about passages that can be used in our Theology section on p. 52.

The Equality Wheel above, provides an excellent tool to explore the topic of healthy relationships. It can be used in all settings, from plenaries with the whole church or

smaller adult groups to more intimate settings like marriage preparation or counselling.

Include information about abusive behaviours in marriage preparation

Marriage and wedding preparation courses are vital opportunities to explore how to build a strong foundation for a healthy relationship and challenge unhealthy assumptions and abusive behaviours.

We strongly recommend that anyone involved in delivering marriage and wedding preparation courses attend at least basic training on recognising domestic abuse, knowing how to handle disclosures, and being aware of the existing referral paths. A few key things to consider:

⁷¹ Radford, L, Corral, S, Bradley, C, Fisher, H, Bassett, C, Howat, N and Collishaw, S (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, NSPCC [online] Available at: www.learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1042/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today-research-report.pdf (accessed 12/07/21).

⁷² Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse. Safe Lives (2020) www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf (accessed 9/07/2021)

⁷³ www.restored-uk.org/resources/restored-primary-resource

- Frame any marriage preparation offered by the Church by the principle of humanity, male and female, being made in God's image and of equal value.⁷⁴
- Be clear that abuse in any form is unacceptable and that domestic abuse in an intimate relationship breaks the sanctity of marriage vows. This (understanding) has proven incredibly liberating for Christian victims/survivors, and they have expressed to Restored how beneficial it would have been to hear this earlier in their relationship with the abuser, particularly from someone with authority within the church.
- Acknowledge the power imbalance present in any relationship and healthy ways to address it. We have designed a Power audit tool⁷⁵ that might help conversations about this topic.

Some essential topics that should be explored include:

- how the couple communicates
- how they resolve conflict
- how they make decisions
- how these things were done in their own families.

All of the above would provide insight into how power is used in the relationship and reveal any toxic ideas about the value and worth of women and controlling or coercive behaviours.

In any case, the safety and security of the potential victim/survivor are paramount. Therefore, if a concern arises, either as a direct or indirect disclosure, it should not be pursued in the presence of the potential abuser, as this could put her in danger. A safe way to communicate with the potential victim/survivor should be identified by the person supporting them, and an offer for a private chat should be extended. If the offer is accepted, it would be helpful for

the person organising the meeting to have relevant information regarding domestic abuse and specialised services available.

Speak about Christ-like masculinity

We have created the *First Man Standing Campaign*, which seeks to foster a space for men to learn and reflect on what it means to be a man in the light of Jesus' example and with particular emphasis on the realities of the use of power in relationships. More information can be found at *First Man Standing* section on our website restored-uk.org/fms.

Raising awareness

An aware church is a church that acknowledges the existence of domestic abuse in communities of faith and the real possibility that it could be present in its midst.

Domestic abuse can be a taboo subject for many people in the church: *'It doesn't happen here'*, and *'we don't like to talk about it.'* However, people in the church will often either know victims/survivors or be victims/survivors themselves. Raising awareness will break this gap between perception and reality.

A church that is aware of domestic abuse could look like this:

- VAWG (Violence against women and girls), particularly domestic abuse are occasionally mentioned from the front. This topic is included in the schedule of preaching and teaching. There are ideas about passages that can be used in our Theology section on p. 52. Also, particular dates in the calendar can be targeted to raise awareness. Amongst them is the 25th of November - *The Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls* or the 8th March, *Women's Day*.

- Prayers are said occasionally for those affected. Including victims/survivors, abusers, other people affected by domestic abuse and all the organisations working in the sector. There are some prayers on p. 60, that you can use as inspiration. Please make these generic, ensuring the safety of any individuals within your congregations -never mentioning names.
- People in leadership or with pastoral duties have clear information about their local support services. It is possible that once awareness is raised, victims/survivors may come forward. It is crucial to have at hand the contact information of your local support service, so anyone who discloses abuse can be referred—more about how to handle a disclosure on p. 40.
- Information about the support that is available locally is displayed in key places around the church, e.g. toilets. People need to be able to access material discreetly.

Enabling safe spaces

A church that enables safe spaces is a church where victims/survivors can recognise when they are in a relationship with an abuser and feel able to disclose. Equally, this type of environment could offer the space for abusers to come forward and seek accountability and support.

Historically, church buildings and faith communities have been seen as places of refuge. More recently, this has been highlighted in our safeguarding policies. This should be no different for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. To enable a safe space for them, we encourage churches to acknowledge the current dangers that will prevent this from happening and strengthen the good things that may be already taking place.

A church that enables safe spaces could look like:

- Church leaders and group leaders have received entry-level domestic abuse training. They have at least a basic understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse and the seriousness of its effects.
- People with pastoral responsibilities have attended intermediate-level domestic abuse training. They understand how to respond to concerns or disclosures of domestic abuse.
- People in leadership, who preach and teach the congregation, understand how values and beliefs, often underpinned by theology, can allow, excuse or even encourage abusive behaviours and take steps to expose this to the congregation.
- Where topics of forgiveness, reconciliation, suffering, marriage and divorce are taught or preached about, there is a recognition of the potential impact on victims/survivors of abuse.
- There is a domestic abuse policy in place for staff and volunteers and a clear section in the safeguarding policy. They explain the way disclosures of domestic abuse will be handled and a referral process. The domestic abuse charter on p. 64, could be a starting point to write a policy if there isn't one yet.

NB: Christian Direction offers a Domestic Violence Protection Policy⁷⁶ for churches. It was drafted by Plan to Protect®. This policy takes into account legal practices in Quebec. Restored offers a 'Charter on conjugal violence', which you will find later in this document, and which could serve as a model for drafting an internal by law for your church if you don't already have one.

⁷⁴ Responding well to domestic abuse: Policy and practice guidance. Church of England 2017

⁷⁵ www.restored-uk.org/powertool

⁷⁶ www.fr.direction.ca/_files/ugd/cc65b6_9e8a976c4623424aaeee0220d6133510.pdf

Providing support

A supportive church is a church that seeks to walk alongside victims/survivors.

Abuse doesn't stop when the victim/survivor leaves the abuser. A study found that 37% of women subjected to abuse reported that the abuse continued after separation.⁷⁷ The aftermath of being in a relationship with an abuser is equally complex and requires different levels of support. Each situation is different. As churches, our call is to walk alongside any specialised support the victim/survivor is receiving, provide a community and address any faith concerns that may arise within this process.

A church that provides support to victims/survivors would:

- Always puts the victim/survivor first.
- Have a team or a specified individual that has been specifically trained to provide pastoral care to victims/survivors of abuse. It has a procedure to walk alongside victims/survivors that is easy to access and understand.
- Have a list of people who can provide practical and temporary support, like accommodation, food, babysitting etc.
- Have links with the local refuge and provide financial support or support in kind regularly.
- Open its building to groups that provide different types of help for the community. These groups can also help victims/survivors by providing a space where relationships are built, isolation is overcome, and information and resources can be accessed, e.g. parents and toddlers, debt centres, advice clinics, and exercise clubs.

