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We strongly encourage you to listen to our corresponding webinar to provide background on the recommendations provided in this document, available at www.plantoprotectschool.com

We are grateful for the work of CCADA for their commitment to addressing Domestic Violence. <https://ccada.org/>

This policy was inspired by the good work of Christian Direction in Montreal and their Rapha Study, a comprehensive study on the prevalence of Domestic Violence in Quebec, published in 2024. The Rapha Project is a study of experiences of domestic abuse and the response of the church in Quebec. Though this study focuses on Quebec, there is much to learn from their findings that apply to all organizations. www.direction.ca/rapha

Domestic Abuse / Intimate Partner Violence

Introduction

Seeking Safety

(adapted from the book "Healing the Broken Places" by Kate Johnson)

When it comes to one's own safety and the safety of their children, we can never be too careful. Although nothing can guarantee their safety, there are things we can do that will add to their ability to feel safer and more protected. Psalm 140: 1-5 states, *"Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars. They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips. Selah. Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men Who have purposed to trip up my feet. The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set snares for me. Selah."* (NASU). This scripture is not talking about rescue physical violence, but verbal and mental anguish.

When we think of safety, it is also important to learn about safe people and unsafe people. It is all part of personal safety. Unsafe people are those who you ask for support and they are all too willing to give you advice, tell you what you should do, and/or tell others what is happening. Safe people respect decisions, and help individuals think through choices, they do so in a supportive way where the individual will feel empowered and loved. It is important to be a safe person and help individuals find safe people with whom they can be themselves and receive encouragement. Everyone has a right to safety in all relationships.

Just as God commands David to seek safety from Saul when his life is in danger, so God wants each person to be safe from those who would do harm. Another example of God condoning seeking safety is the story of Rahab hiding the spies.

When Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. "It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. Joshua 2:1-7 (emphasis added).

In this, we can clearly see that God blesses those who help His people escape from those seeking to harm them. It is no different for those in abusive situations. The Lord is our protector, using whatever means are available to do His will. And His will is for everyone to be safe.

What a safety plan is and isn't:

A safety plan will help individuals to be safer both in and out of the relationship. Individuals experiencing domestic abuse are wise to seek help and take care of themselves and their children. Emotional, psychological, sexual and spiritual safety are just as important as physical safety. Scripture shows us that we have a right to not only protect ourselves, but God wants us

to be safe. God is our refuge and our strength for our spiritual health and well-being, but our physical health and well-being depends on careful planning. It is also important to know that leaving an abusive relationship does not guarantee one's safety. As the abusive person feels that they are losing their power, they may escalate their abuse in order to try to regain their power and control. The most dangerous time is when a victim of domestic abuse decides to leave or just after they have left the relationship. This does not mean they should stay. It just means that they must be careful. The Church can be instrumental in helping victims of domestic violence find safety.

Below is a suggested safety plan for victims of domestic violence. There are great community resources and shelters available for families fleeing from domestic violence.

"Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief... I have become like broken pottery... But my trust is in you, O God; I say, 'YOU are my God' My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me."

Psalms 31:9-15 (NIV)

Definitions

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another person with whom he or she has, or has had, an intimate relationship with. This pattern of behaviour may include physical violence, sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking, and using electronic devices to harass and control their partner or ex-partner.

Exposure to Domestic Violence

Children who live in homes where a parent or caretaker is experiencing abuse are commonly referred to as "child witnesses" or "children who are witnessing" domestic violence. Children's exposure to domestic violence typically falls into three primary categories: hearing a violent event; being directly involved as an eyewitness, intervening, or being used as a part of a violent event (e.g., being used as a shield against abusive actions); and or experiencing the aftermath of a violent event.

Children's exposure to domestic violence also may include being used as a spy to interrogate the adult victim, being forced to watch or participate in the abuse of the victim and being used as a pawn by the abuser to coerce the victim into returning to the violent relationship. Some children are physically injured as a direct result of the domestic violence. Some perpetrators intentionally physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse their children in an effort to intimidate and control their partner. In addition to being exposed to the abusive behaviour, many children are further victimized by coercion to remain silent about the abuse, maintaining the "family secret."

Policy

[Name of Church] is committed to providing an environment of safety for their members and adherents. [Name of Church] does not condone any form of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. As such, we will not dismiss, ignore, downplay or tolerate violent behaviour of our staff or volunteers, during or outside of our programs or services. We expect Ministry

Personnel to be pursuing holiness and righteousness in their daily lives and interaction with others.

