

# Anglican Diocese of Sydney

## *Responding to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Good Practice Guidelines*

### ***A Word from the Archbishop***

God is love. The Bible reveals that God exists as a fellowship of love among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that he is a God who shares his love with all people. As the recipients of his love, he has called us to love him in return, with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. God has also designed marriage as an expression of the covenant love between one man and one woman, and the proper sphere for the expression of love in sexual intimacy, and so that children might be born and brought up in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. Moreover, as the Scriptures remind us, marriage signifies and represents the union of Christ and his Church.

Such a holy union is worthy of great honour and respect, especially by the husband and the wife, but also by society as a whole. As the love of God has joined us to himself, so the Bible instructs husbands to love their wives and wives to love their husbands. God's word condemns unloving behaviour, and especially the misuse of power to control or exploit others. Abuse in all its forms is explicitly forbidden, as it is contrary to the nature of God and the love that he demands of us all. Yet sadly, not all husbands love their wives as Christ loved the Church, nor do all wives love their husbands as they should.

For these reasons, we are concerned for relationships where domestic abuse or family violence is present. As Sydney Anglican Churches, we wish to address this issue honestly and transparently and we wish to extend our compassion, care and assistance to those whose safety is at risk because of domestic abuse. This document provides a framework and practical encouragement in primary prevention of such abuse. I am especially grateful to the many women and men, especially survivors, who have generously assisted in the formulation of these guidelines. Their contribution has been invaluable. We are committed to continuing to listen and learn from their experience.

The recommendations made in this document include a framework for providing specialist support services which can be points of referral to ensure safety and protection for all. It also suggests how we might be better equipped and resourced in identifying and supporting victims of abuse in order to provide the pastoral care that is both appropriate and necessary.

This is a personally and spiritually demanding area with which to engage. Nevertheless, we are committed to doing so, so that we are equipped to respond to people in need of informed care and assistance, and so that we might live as children of light, seeking to honour Christ as Lord and Saviour in every community, especially the family.

KANISHKA RAFFEL  
**Archbishop of Sydney**

### ***Aim***

This document sets out the Domestic Abuse Policy and Good Practice Guidelines of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, as evidence and expression of the Church's commitment to address and respond effectively to domestic abuse both within its own community and in the wider society.

The aim of this policy and these guidelines is to inform, direct and equip people working at a local level so that they can offer the most appropriate care in circumstances of domestic abuse.

This includes not only those who are called upon by victims or alleged or known perpetrators to hear their story, but also those in pastoral ministries who have a responsibility (alongside all church members) to build communities that prevent domestic abuse and actively seek to respond when they identify concerns.

### ***Scope***

This policy applies to all parishes of the Diocese of Sydney, their clergy and church workers. It is also commended to all Anglican organisations associated with the Diocese of Sydney for their adoption as far as is applicable in their contexts.

It should be read in conjunction with Faithfulness in Service, our national Anglican code of conduct for clergy and church workers, as adopted by the Diocese of Sydney.

### ***Outline***

- Section 1 outlines the Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse (the policy).
- Section 2 outlines the Good Practice Guidelines (guidelines) for responding to domestic abuse.

This is supported by 11 Appendices that provide reference material and templates on Good Practice. It is intended that links to additional resources that cover this subject from other perspectives will be published at a later date.

### ***Where to find the Policy and Guidelines (with Appendices)***

The Policy and Guidelines (with appendices) will be distributed via email:

- to all parish councils and organisations in the Diocese of Sydney, and
- to all licensed clergy and authorised lay ministers licensed in the Diocese of Sydney.

The most up-to-date version of the Policy and Guidelines will be available on the Safe Ministry website of the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (**ODSM**). Hard copies of the policy and associated documents can be supplied via the ODSM, on request.

### ***On Terminology***

We have chosen to use the expression **domestic abuse** rather than domestic violence in order to avoid the common misapprehension that only physical violence counts as domestic abuse. We make exceptions when quoting other literature, and when referring to official titles and terminology in common use in other professional circles, e.g., we sometimes refer to "domestic violence services".

We have also chosen to refer to **victims** of domestic abuse, especially in the immediate context of responding to concerns, and the ongoing impact of pain and trauma. But we acknowledge that 'survivor' is also common terminology, preferred by many, since those experiencing domestic abuse show great resilience even just to stay alive in seeking to protect themselves and their loved ones. Therefore, where appropriate to the context, we will sometimes also refer to survivors.

### ***POLICY DATE***

This policy was first passed by the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney in October 2018, and was last revised by the Synod in September 2023.

## *Section 1*

# *Sydney Anglican Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse*

# Domestic Abuse Flowchart

At any time in this process you can seek advice from a domestic violence professional. Within 48 hours of a disclosure you should debrief with such a professional.

## A person discloses domestic abuse:

### RESPECT & LISTEN

- Listen with acceptance
- Don't ask for proof
- Assure the victim it's not their fault
- Be honest about your ability to help
- Reassure normal confidentiality will be maintained, but explain its limits

Is there an immediate risk of harm?

Yes

### SAFETY FIRST

- Discuss with the victim, but call the Police **000**
- Seek advice from the NSW Domestic Violence Line **1800 656 463**

No

Are there children involved?

Yes

### CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

- Call the Child Protection Helpline **132 111**
- Remember that witnessing domestic abuse harms children & may be reportable

No

Is the victim or accused in a ministry family?

Yes

### KEEP THE SAFE MINISTRY OFFICE INFORMED

Call the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry **9265 1604**

No

Has further help been requested?

Yes

No

### ACTION

- Advise that any intervention needs care and can heighten risk.
- Be guided by what the victim wants
- Outline realistic options: Police, AVDOs, DV services, safety planning, GP, counsellor, refuge; explore other supports like friends.
- Supply appropriate information, phone numbers, websites, Daisy app (be careful of storage).
- Encourage the victim to consult a service, or make a referral on their behalf.
- Don't contact perpetrator without proper advice
- Record what was disclosed and safety concerns, note your actions, and from whom you received advice. Date the record and keep it confidential.

### NO FORMAL ACTION

- Your time was well spent. A victim knows they have been believed, is not in the wrong, and can return to you for further help.
- You can't make a victim of domestic abuse take any action. The most you may be able to do is listen and provide information (note earlier obligations regarding immediate danger or if children are involved).
- You may be able to offer other chances to meet and talk.
- You may be able to suggest referring more generally to a GP, psychologist or counsellor.
- You could supply appropriate information, phone numbers such as 1800 RESPECT, websites, Daisy app (be careful of storage).
- Record what was disclosed and your safety concerns, note your actions and/or advice. Date the record and keep it confidential.

# Domestic Abuse – key telephone numbers and websites for help

AGENCY	CONTACT DETAILS
<p><b>1800 Respect national helpline</b> 24 hour national number for sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling and advice.</p>	<p><b>1800 737 732</b> <b>1800respect.org.au</b></p>
<p><b>Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser</b> Advice to clergy and lay ministers in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney especially for domestic abuse in a church-related setting.</p>	<p><b>0438 826 556</b> (business hours)</p>
<p><b>Daisy App</b> The Daisy App connects people who may experience violence or abuse to support services in their local area. It was developed by 1800RESPECT and is free to use and download. It includes some safety features to help protect the privacy of people using it.</p>	<p><b>Free to download from iPhone App Store &amp; Android Google Play</b></p>
<p><b>Child Protection Helpline</b> Contact this helpline if you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.</p>	<p><b>132 111</b> <b>reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg</b></p>
<p><b>Lifeline</b> 24 hour telephone crisis line.</p>	<p><b>131 114</b> <b>www.lifeline.org.au/get-help</b></p>
<p><b>NSW Domestic Violence Line</b> 24 hour number for comprehensive information and referrals to nearby support services, for all categories of domestic violence.</p>	<p><b>1800 65 64 63</b> <b>domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help</b></p>
<p><b>NSW Rape Crisis Centre</b> Counselling service for anyone in NSW – men and women – who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault.</p>	<p><b>1800 424 017</b> <b>www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</b></p>
<p><b>Law Access NSW</b> Free government telephone service that provides legal information, referral and advice for people who have a legal problem in NSW.</p>	<p><b>1300 888 529</b> <b>lawaccess.nsw.gov.au</b></p>
<p><b>Legal Aid NSW</b> Legal Aid's Domestic Violence Unit provides legal advice, referral and representation, as well as social support, to eligible persons,</p>	<p><b>02 9219 5000</b> <b>legalaid.nsw.gov.au</b></p>
<p><b>No To Violence: Men's Referral Service</b> Telephone counselling, information and referral service for men using violence in families, male victims, and for their friends or relatives.</p>	<p><b>1300 766 491</b> <b>ntv.org.au</b></p>
<p><b>Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (ODSM)</b> Advice about abuse involving clergy or church workers in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.</p>	<p><b>9265 1604</b> <b>safeministry.org.au</b></p>

## **SECTION 1:**

# **Sydney Anglican Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse**

## **1.1 We acknowledge domestic abuse exists and is wrong**

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- 1.1.1 We acknowledge, with grief, that domestic abuse is a significant problem, not only within the community, but also inside the Church.
- 1.1.2 All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong. Perpetrators must stop.
- 1.1.3 **Domestic abuse** involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.
- 1.1.4 The primary focus of this Policy is abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. However, domestic abuse can occur between siblings, towards older people, and between other people sharing a home.
- 1.1.5 Domestic abuse has many negative impacts on any children in the family – whether or not a child sees or hears the abuse. Such impacts may include physical and emotional harm, ongoing trauma, educational and social disruption, and compromised relationships with both parents. As such it should be seen as a parenting choice by the perpetrator. Responding to any abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.
- 1.1.6 Sometimes both spouses can be victims of abuse and perpetrate abuse. Typically one spouse is the primary perpetrator of a pattern of abusive behaviour and it is likely that abuse perpetrated by the other spouse is violent resistance in order to protect oneself or others.

## **1.2 We are committed to safe places**

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The Anglican Diocese of Sydney is committed to promoting and supporting safer environments that:

- 1.2.1 Recognise equality between all people, including husbands and wives.
- 1.2.2 Promote a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility and respect in marriages, families and congregations.
- 1.2.3 Ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse.
- 1.2.4 Strive to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse.
- 1.2.5 Refuse to condone any form of abuse.
- 1.2.6 Enable concerns to be raised and responded to appropriately and consistently.

## **1.3 We uphold Faithfulness in Service**

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We uphold *Faithfulness in Service* as our diocesan code of conduct for clergy and church workers, specifically its affirmations in section 6:

- 1.3.1 Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and in the community. In essence, abuse is one person's misuse of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one-off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour (6.2).
- 1.3.2 It is important for clergy and church workers to be good citizens and to obey the laws of the community, except where those laws conflict with Christian convictions (6.4).
- 1.3.3 You are not to abuse your spouse, children or other members of your family (6.6).

## 1.4 Domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response

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- 1.4.1 Working in partnership with vulnerable adults and children, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse.
- 1.4.2 Clergy and lay ministers do not typically have professional expertise in the area of domestic abuse. They need to obtain advice from those with professional expertise when faced with situations of domestic abuse, as advised by *Faithfulness in Service* (4.12).
- 1.4.3 Clergy should ensure the provision of training about domestic abuse, by appropriately qualified professionals or programs, for those in leadership positions, safe ministry roles and other pastoral roles. This should include periodic 'refresher' training.
- 1.4.4 Our response should include attention to primary prevention. This may address a range of factors, such as rigid gender stereotypes, attitudes of male entitlement, general disrespect for women, and other social or cultural factors, which may allow individual misconduct to flourish.
- 1.4.5 Where mistakes in caring for people in difficult situations are made, an apology should be offered and advice sought on how to address any harm caused.

## 1.5 We respect people who come to us for help

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Our churches are to be places of safety. We shall respond to domestic abuse by:

- 1.5.1 Valuing, respecting and listening to victims of domestic abuse.
- 1.5.2 Valuing, respecting and listening to alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- 1.5.3 Appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two.
- 1.5.4 Refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

## 1.6 We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements

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In our words and public statements, we ought to:

- 1.6.1 **Clearly teach that domestic abuse is wrong** and that the Bible should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness.
- 1.6.2 Clearly teach that the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse.
- 1.6.3 Clearly teach that the Bible encourages victims to seek safety, that separation for such reason is an appropriate step to take, that divorce may properly be a way of protecting victims

in such tragic situations.

- 1.6.4 Oppose false teaching about these matters.
- 1.6.5 Raise awareness of domestic violence agencies, support services, crisis accommodation, resources and expertise.

### 1.7 We ensure safety first

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- 1.7.1 **Safety First** – Ensure that those who are experiencing domestic abuse can find safety and informed help as a first priority and can continue to stay safe.
- 1.7.2 **Take it Seriously** – Ensure that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed; also noting that a perpetrator may deliberately undermine a victim about to disclose abuse, by making their own allegation first.
- 1.7.3 **Get help from outside authorities** – Work with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community.
- 1.7.4 **Keep it confidential** – Respect the need for confidentiality within the bounds of good Safe Ministry practice, noting that reporting requirements exist where there is an immediate danger, where a child is at risk of serious harm or where the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender. Where a report is required, this should first be discussed with the victim wherever possible.
- 1.7.5 **Challenge with Care** – Carefully challenge inappropriate behaviour, but only after receiving professional advice, and only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk.

### 1.8 We offer pastoral support to those in our care

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- 1.8.1 **Offer informed care** – Ensure that informed and appropriate pastoral care and professional help is offered to any adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse.
- 1.8.2 **Be guided by the victim** – It is never appropriate to pressure any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender. Allow victims to set the pace.
- 1.8.3 **Understand that reconciliation comes with conditions** – Any possibility of reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon the genuine repentance and reformation of the offender. A victim may choose not to reconcile where they do not feel safe.
- 1.8.4 **Coordinate the care** – Be familiar with appropriate pastoral care relationships for both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse; identify the need for any specialist support and help coordinate its provision; any children involved should be offered separate and independent support.
- 1.8.5 **Recognise cultural differences** – Respond in a culturally sensitive way and understand how cultural norms and values may affect victims or can contribute to abuse being perpetuated.
- 1.8.6 **Ensure equal access to care** – Work to ensure that clergy, clergy spouses, lay ministers and their spouses all have the same access to support and resources as others who experience domestic abuse.