"We were separated for a couple of years before I got a divorce. But none of it was easy as each step of the way he made it difficult, put all the blame on me, and fought to say I wasn't fit to look after the children. He tried hard to tell people I was mentally ill."

Survivor Quote

- Be aware of the long-term impact of the abuse in victims/survivors in the different areas of their life.

Establishing partnerships

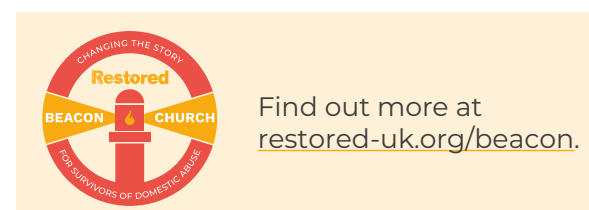
The journey of a victim/survivor doesn't end when leaving the abuser, rather a different journey starts. There will be a multitude of different needs requiring a variety of interventions. It's essential that the church interacts with partners who have the relevant expertise.

Historically there has been distrust between churches and domestic abuse agencies and vice versa. Churches need to intentionally overcome this and work in collaboration with professionals and other agencies.

Many local providers face shortages in statutory funding and a lack of resources. Churches can be a source of blessing to these agencies and the women and children they support.

- Be aware that domestic abuse is a specialist area of counselling. Not every therapist or counsellor is trained in this field, always referring victims/survivors to relevant domestic abuse organisations.

- Engage with local services; consider financially supporting Women's Aid, Refuge or another agency. Or develop a scheme to provide emergency packs of toiletries or small bags of toys for children who are in a local refuge.
- Attend the training provided by your local authority on the different issues involving violence against women and consider becoming part of your local Domestic Abuse/Violence Forum⁷⁸.



- Partner with *Restored* to become a *Restored Beacon Church* and join our network of churches working to end domestic abuse.

"It's essential that people understand that once you leave the grief hits you - the loss of years, of life, of choice - many assume that because you're out it's finished but the healing journey has only just begun"

Survivor Quote

⁷⁷ Kelly, L. (2016) Moving in the Shadows: Violence in the lives of minority women and children p. 17. United Kingdom: Routledge.

⁷⁸ See: Consultez le site www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca

Responding well to victims/survivors

Handling disclosures

When a victim/survivor comes and talks to you, they're very unlikely to say they are being abused. It is likely to be much more subtle and easy to miss. An actual disclosure may not happen on the first conversation or disclosures of different magnitudes can be made in different conversations.

In whatever form this takes place, it is important, as recipients, to be aware of the experiences and beliefs we bring to these conversations. Particular attention needs to be paid to the high value we put on marriage and how this can cause us to minimise the seriousness of the situation.

Survivors in our Network have shared some principles that they believe would help churches to respond well to domestic abuse disclosures.

Safety First - don't increase the risk of harm

The most important principle that should guide any action (or lack of action) is the safety of the victim/survivor and any children involved. To prioritise any other considerations can cause grave harm to her and the rest of the family.

Believe her

- As a church leader or a church friend, your role is to believe her and act responsibly with the level of knowledge you have.
- To provide care and safety in the first instance and offer a space where trust and relationships can be built, to give victims/survivors time and space to process and make decisions.⁷⁹

“Looking back it seems incredulous that I couldn't see I was being abused - I had ended up in A&E for goodness sake! I was living in fear. I'd seen the posters about abuse on the loo doors, but I didn't think it applied to people like me... I remember hearing a talk at church by a man whose charity rescued women from forced prostitution... everything in me resonated with these women, but that was ridiculous I told myself, I'm married.”

Survivor Quote

- She needs help understanding her situation and responding wisely to it. The impulse to *'get both sides of the story'* should not be your initial response in domestic abuse situations.
- Do not ask why she hasn't mentioned it before if it has been going on for years. If it has been years of abuse then try to hold back the shock!
- If relevant and in time, specialised services such as the independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVA), police, social services and lawyers will use their skills and mandates to collect the necessary evidence for the relevant purpose.

“You are not God and therefore have limited access to direct knowledge of what's occurring. This means your instincts are not necessarily an accurate gauge of truth and may be conditioned by the nice-guy tactics of an abuser's public persona”⁸⁰.

A victim/survivor who discloses that she is being harmed, damaged, controlled or coerced by her partner is taking a significant risk and putting herself in a vulnerable position before you. Government sources state that domestic abuse is often under-reported due to fear of retaliation by the abusive spouse.⁸¹

Do not approach the abuser

To approach or confront the abuser after a disclosure is a common mistake among well-meaning church leaders, who either want to check with the other person to avoid gossip or tackle the issue. Corroborating the veracity of the disclosure should not be the priority; instead, the safety of the victim/survivor is.

Approaching the abuser could set off a chain reaction that increases the likelihood of harm for the victim/survivor or/and any dependents.

Abusers are very skilful manipulators, and approaching them as a result of a disclosure from the victim may offer an opportunity for them to use these skills and *'recruit'* unwitting volunteers to further their control over the victims/survivors.

Don't treat it like a regular relationship problem

Sometimes, the first response to any marriage breakdown is to suggest couples counselling, which can often be damaging in an abusive situation.

It is a mistake to treat abuse in an intimate relationship like any other relationship issue. It's tempting to look for speedy repentance and reconciliation, but this is not an easy problem to solve.

The controlling and coercive nature of domestic abuse and the extensive harm that it causes means that it is essential not to handle it in the same way as other relational issues. See p. 51 for more information.

“People like me don't go to the police or a Women's Aid refuge but I might talk over a coffee. How you respond makes a huge impact. I might be in denial, so I need someone to say, 'this seems wrong'. There is so much help for all sorts of problems but most people need a friendly hand to guide them to professional help.”

