

Responding to Domestic Violence What the Religious Community Can Do

Religious communities provide a safe haven for women and families in need. In addition, they exhort society to share compassion and comfort with those afflicted by the tragedy of domestic violence. Leaders of the religious community have identified actions to create a unified response to violence against women.

- **Become a Safe Place.** Make your church, temple, mosque or synagogue a safe place where victims of domestic violence can come for help. Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area. Publicize the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TDD).
- **Educate the Congregation.** Provide ways for members of the congregation to learn as much as they can about domestic and sexual violence. Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Sponsor educational seminars on violence against women in your congregation.
- **Speak Out.** Speak out about domestic violence and sexual assault from the pulpit. As a faith leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.
- **Lead by Example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.
- **Offer Space.** Offer meeting space for educational seminars or weekly support groups or serve as a supervised visitation site when parents need to safely visit their children.
- **Partner with Existing Resources.** Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects. Adopt a shelter for which your church, temple, mosque or synagogue provides material support, or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.
- **Prepare to Be a Resource.** Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to family violence and receive training from professionals in the fields of sexual and domestic violence.
- **Intervene.** If you suspect violence is occurring in a relationship, speak to each member of the couple separately. Help the victim plan for safety. Let both individuals know of the community resources available to assist them. Do not attempt couples counseling.

Sample DV Screening Questions

Intro: Because domestic violence/family abuse is common in many people's lives, we ask all prospective clients a few questions about it. Ask the person if that is okay. If she/he asks why or seems unsure, then let her/him know that you want victims of such violence/abuse to know that help is available (i.e., victims are not alone and the abuse is **NOT** their fault) and that you may be able to provide specialized assistance and/or offer referrals that may help victims to enhance their safety and/or cope with their situation.

Questions:

Are you in a relationship with a person who has ever physically hurt or threatened you?

Or, have you ever been kicked, shoved, pushed or had things thrown at you by your partner? And has your partner ever threatened your life or the life of someone close to you?

Has your partner ever physically harmed or threatened to physically harm your children?

Have you ever felt afraid of your partner (or afraid of your partner's anger)? Or, are you afraid to disagree with your partner?

Does your partner often criticize/insult you or put you down?

Does your partner withhold money for food, clothing, or other basic needs?

Does your partner make all or most decisions for you?

Does your partner control who you can see or talk to?

Does your partner control or restrict where you can go?

Does your partner try to isolate you or keep you from contacting your family members and/or friends?

Has your partner ever forced you to have sex or harmed you sexually?

Is it safe for you (and your children) to go home/stay at home with your partner?