
Family and Domestic Violence Protocols

Definition

1. Family and Domestic Violence is defined primarily as violence and abuse perpetrated upon a partner in a marriage. It is used to gain control over the partner and then to maintain that control.
2. Violence also occurs in other close relationships. A person may be threatened, molested, harassed or attacked by someone in a relationship or with whom he or she shares a household. Carers, such as sons and daughters may abuse older people.

Statement of Principles

- Domestic and family violence is abhorrent to God who would have partners in a marriage live as examples of the loving relationship that exists between Christ and his ecclesia. It is in direct opposition to the commandment that we love one another “as I have loved you” (John 13:34).
- Men, women and children have a right to live safely and free of fear within their own homes in relationships that promote the development of a God-like character. Ephesians 4:15-16
- Domestic violence damages the well-being and future life chances of men, women and children.
- Domestic violence occurs across all cultural and socio-economic groups.
- Domestic violence is perpetrated by men in 95% of reported cases.
- Acts of domestic violence and its consequences are the sole responsibility of the perpetrator.
- Domestic assault is a crime.
- The safety and ongoing protection of men, women and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence are paramount considerations in any response.
- Essential to any response are early identification, appropriate intervention and long-term solutions to provide for the spiritual well-being and life chances of men, women and children who have to grapple with the issues of domestic and family violence.
- On-going education and programs to promote an understanding of the Scriptural role of men, women and children are needed to ensure loving relationships exist within homes and families.
- Any response to domestic violence requires a consistent and planned approach in ecclesias and across the Christadelphian community.

Issues

4. Domestic violence is abhorrent to God, (Proverbs 21:7) and is a crime punishable by law. All acts of physical and sexual violence constitute assault and are criminal offences. Domestic violence occurs in all age groups, income levels, ethnic and cultural groups.
 5. A small minority of cases of domestic violence involves violence perpetrated by women against their male partner.
 6. Children who witness domestic violence or experience violence in the home can be profoundly affected.
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7. Although some domestic violence cases present as obvious abuse, and men and women may speak openly about the problem, the majority of abuse within the home remains hidden. Much domestic violence goes unreported by women for fear and safety reasons. For this reason, it is important to be aware of indicators of domestic violence.

Categories of domestic violence

8. There are six broad categories of domestic violence:

- physical assault
- psychological/emotional/verbal abuse
- social abuse
- economic abuse
- sexual assault
- spiritual abuse

9. *Physical assault* includes slapping, pushing, punching, kicking, choking, or use of weapons against a partner to inflict injury. All acts of physical assault are criminal offences.
10. *Psychological/emotional/verbal abuse* is the use of language, threats, insults and abuse to denigrate or degrade the victim. Such abuse may destroy a sense of worth, undermine self-confidence and challenge perceptions of reality. Threats to children's well-being and safety as well as damage to property are also used by perpetrators to inflict psychological and emotional abuse.
11. *Social abuse* refers to social and geographic isolation imposed upon a partner by conduct that impedes or curtails access to family and friends, the ecclesia and community agencies including welfare agencies.
12. *Economic abuse* refers to the controlling and withholding of access to family resources including money and the purchase and ownership of goods and property.
13. *Sexual assault* is a criminal offence. It includes a range of sexually abusive and exploitative behaviours including rape - with or without use of threats or other violence being inflicted, indecent assaults, and forced viewing of pornography.
14. *Spiritual abuse* refers to an undermining of ourselves and our relationship with God. It seeks to erode our spiritual purpose and how we make sense of ourselves in that purpose.
15. These behaviours are used to instil fear and to maintain power and control within families.

Suggested procedures when family and domestic violence is reported or suspected

16. Family and domestic violence is an abuse of power. It is not an issue of communication or misunderstanding in relationships. The aim of the perpetrator is to maintain control and to discredit those who may move to expose the abuse. The perpetrator may present as one who is powerless and blame those who threaten to expose the abuse. Domestic violence is not a relationship issue; it is an abuse of power and is an illegal behaviour. (Proverbs 21:24 and Proverbs 22:10)
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17. As family and domestic violence and any other sorts of abuse are illegal behaviours, the ecclesial role needs to be one, which holds the perpetrator accountable. Mediation or reconciliatory responses may endanger the more vulnerable when abuse and violence is present. There needs to be clear evidence of a change of behaviour (repentance) on the part of the perpetrator. The aim is to help all parties in their spiritual walk. Below are listed some guidelines to assist in that process.