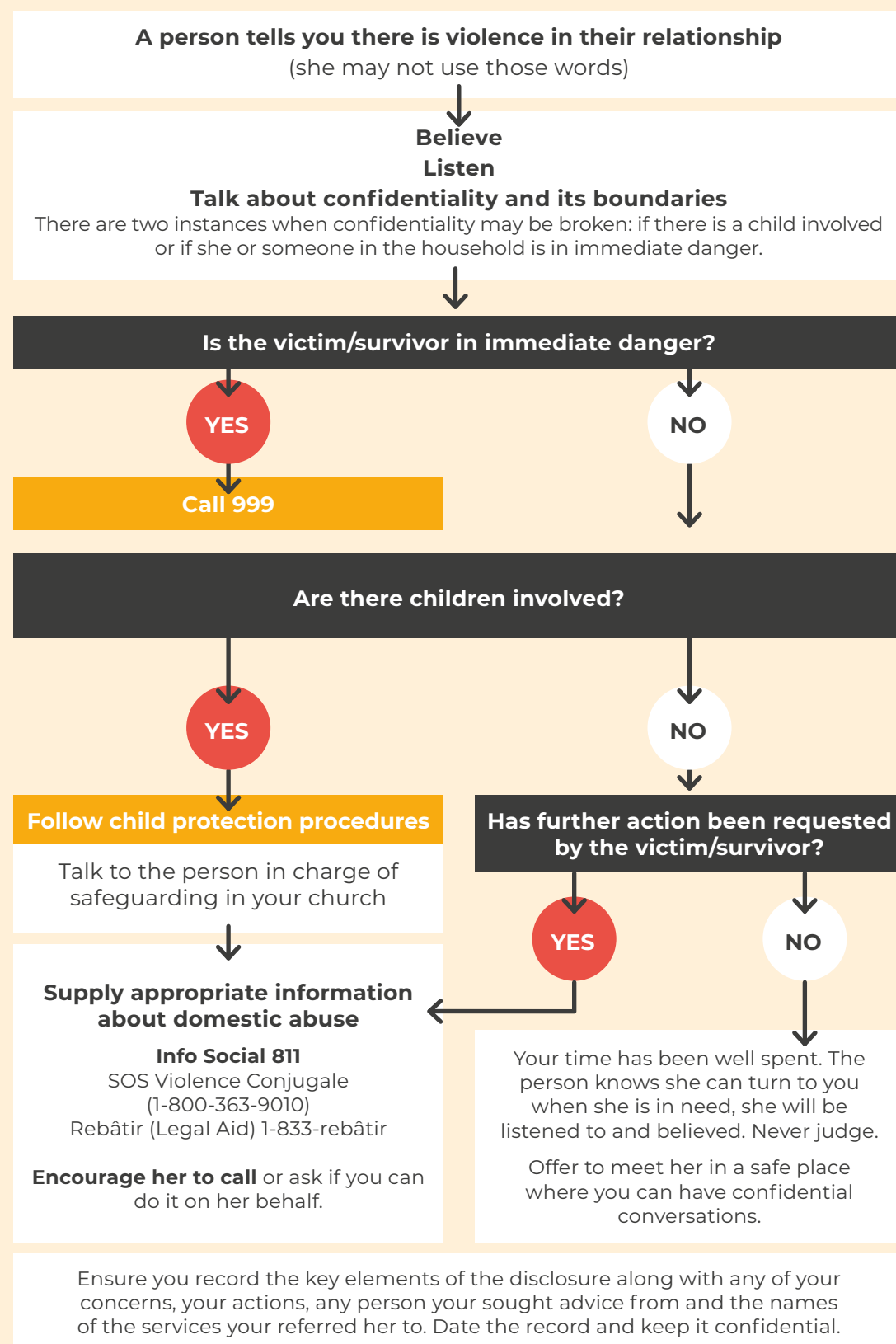
Survivor Quote

⁷⁹ You can create with the person who has divulged her experience of violence a safety plan. A model of this plan is available in the Protection Policy for Churches: www.fr.direction.ca/_files/ugd/cc65b6_9e8a976c4623424aaeee0220d6133510.pdf

⁸⁰ Pierre, J. Wilson, G (2021) When Home Hurts p 82

⁸¹ Office for National Statistics (2017), Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017. London: Office for National Statistics.

Handling disclosures of domestic abuse



Framework for handling disclosures

The '4 Rs' of responding to a disclosure of domestic abuse

Recognise:

- That it's very difficult for a victim/survivor to talk about what is going on.
- She may not use the words abuse or violence or be aware that she is experiencing abuse. She may just reveal that she can no longer manage what she is dealing with at home.
- This situation occurs within an intimate relationship, so the feelings involved are deep and the consequences of the abuse complex.
- You might find it difficult to see the perpetrator as an abuser.

Keep in mind:

- Statistics show that on average, a woman will be assaulted 50 times (abusive incidents)⁸² before seeking help.⁸³
- You can counteract, from the beginning, negative beliefs the abuser may have imposed on her, e.g. it's her fault, she is useless, stupid, a coward.
- Your body language and facial expressions will speak volumes; maintaining your composure is really important.

"I would never have told someone that my ex hit me, but because I was asked if he hit me I had only two options - lie or tell the truth. It allowed me to share for the first time more easily"

Survivor Quote

Respond:

Be aware that any intervention may heighten the victim's/survivor's risk level and that of any children involved. Seek a safe space to talk or medium to communicate (e.g. email/Whatsapp).

- Believe her. Do not ask for proof or contact the abuser to confirm her disclosure.
- Listen and try not to interrupt.
- Reassure her that confidentiality will be maintained but explain the safeguarding boundaries.
- Acknowledge the courage she has shown by disclosing.
- Assure her it is not her fault.
- Ask gentle, clear questions that allow her to answer with a yes or no. Example, Do you feel safe? Has he hit you?
- Determine if there are children or other vulnerable adults in the household.
- Assess her level of risk: Is she or anyone else in the household at immediate risk of harm?
- Are there immediate practical needs that need attention?

Keep in mind:

- Your safeguarding procedures regarding children or vulnerable adults. You can initially share the disclosure with the person responsible for safeguarding in your church without giving any details to identify the victim/survivor and ask for advice.
- You can consult the experts. **Plan to Protect®** is a national safeguarding organisation that offers professional advice to hundreds of churches. You can find out more at www.plantoprotect.com

⁸² Walby, S. and Allen, J. (2004), Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey. London: Home Office.

⁸³ SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives.

- Victims/survivors are very good at assessing their level of risk. Does she fear for her life or the life of her children? If the answer is yes, take it very seriously and you need to call the police.

Refer:

After listening carefully, you can help her assess her options :

- Make information available about domestic abuse like this guide or our Survivors' Handbook. (restored-uk.org/handbook)
- Provide information about SOS Violence Conjugale (1-800-363-9010) and/or your local service provider.
- Provide a safe space to browse the web or make phone calls if necessary.
- If possible and if she wishes, accompany her to see local professionals.
- Do pray with her. For protection, strength and clarity to make the right choices etc.

Keep in mind:

- Due to the abuse, she may be very confused and unable to tell you what she wants.
- She may experience flashbacks and post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.
- She may resist help until trust has been built up.
- After encouraging her to reach out to specialised services, you may be the person who can help her address specific faith concerns, e.g. divorce, forgiveness, suffering. The Restored Survivor's Handbook contains support in this regard.
- **Never** refer her to couples counselling or mediation.

Record:

After all of the above steps have been taken, take a moment to write the following:

- Key elements of the disclosure using her words.
- Include dates and times and photos of physical injuries.
- What you have done and any concerns you have.
- Who (if anyone) you have shared information with.

