



For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

When Responding to a Woman being abused

Goals:

1. SAFETY for the woman and children
 2. ACCOUNTABILITY for the abuser
 3. HEALING of individuals
 4. RECONCILIATION, if possible, of relationships
- OR
- MOURNING the loss of the relationship

What NOT TO DO when helping a woman who is being abused:

DON'T inform her abuser that she has confided in you about the abuse because it could endanger her life.

DON'T give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. DO NOT discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser.

DON'T ask her husband for his side of the story. This could put the woman in more danger.

DON'T recommend marriage counseling. With violence present in the relationship this compromises her safety and ability to be open and honest with the counselor.

DON'T minimize the danger to her. Realize that the situation is likely much more dangerous than she is disclosing. Abused women and their abusers tend to minimize the abuse for many reasons.

DON'T tell her what to do. She has been controlled much of her life. Give her information and support.

DON'T react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you. But, DO NOT react passively either. Let her know that you are concerned. Let her know that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and it is not her fault.

DON'T ask her what she did to provoke his violence. Provocation is never an excuse for violence.

DON'T blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, help her to see, for example, that not having the house clean or dinner on time is no excuse for his violence. She is not responsible for his behavior.

DON'T send her home with the advise that she should pray more, submit to her husband or be a better Christian wife. You may be sending her back into a situation where she could be killed.

DON'T encourage her to forgive him and take him back. Forgiveness follows genuine repentance with behavioral change.

DON'T encourage or allow her to be dependent on you. She needs help to understand that she is capable of making healthy, safe decisions on her own.

DON'T become emotionally or sexually involved with her.

What TO DO when helping a woman who is being abused:

DO believe her. Her description of the violence will be minimal because she needs to determine if she can trust you before she reveals more.

DO reassure her that this is not her fault. She doesn't deserve this treatment. It is not God's will for her.

DO tell her you are concerned for her safety as this is a very powerful statement. It will help her see the reality of the abuse.

DO give her referral information. You can refer her to battered woman's shelters or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). 1-800-787-3224 (TDD).

DO encourage her to use community resources such as the police and emergency rooms to document the abuse and perhaps put a stop to the abuse with her abuser's arrest.

DO refer her to a support group. Abigail Ministries at 440-281-7136 has Christian support groups for women in abusive relationships. All of the domestic violence shelters also have support groups available.

DO support and respect her choices. Even if she chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive. She is the expert on her relationship.

DO encourage her to think about a safety plan: If possible, she should set aside some money; make copies of important papers for her and her children; keep a change of clothes hidden or at a friend's house if she decides to go to a shelter. (She does not need to have clothes to go to a shelter. They will be provided for her and her children, if needed.) She should plan how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent. She should plan what to do about the children if they are at school, if they are sleeping, etc. (This is both practical and helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Safety planning is a process that is ongoing.)

DO protect her confidentiality.

DO help her with any religious concerns. Refer her to Christian resources that address her concerns about being in an abusive relationship or marriage. (Several books are listed in our Resources section.)

DO emphasize that the marriage covenant is being broken by the violence from her partner.

DO assure her of God's love and presence and your commitment to walk with her during this time.

DO help her see that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.

DO support her and help her to mourn the loss of her marriage if she decides to divorce.

DO pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength, courage and wisdom that she needs.

DO consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response.

Adapted from “Responding to Domestic Violence, Guidelines for Pastors” by FaithTrust Institute www.faithtrustinstitute.org