## 1.9 Thinking Theologically – 10 Statements about Domestic Abuse

- 1.9.1 All human beings, both male and female, are created equal in the image of God, and are precious to him. As such their value and dignity rightly commands our respect and protection and should be upheld by all (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 82:3-4; Matthew 22:37-40).
- 1.9.2 Marriage is given by God as a good part of his creation for human wellbeing and should be honoured by all. It is intended as a lifelong union of a man and a woman. Healthy Christian relationships are characterised by servanthood and sacrifice, supremely modeled by Jesus Christ. Within a marriage relationship both husband and wife are to respond to one another by building each other up, which includes mutual love, nurture and respect. Any attempt to justify abusive behaviour by the use of passages in the Bible which speak of headship and submission is intolerable (Mark 10:42-45; Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 13:4).
- 1.9.3 The Bible rejects all abuse, whether physical, verbal, or otherwise expressed from one person towards another and always condemns the misuse of power to control or exploit others. Therefore domestic abuse is evil. Such sin is deceptive in its power and damaging in its effects (Psalm 7; Galatians 5:19-26; 2 Timothy 3:2-3).
- 1.9.4 When domestic abuse in marriage is reported, then separation of the spouses for the sake of the safety of a victim and any children is an appropriate step to be taken and should never be discouraged (Proverbs 27:12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11).
- 1.9.5 Victims of domestic abuse should be encouraged to seek help from the Police, from child protection authorities and other relevant domestic violence services. Church leaders who become aware of situations of domestic abuse should always ensure they meet their mandatory reporting obligations, and obtain professional advice (Romans 13:1-5).
- 1.9.6 When a wife or husband separates for the sake of their safety (or that of their children), such action should not mean the person is deemed to have deserted the marriage or have abandoned their responsibilities as a parent even though they may have physically left the common home. Church leaders should welcome and offer ongoing support to those who have separated for such reasons (Psalm 82:3-4).
- 1.9.7 The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ flows from both justice and love. It calls for repentance and offers forgiveness. When domestic abuse has been indicated as a factor in separation, the perpetrator must be called upon to repent and take full responsibility for their actions. Genuine repentance is demonstrated over time and includes the person gaining an understanding of what led them to behave in an abusive manner, what was wrong with their behaviour, and how it has impacted the victim. (Luke 3:8-14; Romans 12:9; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11). True reformation in such cases takes considerable effort on the part of the perpetrator, may take many years, and, for some, may never be achieved.
- 1.9.8 Forgiveness is often an important part of a victim's healing journey. However any attempts made at reconciliation should only proceed slowly and cautiously, and after consultation with experienced domestic violence services. Care should be taken to manage the risks of further traumatising the victim. The caution of a victim in regard to being reconciled to an offender is appropriate and should not be mistaken for 'unwillingness' to forgive or be reconciled.
- 1.9.9 The grace of the gospel extends to all sinners. Church leaders have an obligation to provide support, pastoral accountability and supervision to any person who remains within their church communities known to have been a perpetrator of domestic abuse. However such support should only be given in a manner that does not condone the abuse nor compromise the safety or pastoral care of victims of domestic abuse.
- 1.9.10 Christians with a genuine desire to be faithful to Scripture hold different views on the question of when divorce is appropriate or remarriage may be possible. However such differences should not impact a Christian's support for a victim of domestic abuse separating from their spouse for the sake of safety. For a discussion of when divorce, and remarriage, might be appropriate actions in the circumstances of domestic abuse please see Appendix 10, which references the 2019 Doctrine Commission report entitled, "The Implications of Domestic

Abuse for Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage 18/18 The nature of marriage” and a “Letter to Members of Synod Regarding Domestic Abuse and Remarriage” from the Archbishop at the time, the Most Reverend Glenn Davies.

## **1.10 What do you need to do in your church?**

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When a case of domestic abuse is reported in a parish or organisation of the Diocese of Sydney, it is right to act in accordance with the following priorities:

**Safety first** – for the victim(s)

**Support and Empowerment** – for the victim(s)

**Healing** – for the victim(s)

**Accountability** – for the abuser

**Repentance, reformation and healing** – for the abuser

**Define and clarify** the state of the relationship

- 1.10.1 A victim’s physical, emotional and spiritual safety must be our primary and ongoing concern. Other matters above may be considered according to the priorities suggested, although inevitably some stages may overlap or need to be revisited.
- 1.10.2 Further advice is available in our detailed **Good Practice Guidelines**, along with extensive information in the series of attached **Appendices**. All clergy and church workers should familiarise themselves with these guidelines.
- 1.10.3 We have also prepared a **Domestic Abuse Response Flow Chart** with the appropriate processes to follow when you become aware of an incident of domestic abuse. On the page following the flow chart we also list a number of key telephone numbers and websites, along with an app for smart phones and tablets.

## **1.11 Key steps for prevention and care**

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- 1.11.1 Clergy and church workers should cooperate with statutory authorities such as the Police, child protection services and domestic violence services.
- 1.11.2 Parish Councils should consider adopting and publishing a local domestic abuse policy (see Appendix 7 for the recommended parish version of the above policy).
- 1.11.3 Consider displaying the church’s domestic abuse policy statement in an appropriate place alongside information about how to access advice and support from the Police, domestic violence helplines and diocesan services.
- 1.11.4 Clergy and Parish Councils should consider appointing specified domestic abuse contact person(s) within the local church, especially where the church only has male clergy or church workers.
- 1.11.5 Parish Councils should consider developing their own support towards local services for victims, such as budgeting funds for victims fleeing abuse or towards support of a local women’s refuge (keeping the location secret), or by facilitating a local victims/survivors’ support group.
- 1.11.6 Clergy and church workers should follow diocesan procedures for responding to concerns about domestic abuse (see Flowchart and Good Practice Guidelines – if there is any doubt as to what action to take, refer to the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry or the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser (see ‘Domestic Abuse – key telephone numbers and websites for help’).

- 1.11.7 Clergy should ensure the training, by appropriately qualified professionals or programs, of those in leadership positions, safe ministry roles and other pastoral roles about domestic abuse; such training should address primary prevention as well as pastoral responses.
- 1.11.8 Clergy should ensure domestic abuse is addressed in appropriate contexts such as preaching, Bible studies, prayers and church publications, as well as in marriage preparation, youth groups and ministry training activities.
- 1.11.9 In such teaching, clergy should consider how to prevent convictions regarding biblical teachings, on matters like the marriage covenant, gender relationships, forgiveness and sacrificial love, being distorted or used to justify domestic abuse.

*Section 2:*  
*Addressing Domestic Abuse:*  
*Good Practice Guidelines*

## **SECTION 2:**

# **Addressing Domestic Abuse: Good Practice Guidelines**

## **Preamble**

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For the purposes of these Guidelines, **domestic abuse** is defined as a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.

A more extensive definition of the various forms which abuse can take is found in Appendix 1.

Anglicare's Family and Domestic Violence Advisor for Sydney Anglicans comments:

*The primary focus in responding to those experiencing domestic abuse typically involves care, crisis intervention, safety planning for the victim, and empowering a survivor to make the best choices for ongoing personal safety and for any children. In addition, ongoing support and pastoral care is likely to be needed over an extended period to support healing and recovery.*

*At all times our responses should clearly state that victims and survivors are not the cause of the abuse they are suffering, that they are not to blame for a perpetrator's behaviour, that God sees them and knows their suffering, and wants them to find safety and healing.*

*In such cases, teaching and pastoral care should recognise that separation from the spouse may well be the survivor's best choice and will be supported.*

*Ministry staff need to be equipped to provide this ongoing support. They should be aware when teaching on topics such as marriage, forgiveness, suffering or reconciliation, that the needs of domestic abuse survivors and their trauma should be addressed.*

## **2.1 How to respond to victims**

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*When you haven't personally experienced abuse, it's easy to listen with an attitude of assessing whether what is being reported is really abuse. 'Would I find that abusive? Doesn't everyone argue sometimes?' However, when a person has repeatedly been victimised and feels powerless, our response always needs to be to offer support, to listen and give those people the respect of being believed.*

- Clinical psychologist and clergy wife

The guidance below aims to assist you in responding to people who disclose domestic abuse.

**2.1.1 Acknowledge your limitations** – Those who respond to news of domestic abuse often feel ill-equipped. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between other types of marital dysfunction and domestic abuse, or it may be that concerns about abuse only emerge gradually. Added complicating factors may include health issues or cultural and social background. Clergy and church workers should acknowledge their professional limitations, and should consult the ODSM, the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or experienced domestic violence services for advice.

**2.1.2 Safety first** – The safety of victims and any children is paramount. All actions should carefully consider the risk to their, and your, safety. Making telephone calls, possessing information about support services for domestic abuse, the use of texts and emails, and accessing relevant websites all create potential risks for those experiencing abuse.

- 2.1.3 **Be informed** – For information on domestic abuse, its prevalence and effects, and how to recognise both victims and alleged perpetrators, please see Appendix 3. This also briefly notes other particular categories of domestic abuse.

## **2.2 Initial Disclosure**

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If a victim discloses or otherwise hints at abuse, the following factors are important.

- 2.2.1 **Ask after them** – If a victim hints at abuse, they may want you to ask how they are doing. Your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help, e.g. 'How are things at home?' and if it becomes appropriate, 'Is anyone hurting you?' or 'Do you ever feel afraid?'.  
2.2.2 **Take time to listen** – Take plenty of time to listen with acceptance to what they say. Proof of abuse is not required in an initial disclosure and the matter does not need to be clarified completely in one sitting. If they sense disbelief, they may be discouraged from speaking again.  
2.2.3 **Choose the place wisely** – If it is at all possible, speak with the victim in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again, keeping in mind that someone in distress may start talking anywhere. As is the case in other ministry situations, when speaking with a woman, male clergy should consider inviting her to bring a support person, or should conduct the discussion where there are others in the general vicinity.  
2.2.4 **The limits of confidentiality** – Make it clear that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, depending on the nature of what is disclosed. For example, further disclosure may be needed when someone is being hurt or in serious danger, a serious criminal offence has been committed, or when children are involved (see below).

## **2.3 Immediate action**

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- 2.3.1 **Dial 000** if you are witnessing a violent incident or if the person needs medical care.  
2.3.2 **Call the Police** if the victim is in immediate danger. Also seek advice from the NSW Domestic Violence Line **1800 656 463**. Be aware that intervention may heighten risk, but it is important to explore how to ensure that people are safe. The Police and staff of the NSW Domestic Violence Line are trained to be careful and sensitive in such situations.  
2.3.3 **Are children involved?** If children are involved and there is a risk of significant harm, a referral to the child protection authorities needs to be made, in addition to calling the Police, and if possible, encourage the victim to make the referral themselves, perhaps supporting them through the process. The victim can be reassured that a referral does not automatically mean that children will be removed from the situation.  
2.3.4 **Is a clergy person or church worker involved?** If the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender, the ODSM will also need to be informed.  
2.3.5 **Is there a threat of self harm?** Any threat to self-harm must be taken seriously as threats of self-harm made by a perpetrator of domestic abuse to their victim are usually part of their controlling and manipulative behaviour. If the victim reports this to you, and you believe there is a risk of serious harm, you should attempt, if possible, to get medical help for the alleged perpetrator or contact the police to request a welfare check for the person.  
2.3.6 **Keep their confidence** – Remember that the confidentiality of the victim must be maintained. Do not contact the alleged perpetrator at this stage without seeking professional advice.

## 2.4 Your response to the disclosure

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- 2.4.1 **You are brave** – Acknowledge the victim’s strength, and the courage it takes both to have endured abuse and now to talk about it.
- 2.4.2 **Here are some options** – Ensure the victim is aware of the choices available to them and support them in deciding on the next steps, unless there is imminent risk of physical harm or mandatory reporting obligations.
- 2.4.3 **Here is where to find help** – Encourage them to seek professional help from a local domestic violence service who will be able to offer practical safety planning advice, even if they do not want to leave their home. In addition, give information about specialist helplines and websites, as required. (See Flow Chart and the page that follows it.)
- 2.4.4 **Are you in danger?** – Express concern for their safety and immediate welfare. Do they have somewhere to stay?
- 2.4.5 **Are children in danger?** – Ask about the children and their safety and welfare. You may need to persuade them to report any concerns to the child protection authorities. You have no option but to do so if you have received information that a child is at serious risk of harm.
- 2.4.6 **Do you have support?** – Be sensitive to people’s backgrounds and cultures (including Indigeneity). Ask how social and cultural issues may affect them. Be aware that disability, mental illness, or other health conditions can create extra vulnerability. Ask them about what support is safely available to them from friends and family. Be ready to point to external sources of assistance. For example, where a victim has English as a Second Language, generally use trained interpreters, rather than relatives.
- 2.4.7 **Take care of yourself** – Encourage them to focus on their own needs, something they may not have been able to do since the abuse began but which is critical in helping them to change their situation.
- 2.4.8 **It’s not your fault** – Reassure them that whatever the circumstances, abuse is not justified and not their fault.
- 2.4.9 **How can our church best help you?** – Ask them what they want from you and the parish. Offer help which is in response to their needs and preferences and which lets them keep in control, as much as possible. This is important for those experiencing trauma.
- 2.4.10 **Let’s talk again** – There is a lot to take in an initial conversation, so encourage them that they can come back and ask more questions and can take time to consider the offers of help that have been made. Reassure them that the help will be provided with their permission and at their preferred speed.

## 2.5 Record keeping and follow up re. victims

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Please also see the guidance from *Faithfulness in Service* paragraphs 4.36 and 4.37 (noted in Appendix 6) which address the need to keep notes of individual pastoral activity, and also to be aware of relevant privacy legislation.

- 2.5.1 **What’s the best way to contact you?** – Check if it is all right to contact the victim at home before doing so. Establish their preferred means of contact, and make sure that this is safe.
- 2.5.2 **Keep it confidential** – Keep information confidential and, as a general rule, only share it where appropriate and with informed consent of the victim.
- 2.5.3 **Tell authorities when appropriate and keep a record** – In some circumstances you will be required to share information with statutory authorities, for example, where the victim or

others may be at risk. Always keep a record of your decision and the reasons why you decided to share (or not). If in doubt, contact the ODSM, the Police or the child protection authorities.

