



Tip Sheet 3

Responding to Domestic Violence from a Leadership Perspective

Domestic and family violence is a sad reality of our fallen world, affecting even churches. As churches we have a duty of care - both moral and legal, towards those affected by domestic violence. Indeed, Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the weak and vulnerable.

► **Special position of Leadership**

When the church appoints a person into a position of leadership, they are saying, "We trust this person to represent God's church in this way." This privilege is not something to be taken lightly. If you are minister, elder, Bible-study leader or have another leadership role you are legally considered to be in a **position of authority within the church**. You have a responsibility to protect others from any abuse, and to notify the Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) should you have any concerns about those under your care.

Ministers, elders and church leaders should be alert to what constitutes domestic and family violence (see Tip Sheet 2), and teach congregations that abuse will not be tolerated.

You must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of **the church** and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You must not misuse or abuse your position of authority.

Please make yourself aware of the provisions in Breaking The Silence.¹ In particular, you should make yourself familiar with the section of the Breaking The Silence training workbook which pertains to domestic violence.

► **Leaders will:**

Recognise and Support

- Appoint from within the congregation several trustworthy people, which must include some women, whom members could approach for pastoral care, support and disclosure of domestic and or family violence. These people must be made known to the congregation in both written and verbal forms;
- Seek to contact a suspected victim as soon as possible, if he or she has not raised a concern, to clarify the situation;
- Listen carefully to the suspected victim (see Tip Sheet 4 for further information on how to do this);
- Recognise that victims may need time and support in order to change. This may mean providing information and support while they consider their options. Victims need to feel supported to make change according to their own individual situations and time frames. It is important to empower suspected victims given domestic violence seeks to disempower them;
- Not promise confidentiality in a conversation where the victim is at risk of harm (see Tip Sheet 4 for more information);
- Recognise that safety and support is paramount to victims and their children in a domestic and family violence situation;
- Ask the victims what can be done to make them feel safe and take steps to make them safe.

¹ Presbyterian Church NSW, Conduct Protocol Unit, Breaking the Silence Training Workbook, Online: <https://www.jerichoroad.org.au/breaking-the-silence/basic-training>



Report

- Determine if a report needs to be made to Community Services. The CPU can provide support in this. It is advisable to complete the Mandatory Reporters Guide located at: <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>;
- Encourage the person to report their concerns to the Police and support them in doing so;
- Contact the Police directly if someone is in danger, or they have knowledge which would assist authorities to apprehend or convict a person of a serious offence, or the incident involves either physical or sexual assault;
- It is not a leader's role to investigate the allegations or to decide who is telling the truth -perpetrators will often try and win leaders to "their side" (See Tip Sheet 7). Report all allegations of domestic violence to the appropriate external authorities and the CPU. The CPU will provide support and oversight in ensuring the church responds appropriately to abuse, and that allegations are dealt with under Breaking the Silence policy and church law.

Refer

- Encourage the victim to seek care and assistance of local and appropriate support agencies (If you are not aware of services in your area call NSW Domestic Violence line -1800 656 463);
- With the permission of the victim, inform appropriate leaders within the church so they can provide appropriate care and support (ensure support persons maintain victim confidentiality).

Review the appropriateness of recommending reconciliation

- If the offender is a member of the church then church discipline may be appropriate. Church discipline often aims for repentance and restoration of relationship but this restoration depends upon genuine repentance (for further information on how to identify genuine repentance see Tip Sheet 7). Care should be taken when an active Police investigation has commenced to ensure that any church discipline proceedings do not interfere with Police matters. The Conduct Protocol Unit can provide advice in these circumstances.
- No victim of domestic and family violence should be pressured to reconcile with, or restore a relationship with an offender. Although the Church values marriage extremely highly, the victim's emotional and physical safety is always paramount. Any deliberation of reconciliation needs to be done with the victim's safety as the highest priority, recognising that there will be cases where restoration of relationships is neither possible nor appropriate.

***"Our God is one who works for the oppressed and marginalised, He is one who will not tolerate injustice. As leaders in His church we serve as ones who must be attuned to this responsibility of care."
Akos Balogh (CEO, The Gospel Coalition Australia).***



► **For further information:**

Breaking the Silence Training Workbook

from <https://jerichoroad.org.au/breaking-the-silence/basic-training/>

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www.breakingthesilence.org.au

NSW Domestic Violence Line

Phone: **1800 656 463**

24/7 support and referrals for victims.

www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help

No to Violence: Men's referral service

Phone: **1300 766 491**

Information, referral and support for male perpetrators, male victims and for their relative and friends.

www.ntv.org.au

Child protection Helpline

Phone: **13 2111**