Ministry Personnel should notify leadership if a restraining order is in effect or if a potentially violent non-work/ministry-related situation, such as domestic violence exists that could result in violence at the church.

Program Leads, Staff and Leadership have an additional responsibility to act immediately on observation of a potentially dangerous situation of domestic violence. Leadership and Program Leads are responsible for addressing potential problems before they become serious. Immediately complete a Suspected Abuse Report Form and submit it to leadership. See also Responding to Vulnerable Adult Abuse Policy Statement. All information gleaned will be handled with confidentiality and only shared on a need-to-know basis.

Learning of Domestic Violence from the Alleged Victim:

All reports of domestic violence will be taken seriously and the alleged victim will be provided trauma-informed pastoral care, a Safety Plan, including but not limited to reporting it to the police and if willing will be referred to a licensed therapist who will provide trauma-informed individual counselling.

Ministry Personnel are to encourage the person to make the report, and support them in their decision, whatever they decide. At no time should the individual be discouraged or instructed not to call the police or to stay living in a home where they or their children are exposed to an abusive relationship.

Ministry Personnel must not force or coerce the victim to report, nor can they make the report on behalf of the victim. Victims must consent and be engaged in the reporting process. However if and when the victim is ready and willing to report the abuse, Ministry Personnel can be present and support the victim in the reporting.

If children are involved, there is a mandatory duty to report. This report must be made to Child and Family Services¹ or the police. (See also policy statement on Hearing and Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse).

From time to time, [Name of Church] will provide opportunities for the community to gain greater knowledge and understanding of domestic violence including community support groups, stress management, conflict resolution, nonviolent crisis intervention, bullying and violence, etc.

The needs of the alleged victim and the children must be paramount.

Learning of Domestic Violence from the Alleged Perpetrator and/or Dealing with the Alleged Perpetrator of Domestic Violence:

All disclosures of domestic violence will be taken seriously.

Do not confront individuals accused of domestic violence until such time as the alleged victim is in a safe home or shelter.

¹ In Québec, this is the Director of Youth Protection. Please consult: <https://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/how-to-report-a-situation>

The Alleged Perpetrator will be provided pastoral care and referred to a licensed therapist for individual counselling.

If the individual is a staff member or person in leadership, they must be temporarily suspended until an investigation is completed and their name has been cleared or they receive a recommendation from the licensed therapist that they can return to active service.

[Name of Church] will recommend and provide opportunities to gain greater knowledge and understanding of domestic violence including community support groups, stress and anger management, conflict resolution, nonviolent crisis intervention, bullying and violence, etc.

Conducting an investigation of Domestic Violence

If a report has been made to legal authorities, [Name of Church] will leave the investigation of Domestic Violence to the Director of Youth Protection or law enforcement.

If a report has not been made and children are not involved, but the alleged perpetrator is a staff member, or a person in leadership in the church, [Name of Church] reserves the right to investigate the allegations of domestic violence. [Name of Church] will appoint a third party investigator or individuals without bias to investigate the allegations and determine the preponderance of evidence of the domestic abuse.

If the allegations are substantiated, [Name of Church] reserves the right to practice progressive steps of discipline, requiring steps to be taken to address the abusive behaviour.

Also refer to policy statements on Disciplinary Action and Whistleblower.

Safety Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence

Be Prepared to Get Away...

Keep a spare set of keys, a set of clothes, important papers, prescriptions and some money with someone you trust.

Keep any evidence of physical abuse (ripped clothes, pictures taken of injuries or destruction of property) or verbal abuse or threats (messages left on the phone or voice mail).

Plan the safest time to get away.

Keep your cell phone with you at all times in case violence escalates and you need to get help. If you do not have a cell phone, contact your local domestic violence agency or police department to see if they have a free 911 phone.

Know where you can go for help. Tell someone you trust what is happening to you so that someone else knows.

Call the police if you or your children are in immediate danger.

If you are injured, go to the hospital or doctor and ask them to document your injuries and cause in your file.

Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them to go or someone to call for help. Teach them how to call 911. Reassure them it is not their job to take care of you, but to stay safe.

Arrange a signal with a neighbor or friend to notify them of danger (such as turning on a porch light in the daytime) so they can call for help.

Contact your local domestic violence hotline to find out about area resources to use during a crisis (such as a shelter) or for support.

Seek out individual (not couples) trauma-informed pastoral care and professional counselling from a licensed therapist.

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