- 2.5.4 **Take notes** – It is recommended that you make a brief objective note of dates, facts and context of what you have been told, but keep your opinions separate. This should be kept in strict confidence but could be useful in any future prosecution.
- 2.5.5 **First 48 hours – Within 48 hours of the disclosure you ought to share the incident with someone who is qualified** in the area of domestic abuse, who can support you and help you to think through the issues. This may be a Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or via the 1800 RESPECT national domestic violence helpline.
- 2.5.6 **Review church safety** – If the alleged perpetrator is in the same church as the victim, you will need to review the safety issues. There may need to be a risk assessment and memorandum of understanding (MOU) put in place. For example, either an ADVO or a pastoral assessment may require that an alleged perpetrator should neither physically attend the same congregation nor digitally belong to the same church Facebook group as the victim. Clergy and church workers should take the initiative in monitoring any MOU and/or ADVO that they are aware of and not leave reports about possible breaches solely for the victim. You are advised to consult with the ODSM.
- 2.5.7 **Safety plan with a professional** – Victim safety planning should be conducted by a professional, ideally from a domestic violence service or the Police. But there may be an occasion when a victim wishes to discuss their safety with you. You should seek advice before entering into detailed safety planning discussions with the victim. However, Appendix 7 gives an example of a safety planning format that normally guides such planning. Careful consideration should be given to where and how such information is provided and kept by the victim, to avoid the alleged perpetrator learning the details of the plan.
- 2.5.8 **When to go to the ODSM** – If the alleged perpetrator is a clergy person or church worker you must report this to the ODSM. There are a range of options available to people who contact the ODSM - not only pursuing a formal complaint about misconduct. Victims experiencing abuse can be afraid to approach the ODSM because they are frightened of having matters taken out of their hands. This is rarely the case, and the ODSM places a high priority on victim safety and choice, and collaborates with victims to work out what is the best way forward for them (and any children).
- 2.5.9 **Extreme discretion needed – Do not give information about the victim’s whereabouts, contact details or personal circumstances to the alleged perpetrator or to others who might pass information on to the alleged perpetrator.** Do not discuss with the parish council or any other members of a congregation or anyone who might inadvertently pass information on to the perpetrator. However, in a larger church setting with a larger pastoral staff team, some discussion and documentation may be required about whom else is brought into the confidentiality circle of the victim and their disclosure. It may be necessary to inform other staff in the safety planning around church practices if the perpetrator is also part of the church but sensitivity and great care needs to be had in this area. Advice from the ODSM will be beneficial in this context.
- 2.5.10 **Offer practical help** – When victims are leaving a controlling perpetrator, they often have to leave with nothing and have access to very limited financial support. Consider how your church can provide practical support for victims. Provide information about the assistance that agencies like Anglicare can supply.

## **2.6 Responding to alleged or known perpetrators**

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Every church has an important role to play in challenging inappropriate behaviour among its members. This can, however, lead to increased risks for both the victim and the person who

challenges an alleged or known perpetrator. This needs to be done in an extremely careful way that does not place a victim at increased risk.

Anglicare's Family and Domestic Violence Advisor for Sydney Anglicans comments:

*It is crucial to understand that a perpetrator's abusive behaviour is sinful, and that true repentance and behaviour change will likely involve long-term and challenging work. Clergy, church workers and church members ought not be persuaded by a perpetrator that 'everything is OK' because there is an apology or expression of regret. Being alert to perpetrators' attempts to persuade others, particularly those in ministry or positions of influence, to collude with their perspective is a vital part of keeping survivors safe. Even the most experienced Men's Behaviour Change Program workers find managing the issue of collusion to be a challenge.*

Consider the following factors when responding to perpetrators.

- 2.6.1 **The victim comes first** – Ensure that the victim is at the highest priority in terms of safety and wellbeing, and that any action is centred on the victim. Action here includes giving the victim choice in what the next steps are and the timing of those steps unless there is imminent risk of physical harm or mandatory reporting obligations.
- 2.6.2 **Be alert** – Understand the possibility that you are being or may have been groomed or enlisted by a perpetrator towards their point of view.
- 2.6.3 **Strength in numbers** – If meeting an alleged perpetrator, ensure that it is in a public place, and that there are others in the meeting.
- 2.6.4 **Be safe** – Maintain an awareness of the danger that the alleged perpetrator may pose to you, and ensuring that you and others are safe.
- 2.6.5 **First 48 hours – Within 48 hours of the disclosure you ought to share the incident with someone who is qualified** in the area of domestic abuse, who can support you and help you to think through the issues. This may be a Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or via the 1800 RESPECT national domestic violence helpline.
- 2.6.6 **Get help** – If the alleged perpetrator threatens self-harm while talking with you, then they may require urgent support. Dial 000 if you are witnessing a violent incident or if the person needs urgent medical care. Otherwise you could refer them to their GP, or Mental Health Community Access Team.
- 2.6.7 If the alleged perpetrator is in the same church as the victim, you will need to review the safety issues. There may need to be a risk assessment and 'memorandum of understanding' (MOU) put in place. You are advised to consult the ODSM.
- 2.6.8 **When to contact the ODSM** – If the **alleged perpetrator is a clergy person or church worker** you must report this to the ODSM.
- 2.6.9 **Extreme discretion needed** – Ensure that information concerning the victim is only given to statutory authorities and not to the alleged perpetrator. This includes keeping all contact details and personal circumstances confidential.
- 2.6.10 **Where to get help** – Share information about helplines and accountability programs.

## **2.7 Record keeping and follow up re. perpetrators**

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Please see the previous section on 'record keeping and follow up' in regard to a victim. What follows is additional guidance in relation to responding to alleged or known perpetrators. Any conversation or intervention with a perpetrator of abuse will impact the safety of the victim. It is advisable to always ask the victim first whether or not it is safe to speak with the perpetrator and to plan for and check on

their safety after any interventions. Also recall that it is generally inadvisable for the same person to provide support or pastoral care to both a victim and alleged perpetrator.

- 2.7.1 **You can't promise confidentiality** – While you might respect an individual's right to confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed. In some circumstances you will be required to share information with statutory authorities, for example, when someone is being hurt, a serious criminal offence has been committed, or a child or adult is at risk.
- 2.7.2 **Keep a record** – Always keep a record of your decision and the reasons why you decided to share or withhold information. If in doubt, contact the ODSM, the Police or the child protection authorities.
- 2.7.3 In following up alleged or known perpetrators:
- Do not collude with, excuse or minimise their behaviour;
  - Do not meet with them alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the church with several other people around; and
  - Do not try to offer/provide treatment. Only those with professional training should discuss such issues formally with them.
- 2.7.4 In relation to any investigations or legal proceedings for domestic violence:
- Cooperate fully with requests from the police;
  - In the event that the alleged perpetrator requests you to produce documents or give oral evidence in any proceedings, insist that a subpoena is issued;
  - A church leader should exercise extreme caution and seek advice before acting as a character witness or advocating for an alleged perpetrator; and
  - A church leader may arrange for the alleged perpetrator to be provided with pastoral care throughout the investigation or proceedings, but should contact the ODSM for further advice and not provide this care themselves.

## **2.8 Additional guidance for clergy and licensed lay ministers – responding to victims**

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- 2.8.1 **Help** – Help the victim with any spiritual concerns.
- 2.8.2 **Be patient** – Accept that victims may choose to stay in their situation for a variety of reasons.
- 2.8.3 **Abuse is always wrong** – Emphasise that violence or other domestic abuse is always unacceptable in a marriage, whether Christian or otherwise.
- 2.8.4 **Remember the Lord** – Assure them of God's love and presence and pray with them.
- 2.8.5 **Don't rush to reconcile** – Do not encourage them to forgive the alleged perpetrator or take them back in the absence of persistent evidence of repentant attitudes and behaviour, especially without obtaining professional advice.
- 2.8.6 **Do not pursue couples' counseling/mediation with them and their partner if you are aware that there is abuse in the relationship.**
- 2.8.7 **Seek advice** – Where couples' counseling has been commenced for general marital difficulties and concern about abuse emerges, seek advice about whether it should be discontinued.

## 2.9 Responding spiritually to perpetrators

- 2.9.1 **Be clear** – Address any spiritual rationalisations they may offer or questions they may have.
- 2.9.2 **No excuse** – Do not allow them to use theological excuses for their behaviour.
- 2.9.3 **Name the sin** – Name the abuse as *their* sin, not the victim's sin. Tell them that only they can stop it and that they need to seek help. Advise that true repentance and behaviour change will likely involve long-term and challenging work.
- 2.9.4 **Parenting Choice** – For perpetrators who are parents, it is also considered helpful to remind them that domestic abuse is also a choice about parenting. This may provide an additional perspective for understanding the impact of their behaviour.
- 2.9.5 **Do not be easily swayed** – Do not be taken in by the perpetrator's remorse or "conversion" experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as they proceed with accountability. If it is not genuine, it is only another way to groom or manipulate you, so as to maintain control of the process and to avoid accountability.
- 2.9.6 **Pray** – Pray with them.
- 2.9.7 **Remorse** – Be aware that remorse expressed may or may not be genuine. Expressions of regret are often part of the cycle of domestic abuse. Be particularly careful of an alleged perpetrator expressing remorse without any accompanying signs of real and visible repentance.
- 2.9.8 **Repentance must be real, visible and enduring** – A perpetrator may ask for forgiveness from God and seek to live a repentant life. Look for actions of repentance, not just words of repentance. What has the perpetrator done, for how long, with what kinds of accountability, to show evidence of change, such as engaging in a long-term behaviour change program?
- 2.9.9 **Care** – Assure them of your pastoral care in this endeavour.
- 2.9.10 **Do not pursue couples' counselling/mediation with them and their partner if you are aware that there is abuse in the relationship.**

## 2.10 Perpetrator programs

The attitudes that underpin domestic abuse often have deep roots and are difficult to change. Some success has been achieved through Men's Behaviour Change programs for alleged or known perpetrators. These programs are conducted over an extended period of time and include one-on-one support as well as a group work program. Participation in such programs should not be linked to suggestions of reconciliation or discussions of postponing separation or divorce.

NSW has minimum standards for accredited Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Information on who is accredited and where programs are conducted can be found at the Men's Behaviour Change Network website: [Men's Behaviour Change Programs \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://men'sbehaviourchange.org.au). Accredited programs in NSW are strongly underpinned by victim support.

Anglicare is accredited to run Men's Behaviour Change Programs in Nowra and Parramatta. Contact the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser for further information.

Participation in a Men's Behaviour Change Program may be mandated by a court but self-referral to community-run programs is possible. Contact the Men's Referral Service (MRS) on 1800 065 973.

Also note that Behaviour Change Programs are more appropriate than the 'anger management' courses sometimes suggested for domestic abusers. A perpetrator may become more dangerous

after completing an anger management course, if he is better able to control and therefore hide his anger, potentially placing his spouse and any children in greater danger.

There is currently not a female equivalent to accredited Men's Behaviour Change Programs. If a female perpetrator was willing to seek assistance, a referral to a specific domestic violence service would be an appropriate option. Be aware that female perpetration often occurs in the context of self-protection, and needs to be thoroughly assessed.

## **2.11 Pastoral issues**

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- 2.11.1 **Consult the ODSM** – There are complex issues for parishes where both parties continue to attend church. Parishes need to be aware of any legal restrictions (such as an ADVO) around those accused of perpetrating abuse and ensure that these are not undermined. As stated earlier (2.5.6), a risk assessment and MOU may also need to be put in place. You are advised to consult with the ODSM regarding any instance of a victim and a perpetrator (known or alleged) remaining in the same church (including the church's digital environment). If a MOU cannot be agreed, the ODSM can provide further advice about options.
- 2.11.2 **Perpetrators moving church** – If an alleged perpetrator moves to another church, the ODSM should again be consulted regarding any communication between churches. Recall that abusers are often adept at manipulation and at providing a convincing but false narrative to others. Remember that safety for the victim (and others at risk) is paramount.
- 2.11.3 **Is a clergy person involved?** If the victim or alleged perpetrator is a member of the clergy, please talk urgently to the ODSM to review the action required to ensure the victim's safety and the appropriate response (see section 2.12 and section 2.13 below).
- 2.11.4 **Division of care** – Congregational leaders will need to consider how to provide pastoral care to both parties safely, noting that a clergy person or church worker cannot do this for both individuals. Primary attention must always remain on the safety and support of the victim. If they need further advice in relation to providing support they should contact the ODSM or the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser.
- 2.11.5 **Long-term care for victims** – Churches and carers need to be prepared for the length and complexity of the road ahead. Few are ready for the fact that long term victims of abuse rarely walk out of an abusive situation in a linear fashion. Long-term pastoral support for victims of domestic abuse may also include support to couples when one or both parties have experienced abuse in a previous relationship.
- 2.11.6 **Caring for carers** – Long term abuse also produces secondary victims among the carers, who may not only carry some of the grief and pain of the victim but may also receive abuse themselves. Therefore, those responsible for caring for victims, or for perpetrators, also need emotional and pastoral support, along with others indirectly impacted, for example, friends or family within the parish.
- 2.11.7 **Dissatisfaction with care is possible** – There may be times that either victim or perpetrator, or both, may be dissatisfied with pastoral care provided in such difficult situations, even with significant efforts by congregational leaders to follow good practice guidelines.

## **2.12 Domestic Abuse involving Clergy or Lay Ministers – Victims**

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- 2.12.1 **Care for victims** – If a clergy person or lay minister, or the spouse of such ministry leaders, discloses abuse, they must be treated like any other victim. Clergy and lay ministers, and their spouses, must have the same access to support and resources as others who are experiencing domestic abuse. In addition, they may speak to the ODSM.

- 2.12.2 **Bishops' protocol** – Our bishops agree that the priority of safety is paramount for victims of abuse within ministry families. Clergy and lay ministers, or their spouses, should expect a bishop to listen with acceptance when disclosing abuse. Working with the ODSM, and in particular, the ODSM Chaplain, these protocols provide guidance for the support of such ministry spouses, especially should they wish to separate. Attention is also expected to be given to matters of housing, schooling, and counselling for the spouse and any children affected.
- 2.12.3 **Heightened vulnerabilities** – In addition to the seriousness of marriage vows, the significance of ordination promises, and/or issues regarding housing security may make clergy and lay ministers or their spouses particularly vulnerable to staying in abusive relationships. In such situations, our diocese should not put fear of scandal above the safety of vulnerable people.
- 2.12.4 **Ministry Support Fund** – Acknowledging that clergy and other ministry couples and families are in a unique situation (often with housing and other family arrangements attached to a parish), a Ministry Spouse Support Fund has been established to assist the spouse and family (if any) re-establish their lives when there has been domestic abuse (or other serious misconduct) by the church worker, which will leave the spouse (and family) in financial hardship. For example, this may include support for school fees, counselling or housing.