Characteristics of an abused woman

- Often blames herself, but knows the violence is not what she wants.
- Continues to look for ways to make the relationship work.
- Can feel very sympathetic towards the abuser whilst being distressed about the abuse.
- May be very compliant especially with men in authority.
- May be so frightened of the abuser that she continues to stay in the relationship despite the risks to her and her children.
- May feel guilty and have a lot of self doubt about her choices.
- May be depressed or have other constant ill health issues.

What if a woman reports domestic violence by her husband?_

- Respect the report, she is unlikely to be lying. Her report of violence is probably only the tip of the iceberg.
- Reassure her that she does not deserve this treatment. It is not God's will for her.
- Ask her how she can be supported by the ecclesia, especially when the abuse is exposed.
- Protect her confidentiality.
- Don't minimise her experience. Say something like.... "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for you (and your children's safety).
- Pray with and for her for God's guidance as she goes through this valley of tears.
- Emphasise that her husband has broken the vows he made before God at their marriage to love and honour her.
- Encourage her to think about a safety plan for herself and her children. (See Attachment 1.)
- Encourage her to find information that will assist her (and the children) to prayerfully consider her future course of action.
- Contact your local support/care group for resources to assist you.
- Do not recommend she seek couple counselling. This may place her and her children at emotional and physical risk.
- Encourage her to seek professional help for herself and her children.
- When talking to either party see them separately (at least in the short term).
- Don't encourage her to forgive the perpetrator or overlook his behaviour unless there is clear evidence of a change of heart on the part of the perpetrator (repentance). Scripture encourages a change of heart and this is reflected in a change of behaviours and attitudes. Perpetrators of violence need God's help coupled with extensive professional help to challenge their thinking and behaviour.
- Encourage her to find a spiritual path through the situation and to find freedom from the fear of violence.
- Do not attempt to counsel beyond your expertise.

- Be aware that those who are helping her may also be at risk.

Characteristics of children living with domestic violence

18. Research has identified two types of reactions among the young who are affected by family violence: **externalising behaviours** **internalising behaviours** (such as withdrawal and anxiety). The impact of violence on children and young people at various stages of their development include the following
- Infants may exhibit poor health and sleeping habits and excessive screaming, are reactive to their environment, when distressed they cry, refuse to feed or withdraw and are particularly susceptible to emotional deprivation.
 - Toddlers suffer distress when witnessing violence and can often experience behavioural problems such as frequent illness, severe shyness, low self worth and may be troublesome when in the care of others. They may develop social problems such as hitting, biting or being argumentative. Girls are more likely to become withdrawn, passive, clinging or anxious. Boys are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour.
 - Pre-schoolers interpret most events in relation to themselves. Witnessing violence, they may believe they have caused it and suffer acute distress. Some children display distress openly, some hide it, some “act out and exhibit physical and verbal aggression” - all experience strong mixed feelings.
 - Primary school children begin to learn that violence is an appropriate way of resolving conflict in human relationships. They often have difficulties with school work and girls in this age group have been found to have the highest clinical levels of aggression and depression. Other indicators are difficulty in concentrating, fighting with peers, rebelling against adult authority, suffering anxiety and withdrawal.
 - Adolescents access networks outside the family. They have begun to form opinions about the violence and often regard the victim as being responsible. Having lived with violence they may find it difficult to engage in more positive forms of social interaction. Girls are more likely to develop depression, boys more likely to exhibit aggression, sometimes assaulting their mother or siblings. “Acting out” in inappropriate ways may indicate a difficulty at home. Ongoing conflict between parents has a profound influence on adolescent development and future adult behaviour, and can be the strongest predictor of violent delinquency, severe marital violence and potential child abuse and increased psychological stress.

