



## Tip Sheet 5

# How to Respond to Domestic and Family Violence as a friend

### ► **Your support can make a difference**

It can be really worrying when you suspect someone in your church is experiencing domestic abuse. (For a definition of domestic and family violence please see Tip Sheet 2). There is much you can do, however, to help your friend.

Sometimes in a church it is easy to think that someone else might look after a suspected victim/s. But research tells us this is not true. Sometimes people think “someone else will do that”, and so do nothing. In fact, there is a term for this – it is called the “bystander effect”.

The bystander effect occurs when the presence of others discourages an individual from intervening in an emergency.

So, it is important that as a church we are aware of this effect, and take steps to reach out and support victims, because what you do is important.

### ► **What you do is important**

*“I wasn’t sure who to tell, or who was safe to tell. I ended up speaking to a friend at church. She never judged me. She helped me to think about what to do and where to get support. It can’t have been easy on her, but it made all the difference.” – Sharon*

### ► **Recognising Domestic and Family Abuse**

(For a definition of Domestic and Family Abuse please see Tip Sheet 2)

#### **Signs that someone may be being abused**

Throughout this tip sheet we refer to the victim as ‘she’ for simplicity and because most victims are women. However, men can also be victims. If you notice some of the below signs in someone you know please check that they are okay, and seek further assistance from the CPU.

- She starts to see friends and family less and become withdrawn and isolated.
- Her partner may often criticise her or humiliate her in front of other people.
- Her partner takes advantage of (and misuses) Bible verses that speak of submission, as a way to control her (see Tip Sheet 1).
- Her partner often insists on making all the decisions (for example, her partner controls all the money, tells her who she can see and what she can do).
- She talks about relationship difficulties, and her partner’s ‘jealousy’, ‘bad temper’ or ‘possessiveness’.
- She reports that her partner uses passive aggression to control or manipulate her.



- She becomes anxious, depressed, unusually withdrawn or confused.
- She becomes overly anxious about pleasing her partner.
- She often seems “on edge”: fearful and/or flighty.
- She often has physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc). She makes excuses (I fell over the kids skateboard etc ) for the injuries in order to conceal the truth.
- She reports that her partner pressures or forces her to do sexual things.
- Her children seem afraid of her partner, have behaviour problems, or are very withdrawn or anxious.
- She is reluctant to leave her children with her partner.
- If she has left the relationship, her partner constantly calls her, harasses her, follows her, or stalks her.

### What to do

- If you notice some of the above signs in someone you know, please check that they are okay. Perhaps invite your friend to your home for a “cuppa” or other neutral place (e.g. café) when you can be alone with them and in a context where they feel they are supported and safe. Do not do it in their home where the suspected domestic abuser may be present.
- If a victim discloses abuse, then listen, listen, listen, and do not add anything. Don’t say much - just use active listening skills (‘yes’, ‘mmm’, ‘ok’ ‘ahh’ etc. ) until the person finishes telling their story. Seek to use open body language which encourages others to feel safe.
- Respond with concern and sympathy.
- A victim is likely to ask you to ensure the confidentiality of their story before talking about their abuse. You can’t promise absolute confidentiality. Let them know that you are concerned and want to hear what they have to say, but that if they or their children are at risk of harm, you have a duty of care and are mandated to report to relevant authorities, but will ensure their privacy as much as possible.
- Ensure their safety-ask what can be done to make them feel safe and follow through. Tell your minister (and the police if their safety is at risk) and let the authorities follow legal and mandatory processes.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Let them know that you will continue to support and befriend them.
- Pray for them, and their families. Pray for the Police and other support services.

If a friend/church member or child has not disclosed violence in the home but you are **concerned that abuse may be occurring**, please raise your concerns with your Breaking The Silence representative or the church leadership.



### And remember to look after yourself...

As a friend it can be very distressing to have someone close to you who you think may be a victim of domestic violence. It's important to debrief. That is, find some way to verbally and emotionally unload. Tell a trusted friend about your feelings. You can share how the situation is impacting you without disclosing the name of your friend. If you are involved in supporting a victim in an ongoing fashion – seek to debrief regularly.

If you are concerned about someone in your church community, please let your minister know and or contact the CPU-Conduct Protocol Unit.

Should you require further support, please contact Jericho Road (<https://jerichoroad.org.au/>). There are counselling services that can be of assistance and the Presbyterian Church wants to support you.

### ► Further resources:

#### **Jericho Road**

Justine Jenner

Phone: **1800 818 133**

Email: [jjenner@jerichoroad.org.au](mailto:jjenner@jerichoroad.org.au)

<https://jerichoroad.org.au/counselling>

#### **Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU), Presbyterian Church of NSW**

Jon Flood

Phone: **02 9690 9325**

Email: [jflood@pcnsw.org.au](mailto:jflood@pcnsw.org.au)

[www.breakingthesilence.org.au](http://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](http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help)