## 2.13 Domestic Abuse involving Clergy and Lay Ministers – Alleged perpetrator

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- 2.13.1 Clergy and lay ministers who are suspected of perpetrating domestic abuse must be treated like any other alleged perpetrator (see section 2.6).
- 2.13.2 Any allegations of domestic abuse committed against a lay minister or member of the clergy should also be referred to the ODSM (see section 2.12).
- 2.13.3 Bishops may consider appointing someone to offer pastoral support to an alleged perpetrator who is a lay minister or member of the clergy. If the alleged perpetrator is a bishop, then the ODSM must be consulted about the provision of such support.
- 2.13.4 Domestic abuse may result in proceedings under our ministry standards and disciplinary ordinances (which can be found under the Ordinances on the SDS website – [www.sds.asn.au](http://www.sds.asn.au)) if:
- it involves sexual abuse of an adult, or
  - conviction for an offence punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more, or
  - may otherwise call into question the fitness of the person to hold a role or position or to remain in holy orders.

## 2.14 Mediation

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- 2.14.1 **Get professional help** – Mediation is a specialist activity that in the context of domestic abuse must be undertaken by trained professionals. In order for mediation to be effective any imbalances in power in the relationship need to be addressed.
- 2.14.2 **Safety first** – In the context of family and domestic abuse, mediation (or 'family dispute resolution' as it is known when parenting arrangements are being discussed) can be an empowering process for a victim. However, this can only occur if safety needs are managed and both parties are well-prepared for the mediation process.
- 2.14.3 **Legal advice** – Where children or property matters are concerned, it is also important that both parties have received legal advice. Government-funded Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) are a good referral option for family dispute resolution and have designated processes to ensure the safety of all concerned. Anglicare currently operates FRCs at Nowra and Parramatta.

## A Case Study: Andrew and Jody

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Andrew is separated from his wife, Jody. She had called the Police and Andrew was arrested after an incident of domestic abuse. Charges were pressed and he was found guilty. An Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) has been issued, with Jody and the children listed as protected parties.

Andrew is living apart from Jody. The couple have two children aged 6 and 8, both of whom live with Jody. Andrew wants to be reconciled with his wife and with the church of which they are both long-standing members. He has come to the rector's home in order to discuss with the rector how he can achieve reconciliation with Jody. He is currently not attending church. But Andrew appears to be remorseful and says how sorry he is and how desperate he is to be back in church fellowship and back with his family.

### *Considerations in responding*

The rector needs to seek advice and support from the ODSM or Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser in how best to respond. He must also recall that pastoral support cannot normally be provided by one person (such as the rector) both to victim and perpetrator.

The conditions in the ADVO need to be understood to ensure that any contact Andrew has with Jody and the children does not breach the conditions of the ADVO.

The rector needs to be aware and cautious of Andrew's motives. The rector should ensure he is acquainted with the cycle of domestic abuse. In approaching the rector, who knows them both, Andrew might be seen as manipulating or grooming the rector to support him, with the prime motive of reconciliation with his wife. What evidence is there of his repentance, and the steps he has taken to change his behaviour? How are his spiritual needs currently being met?

Consideration of Andrew's desire for reconciliation with Jody must be made in the context of assessing risk to her and risk to their children, and can only be considered if Jody is also willing to consider a conciliation process, and the conditions of the ADVO allow for contact. Extreme caution should be taken by the rector before raising the possibility of conciliation with her, given the perceived implications of his position of authority, and the difficulties in her freedom to choose not to engage in such a process if initiated by the rector.

However, the rector should not get involved in any conciliation between them as this is specialist work and needs to be undertaken by an independent agency equipped for the purpose. The rector can signpost Andrew to such agencies.

The rector can discuss with Andrew the marks of true repentance and forgiveness by God, and arrange for him to receive pastoral care. This would be most appropriately offered by someone not known to either of them.

The rector needs to be aware of boundaries of confidentiality and should not be passing information from Andrew to Jody or vice versa. If he were to do so not only may he lose the trust of one or the other, but he may be putting Jody and her children at further risk.

In conclusion, the rector should be careful to give priority to the safety of the victim and her children who are the vulnerable people in this circumstance.

I Certify that the Policy as printed is in accordance with the Policy as reported.

R TONG  
Chair of Committee

I Certify that this Policy was passed by the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney on 13 September 2023.

B BOUNDS  
Secretary

## Section 3: Appendices

Please note that these appendices do **not** form part of the Policy or Guidelines, but are provided as additional resources.

1. An expansive description of Domestic Abuse
2. Doctrine Commission on The Use and Misuse of Scripture with Regard to Domestic Abuse
3. Visual Representations of Domestic Abuse
4. Domestic Abuse Facts
  - 1) Who experiences domestic abuse?
  - 2) Domestic Abuse Statistics for Australia
  - 3) Challenging misconceptions about domestic abuse
  - 4) Recognising domestic abuse in adult victims
  - 5) Recognising domestic abuse in children
  - 6) Who are the perpetrators of domestic abuse?
  - 7) Social factors that contribute to domestic abuse
  - 8) Recognising perpetrators of domestic abuse
  - 9) How a perpetrator of abuse might invite you to collude with them
  - 10) Particular Types of Domestic abuse
  - 11) Trauma-Informed Care
5. Legal Framework
6. Domestic Abuse: Policy Guidance from *Faithfulness in Service*
7. Suggested Parish Policy on Domestic Abuse
8. Draft Safety and Exit plan
9. Marriage Preparation: Recommended good practice
10. Doctrine Commission on Divorce and Remarriage
11. "Walking Through It: A Family Violence Survivor's Reflection"

## An expansive description of Domestic Abuse

It is critical to understand that domestic abuse includes far more than just physical violence. The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children (NCRVWC) found that –

... a central element of domestic violence is that of an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling one's partner through fear (for example, by using violent or threatening behaviour)

... the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics used by the perpetrator to exercise power and control ... and can be both criminal and non-criminal in nature.<sup>1</sup>

Following wide consultation<sup>2</sup>, this Policy has adopted the following definition:

***Domestic abuse** involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.*

Domestic violence includes:

- **Emotional Abuse** – blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, undermining the victim's self-esteem and self-worth through comparisons with others, withdrawing interest and engagement and emotional blackmail;
- **Verbal Abuse** – and humiliation in private and public by swearing, yelling, insults or name-calling, focusing on intelligence, sexuality, body image or the victim's capacity as a parent or spouse;
- **Financial Abuse** – controlling a victim's access to money or bank accounts, forcing the victim to account for how they spend money, withholding financial information, providing an inadequate 'allowance', preventing the victim seeking or holding employment, taking the victim's wages or money without consent;
- **Psychological Abuse** – making threats regarding custody of children, asserting the justice system will not believe or support the victim, destroying property, abusing pets and driving dangerously;
- **Spiritual Abuse** – using religious beliefs to scare a victim, stopping a victim from practising their religion or forcing them to take part in religious practices, misusing religious beliefs to force victims into subordinate roles and misusing religious or spiritual traditions to justify physical violence or other abuse;
- **Cultural Abuse** – forcing someone to act against their cultural beliefs and practices, or using cultural norms and practices against them. E.g., not allowing someone to return to Country, isolating from or humiliating someone in their cultural community, dowry abuse, female genital mutilation or forced marriage based on cultural practices, threats to have someone deported from Australia if they leave a marriage;
- **Physical Abuse** – direct assaults on the body, including hitting, kicking, pushing, shaking or choking, the use of weapons (including objects), locking the victim out of the house, sleep and food deprivation, also the assault of children;

<sup>1</sup> "National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children, *The National Council's plan for Australia to reduce violence against women and their children, 2009–2012, Background paper to Time for Action*, Attachment A, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, March 2009, p13, cited in "Domestic violence in Australia – an overview of the issues" By Liesl Mitchell, Social Policy Section, Parliamentary Library Research Publications, 22 November 2011, Parliament of Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Sources consulted: Australian Government: Services Australia, "What is family and domestic violence?" (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/what-family-and-domestic-violence/>); NSW Government: NSW Police, "What is Domestic Violence?" ([https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/crime/domestic\\_and\\_family\\_violence/what\\_is\\_domestic\\_violence/](https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/crime/domestic_and_family_violence/what_is_domestic_violence/)); NSW Government: Communities and Justice, "What is domestic and family violence?" (<https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/about-domestic-and-family-violence/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.html>); all accessed 20 March 2023. Also National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book, "Cultural and spiritual abuse" (<https://dfvbenchbook.aija.org.au/understanding-domestic-and-family-violence/cultural-and-spiritual-abuse/>); accessed 25 April 2023.

- **Sexual Abuse** – any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation, causing pain during sex, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly and criticising or using degrading insults;
- **Social Isolation** – systematic isolation from family and friends, instigating and controlling relocations to a place where the victim has no social circle or employment opportunities and preventing the victim from going out to meet people;
- **Stalking** – behaviour that harasses or intimidates by repeated phone calls or messages, unwanted or obsessive attention, following or monitoring the victim;
- **Image-based or technology facilitated abuse** – publishing intimate photos without consent, sharing or threatening to share photos or messages with the intention of putting the victim at risk of stigma, discrimination or harm, monitoring what the victim does online, by checking their computer and phone use, or by using spyware to track the person.

Coercive Control is another phrase that is now commonly used. Coercive control can be thought of as abusive conduct used to maintain control over the victim's behaviour, or to have them suffer emotional or physical torment and live in fear. It may make the victim do or believe things they wouldn't normally or adversely impact the victim's capacity to engage in some or all of the person's ordinary day-to-day activities. For example, they may be caused to doubt themselves, or be stopped from seeing people, leaving the house or doing other activities important to them.

Appendix 2

**Doctrine Commission on The Use and Misuse of Scripture with Regard to Domestic Abuse**

Some people use Bible verses as an excuse to abuse their wife, husband, or children. This is always wrong. Others think that the Bible tells them to put up with abuse. This is also wrong. Here are some important Bible verses that are sometimes used in this way. For each verse, there are wrong meanings and correct meanings. There are many more things to say about these verses, but these are the most important points for domestic abuse. These points do not explain the verses fully. To understand them more fully, we must do three things together:

- a) Read the whole chapter or section in which the verse or verses are found.
- b) Understand how the verse or verses fits into the chapter or section.
- c) Think about how the Bible’s teaching applies to your situation.

**Please note:** If you think you might be a victim of domestic abuse, we suggest you read this document with a supportive friend or counsellor.

**Key Words and their Meanings**

*Helper*

**Bible verses: Genesis 2:18, 21**

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” ... <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man was sleeping, the LORD God took out one of the man’s ribs. He closed up the opening that was in his side.

<b>Wrong meaning: The woman is below the man.</b>	
	A “helper” is a servant. God made the woman to be the servant of the man. The woman is less important than the man.
<b>Correct meaning: The woman and the man are equal.</b>	
	The word “helper” does not mean below or less. This word is mostly used in the Bible to describe God. God is Israel’s “helper” when he comes to rescue them (e.g. Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 22:19; Psalm 121:1-2). The words “just right for him” mean that the woman and the man are a perfect match. Each one needs the other.  In Genesis 2:21 God made the woman out of the man’s rib. She was not taken from his head, to be over him, or from his foot, to be under him. She came from his side to be his equal partner.

**Submit**

**Bible verses: Ephesians 5:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands as you submit to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. The church is Christ's body. He is its Saviour.

<b>Wrong meaning (verse 22): The wife must always submit to her husband no matter what.</b>	
	A wife must not ask questions or think for herself. She must always do what her husband tells her to do, even if he asks her to sin or submit to abuse. If she does not submit to him, then he is allowed to punish her.
<b>Correct meaning (verse 22): A wife chooses to submit. Her husband must not force, pressure or punish her.</b>	
	The Bible teaches that a wife should freely choose to submit to her husband. It is a gift she gives. A husband must never force or pressure his wife to submit. He must never punish her if she does not submit. If a wife cannot say no, then her submission cannot be free. Sometimes a wife should not submit. She must be free to say no to sin. She should not submit to abuse.
<b>Wrong meaning (verse 23): The husband may do anything he likes.</b>	
	The husband has all the power, because he is the head. He can do what he wants. He can make all the decisions. He can tell his wife what to do, but she can never tell him what to do. For example, he may demand sex whenever he wants, and she has no right to refuse.
<b>Correct meaning (verse 23): The husband's responsibility is to serve his wife.</b>	
	"Christ is the head of the Church." This means that he loved us and sacrificed himself for us. A husband must be the head of his wife in the same way. He must do all he can to love and protect her. He must encourage and care for his wife like his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29). Loving and caring means putting his wife's needs first.

**Bible verses: 1 Peter 3:1, 5-6**

<sup>1</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands in the same way. Suppose some of them don't believe God's word. Then let them be won to Christ without words by seeing how their wives behave... <sup>5</sup> This is how the holy women of the past used to make themselves beautiful. They put their hope in God. And they submitted themselves to their own husbands. <sup>6</sup> Sarah was like that. She obeyed Abraham. She called him her master. Do you want to be like her? Then do what is right. And don't give in to fear.

<b>Wrong meaning: Endure abuse to show your husband what Jesus is like.</b>	
	In the same way that Christ endured suffering (1 Peter 2:21-23), and slaves are to endure mistreatment from unjust masters (2:20), a wife should also endure abuse at the hands of her husband. A wife should be like Jesus. If her husband beats her, she should suffer the beating quietly. She should not be afraid. This will show her husband what Jesus is like.

<b>Correct meaning: Respect your husband, even if he is hostile to your faith.</b>	
	<p>1 Peter 3 continues the argument of 1 Peter 2. "In the same way" (3:1) means that Peter is continuing his discussion of respect. Out of respect, slaves should submit to their masters (2:18). Out of respect, wives should submit to their husbands (3:1). Out of respect, husbands should be considerate of their wives (3:7).</p> <p>However, it is important to understand the difference between the examples given in 1 Peter 2 and 1 Peter 3. Peter told slaves to suffer beatings patiently, like Jesus did. But he does not tell wives to suffer beatings. Wives are not slaves. Even the laws of the Romans did not permit wives to be beaten. The hardship the wife must endure in 1 Peter 3 is the hardship of being married to an unbelieving husband, not to an abusive husband. The passage does not teach wives to submit to domestic abuse.</p>

**Sex**

**Bible verses: 1 Corinthians 7:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> A husband should satisfy his wife's sexual needs. And a wife should satisfy her husband's sexual needs. <sup>4</sup> The wife's body does not belong only to her. It also belongs to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong only to him. It also belongs to his wife. <sup>5</sup> You shouldn't stop giving yourselves to each other except when you both agree to do so. And that should be only to give yourselves time to pray for a while. Then you should come together again. In that way, Satan will not tempt you when you can't control yourselves.