Keep in mind:

- Data Protection: Keep the record in a safe place and record things in a way that only you can identify who you are writing about.
- Your records may be helpful to the police or evidence in court.
- By taking the disclosure seriously, you will be counteracting any gaslighting⁸⁴ that has occurred. It can help reassure victims/survivors the abuse is real.

Gaslighting

noun [U]

UK /'gæs.lai.tɪŋ/ **US** /'gæs.lai.tɪŋ/

the action of tricking or controlling someone by making them believe things that are not true, especially by suggesting that they may be mentally ill.

Do's and don'ts when supporting a victim/survivor



Do:

- Believe her; her description of the abuse is probably only the '*tip of the iceberg*'.
- Listen to what she has to say – and take it seriously.
- Prioritise her immediate safety (and that of any children involved) by checking that the way you are communicating and the support you are offering is not putting her in further danger.
- Equip and empower her to make her own decisions.
- Support and respect her choices. Even if, initially, she chooses to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive. However, if children are involved, their safety must come first, and this choice may need to be overruled.
- Give her information about relevant support agencies and, if appropriate, offer to contact an agency on her behalf and do so in her presence or provide a safe and private place from which she can contact relevant agencies.
- Use the expertise of those who are adequately trained.
- Reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, and it is not God's will for her.
- Let her know that what the abuser has done is wrong and completely unacceptable.
- Be patient.

Pray:

- In gratitude for her bravery and courage in talking about what's going on at home.
- For God's protection over her and her family.
- For strength and wisdom to make the right decisions.
- For a growing understanding of her value in Christ.



Don't:

- Judge her or what she tells you.
- Minimise the severity of her experience or the danger she is in.
- React with disbelief, disgust or anger at what she tells you or respond too passively.
- Ask her why she did not act in a certain way or blame her for his abuse.
- Make promises you can't keep.
- Act on the person's behalf without her consent (unless children are involved or she is in danger).
- Expect her to make decisions quickly.
- Encourage her to forgive the abuser and take him back.
- Send her home with a prayer/directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church or try to be a better Christian wife.
- Contact her at home unless she has agreed on a safe way to do this.
- Give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser.
- Encourage her to become dependent on you or become emotionally involved with her; this can be problematic and make you seem to be the answer to her problems.

⁸⁴ Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus [Online]. Available from: www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gaslighting (Accessed 27/9/21). It is a form of coercive control, which has been a criminal offence since 2015.

Responding well when children are involved

There are multiple safeguarding implications for children living in a household where there is domestic abuse.

- Listen to the views of the children.
- Follow your safeguarding policy.
- The child's welfare is paramount, and their needs and overall safety should always be at the forefront of any decision making.

If in doubt about what action to take, it is always best to seek advice. You can call Youth protection services (la Direction de la protection de la jeunesse⁸⁵) at any time and make a confidential report.

As mentioned before, you can contact **Plan to Protect** where practitioners and advisors are always ready to take a call, talk things through and provide clear written advice.

Building a good relationship with your local social services⁸⁶ is a good practice as it will facilitate contacting them if you are unsure how to proceed.

Below are some examples of scenarios that may be helpful to consider:

A parent informs you their children are present when violence is used in the home, although it is never directed towards the child(ren). The parent should be advised that the matter will be recorded, and advice sought regarding the appropriateness of Youth Protection services (DPJ) being notified. This allows statutory agencies (police, education, and health) to assess whether the child is at risk of harm and provide direct support.

In severe cases, it may be deemed necessary to place a child/children on a *Child Protection Plan* to support the child and the parent/s, which involves regular monitoring and set measurable outcomes.

You are informed a child has been injured as a direct or indirect result of domestic abuse. In this case, the police should be notified immediately to ensure this matter is investigated.

A child/young person makes you aware an argument is taking place in the family home. The reality is that most families have arguments. The severity and frequency of these can vary, and it can be a fine line as to when such arguments are considered abusive. In most cases, it will not be appropriate for you to attend the address and speak to those involved.

Whilst you may have the skills to manage the situation and calm the individuals concerned, it is essential to remember that you will have to leave again, and when you do this, children can be placed at even greater risk. It is often best to monitor the situation closely and ensure that the child has someone to call or reach out to if things escalate. If in doubt, the police should be contacted as it is their role to assess the risk, and they are required to complete a referral to Children's Services to notify when children are in a household where domestic abuse has occurred. The police can also refer to and make links with victim support and other support services locally.

How can a church/organisation support a child or young person in this situation?

If a child talks to you about domestic abuse, it is essential to listen carefully. It is unlikely a child will sit down with you and fully describe everything happening at home as most children are naturally protective towards their parents. A child's communication might be subtle.

They may only mention that a parent gets cross, ask questions around how relationships should be, or a younger child might repeat inappropriate language that has been heard or draw pictures that show conflict.

A child or young person, who is brave enough to voice their concerns, needs your attention and is asking for help. Always try to affirm their feelings and explain that they have done the right thing by telling you, reassure them they are not in trouble, nor is it their fault. Many children will often believe that they are to blame, thinking that it is something they have done to cause the arguments or fighting, rather than the adults holding the responsibility.

Children may also find it challenging to communicate what they really mean. For example:

"I'm so tired" could mean '*I've been awake all night listening to the arguments, shouting, or fighting*'.

"It's my fault" could mean '*If I weren't so naughty, mum and dad would stop arguing, and they would love each other more*'.

"Everything is okay" could mean '*I don't want anyone to get into trouble – it will get better. What happens at home stays at home*'.

As with all safeguarding matters with children, you can not promise confidentiality. It is vital to treat whatever the child says seriously, even if the disclosure is hard to comprehend. You will need to be clear about any action you propose to take. It might be that you tell them you are going to get further advice or that you need to ensure they are safe, and therefore you will need to share this with a person that knows more than you about safeguarding as they will know what to do.

You mustn't seek to challenge the alleged abuser yourself, and it may not be appropriate to speak to the other parent of the victim of the abuse either, without first seeking advice and guidance. At critical times, inappropriate contact with the parents can put children and the parent on the receiving end of domestic abuse at greater risk with sometimes devastating consequences.

After you have become aware of a situation, always document what has been said as accurately as possible and share this with the safeguarding lead in your church.

Bear in mind that often information is limited and unclear at the beginning but being alert and available helps the child feel safe to disclose further details later on. It is also important to note that, as with all safeguarding disclosures, your notes are vitally important and may be required if a criminal investigation is initiated.

⁸⁵ www.quebec.ca/famille-et-soutien-aux-personnes/enfance/services-jeunes-difficulte-famille/protection-de-la-jeunesse/faire-un-signalement-au-dpj/comment-faire-un-signalement

⁸⁶ www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca

Responding well when the abuser is in your congregation

The reality is that if a member of our congregation discloses abuse, it is very possible that the abuser is also a member, and we will need to think about how we pastor him.

In this instance, at all times the safety, sanity and dignity of the victim/survivor must be at the forefront of all actions.