What to do for children who are witnesses of family and domestic violence

- Remember children are at risk in domestic violence situations and suffer enormously. If you suspect that children are subject to abuse you will need to check the reporting requirements in your state. Reporting abuse may be a mandatory requirement.
- Encourage their parents to seek help for children
- Provide local numbers and information for children’s services
- Encourage as much normal interaction as possible with violent free activities (and settings)

What to do if domestic violence is suspected or an ecclesial member reports the possibility of domestic violence in the ecclesia

- We have a duty of care for one another and it is not God's will that these things remain hidden. As already mentioned where children are involved mandatory reporting of abuse of children may be lawfully required.
- It is important that the perpetrator be encouraged to confess his sins and seek forgiveness from the person(s) wronged. It is essential that this be accompanied by "works meet for repentance".
- Be aware of safety issues for the victim or victims. They need to feel as safe and secure as possible. (Doe etc.) They carry the secret of the abuse and will probably be frightened if approached to talk about the violence (and may deny it is happening if asked).
- Does the child have trusted friends in the ecclesia or are they isolated?
- Does the child have strong family support?
- Is the perpetrator isolated in the ecclesia, or do they have supports?
- Have safety information, phone numbers, local resources available.
- Take time to talk to the child and observe how they are.

Characteristics of perpetrator behaviour (Proverbs 16:29)

- May deny the abuse happened.
- May minimise the abuse, blame the victim, justify their behaviour.
- Talk about women/men in derogatory, disrespectful ways.
- Denigrate women's/men's intelligence, ability to manage money, parenting abilities etc.
- Have bad relationships with opposite sex.
- Blame others for abuse (eg families, ecclesia, work stress, financial issues etc).
- May be "over-protective" of partner and family (this can be the smothering of them and their attempts to lead their own lives).
- Be excessively angry about everything.
- Be remorseful/weepy when she leaves.
- Does not want to be responsible about the violence.
- Tries to make her appear unreasonable.

What to do for the person perpetrating the violence (Matthew 7:19-20)

- Hold him accountable at all times. Do name the violence as his issue, not hers. As long as he perpetrates violence his spiritual walk is compromised. (Proverbs 21:7)
 - Don't confuse remorse with true repentance (repentance brings the need to bring restitution and an understanding of the impacts of violence). (1 John 1:9)
 - Encourage him to control his behaviour, not hers.
 - Help him face his behaviour and its consequences.
 - Do pray with him and for him and assure him of your support in his efforts to overcome the violence.
 - Encourage him to seek professional help.
 - Provide a package of local resources, phone number, web addresses where information can be accessed.
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- Do address any religious rationalisations he may offer. Violence is never acceptable.
 - Do assess him for suicide or threats of homicide. DO warn those against whom he has made threats
 - Don't go to him to confirm her story. This places her and the children at risk. Remember violence happens in the home, when others are not there to observe.
 - Don't give him information about her whereabouts (if she has left him)
 - Don't accept his attempts to rationalise, blame, deny or justify, gently hold him accountable. (Say something like... "How does it help you to keep blaming her?")
 - Don't be taken in by his "conversion". If it is genuine, it will be strength to him as he moves towards being more accountable. If it is another way to manipulate you and others, it endangers people. Scripture teaches that a change of heart needs to be genuine and this occurs over time. For the perpetrator, if this is so, it will be seen through recognition of personal accountability for their violent behaviour and a need for restitution. (Proverbs 22:24-25)
 - Do not attempt counselling beyond your expertise.

What can ecclesial members do to support victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence (Psalm 17:4)

- Support those who disclose abuse and those who speak out against the problem.
- Help to find resources to support either party. It is unlikely that she is lying.
- Talk to the survivor and accept her story.
- Encourage her to move through the losses that she may experience (eg, loss of partner, homelife, hopes of unity in walking together etc).
- Talk to the perpetrator and encourage them to accept their accountability.
- Don't accept blame, justification, rationalisations as an excuse for the violence.
- Give the children opportunity for normal interaction free from violence where they can experience safety to just "be" children.

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ATTACHMENT 1

The following information may be of use to the victim of domestic and family violence

PERSONALISED SAFETY PLAN

If you are in an abusive relationship, think about....

1. Having important phone numbers nearby for you and your children. Numbers to have are the police, hotlines, friends and the local 1800 number
2. Ecclesial member, friends or neighbours you could tell about the abuse. Ask them to call the police if they hear angry or violent noises. If you have children, teach them how to dial 000. Let others know a code word that if you use means you need help.
3. How to get out of your home safely. Practice ways to get out.
4. Safer places in your home where there are exits and no weapons. If you feel abuse is going to happen try to get your abuser to one of these safer places.
5. Any weapons in the house. Think about ways that you could get them out of the house.
6. Even if you do not plan to leave, think of where you could go. Think of how you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house – taking out the rubbish, walking the pet or going to the shops. Put together a bag of things you use everyday (see checklist). Hide it where it is easy for you to get.
7. Go over your safety plan often.