<b>Wrong meaning: You must always have sex when your spouse wants to.</b>	
	<p>It is always wrong to say no to your spouse. If you say no to your spouse, they will fall into sexual temptation. This will be your fault.</p>
<b>Correct meaning: Sex is a gift which a husband and a wife freely give to each other.</b>	
	<p>Sex is a gift your spouse gives to you. You do not take it from them. It is their free gift. It is a normal part of married life. It helps to avoid temptation. When you are free to give sex, then you should give sex, unless you both agree to stop for some time, so you can pray (verse 5).</p> <p>But your spouse is not always free to give and receive sex. They may be sick, or in pain, or tired, or sad, or bearing a child, or having sexual problems. The bodies of husbands and wives belong to each other (verse 4). This means you must care for each other's bodies. You should wait until they are ready to give and receive sex. You must not pressure them. A gift that you demand is not a true gift, and a gift you force upon someone is not a true gift. You must be patient and kind with each other.</p>

**Forgive**

**Bible verse: Matthew 6:15**

But if you do not forgive the sins of other people, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<b>Wrong meaning: Forget the sin and start again.</b>	
	If you forgive someone, then you must forget what they did. Everything can be the same as it was before. The other person does not need to change their behaviour.
<b>Correct meaning: Forgive others as God has forgiven you.</b>	
	This passage does not say everything that the Bible teaches about forgiveness. The basic point of Matthew 6:15 is that we should forgive as we have been forgiven. If we genuinely repent and turn from our sin, then God forgives us. In the same way, when an abuser genuinely repents and tries to change, we also should forgive them. This may be a difficult and long process. Sometimes we will come back together with a person we have forgiven. Sometimes this will not be possible. Separation may be necessary and may even become permanent.  Forgiveness does not mean that we take sin lightly. If an abuser continues to abuse, they must be stopped. You do not need to endure abuse in the name of forgiveness.

**Trust**

**Bible verse: Deuteronomy 19:15**

Every matter must be proved by the words of two or three witnesses.

<b>Wrong meaning: Doubt the victim’s testimony.</b>	
	When someone says, “I was abused!”, you should not believe them. You should only believe them if other people saw the abuse and agree to be witnesses.
<b>Correct meaning: Trust the victim’s testimony.</b>	
	Moses gave this law for crimes that other people witnessed. When nobody saw a crime, Moses did not expect witnesses. Deuteronomy 22:25-27 shows that we may believe the word of an abused person when there are no witnesses.

**Conclusion**

The Bible is the good Word of a good God. Sadly, we can twist and misuse this good gift. So it is very important that the Bible is rightly understood and rightly applied to our lives. When it is wrongly understood and wrongly applied, it can damage people, destroy relationships and dishonour God. Rightly understood, the Bible condemns all forms of domestic abuse.

*Mark D. Thompson*

On behalf of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission

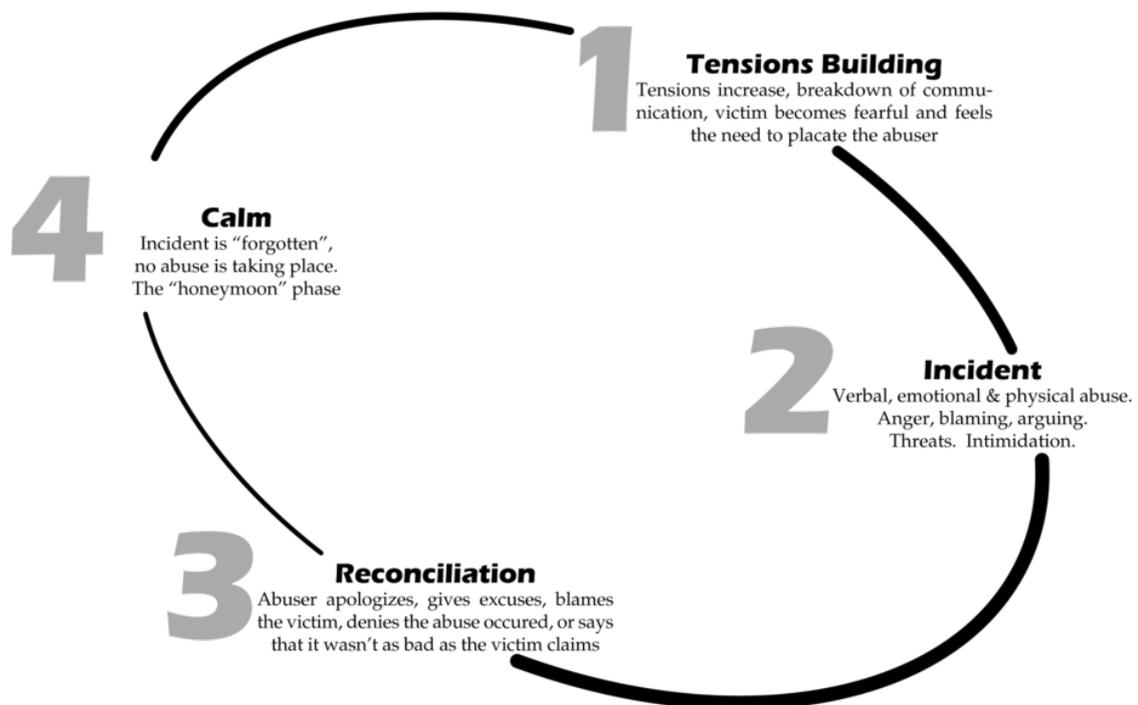
6 September 2018

**Visual Representations of Domestic Abuse**

Many victims have found a visual representation of the signs or symptoms and patterns of domestic abuse helpful in identifying and understanding their own situation.

The ‘Cycle of Abuse’, first developed by Dr Lenore Walker (1979) in the USA, is one such resource (diagram public domain and courtesy of user ‘Avanduyn’ via Wikipedia)

# Cycle of Abuse



The Duluth 'Power and Control' Wheel is another resource. The Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, which developed the diagram, invites others to use it in efforts to inform and educate (theduluthmodel.org).



## **Domestic Abuse Facts**

### **1. Who experiences domestic abuse?**

Domestic abuse can occur to anyone regardless of age, race, culture, disability, sexuality, class, geography or income.

Most domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women, but the perpetrator of domestic abuse can be of either sex, and the victim can be of either sex.

Victims can be male, although the majority are female. Abuse can also occur in same sex relationships, between siblings or by adult children against a parent.

Sometimes both spouses can be simultaneously perpetrators and victims of abuse, although the pattern of abuse is not usually symmetrical.

Many victims will only disclose that a partner was violent and abusive after leaving a relationship. Things to keep in mind:

- Women are particularly vulnerable to abuse when pregnant or seeking to leave a relationship;
- Older people and disabled people can be vulnerable to domestic abuse;
- Children experience domestic abuse in many ways, including through directly intervening to protect one of their parents, being forced to join the adult perpetrator, and hearing or witnessing violent attacks or verbal abuse;
- Coercive and controlling behaviour in a domestic abuse situation can be exerted over the whole family so any children suffer as well as the victim;
- Many women come to Australia to work and improve their lives, and many can then become trapped in relationships characterised by abuse with no avenue to seek safety and support; and
- Domestic abuse happens within the Church. Church leaders, members of the clergy, and spouses of clergy have been found to be victims of domestic abuse.

### **2. Domestic Abuse Statistics for Australia**

Note: Statistics do not tell the whole story, as they do not identify patterns of control and abuse in relationships. They do not capture level of fear, or the severity of injury or impact, for the victim.

#### *Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Australia*

- 1 in 6 women (17%) and 1 in 18 men (5.5%) had experienced threatened or actual physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, since the age of 15.<sup>1 2</sup>
- 23% of women and 14% of men have experienced emotional abuse by a partner since the age of 15.<sup>1</sup>
- 16% of women and almost 8% of men have experienced economic abuse by a partner since the age of 15.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 13% of people aged 18 and over in Australia have been witnesses to domestic violence towards a parent by a partner before the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous women were 33 times more likely than the wider female population to be hospitalized due to family and domestic violence. Such

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2021-22) *Personal Safety Australia*, accessed 21 March 2023 at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/2021-22> The survey collected information about the nature and extent of violence experienced by men and women since the age of 15, including their experience of violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.

<sup>2</sup> This means that approximately 1.7 million women have experienced at least one incident of actual or threatened physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner (since the age of 15). Note that this excludes broader forms of domestic abuse, such as emotional or spiritual abuse.

hospitalisation rates increased with remoteness and were highest for those in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic areas.<sup>3</sup>

### *Reported incidents of Domestic Violence in NSW<sup>4</sup>*

- Utilising data recorded by the NSW Police Force, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reported that, in the five years to December 2021 –
  - 71% of IPV murder victims were female.
  - 78% of ‘persons of interest’ (i.e. alleged perpetrators) in IPV murders were male.<sup>5</sup>
- The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team reported that 89% of men killed by a female intimate partner had been the primary domestic violence abuser in the relationship.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2022, NSW Police recorded over 33,000 incidents of domestic violence related assaults. In addition there were over 20,000 domestic violence related incidents of intimidation, stalking or harassment, and over 10,000 domestic violence related incidents of malicious damage to property. 69% of adult victims of domestic violence assault were female. Intimate partner violence accounts for 55% of all domestic violence assaults, 70% of alleged domestic violence offenders were male.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Challenging misconceptions about domestic abuse**

Many people will have misconceptions and attitudes about domestic abuse which are incorrect. Here are some common myths about what domestic abuse is and who it affects:

#### *Myth 1: It happens to certain types of people*

It can be thought that domestic abuse happens to a certain type of person – based on socio-economic status, religious or cultural backgrounds, or a perception of strength and resilience. This is not the case. Domestic abuse and violence can happen to anyone at any time.

#### *Myth 2: It happens because of...*

It is sometimes claimed that domestic abuse happens primarily because of a person’s religion, or because of alcohol or drug abuse, unemployment, abuse as a child, mental or physical ill health, or other environmental factors.

Although these may be contributory factors, abuse happens because an abusive person chooses to behave in a way that enables them to assert power and control over another person – excuses and reasons are given to justify abusive behaviour.

#### *Myth 3: A victim can cause a perpetrator to become abusive*

Often a perpetrator will tell a victim that they caused them to do it. But a victim is never to blame if a perpetrator chooses to behave in an abusive and controlling way.

#### *Myth 4: A victim can fully understand what is happening to them*

When someone is in a relationship in which they are subject to abuse they will often feel very confused about what is happening, and they are sometimes not sure that what they are experiencing is abuse.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, “Family, domestic and sexual violence data in Australia”, 9 November 2022, accessed 21 March 2023 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-data/contents/what-services-or-supports-do-those-who-have-experienced-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-use/hospitalisations-for-family-and-domestic-violence>.

<sup>4</sup> Much domestic violence goes unreported – usually because the victim does not consider an incident serious, is too ashamed, fears the offender, or thinks police cannot or will not act.

<sup>5</sup> NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2022), *Domestic Violence-related murder in NSW*, infographic accessed 21 March 2023 via [https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar\\_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (2017), *NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team Report 2015-2017*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>7</sup> NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2022), *Domestic & Family Violence in NSW, 2018-2022*, infographic accessed 21 March 2023 via [https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar\\_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx)

*Myth 5: A victim can choose to leave and if they don't, they are choosing to stay*

People ask why victims stay in a situation where they are suffering abuse, and assume that it is easy to leave, to escape the situation and to start a new life. This is not the case, either on a practical or an emotional level. A perpetrator of abuse will work to ensure that the victim feels that they cannot cope on their own.

Leaving a physically violent relationship is often the most dangerous time for women and children. It may also be financially impossible to leave the situation, particularly when there are children. Victims often do not have a choice in leaving and may feel, or be, threatened that if they leave they will be in danger. It may feel safer to stay than to leave.

*Myth 6: Victims should stand up for themselves and their children*

It is important to recognise such strength and resilience displayed by victims. Indeed, victims are usually doing many things to protect and look after themselves and their children, e.g. getting their children fed, and ensuring they get to school.

*Myth 7: Domestic abuse is all about anger*

Domestic abuse is not all about being angry or losing control. Although not always a calculated action, a central element is the choice to act in a controlling way.

*Myth 8: Domestic abuse doesn't happen in our church*

Domestic abuse happens in every community, including within the Church. The National Anglican Family Violence Project Research reported that sad 'headline' finding that Anglican church attenders (defined as attending at least several times a year) appear to be more likely than members of the general public to have experienced domestic abuse over a lifetime, and as likely within the last year. So it is extremely likely that there will be those in your church who have been affected by domestic abuse.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. Recognising domestic abuse in adult victims**

It is very difficult to create a definitive list of signs that domestic abuse is happening because abuse can occur on many levels and both victims and alleged or known perpetrators can behave and respond in a range of different ways. The following list of signs of behaviour for victims is not exhaustive, and should not be used as a definitive list but should be used as guidance:

- Has unexplained bruises or injuries;
- Shows signs of feeling suicidal;
- Becomes unusually quiet or withdrawn;
- Has panic attacks;
- Has frequent absences from work or other commitments;
- Wears clothes that conceal even on warm days;
- Stops talking about her/his partner;
- Is anxious about being out or rushes away;
- May never be seen alone, and is always accompanied by their partner;
- May become more isolated, possibly moving away from home, withdrawing from friends and family;
- Goes along with everything their partner says and does;
- Checks in often with their partner to report where they are and what they're doing;
- Receives frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner; and/or
- May have unexplained injuries, and may give other reasons for the injuries which refer to them being accidental.

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<sup>8</sup> Powell, R. & Pepper, M. (2021), *National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: for the Anglican Church of Australia*, NCLS Research Report, accessed 21 March 2023 via <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/1.-NAFVP-Research-Report.pdf>; the report notes the limitation that this finding arises from a carefully weighted non-probability sample, so caution must be exercised in generalising. In addition, the research did not address the question of the *prevalence of perpetrators* within Anglican churches.

## Survivor View

*The abuse went on for six years before I realised that what I was experiencing wasn't just a bad marriage. Everyone says marriage is difficult so at first I thought it was that – our adjustment to married life.*

*There was pressure to make marriage work and to sacrifice yourself. After all the church says 'till death us do part'. I bent over backwards to make it work.*

*From the outside most people thought we were the perfect happy couple. But I was walking on eggshells in my own home, never knowing what mood he would be in when he came home.*

*It was such a lonely time. I didn't think anyone would believe me if I told them what it was really like at home. I was desperate for some hope.*

## 5. Recognising domestic abuse in children

Living in a home where there's domestic abuse is harmful. It can have a serious impact on a child's behaviour and wellbeing. Parents or carers may underestimate the effects of the abuse on their children because they don't see what's happening.