Remember: Confronting or speaking to the abuser can increase the level of risk to victims/survivors and their families.

Only talk about the abuse with the abuser if:

- He has disclosed it to you directly.
- You have been asked to do by the victim/survivor. **(Exercise extreme caution!** She might have unrealistic expectations of the outcome of your intervention and not fully understand the dangers this may put her in).

Training is essential for anyone wanting to approach an abuser, and we recommend this person is either part of the leadership or a recognised and respected strong Christian.

Things to recognise:

We need to recognise the sin of domestic abuse and consider the following:

- Abuse (in any form) is a sin.
- Abuse is the choice of the abuser. They can choose whether to be abusive or not.
- Abuse is never acceptable. We can never change anyone. We can only support and encourage. The abuser has to want to change and be willing to be accountable.
- This is not a short-term issue. Always prioritise the safety and well-being of the victim/survivor.

- Professional support is vital.
- Regular biblical preaching and teaching on domestic abuse and healthy relationships will enhance any pastoral support that is provided.
- A desire to see a relationship restored can cause the leadership to ask the victim to pray, forgive and reconcile with the abuser rather than take steps to address the abuse, support the healing process and seek out the accountability of the abuser.
- At times an abuser can be charismatic, engaging and potentially in a leadership role within the church. He will have had the opportunity to groom those around him, gathering allies and promoting a false narrative about his spouse and relationship. This can cement the abusers control and cause her to feel isolated. She may not feel confident to come forward or when she does come forward she is not believed.

Things to consider about restoration

As Christians, we're hard-wired to want to bring restoration, it's a wonderful thing, but we need to be careful not to encourage restoration where in fact it would be harmful.

We must be careful how we define restoration: ensuring that the couple physically stays together is not the same as being restored and living in a healthy relationship.

Restoration needs to be about the individual: God's heart is always to restore the person, but God did not come to save the marriage or an intimate relationship. He came to save and restore the individual. Restoring

someone does not necessarily mean that the relationship can or should be restored.

If the victim/survivor does not wish to continue in the relationship, then her wishes are to be prioritised even if this means that the abuser is asked to stop attending their local church. Support should be offered to the abuser by helping them to integrate into another local church (if possible), linking him with the new leadership to promote transparency and accountability.

Professional support

When an abuser wants to address his abusive behaviour, the support must be pastoral **and** professional. There is a need to refer to a domestic abuse perpetrator service to address the abuse, and there is a need for pastoral support.

It is crucial for any abuser willing to address his abusive behaviour to self-refer or be referred to a domestic abuse perpetrator programme that works towards genuine and meaningful change.

These programmes are usually run by local authorities by experienced professionals who will work with groups and individuals to challenge abusive behaviours by exploring the beliefs and perceptions that underpin them. Some of the topics explored in this programme include the impact of domestic abuse on the victim/survivor and the rest of the family, definitions of domestic abuse, power and control, why people abuse, and strategies and methods to behave in non-abusive ways.

We recognise that this type of support may not be readily available in your local area. Online courses and programmes for this type of support do exist, although it may require some research. More information about perpetrators programmes can be found on p. 63.

Pastoral support

As perpetrator programmes are often secular, it would be beneficial for the abuser to have a strong Christian man walking alongside him who will offer accountability and a space to talk about life, love, God, everything and anything. We will refer to this person as an **accountability partner**.

Any pastoral support should be based on an agreement of not abusing the victim/survivor and engaging with the perpetrator's course. It is advisable to build a check-in system to help the accountability partner to oversee improved behaviour regularly. This support has to be based on relationship, friendship and open and honest ongoing conversation about the issues and how they are being dealt with. Genuine spiritual accountability will continue long after the professional programme has ended.

The abuser must decide whether he is willing to accept this level of accountability, and that decision is an indicator of his sincerity.

The accountability partner must have received training on domestic abuse and be prepared to walk alongside someone for the long term. Ideally, this person should also be in contact with the person running the perpetrator's programme to strengthen accountability. The whole concept of accountability is to establish self-control, so initially, the support may be 1-2 times each week with a visit or a video/phone call. After 2-3 months, this support can gradually decrease to a check-in, 1-2 times each month.

It must be evident to the abuser that if there is any escalation of the abuse during or after the involvement in the programme, the support must end.

The accountability partner must be comfortable enough to confront and challenge any sign of abusive behaviour and must be in contact with the victim/survivor to determine if the behaviour is actually improving.

Support for victim/survivor

The abuser should accept that their partner receives ongoing support as a victim/survivor of domestic abuse. As part of a perpetrator programme, in most cases, victims/survivors are invited to provide feedback about the abuser's behaviour to strengthen accountability.

The abuser is likely to minimise or justify the abuse and his manipulation. We must be aware of this and ask God for discernment and recognise that the victim's/survivor's ongoing reports of any changes or lack of change are to be believed. If the feedback from the victim/survivor is that the abuser is not modifying his behaviour or is increasing or finding new ways to abuse, the accountability partner must consider stepping back as it is clear that the commitments established at the beginning are not being met. Maintaining clear boundaries and expectations are very important.

Key signs of an abuser who may be changing:

There are key markers that help identify if an abuser is moving towards changing his abusive behaviours:

- He shows **ownership** of his actions.
- He **doesn't blame** others, particularly the victim, for the situation.
- He **shows respect** for the victim and her decisions.
- He is open to **accountability**.
- He **acknowledges** the pain and suffering he has caused.
- In his decision-making, **he puts the needs and wants of the victim/survivor first**.

Do's and don'ts when supporting a victim/survivor

This should be done in the context of the abuser engaging with a perpetrator's programme or with that goal in mind.



Do:

- Regard the victim's safety (and that of any children) as the highest priority and ensure that any actions you take are victim-centred.
- Meet him in a public place or the church with several other people around if meeting him is appropriate.
- Hold him accountable for his abusive behaviour, underlying that being abusive is a choice.
- Find ways to collaborate with the perpetrator programme, police, probation and other services to hold him accountable.
- Counteract any blame-shifting or efforts to portray himself as the victim, as this is often used as a control tactic.
- Maintain awareness of the danger he may pose to you or other people, especially the victim/survivor, their/her children, and her wider family.
- Offer spaces to talk about the Bible where toxic beliefs can be exposed and challenged and address any questions he may have.
- Take seriously any threats he may make and inform the relevant authorities and the victim/survivor.
- Share any concerns you have with a properly trained professional.

Pray:

- For him to stop using his power to abuse the victim/survivor.
- For the humility to recognise his sin.
- For a growing acknowledgement of the pain he has caused and a genuine desire to recognise his partner as an equally valuable person and put her needs and wants and that of the rest of the family first.