If you consider leaving your abuser, think about....

1. Four places you could go if you leave your home.
2. People who might help you if you left. Think about people who will keep a bag for you. Think about people who might lend you money. Make plans for your pets.
3. Keep change for phone calls or get a mobile phone.
4. Open a bank account or get a credit card in your name.
5. How you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house – take out the rubbish, walk the pet or go to the shops. Practice how you would leave.
6. How you could take your children with you safely. There are times when taking your children with you may put all of your lives in danger. You need to protect yourself to be able to protect your children.
7. Put together a bag of things you use everyday. Hide it where it is easy for you to get.

ITEMS TO TAKE IF POSSIBLE

Children (if it is safe)
Money
Driver's license
Keys to car, house, work
Extra clothes
Medicine
Important papers for you and your children
Birth certificates

Health card, credit cards, Centerlink identification
School and medical records
Car registration
Welfare identification
Passports
Lease/rental agreement
Mortgage payment info, unpaid bills
Insurance papers
Domestic Violence Order
Any legal documentation
Your will
Address book
Photos, jewellery, things that mean a lot to you
Items for your children (toys, blankets etc)
His tax file number

8. Think about reviewing your safety plan often.

If you have left your abuser, think about....

1. Your safety – you still need to.
 2. Get a mobile phone.
 3. Get a Domestic Violence Order (protection order) from the court. Keep a copy with you all the time. Give a copy to the local police, people who take care of your children, their schools and your boss.
 4. Change the locks. Consider putting in stronger doors, smoke detectors, security system, outside lights.
 5. Tell friends and neighbours that your abuser no longer lives with you. Ask them to call the police if they see your abuser near your home or the children.
 6. Tell people who take care of your children the names of people who are allowed to pick them up. If you have an order protecting your children give their teachers and baby-sitters a copy of it.
 7. Tell someone at work about what has happened. Ask that person to screen your calls. If you have a protection order that includes where your work, consider giving your boss a copy of it and a picture of the abuser. Think about and practice a safety plan for your workplace. This should include going to and from work.
 8. Ensure bank accounts, mobile phone statements (all identifying information) go to a safe address where the abuser does not have access to the information.
 9. Not using the same shops or businesses that you did when you were with your abuser.
 10. Someone that you can call if you feel down. Call that person if you are thinking about going to a support group or workshop.
 11. Find a safe way to speak with your abuser if you must. Consider putting in an answering machine to filter calls.
 12. Go over your safety plan often.
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SPECIAL NOTE: Abusers try to control their victim's lives. When abusers feel a loss of control – like when victims try to leave them – the abuse often gets worse. Take special care when you leave. Keep being careful even after you have left.

Some Scriptural considerations

Malachi 3:16 and Prov. 13:2 God equates violence to faithlessness. Violence is antagonistic and therefore offensive to God.

Luke 3:14 “Do violence to no man” a clear scriptural injunction to those who have the power to oppress.

Psalm 11: 5. God’s “soul hates him that loves violence”

Malachi 3:15 God desires Godly offspring and that is not possible where violence is present.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 We are Gods holy temple – the violence of mankind cannot dwell with God’s spirit

Psalm 140 Violence and wickedness are considered to be evil. This Psalm also gives insight into the heart of a violent man, despite what he might be saying

Psalm 72:14 Also links violence, oppression and deceit..the heart of a person who uses violence

Ephesians 5:21 Each partner is to submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. Submission is an act of will, not a forced event

Matthew 22:37-39 Love your neighbour as yourself – Christ did not say love your neighbour at the expense of yourself, this also means not accepting abusive behaviours

Ephesians 4:15-16 This piece of Scripture describes a unity where each part is supportive of others, in love.

1 Corinthians 7:4-5. Although not specifically talking about abuse in this passage, it does give guidelines about what to do when couples separate. Devote oneself to prayer, this is true for all parties. Spiritual retreat may be necessary to find the mind and spirit of Christ

1 John 1:9 Confession of sins is necessary before God, if we are to seek forgiveness. There is a clear scriptural process. First confession, second repentance (which is a godly sorrow – see 2nd Corinthians 7:10), third restitution or reparation (Leviticus 6:4)

Proverbs 16:29. It is easy to believe a man of violence, he uses enticing words.