Indeed, a child who witnesses or overhears domestic abuse is generally considered to be the victim of indirect child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour. If children are involved this way, a referral to the child protection authorities will need to be considered.

Domestic abuse can also be a sign that children are suffering another type of abuse or neglect. The effects can last into adulthood. However, once they're in a safer and more stable environment, most children are able to move on from the effects of witnessing domestic abuse.

### Younger children who experience and witness domestic abuse may:

- Become aggressive;
- Display anti-social behaviour;
- Become anxious;
- Complain of tummy aches and start to wet the bed;
- They may find it difficult to sleep, have temper tantrums and start to behave as if they are much younger than they are;
- They may also find it difficult to separate from their abused parent when they start nursery or school; and/or
- Children may be clingy, have behavioural difficulties, may be tired and lethargic, and struggle in social settings and at school.

### Older children/young people who experience and witness domestic abuse react differently:

- Boys seem to express their distress much more outwardly, for example by becoming aggressive and disobedient. Sometimes, they start to use violence to try and solve problems, and may copy the behaviour they see within the family;
- Older boys may play truant and start to use alcohol or drugs (both of which are a common way of trying to block out disturbing experiences and memories);
- Girls are more likely to keep their distress inside. They may become withdrawn from other people, and become anxious or depressed;
- Girls may think badly of themselves and complain of vague physical symptoms. They are more likely to have an eating disorder, or to harm themselves by taking overdoses or cutting themselves;
- Girls are also more likely to choose an abusive partner themselves; and/or
- Suffer from depression or anxiety.

Children of any age can develop symptoms of what is called 'Post-traumatic Stress Disorder'. They may get nightmares, flashbacks, become very jumpy, and have headaches and physical pains. Children dealing with domestic violence and abuse often do badly at school. Their frightening experiences at home make it

difficult to concentrate in school, and if they are worried about their abused parent, they may refuse to go to school.

### **Long-term impact on children and young people**

As adults, children who have experienced domestic violence and abuse are at greater risk of becoming involved in a violent and abusive relationship themselves. Children from violent and abusive families may grow up feeling anxious and depressed, and find it difficult to form trusting relationships.

However, children don't always repeat the same patterns when they grow up. Early intervention, support, and safety will assist children to recover so they may flourish as adults.

## **6. Who are the perpetrators of domestic abuse?**

Most known perpetrators of domestic abuse are men, but women are also known to engage in such behaviour.

- Anyone across the social spectrum can perpetrate domestic abuse – a perpetrator's outward appearance may be outgoing and friendly, and/or very confident, whilst the victim may be withdrawn and considered by many as unfriendly. However a disclosure of domestic abuse by any individual should always be taken seriously.
- There is no excuse for abuse. People who abuse their partners make a choice to do so. Often alcohol, drugs, childhood problems (such as a violent/abusive childhood), and mental health and psychological disorders are cited as causes of domestic abuse. Whatever the contributors in any given case, domestic abuse always involves a misuse of power by one person over another. Individuals who perpetrate domestic abuse generally do so to get what they want and to gain control.
- Domestic abuse happens within the Church; church leaders, members of the clergy, spouses of clergy, and prominent lay members have all been found to be perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- Seeing change in perpetrators is a long-term process. Perpetrator programs are long-term groups or one to one interventions which challenge the underlying attitudes and beliefs that drive domestic abuse. For more information on where accredited programs are conducted can be found at the Men's Behaviour Change Network website: [Men's Behaviour Change Programs \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://Men's Behaviour Change Programs (nsw.gov.au))

## **7. Social factors that contribute to domestic abuse**

Domestic abuse is complex and is not necessarily explained by any single factor or theory. However extensive research indicates that there are common 'social drivers' of domestic abuse – factors that allow it to flourish in society – including gender inequality and other forms of oppression. Related factors are condoning of men's violence against women, rigid gender stereotyping, cultures of masculinity that emphasise dominance, aggression and control, and men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public or private life.

## **8. Recognising perpetrators of domestic abuse**

Perpetrators are very good at hiding their behaviour. The following list of signs of perpetrator behaviour is not exhaustive, and should not be used as a definitive list but should be used as guidance:

- Presents confidently;
- Focuses on themselves and has no empathy with partner;
- Assertively claims victim status;
- Finds no fault in themselves;
- Makes unfounded accusations;
- Puts partner down and portrays partner often as unreasonable or unstable;
- Does not consider the children's experiences;
- Makes disparaging remarks about their partner in public – "overly emotional, can't cope, mentally ill";
- Uses their wedding vows as leverage to keep their partner tied to them – "you promised...";
- Expresses suspicion about legitimate activities of partner;
- Restricts access to partner's family and friends;
- Controls financial access and activity;

- Recruit others to back them up against their partner;
- Uses inappropriate humour, especially about compliance;
- Tries to engender pity in order to manipulate and recruit colluders;
- Shows changeable behaviour in order to hold onto control;
- Restricts partner's attendance at church or Bible study groups; and
- Uses Scripture to justify behaviour, demands or requests.

### **9. How a perpetrator of abuse might invite you to collude with them**

Those who use abuse in their family relationships tend to deny their behaviour, minimise its impacts and blame their victims for causing them to behave in such ways. Additionally, they may seek to influence those around them, especially those with positional power or spiritual authority to support their perspective, and to see the victim as the problem. This may include emphasising the spouse's weaknesses, or portraying themselves as victims or as long-suffering of their partners' behaviour, or undermining the other's reputation within the church community, so that the victim's disclosures will not be believed. (This is a form of 'gaslighting' before a victim makes a disclosure.)

Sometimes perpetrators hold positions of power or influence in the church, present well in public, or have a vital ministry, adding further challenge for those who know them to conceive the real possibility that their private behaviour may be abusive and should be taken seriously.

### **10. Particular Types of Domestic abuse**

Domestic abuse can occur in many contexts. For example, there is abuse within Indigenous communities, and in same-sex relationships; there is also child or adolescent to parent abuse, and abuse of elders.

Some perpetrators will use **religious or cultural beliefs** as a way of maintaining patriarchal power and control, and to justify their abusive behaviour. Often the violence or abuse is perpetrated by members of the extended family, with the collusion of others in the community. Awareness of the wide variety of culturally specific forms of abuse will also help in identifying abuse and responding appropriately.

For example, these can include so-called 'honour' crimes and killings, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, all of which constitute criminal behaviour. Culture is never an excuse for abuse.

Tragically, **Indigenous communities** are over-represented in domestic abuse statistics. When responding to domestic abuse within this community, we must always speak first of the importance of the safety of the victim, yet understand it is not always possible or advisable to treat domestic abuse identically to other groups. Due to historical abuses, including the removal of children from their families, as well as intergenerational trauma, Indigenous communities are often reluctant to engage with authorities. Some in such communities may sometimes consider removal of children as an outcome worse than adults enduring such violence.

**Men** are in the minority, in terms of sex, as victims of domestic abuse. However it is important for male victims to know they are not alone. Such abuse can involve dominating behaviour, social isolation, emotional and psychological abuse, as well as physical assault. Perpetrators can be a wife, girlfriend or partner but can also be children, parents, siblings and carers of all genders. Men often don't report abuse by women because they feel embarrassed or think they won't be believed if they report it. They may also be in denial or lack support, or their religious or cultural beliefs may cause them to hesitate. However men can call MensLine Australia (1300 78 99 78), or 1800RESPECT, where there are trained counsellors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The need to protect victims remains the main imperative, irrespective of the cultural context in which domestic abuse occurs.

### **11. Trauma-Informed Care**

Trauma-informed care recognises and responds to the particular needs of those who have been subjected to abuse. Abuse, by nature, removes a victim's actual and perceived safety and agency, and betrays their trust. A trauma informed approach to caring for a victim therefore places high priority on the values of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. For those seeking to care for a victim of abuse this will

mean respecting and supporting their choices, even if these are not the same choices as the carer would make. This doesn't mean it is 'not OK' to make suggestions, and in a crisis situation – for example, where someone is in immediate danger – then it will be necessary for a carer to be more directive until a situation has been stabilised.

For more information on trauma informed care go to [blueknot.org.au](http://blueknot.org.au), a national centre which advocates for and provides support to people who have experiences of complex trauma.

## Legal Framework

A range of legal measures exist to protect people in Australia who have experienced domestic violence and to prevent further violence.

The following legislation governs responses to incidents of domestic and family violence in NSW:

- *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*;
- *Crimes Act 1900*;
- *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*;
- *Young Offenders Act 1997*;
- *Criminal Procedure Act 1986*; and
- *Family Law Act 1975*.

### **NSW Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007**<sup>1</sup>

The primary piece of legislation governing domestic violence matters in NSW, is the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* (the “Crimes DPV Act”).

The Crimes DPV Act has the following **aims**:<sup>2</sup>

- (a) to ensure the safety and protection of all persons, including children, who experience or witness domestic violence;
- (b) to reduce and prevent violence by a person against another person where a domestic relationship exists between those persons;
- (c) to enact provisions that are consistent with certain principles underlying the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women; and
- (d) to enact provisions that are consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Crimes DPV Act sets out a framework for applications to be made to the Magistrate’s Court for Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs) for the protection of a person against another person with whom he or she has or has had a **domestic relationship**. Further detail about ADVOs is set out below.

According to Section 5 of The Crimes DPV Act, a person has a **domestic relationship** with another person if the person is or has been married to the other person (s 5(1)(a)), is or has been a de facto partner of that other person (s 5(i)(b)) or has or has had an intimate personal relationship with the other person (s 5(i)(c)). However, the the definition of domestic relationship under the Crimes DPV Act also includes:

- (a) A person who is living or has lived in the same household or other residential facility as the person who commits the offence;
- (b) A person who has or has had a relationship involving his or her dependence on the ongoing paid or unpaid care of the person who commits the offence (such as staff of licensed boarding houses); or
- (c) A person who is or has been a relative of the person who commits the offence or in the case of an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander, is or has been part of the extended family or kin of the other person.

The Crimes DPV Act extends upon the personal violence offences set out in the Criminal Code. Under Section 11, a **domestic violence offence** includes not only personal physical and sexual violence but also those offences that intend to coerce or control a person or cause them to be intimidated and/or fearful.

Section 13 also makes it an offence to stalk or intimidate another person with the intention of causing the other person to fear physical or mental harm.

<sup>1</sup> NSW Government, *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*, accessed March 2023 at <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2007-080>

<sup>2</sup> Section 9

The *Criminal Procedure Act 1986* indicates that domestic violence victims are able to give evidence through a recorded video or audio statement, and the court should be closed when evidence is given (whether given in person or by recording). Evidence may also be given by audio visual link from a place other than the court room.

In proceedings where an offender is self-represented, the offender cannot question the victim directly in evidence (e.g. in cross-examination) but must examine the victim through a court appointed questioner or through the use of court technology.

### Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs)

The Crimes DPV Act provides the legislative framework for the issue of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs). An ADVO is a civil matter and does not result in a criminal offence unless the ADVO is breached. The aim of an ADVO is to protect a person from future violence. Restrictions are placed on persons against whom an order is made. These restrictions may include not harassing or not approaching the person.

There are two different types of temporary ADVOs that can be made to protect a person until a court decides whether to make a Final ADVO: a Provisional ADVO, and an Interim ADVO.

Police can apply for a Provisional ADVO if they believe that someone needs immediate protection, even if the victim is not willing to make a complaint. The Police may also direct or detain offenders while applying for a Provisional ADVO. The Provisional ADVO will remain in force until it is revoked, the application is withdrawn or dismissed, or until an Interim or Final AVO is made.

An Interim ADVO is made by the court to extend a Provisional ADVO or where the Court agrees that it is necessary for someone to have temporary protection.

The Court has the power to issue a Final ADVO if it is satisfied that a person (applicant) has reasonable grounds to fear that a domestic violence offence will be committed against them.

Section 48 of the Crimes DPV Act enables police to apply for an ADVO on behalf a person experiencing domestic violence, sometimes referred to as a *person in need of protection* ('PINOP').

If the PINOP is aged 16 or over, that person may also apply for an ADVO on their own at the Local Court of NSW. Police are the only authority mandated to apply for ADVOs on behalf of a child under section 48(3) of the Crimes DPV Act. If an ADVO application lists both adults and a child or children (e.g. a parent and a child), the adult can apply to either the Local Court or ask the police to apply for an ADVO.

If there are only children listed as PINOPs in an ADVO application, police are the only authority mandated to make an application under s 48(3) of the Crimes DPV Act.

More information is available from the NSW Government Domestic Violence website<sup>3</sup>, Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme or a local Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.<sup>4</sup> An individual who wishes to hire a lawyer may contact Legal Aid NSW.

### **Protection of Children**

There are both Federal and State laws which govern the protection of children. The *Family Law Act 1975* governs the resolution of private disputes about the parenting of all children in Australia. In comparison, NSW 'child protection laws' aim to protect children from abuse and neglect.

Due to the substantial overlap between Federal and State Laws in regard to domestic violence and protection of children, there have been calls for the institution of one court to deal with domestic violence, including protection orders, child protection, family law, perhaps even criminal issues.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> NSW Government, "Getting an Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs)", website accessed 1 April 2023 at <https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/police-legal-help-and-the-law/getting-an-apprehended-violence-order--avo.html>

<sup>4</sup> Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service, accessed 1 April 2023 at <https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-partners/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-program>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (2010), *Family Violence: A National Legal Response*, ALRC Report 114, accessed 1 April 2023 at <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/family-violence-a-national-legal-response-alrc-report-114/>

### Federal Family Law Act 1975<sup>6</sup>

In 2006, the Australian Government introduced legislative changes to the *Family Law Act 1975*, in order to increase parental cooperation and responsibility in the separation process and increase the focus on the child's best interests.<sup>7</sup> However, in 2011 amendments were made after research suggested that the co-operative parenting changes made in 2006 may have contributed to increasing rates of reports of family violence and child abuse around relationship breakdown. The main changes to the *Family Law Act* were as follows:

- Section 4AB, now provides that family violence is violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family (the family member), or causes the family member to be fearful. For clarity, a new sub-section 4AB(2) provides an open list of the types of circumstances that may constitute family violence under the Act;
- The definition of child abuse has been extended to include two new categories of behaviour. The new definition, at sub-section 4(1) provides that child abuse is physical or sexual assault, serious neglect, and now action causing a child 'serious psychological harm' and expressly including *subjection or exposure to family violence*. Exposure to family violence is explained further by example at sub-sections 4AB(3) and (4);
- Ensuring that the 'need to protect a child from harm' carries more weight than the 'relationship with parents' consideration (s 60CC(2A));
- New provisions requiring the court, in every child-related case, to expressly ask the parties about whether they have any concerns about family violence or child abuse (s 69ZQ(1)(aa));
- In section 60CG, courts must ensure that parenting orders are consistent with any family violence order; and do not expose a person to an unacceptable risk of family violence; and
- Courts must be advised of any ADVOs or other State investigations into domestic violence.