Don't:

- Go to him to confirm the victim's/survivor's story.
- Meet him alone and in private.
- Accept his use of religious excuses for his behaviour.
- Give him any information about the victim's/survivor's whereabouts if she has left him.
- Be taken in by him minimising, denying or lying about the abuse.
- Accept him blaming the victim or anything or anyone else.
- Be taken in by his 'conversion' experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as he proceeds with accountability. If it is not genuine, it is another way of manipulating you and the system and maintaining control of the process to avoid responsibility.
- Pursue baptism or confirmation at this time. If the repentance and conversion of the abuser are genuine, he can be baptised or confirmed at a later date when long term, consistent change has been demonstrated.
- Give him leadership responsibilities in the church as a way to improve his behaviour.
- Advocate for the abuser to avoid the legal consequences of his violence.
- Provide a character witness for any legal proceedings.
- Forgive him quickly and easily.
- Confuse his guilt, sadness or remorse with true repentance and change.

What if they belong to the same church?

Domestic abuse is a complex issue, and becomes even more so when both parties attend the same church. After a disclosure, the following things need to be considered:

- Our call as churches is to stand with those in positions of vulnerability. Therefore our primary responsibility is to support and protect the victim/survivor and any children involved in the situation.
- Abuse is a sin, and there are consequences of sin in our life. We are redeemed and free from sin but will have to face the consequences of our actions; Gal 6.7: *do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*
- Handle the disclosure with the safety of the victim/survivor at the forefront, follow the disclosure flow chart pg. 40.
- Abuse breaks the covenant of marriage, and separation becomes a process to seek safety.

If the victim/survivor does not wish to remain in the relationship

- Offer to walk alongside her during the gruelling separation process. There will be practical, emotional and spiritual needs that the church can help meet.

- Recognise that separation is a high-risk period for victims/survivors and their children. The safeguarding lead in the church should put measures in place to ensure their safety.
- It might be safest for there to be no contact between victim/survivor and abuser. Therefore the abuser should be encouraged to seek another church/congregation where accountability and support are available.

If the victim/survivor is unsure about remaining in the relationship

- Support her to read or listen to information about domestic abuse.
- Put her in contact with possible support groups like our Survivors' Network.
- She may then decide she wants to leave the abuser (section above) or to continue to live with him (section below).

If the victim/survivor decides to remain in the relationship

- Establish a safety plan with her.
- Stay in regular contact with her.

Why couples counselling, mediation or marriage courses are not the answer

In general, couples counselling, mediation or a marriage course can be effective measures for marital problems. They can help people with conflict resolution or communication problems, childhood issues brought to the relationship and struggles with intimacy. In the case of relationships with an abuser, however, they may cause more harm than good.

These measures are not safe for a victim/survivor of abuse; her honest and open participation could result in the abuser escalating the abuse.

Abusers are highly manipulative and can use these spaces as another arena to exercise coercion and control.

Counselling, mediation and marriage courses assume the concept of mutuality in the relationship. This mutuality doesn't exist with an abuser, as there is no respect for the victim/survivor, and he is not interested in equality.

Attending these kind of supports as a couple implies an understanding that the problems are shared between the two parties. Abuse is not a shared problem, it is the problem of the abuser. Abuse is a choice that the abuser makes to use his power to exercise control over the victim/survivor.

Commonly in these settings, the couple would be asked to focus on their individual feelings. This approach is counterproductive when in a relationship with an abuser as he is already spending too much time focusing on his feelings and not enough time focusing on his actions and their impact on his partner's.

Theological reflections

Restored was set up to respond to the clear biblical mandate to speak up for those whose voices have not been heard and to stand with those who face oppression and injustice. We believe this call to action includes standing against domestic abuse and standing with victims/survivors.

Across the Church, we may differ in opinion on the roles of men and women. Still, there are many principles around which we find unity: the equal value and worth of men and women, made in the image of God, the importance of doing all things through the lens and love of Christ, loving one another and laying down our lives for each other. Yet, some still take isolated texts within the Bible and twist or 'weaponise' them to condone, minimise or continue the abuse of women.

This section looks at what the Bible says about power, control and the relationship God intended between men and women and what that means for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Exploring Genesis

The creation stories in Genesis lay the foundation for our understanding of both the relationship between God and humanity and the relationship between men and women.

The creation narrative of Genesis chapter 1 details how God created the world. God saw His creation was good, but on the sixth day, when He created human beings, He declared it to be **very** good (1:31).

Genesis 1:27 tells us that male and female were created in God's image (*imago dei*). What is fundamental about this verse is that it is true for both men and women.

As part of being made in God's image, males and females were both given the mandate to *'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'*

To understand the concept of *'ruling over'*, we need to look at the one who held the power in the first place. Philippians 2 describes how Jesus considered His power as something not to be used for His own advantage – this is a good model for us to follow.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

Domestic abuse robs men and women of their dignity, value and identity. To be made in God's image means that **both**, male **and** female, reflect the glory and wonder of Him who made **them**. **Both** men and women carry the hallmark of the King. It means **both** have inherent dignity and value that cannot be taken away.

Genesis 2 & 3: What happened next?

Genesis 1 finishes with the words *"it was very good"* (1:31). In Genesis 2:18, however, we discover that God then said, *"it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* To explore this passage and the rest of the creation narrative in Genesis 2, it is fundamental to remember that both men and women are created in God's image.

Women as helpers?⁸⁷

Eve's description as Adam's '*helper*' has been used by some to suggest women were created to serve men or have a subordinate role. However, the language used in Genesis 1:18, translated as '*suitable helper*', is *ezer kenegdo* in Hebrew. *Ezer* is a term that does not imply inferiority but a superior or equal relationship in most contexts. In fact, the same root word is used 16 times to describe God and three times to describe military support. It refers to strength rather than weakness. For example, in Psalm 46:1, God helps us because he is our refuge and strength - our *ezer*. He certainly isn't our subordinate!

To maintain the equality given in Chapter 1 and to not imply women are superior to men, the word *suitable* or *kenegdo* is also used. This word indicates balance and equality. Eve's role is to be a strong, worthy companion placed to carry and steward creation with Adam equally.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

Women are made in the image of God, they are an *ezer kenegdo* - not a servant, nor inferior, but a strength alongside their mate.

Women are to blame?⁸⁸

Eve is sometimes depicted as solely responsible for the fall because she is first to eat the fruit and pass it on to Adam, who then blames her in Genesis 3:12 for his actions. However, it's interesting that Adam is the one given the instruction not to eat from the tree before Eve even existed. Even if he relayed the instruction correctly to Eve, he should have known better than anyone not to eat the fruit he had been given. There is a shared responsibility for this Fall that we sometimes miss, and it is highlighted by God's response which sees consequences for both Adam and Eve.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

Blame is a concept that characterises domestic abuse. Abusers take no responsibility for their behaviour and victims/survivors are blamed for everything bad that happens.