### Mandatory Reporting of Children at Risk of Significant Harm in NSW

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*<sup>8</sup> (The Care and Protection Act) provides the legislative framework for the reporting of domestic violence incidents which put children at significant risk of harm. Section 23(1)(d), states the circumstances which constitute a reportable incident include:

*the child or young person is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, the child or young person is at risk of serious<sup>9</sup> physical or psychological harm.*

A **mandatory reporter** is an individual required by law to report to government authorities when they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm. Mandatory reporters are defined under section 27 of the Care and Protection Act, as people who deliver the following services to children as part of their paid or professional work, or who hold a management position which includes direct responsibility or supervision of such services.

A person in religious ministry, or a person providing religion-based activities to children is a mandatory reporter. This is the case regardless of whether the person is an employee, office-holder or volunteer.

Mandatory reporters also include people who deliver or who supervise the following services:<sup>10</sup>

- Health care (e.g. registered medical practitioners, nurses government and other allied health professionals working in sole practice or in public or private health practices);
- Welfare (e.g. psychologists, social workers, caseworkers and youth workers);

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Parliament, *The Family Law Act 1975*, accessed 3 April 2023 at <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2023C00056>

<sup>7</sup> Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, *Children affected by domestic violence: a literature review*, Report produced for The Benevolent Society, Sydney, 2011. Accessed 26 July 2017 at <http://earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/files/ImpactofDVonChildren.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> NSW Government, *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, accessed 3 April 2023 at <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-157>

<sup>9</sup> Here, "serious" means sufficient to warrant a response by a statutory authority irrespective of a family's consent.

<sup>10</sup> NSW Government, *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, accessed 3 April 2023 at <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-157#sec.27>

- Education (e.g. teachers, counsellors, principals);
- Children's services (e.g. child care workers, family day carers and home-based carers);
- Residential services (e.g. refuge workers); and
- Law enforcement (e.g. police).

Members of the community and mandatory reporters who suspect that a child or young person is at "risk of significant harm" should report their concerns to the Child Protection Helpline. To help reporters decide whether a case needs to be reported to the Child Protection Helpline, reporters can use the online Mandatory Reporter Guide.<sup>11</sup>

It is also mandatory for any person to report knowledge of most domestic violence offences to the police under s316 of the *Crimes Act 1900*. However, there is a 'reasonable excuse' for not reporting if the alleged victim is an adult and the person believes on reasonable ground that the alleged victim does not wish the information to be report to the police.

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<sup>11</sup> Childstory Reporter, *Welcome to the ChildStory Reporter Community*, accessed 4 August 2017 at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/>

## **Domestic Abuse: Policy Guidance from *Faithfulness in Service***

All clergy and church workers (whether paid or volunteer leaders) in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney are bound by our national code of conduct, *Faithfulness in Service*, as adopted in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

Section 6 of *Faithfulness in Service* addresses **Personal Behaviour**.

In its **Preamble**, it states that *misuse of power* is at the heart of abuse. This includes domestic abuse.

- 6.1 *The personal behaviour and relationships of **clergy** and **church workers** have a significant impact on the **Church** and the community because they are a model to others. In a context where their responsibility is to care for others, people will especially observe the way in which clergy and church workers exercise power.*
- 6.2 *Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and the community. In essence, abuse is one person's misuse of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour.*
- 6.3 ***Abuse** can take any of several overlapping forms: **bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, sexual abuse** or **spiritual abuse**. Abuse in a family or domestic context is commonly known as "family and domestic violence".<sup>1</sup>*
- 6.4 *It is important for clergy and church workers to be good citizens and obey the laws of the community, except where those laws conflict with Christian convictions.*

The section entitled "**Standards for clergy and church workers**" states the Church's expectations for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry. This section **unequivocally rules out any domestic abuse** from clergy and church workers.

- 6.5 *You are not to engage in:*
  - *bullying;*
  - *emotional abuse;*
  - *harassment;*
  - *physical abuse;*
  - *sexual abuse; or*
  - *spiritual abuse.*
- 6.6 *You are not to **abuse** your spouse, children or other members of your family.*

This section also insists that **church leaders must observe** the law of the land, which obviously includes **laws regarding domestic abuse**.

- 6.14 *You are to observe the law, other than any law that:*
  - *is contrary to the Holy Scriptures;*
  - *unjustly prohibits the practice of religion; or*
  - *prohibits civil disobedience.*

Section 4 of *Faithfulness in Service* addresses **Pastoral Relationships**.

In its **Guidelines** section, it gives the following guidance regarding **Boundaries** in pastoral ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> The full definitions of these forms of abuse within *Faithfulness in Service* can be read at the end of this Appendix. It should be noted that these definitions overlap to a significant extent with common secular definitions of domestic abuse, such as those adopted by the diocesan Policy.

- 4.12 *Recognise the limits of your skills and experience. Do not undertake any ministry (such as relationship counselling, counselling for abuse or addictions, or an exorcism) that is beyond your competence or the role for which you have been employed or trained. If in doubt seek advice. A person who requires specialised help should be referred to an appropriately qualified person or agency.*
- 4.13 *Where ministry responsibilities overlap, be aware of the activities, function and style of other clergy and church workers. Consult with these colleagues and co-operate wherever possible.*
- 4.14 *Where your ministry responsibility to one person may conflict with your responsibility to another person to whom you are ministering, or with your own needs, you should seek advice from a colleague or supervisor. Consider the possibility of transferring ministry responsibility for one or both of these to another minister.*

This supports our good practice guidelines, which **require church workers to obtain specialised help** from persons or agencies appropriately qualified in responding to situations where domestic abuse is indicated or alleged.

It also notes the difficulty clergy and church workers can have from the expectations of multiple roles, for example in:

- providing pastoral care both to victim and alleged perpetrator;
- making some kind of investigation of the allegations; and
- being responsible for the adjudication and implementation of some aspects of church discipline should an offender have been or continue in the life of the church.

Also note the following provisions regarding **record keeping and privacy**, which can be especially crucial for safety in situations involving domestic abuse.

- 4.36 *If you are engaged in individual pastoral ministry, consider keeping a factual record of your daily pastoral activity. Record details such as the date, time, place, participants, subject, and any proposed action arising from each activity. Record personal remarks accurately.*
- 4.37 *You need to know the relevant principles of the applicable privacy legislation in relation to the collection, use, disclosure and management of personal information. These have implications for:*
- *the publication of personal information in church directories, newsletters, rosters and websites;*
  - *the recording and publication of voices and images of individuals; and*
  - *the use and security of all personal information, and especially sensitive information, held by clergy and church workers or in church offices.*

Section 3 of *Faithfulness in Service* speaks of **Putting this Code into Practice**.

Its **Guidelines** section make it clear that where you have reason to believe that a clergy person or church worker has perpetrated domestic abuse (breaching standards of the Code at 6.5 and 6.6), then **you have a reporting obligation**, since the threat of domestic abuse certainly creates the risk of harm.

- 3.9 *If you know or have reason to believe that another member of the clergy or another church worker has failed to meet a standard of this Code, other than for **child abuse**, (the reporting of child abuse is addressed in paragraphs 5.14 and 5.15), you should:*
- *where you believe that a person has not suffered harm or is not at the risk of harm, approach the member of the clergy or church worker and identify the concern; or*
  - *where you believe that a person has suffered harm or is at the risk of harm, report this to the **church authority** having responsibility for the member of the clergy or church worker or the **Director of Professional Standards**.*

*If in doubt seek advice from a colleague or supervisor or the Director of Professional Standards without identifying the member of the clergy or church worker.*

- 3.10 *If you know or have reason to believe that another member of the clergy or another church worker has not followed a guideline of this Code, you should approach the member of the clergy or church worker and identify the concern. If you consider that the member of the clergy or church worker is persisting in disregarding the guideline without good reason and a person has suffered harm or is at the risk of harm, you should seriously consider reporting this to the church authority with responsibility for the member of the clergy or church worker or the Director of Professional Standards. If in doubt seek advice from a colleague or supervisor or the Director of Professional Standards without identifying the member of the clergy or church worker.*

Section 3's Preamble makes it clear that domestic abuse or a failure to observe the law could result in clergy or church workers facing formal disciplinary action. Likewise negligence of guidelines in pastoral counselling regarding domestic abuse might result in the requirement to receive specialised help.

- 3.4 *Failure to meet the standards of this Code will indicate an area where clergy and church workers require guidance and specialised help. Such failures may result in formal disciplinary action if the conduct infringes an applicable disciplinary rule of the Church or is a breach of an employment contract.*
- 3.5 *Clergy and church workers are encouraged to follow the guidelines of this Code. Where this is impractical, the exercise of judgement will be required to ensure the safety of those to whom they minister and themselves. Wilful disregard of the guidelines may indicate an area where clergy and church workers require guidance and specialised help.*

## **Definitions**

Please note the following definitions of abuse from *Faithfulness in Service*, Section 2, the **glossary of terms**.

**abuse** in relation to an adult means the following conduct:

- bullying;
- emotional abuse;
- harassment;
- physical abuse;
- sexual abuse; or
- spiritual abuse.

**bullying** means behaviour directed to a person or persons which:

- is repeated;
- is unreasonable (being behaviour that a reasonable person, having considered the circumstances, would see as unreasonable, including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening); and
- creates a risk to their health and safety.

Bullying can include:

- making derogatory, demeaning or belittling comments or jokes about someone's appearance, lifestyle, background, or capability;
- communicating in an abusive manner;
- spreading rumours or innuendo about someone or undermining in other ways their performance or reputation;
- dismissing or minimising someone's legitimate concerns or needs;
- inappropriately ignoring or excluding someone from information or activities;
- touching someone threateningly or inappropriately
- invading someone's personal space or interfering with their personal property;
- teasing, or playing pranks or practical jokes on someone;
- displaying or distributing written or visual material that degrades or offends.

Bullying does not include lawful conduct of clergy or church workers carried out in a reasonable manner, such as:

- disagreeing with or criticising someone's belief or opinions or actions in an honest and respectful way;
- giving information about inappropriate behaviour in an objective way to the person or persons concerned and to any other person with a proper reason for having that information;
- setting reasonable performance goals, standards or deadlines;
- giving information about unsatisfactory performance in an honest and constructive way;
- taking legitimate disciplinary action.
- Cyberbullying is a form of bullying which involves the use of information and communication technologies.

**emotional abuse** means acts or omissions that have caused, or could cause emotional harm or lead to serious behavioural or cognitive disorders. It includes:

- subjecting a person to excessive and repeated personal criticism;
- ridiculing a person, including the use of insulting or derogatory terms to refer to them;
- threatening or intimidating a person;
- ignoring a person openly and pointedly; and
- behaving in a hostile manner or in any way that could reasonably result in another person feeling isolated or rejected.

**harassment** means unwelcome conduct, whether intended or not, in relation to another person where the person feels with good reason in all the circumstances offended, belittled or threatened. Such behaviour may consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time. It includes:

- making unwelcome physical contact with a person;
- making gestures or using language that could reasonably give offence including continual and unwarranted shouting;
- making unjustified or unnecessary comments about a person's capacities or attributes;
- putting on open display pictures, posters, graffiti or written materials that could reasonably give offence;
- making unwelcome communication with a person in any form (for example, phone calls, email, text messages); and
- stalking a person.

**physical abuse** means any intentional or reckless act, use of force or threat to use force causing injury to, or involving unwelcome physical contact with, another person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. An injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures. It does not include lawful discipline by a parent or guardian.

**sexual abuse** of an adult means sexual assault, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment of an adult. [Note: these terms are further defined in the same section]

**spiritual abuse** means the mistreatment of a person by actions or threats when justified by appeal to God, faith or religion. It includes:

- using a position of spiritual authority to dominate or manipulate another person or group;
- using a position of spiritual authority to seek inappropriate deference from others;
- isolating a person from friends and family members; and
- using biblical or religious terminology to justify abuse.

**Suggested Parish Policy on Domestic Abuse****Parish of.....Policy for Responding to Domestic Abuse****All forms of domestic abuse are wrong. Perpetrators must stop.**

1. The primary focus of this Policy is abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. (Abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.) **Domestic abuse** involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.

**2. We are committed to safe places which –**

- Recognise equality amongst people,
- Promote a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility in marriages, families and congregations,
- Ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse,
- Strive to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse,
- Refuse to condone any form of abuse, and
- Enable concerns to be raised and responded to appropriately and consistently.

**3. We uphold *Faithfulness in Service* as our national code of conduct for clergy and church workers, specifically its affirmations that –**

- Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and in the community. In essence, abuse is one person's misuse of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one-off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour, (6.2)
- It is important for clergy and church workers to be good citizens and to obey the laws of the community, except where those laws conflict with Christian convictions, (6.4) and
- You are not to abuse your spouse, children or other members of your family (6.6).

**4. We recognise that Domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response –**

- All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong,
- Domestic abuse can occur in all communities, including churches,
- Domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour,
- Working in partnership with vulnerable adults and children, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse,
- Clergy and lay ministers need to obtain advice from those with professional expertise when faced with situations of domestic abuse,
- Clergy should ensure the provision of training about domestic abuse by appropriately qualified professionals or programs to those in leadership positions, safe ministry roles and other pastoral roles, with periodic 'refresher' training.
- Our response should also include 'primary prevention', challenging disrespect and other attitudes or stereotypes, and other social or cultural factors which may allow individual misconduct to flourish.
- Where mistakes in caring for people in difficult situations are made, an apology should be offered and advice sought on how to address any harm caused.

**5. We respect people who come to us for help by –**

- Valuing, respecting and listening to victims of domestic abuse;
- Valuing, respecting and listening to alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two; and
- Refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

**6. We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements by –**

- Clearly teaching that domestic abuse is wrong and that the Bible should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible encourages victims to seek safety, that separation for such reason is an appropriate step to take, and that divorce may properly be a way of protecting victims in such tragic circumstances.
- Raising awareness of domestic violence agencies, support services, crisis accommodation, resources and expertise.