Husband as rulers?⁸⁹

Genesis 3 details the consequence of the Fall: curses and consequences. This passage provides an overview of the impact of the Fall on the relationship between men and women. It is not God's original intention.

In verse 16, God says, "*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*" This statement describes the power imbalance in the relationship between men and women brought by the Fall. It is not a declaration of God's ideal for relationships between men and women. '*Ruling over*' women was not a command, just as women desiring their husbands was not a command.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

God's original intention was never for man to rule over women - it was a consequence of the Fall. In Jesus, all things are being restored, including the equal relationship between men and women.

Tales of terror in the Old Testament and a God of silence

The Old Testament has many difficult stories when it comes to the treatment of women. There are stories of women being treated as less valuable than men and experiencing terrible abuse at their hands. Although these stories are in the Bible, it doesn't mean God validates the actions within them or that they reflect God's plan for humanity. They do show us that the Bible has something to say about violence, abuse and injustice. Sometimes God actively shows His opposition in a dramatic way, and sometimes, God remains silent. But God's silence does not signify approval, most often, it means the opposite. Very often, these tales of terror happen when God's people are furthest from Him, ignoring His laws and doing what seems right in their own eyes. As God's representatives, we are called to do something and speak up, and we see that in the example of Jesus.⁹⁰ You can access a sermon tackling the complex passage of Judges 19 here: restored-uk.org/judges19.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

God sees and cares about those who have been abused, raped and violated throughout the ages. These are not taboo subjects. We must speak about and against such things and make it clear that it is safe to disclose abuse.

⁸⁷ More about this topic on Helen Paynter's book *The bible doesn't tell me so*
⁸⁸ More about this topic on Mary Evans' book *Women in the bible*

⁸⁹ More about this topic on Lucy Peppiatt's *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts*
⁹⁰ www.restored-uk.org/judges19

Jesus brought dignity to women

As Christians, the whole Bible should be read in the context of Jesus. Jesus' attitude towards women challenged the patriarchy of the day. Dorothy Sayers famously said it is:

'...perhaps no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man – there never had been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered them...who took their questions and answered seriously'.

When supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse, we can follow the example of Jesus illustrated in the following stories.

Jesus restores – Luke 8:40-48

This story details one of Jesus' miracles- he healed a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. This affliction would have taken her already lowly status as a woman and made her unclean (Leviticus 15:19). She would have been an outcast from society, barely spoken to, let alone touched. Jesus healed her and allowed her to recover her voice. He not only restored her health, but He also restored her dignity in front of her community. She was held up as an example of faith. This occurred when Jesus was on His way to heal the daughter of an important dignitary. Jesus did not prioritise this important leader at the expense of this woman. He went out of his way to show his impartiality against all the expectations of the time.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

God's response to someone's need is not affected by status or privilege. If a victim/survivor of abuse discloses that their abuser is someone of high standing in the Church, we should prioritise her needs over his reputation.

Jesus dignifies – John 4:1-30

Jesus challenged the hierarchy of the day everywhere He went. Jews did not associate with Samaritans, but Jesus chose to walk through Samaria. In this journey, He has an encounter with a woman at a well. We learn that she had been married four times, and the likelihood is that she would have been rejected and divorced. Her status was now so low that her current partner would not even marry her. Even the disciples showed surprise at Jesus' encounter with her. (John 4:27)

Jesus gave her dignity, spoke to her about theology, and incredibly, for the first time in the Bible, chose her to reveal His divine identity. By choosing her, Jesus didn't stand to gain influence, money or support, but by giving this woman value and dignity, He changed her story forever and left an incredible example for His followers.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

Jesus reminds us that a woman's dignity is not linked to her relationship history but rather on the intrinsic value of being God's creation. No matter their story, using this as a starting point for any conversation with a victim/survivor provides a respectful space where opportunities for restoration and extending God's mission are possible.

Jesus liberates - John 8:1-11

In John 8, teachers of the law bring out an adulterous woman to test Jesus' reaction. Notice they don't bring the man involved - this is about shaming the woman. The man is not held accountable. Jesus, in His wisdom, turns the tables on the teachers of the law and questions their ability to judge another. He held up a metaphorical mirror and said, *'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,'* and one by one, they left the scene.

Jesus not only prioritised the needs of the adulterous women over satisfying the Pharisees' expectations but proceeded to engage her in conversation. In verse 8, Jesus speaks words of freedom to a woman condemned to be subjected to a slow, shameful death. Instead, she is lavished with incredible grace.

What does this mean for victims/survivors?

We need to stop judging women for what men do to them. Instead, we can open ourselves to listen, be conduits of Jesus' freedom and help to change the story for victims/survivors of abuse.

The fault of domestic abuse does not lie with the woman. It lies with the abuser who chooses to abuse.

Key questions:

Shouldn't wives just submit to their husbands?

This passage in Ephesians 5:21-33 begins with a command to submit to one another, which echoes the equality we see before the Fall.

Paul explains the concept of submission by comparing it to the relationship between the Church and Christ. (Eph 5:24). The church's submission to Christ is not a result of obligation or force, neither of coercion or fear. The church submits to Christ as a response to His great love. From a Christian perspective, submission should be a voluntary act of love, not a consequence of fear.

Can a man rape his wife?

Marital rape exists and is not only a sin but also a crime. It is considered a form of domestic abuse and has been illegal since 1992. 1 Corinthians 7:4b tells us that a *'wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband'*. Taken out of context, this verse has been used to deny women the choice to consent to sex and sometimes to justify marital rape.

Paul throughout this passage (1 Corinthian 7:1-7) explicitly, consistently and intentionally reflects a sense of mutuality in the relationship between wife and husband. He does indeed writes that *'the wife does not have authority over her own body'* but also in the same sentence he says ... *'in the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife'*.

What a strong word is used here: *'yielding'*. In this case, the husband, the one with greater power and status, is called upon first to yield by giving what rightfully belongs to his wife. Then, to be complete, the wife is told the same obligation applies to her. Such mutuality regarding marriage is remarkable in a predominantly patriarchal world.

Paul's language of mutuality contrast sharply with the idea of sex without consent or sex on demand. To use his words to excuse or minimise rape is not only a manipulation of his writings but it misses a central point of his teaching about putting each other first.

Aren't we meant to embrace suffering?

Following Jesus is recognised as being costly. Jesus told His followers to pick up their cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). In 1 Peter 2: 20-21, Peter writes that suffering for doing something right is commendable and that we should follow in Christ's footsteps. Some have used this passage to suggest that women should remain with abusers and endure the suffering with gladness. But let's not forget that Jesus avoided those in authority who meant to harm Him on several occasions, to continue His mission (John 8: 59, Matthew 12: 14-15, John 10:39). He did not submit to suffering every time the opportunity arose but withdrew or escaped, and He only submitted Himself to the cross for a very particular purpose for a greater good.

Doesn't God hate divorce?

Malachi 2:16 says, *'For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.'* For many victims/survivors, this verse has left them feeling like they have to choose between their faith and their freedom. However, the audience for this message is the men in the community who were divorcing their wives with shameless ease. At the time of this letter, women's safety and livelihood were closely linked to their marital status. The intention of the whole passage, from which this verse is often taken out, is to admonish the men who were treating divorce very lightly, jeopardising their wives by leaving them destitute in the event of a divorce.

The second half of this passage is interesting too - in those days, men would cover their wives symbolically with their cloak to show that they would protect them. (Ruth 3:9) Malachi's reference to *'covering a garment with violence'* signifies a breaking of the marriage covenant through failing to protect.⁹¹ God does hate divorce, but He also hates abuse. This passage was about protecting women in this culture, in this era, from abuse and destitution.

⁹¹ Paynter, H. (2020). The Bible Doesn't Tell Me So: Why You Don't Have to Submit to Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control. United Kingdom: Bible Reading Fellowship.

Resources for use in a church service

A reading based on Matthew 25:35-46⁹²

I was hungry, and you gave me bread.
 I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.
 I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.
 I was naked, and you clothed me.
 I was sick, and you visited me.
 I was in prison, and you came to me.
 I was raped, and you stood by me.
 I was beaten, and you sheltered me.
 I was harassed, and you helped me act.
 I was abused, and you intervened.
 I was in pain, and you comforted me.
 I was bleeding, and you attended to my wound.
 I was orphaned, and you mothered me.
 I was alone, and you took my hand.
 I was unworthy, and you believed in me.
 I was victimised, and you empowered me.
 I was confused, and you brought me insight.
 I was silent, and you listened to me.
 I was seeking, and you searched with me.
 I was knocking, and you opened the door.

A confession

O God, You know our hearts, our minds, our feelings and thoughts. You know the heavy stones that weigh down our spirits. We cry for all that cannot be saved. Comfort us as we mourn the loss of women's lives to violence. Strengthen us as we break the silence, confront evil and cry out for justice. Help us see the chains that bind us and the chains that we place around others. Set us free to walk in the fullness of life that is promised to all people. Let us live into that promise with every moment of our lives.

Amen.

A prayer

God of love, may we find the insight to recognise violence in all forms and courage to name it and speak out for justice.

May the Lord Jesus bless each one of us with compassion for the vulnerable and grace to stand with them, sharing his strength.

May the Holy Spirit bless us with prayerful hearts and the power to breathe peace, transforming the world.

We pray for systems that tackle inappropriate attitudes, corruption and cruelty.

Loving God, you are the one who desires that all people be brought into nurturing relationships with one another and with you.

Show us the path to justice and fill us with your healing power through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

More resources can be found on our website
www.restored-uk.org/prayers

The Domestic Abuse Charter

This church:

1

Understands domestic abuse to be a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

2

Holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and irreconcilable with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.

3

Accepts that domestic abuse is a serious and complex problem, which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.

4

Undertakes to listen, to support and care for those affected by domestic abuse.

5

Will always place the safety of women and children affected by domestic abuse as the highest priority.

6

Will work with domestic abuse specialised services, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways, and will publicise their work.

7

Will seek to appoint advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and to keep the church informed about the implementation and development of these guidelines.

8

Will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin.

9

Will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image.

10

Believes in the restoration of victims/survivors as per Isaiah 61:3 '*a crown of beauty, instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*'

⁹² Adapted from: Breaking the Silence of Violence by Women in Mission and Ministry Office at the Episcopal Church Centre

⁹³ Lisherness, S. and Basham, B. (2016) Striking Terror No More: The Church Responds to Domestic Violence P 12. United States: Bridge Resources.

SPECIALISED SERVICES

Emergency services: 911

Info-Social

Service 24/7 Tél.: 811

SOS violence conjugale

Service 24/7

Tel.: 1 800 363-9010

Only texting : 438 601-1211

sosviolenceconjugale.ca

Find a shelter or external service help:

Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale:

www.maisons-femmes.qc.ca/maisons-membres

Legal aid and information:

Rebâtir

Free legal counselling for victims of sexual or domestic violence:

Tel.: 1 833 732-2847

projet@rebatir.ca

rebatir.ca

Juripop

Free legal aid:

Tél.: 514 705-1637

juripop.org

Support for men:

À Coeur d'Homme

acoeurdhomme.com

Prends L'air

prendslair.ca

Support organizations for men in difficulty – Government of Québec

www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/violence/conjugal-violence/support-organizations-men-in-difficulty

Réseau Maisons Oxygènes : Support and emergency lodging for fathers and children in difficulty

www.maisonsoxygene.ca

Specific support for women from cultural or minority groups

Shield of Athena

www.shieldofathena.com/fr/qui-sommes-nous

Doctors of the World - clinic for migrants with precarious status

www.doctorsoftheworld.ca/help/clinic-for-migrants-with-precarious-status

Specific support for Indigenous women

Native women's shelter

www.nwsm.info/what-we-offer

Québec Native Women

www.faq-qnw.org/en

Aid Programs for survivors and victims

Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVACS)

www.cavac.qc.ca/en

Crime Victims of Sexual Assault Centres (CALACS)

www.agressionsexuellemontreal.ca/reseau-des-services-en/reseau-communautaire-en/calacs-en

Sexual Violence helpline

www.sexualviolencehelpline.ca

Help for children and youth

Department of Youth Protection

www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/childhood/services-youth-difficulty-families/youth-protection/reporting-a-situation-to-the-director-of-youth-protection/contact-informations-of-the-dyp

TelJeunes

www.teljeunes.com/en

Kids Help Phone

www.teljeunes.com/en

Restored
CHANGING THE STORY
for women



Restored: Supporting Survivors since 2015

Many Christian survivors of domestic abuse are left feeling as though they have to choose between their faith and their freedom.

We want them to know they can have both.

The Survivors' Network

An international online community that creates a safe space for Christian survivors to explore the questions and challenges they face as a consequence of the abuse they have faced and to rediscover the value, security and hope that is found in the love of God.

restored-uk.org/survivors



**FREE FOR
SURVIVORS**

The Survivors' Handbook

In response to the hundreds of questions we have been asked over the years, we created this invaluable handbook that includes chapters on:

- 1. managing the practical realities after leaving an abuser**
- 2. healing and recovery after leaving an abuser**
- 3. theological issues relating to domestic abuse**

restored-uk.org/handbook



DIRECTION CHRÉTIENNE

Quebec resources for churches and Christians:

www.direction.ca/rapha
514-878-3035

A guide for churches to address domestic abuse

Published by Restored
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Shine a light in the darkness

1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse.

It robs them of their identity, value and security, we want to partner with you to give it back.

We want to see a network of churches standing against domestic abuse, shining a light in the darkness and providing a place of safety and welcome for survivors.

If you'd like your church to start changing the story for women visit restored-uk.org/beacon



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