**7. We ensure safety first by –**

- Ensuring that those who have experienced domestic abuse can find safety and informed help as a first priority, and can continue to stay safe,
- Taking it Seriously – Ensuring that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed; also noting that a perpetrator may deliberately undermine a victim by making their own allegation first,
- Getting help from outside – Working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community,
- Keeping it confidential – Respecting the need for confidentiality within the bounds of good Safe Ministry practice, noting that reporting requirements exist where there is an immediate danger, where a child is at risk of serious harm or where the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender; where a report is required, this should first be discussed with the victim wherever possible, and
- Challenging with Care – Carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour, but only after receiving professional advice, and only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk.

**8. We offer pastoral support to those in our care by –**

- Offering informed care – Ensuring that informed and appropriate pastoral care and professional help is offered to any adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse,
- Being guided by the victim – Never pressuring any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender,
- Understanding that reconciliation comes with conditions – Understanding that any reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender,
- Coordinating the care – being familiar with appropriate pastoral care relationships for both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse, identifying and helping provide any specialist support, including separate and independent support for any children involved, and,
- Recognising cultural differences – understanding how cultural norms and values may affect victims or can contribute to abuse being perpetuated.

**If you have any concerns or need to talk to anyone please contact...**

- The Police: dial **000**
  - 24/7 in emergencies where safety is at risk.
- 1800 RESPECT national helpline: **1800 737 732** or [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)
  - 24/7 for sexual assault, & domestic violence counselling and advice.
- Child Protection Helpline: **132 111** or [reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg](http://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg)
  - If you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.
- Lifeline: **131 114** or [www.lifeline.org.au/get-help](http://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help)
  - 24 hour telephone crisis line.
- Office of the Director of Safe Ministry **9265 1604** or [safeministry.org.au](http://safeministry.org.au)
  - Advice about abuse involving Anglican clergy or church workers

Appendix 8

**Draft Safety and Exit plan**

*Ordinarily safety planning would be done with an experienced professional in the field of responding to domestic abuse. However this sample gives a sense of the wide range of issues that would have to be considered.*

**Step 1: I CAN USE SOME OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:**

- A. If I decide to leave, I will\_\_\_\_\_. (Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?)
  
- B. I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them\_\_\_\_\_ (place) in order to leave quickly.
  
- C. I can tell\_\_\_\_\_ about the abuse and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.
  
- D. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police and the fire department.
  
- E. I will use\_\_\_\_\_ as my code for my children or my friends so they can call for help.
  
- F. If I have to leave my home, I will go\_\_\_\_\_ (Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time). If I cannot go to the location above, then I can go to \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
  
- G. I can also teach some of these strategies to some/all of my children.
  
- H. When I expect we are going to have an argument, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as \_\_\_\_\_ . (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door).
  
- I. I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I may be able to give my partner what he/she wants to calm him/her down. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

...over

## Step 2: SAFETY WHEN PREPARING TO LEAVE

Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Perpetrators often strike back when they believe that the person they are abusing is leaving the relationship.

I can use some or all the following safety strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with \_\_\_\_\_ so that I can leave quickly.
- B. I will keep copies of important papers and documents or an extra set of keys at \_\_\_\_\_.
- C. I will open a savings account by \_\_\_\_\_, to increase my independence.
- D. Other things I can do to increase my independence include:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- E. The domestic violence program's hot line telephone number is \_\_\_\_\_ and I can seek shelter by calling this hot line.
- F. I understand that if I use my mobile, the following month the telephone bill will tell my perpetrator the numbers that I called after I left. I could get a 'pay as you go' phone, or use a public phone. There are no bills and all communication would be confidential.
- G. I will check with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money in an emergency.
- H. I can leave extra clothes with \_\_\_\_\_.
- I. I will sit down and review my safety plan every \_\_\_\_\_ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence.
- J. \_\_\_\_\_ (domestic violence advocate or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan.
- K. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.

...over

### Step 3: SAFETY IN MY OWN RESIDENCE

There are many things that a person can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use include:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- B. I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- C. I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc.
- D. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- E. I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- F. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.
- G. I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a reverse charge call to me and to \_\_\_\_\_(friend/ other) or get them a mobile phone in the event that my partner takes the children.
- H. I will tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick- up permission include:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_(school)
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_(day care staff)
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_(Sunday School teacher)

### Marriage Preparation: Recommended good practice

Marriage preparation offers an opportunity to challenge inappropriate behaviour and assumptions about domination, control or abuse, while making it clear that some degree of conflict within an intimate relationship is natural and healthy, if dealt with appropriately.

The principles of understanding humanity (female and male) as made in God's image and of equal worth; of equality amongst people and within relationships; and of not condoning any form of abuse, should underpin any marriage preparation offered by the Church.

Care must be taken if the biblical themes of a wife's submission or a husband's role as 'head' are to be expressed in the marriage vows or other parts of the marriage service, or in marriage preparation more generally. Please spell out what such ideas **do not and must not** involve to avoid any misunderstanding or twisting of Scripture.

For example, any wife's submission must only ever be voluntary. It ought not to involve submitting to disobedience to God or to illegal activity. No wife is spiritually obligated to submit to domestic abuse from her husband.

Likewise husbands are never told to assert authority over their wife. In particular, they are never told to make their wife submit. Any manipulation or hint of coercion of her towards such ends is sin.

Given the high incidence of domestic abuse within marriage, we recommend that clergy and lay people who offer marriage and wedding preparation should have engaged in some training from suitably qualified professionals or programs on issues of domestic abuse. It is important that there is a clear understanding amongst those who offer marriage preparation that domestic abuse is always unacceptable and that domestic abuse breaks the sanctity of marriage.

The subjects regularly dealt with when preparing couples for marriage, e.g. communication, conflict and in particular "How do you deal with your anger?" offer an opportunity for couples to discuss together how their parents dealt with anger, rows and conflict, or how the couple might have dealt with these in previous relationships. Sometimes those who have experienced domestic abuse as children have a very idealised view of marriage.

It is possible that those working with couples hoping to marry may become aware or suspect that abuse is taking place or may take place between the partners. This is always a difficult area to deal with and illustrates the need for training for people involved in this work, but one or more of the following ideas might help in such a situation.

The facilitator might include a statement at the beginning of the 'course' or conversation and again before dealing with a subject such as 'marital conflict' or anger. The following, which may need amending depending on the circumstances, is an example of a form of words that might be appropriate:

*"When we think about relationships in general and our own in particular, there is always a chance that issues may be raised that touch us in a way that leaves us feeling disturbed, uncomfortable or anxious. If this happens you may wish to speak to one of us today more privately or to seek help from a counsellor or other helping organisation."*

If a domestic abuse issue is raised directly or indirectly by one of the couple, the facilitator should not pursue it in the presence of the other: this could be highly dangerous. They may need to find a way to give the person a chance to say more in private, with the object of encouraging them to get one-to-one help from a competent person or organisation.

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Because the Prepare-Enrich questionnaires are so widely used among Anglican churches for marriage preparation and marriage enrichment, it is worth reporting briefly on research published by the Prepare-Enrich organisation, entitled, "Spouse Abuse & Marital System based on Enrich" by Shuji G. Asai and David H. Olson, both of the University of Minnesota<sup>1</sup>.

This was research based in the United States from a national sample of over 20,000 couples taking the Enrich questionnaire.

Its literature review noted that one's background (e.g. family abuse in one's own past) and context (e.g. unemployment) can be correlated with higher rates of abuse. It noted that individual traits and behaviour can be significant with victims tending to have low self esteem and to be higher on avoidance. It also showed features of couple interaction, such as good communication and conflict resolution, can be associated with higher relational quality. Conversely, there is an association between family violence and unequal decision making power, with levels of violence higher for wives among husband-dominating patriarchal couples.

Based on self-reporting to the inventory question, "Have you ever been abused (verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually) by your partner?", over 61% of couples in the study were classified as non-abusing, 16.8% as having the husband abusing, 13.4% having both partners abusing, and 8% having the wife abusing.

Using the Enrich Couple typology, 95% of Vitalised couple types, 88% of Harmonious couple types, and almost 80% of Traditional couple types were classified as non-abusing.

Conversely, less than 28% of Devitalised couple types were non-abusive.

In the middle, 52% of Conflicted couples types were non-abusive. So it was noted that about half of conflicted couples could maintain non-abusive relationships, even when there were significant difficulties reported. That is, unresolved conflict does not always make a marriage abusive.

Of the various Couple scales, the most significant predictors of abuse were lower scores for Positive Couple Agreement in the categories of 'Family and Friends', 'Personality Issues', 'Communications', and 'Conflict Resolution', along with lower rating of 'Couple Closeness'. Lack of 'Couple Flexibility' was also significant.

Couples with a more Egalitarian<sup>2</sup> approach to Role Relationships appeared to be less likely to experience abuse of the wife.

On individual Personality scales, non-abusive couples tended to display both partners scoring higher in self-confidence and assertiveness, and lower in partner dominance and avoidance.

Unsurprisingly, abusive couples have the abused partner tending to be high in avoidance and partner dominance and lower in assertiveness and self-confidence (although not so much with self-confidence in the case where husbands report abuse).

A strength of the research was its broad definition of abuse, including verbal, emotional, physical and sexual. A limit is its self-reporting nature, especially given the likelihood that abuse is underreported. The study sample group was predominantly Caucasian (85%), so results may be different in other ethnic groups.

Another limit would be in applying this to marriage *preparation* since the study only measured those who had already been married for some time, and were engaging in the Enrich inventory. So some caution would be needed in extrapolating findings of correlations to results of those doing the Prepare inventory, although there is intuitive expectation that similar correlations might be found.

Nevertheless, this research may give those engaged in marriage preparation some idea of particular measures to focus on as possible correlates for abuse being more likely as a possibility, especially where domestic abuse is expressed or suspected as a concern.

Steps taken to increase an individual's assertiveness and self-confidence and to develop skills in communication and conflict resolution may be worth considering in this context. But where a proneness to abuse or other serious relational difficulty is suspected, clergy and church workers should carefully consider referrals to trained counsellors or other professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://app.prepare-enrich.com/pe/pdf/research/abuse.pdf>, viewed 1 August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Note that 'Egalitarian' here in Prepare/Enrich is not defined primarily in theological terms.

### **Doctrine Commission on Divorce and Remarriage**

There are various views among Bible-based Christians about divorce and remarriage. To aid Sydney Anglicans in their consideration of these matters, we note the 2019 Doctrine Commission report entitled, “The Implications of Domestic Abuse for Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage 18/18 The nature of marriage”.<sup>1</sup>

This report also included as an appendix the “Letter to Members of Synod Regarding Domestic Abuse and Remarriage” from the Archbishop at the time, the Most Reverend Glenn Davies, which includes this key paragraph,

*“The Regional Bishops assess each application for remarriage on a case by case basis. In many cases of domestic abuse, it is evident that the abusing spouse is an unbeliever who has demonstrably ‘abandoned’ the marriage by the manner in which they have treated their spouse (notwithstanding the fact that the victim may be the one who leaves the marital home for reasons of safety). Even in cases where the abusing spouse still claims to be a believer, the bishops recognise that he or she is acting like an unbeliever in perpetrating domestic abuse. In such cases the principles of Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:11 may well apply, so that the person is treated as an unbeliever. It is also possible, however, that there are circumstances where there are legitimate grounds for divorce, which may not satisfy the biblical grounds for remarriage.”*

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<sup>1</sup> The PDF was accessed on 4 April 2023 and is available at <https://www.sds.asn.au/2019-doctrine-commission-report-implications-domestic-abuse-marriage-divorce-and-remarriage>

## Walking Through It: A Family Violence Survivor's Reflection

The author of this article has asked that her name be withheld.

*(Used by permission, courtesy of The Gospel Coalition, Australia<sup>1</sup>)*

I recently wrote a letter to ministers, entitled “Things I wish you understood: An open letter to ministers from a family violence survivor.” The response has been humbling. I'm glad it resonated with the experience of many, because it reminds me that I'm not alone, and that nor am I crazy because sometimes I have to fight with my emotions and body to get control again. Thank you to the sisters and brothers who have said “that's me, too.” May God bless, comfort and heal you also.

I'm also more glad than I can say for the people who said it would help them to love their flock better. That's what I was praying for. My experience won't speak to everyone, and won't be applicable to everyone, but if it starts a conversation or raises awareness, then I thank God for that. If it means that I or someone else might have a better chance of hearing and understanding what the Bible says on some of those more difficult passages, so much the better. That was my heart—I want to hear and learn, and sometimes I can't because of what I've been through. I'm not alone in that.

I've been encouraged privately to reflect and share on the experience of coming forward in the church. I am profoundly grateful for the godly men and women who walked through it with me. My experiences were generally positive but there were moments that weren't so positive as well, and moments which might have gone much, much worse but for the grace of God. I am somewhat unusual, from what I can gather, in that I didn't meet with anyone (outside of my then-husband) who treated me with harshness or ungraciousness. Even those who weren't helpful still tried to treat me with love. My heart aches for those who have not been met with grace and love.

Here are some things that I've been reflecting on about my own experience:

### **1. Listening to me, and believing me were the biggest gifts anyone could give me.**

Those who listened and believed will have my everlasting gratitude and love. The first person I shared with was not a minister, but a friend who by the grace of God had walked this journey before. I didn't realise that at the time because I didn't actually know what was happening to me. I just knew my life was suddenly spinning out of control, and I was scared. She knew the value of listening and believing. She'd had experience. She knew what to do on every level: emotional, spiritual, practical. She validated what I told her—the first tentative forays into shattering the illusion I had been so carefully maintaining. I didn't tell her the whole picture, just the part that was upsetting me the most at the time. She treated me with respect, grace and dignity. That led me to go further, to bring deeper wounds forward to see if perhaps—breathtakingly—they might meet with tenderness too. *She believed me, and she told me she believed me.*

### **2. It was an incredibly scary thing to bring the leadership of my church into the picture.**

I knew them to be men of gentleness and compassion, but I had seen what I thought was gentleness and compassion turn into harshness and anger before. I was terrified of being dismissed. I was petrified of being told that I was in sin, that I needed to go back. I didn't know what I would do if they did. The weight of that possibility made it difficult to breathe. I thought I was going to have a heart attack from the mere thought of having to choose between going back or defying the leadership of my church. The choice *felt* like one between my life and sanity, and my very salvation. My salvation was never actually on the line but, battered and broken as I was, that is what it felt like. It was agony.

### **3. Common sense isn't really enough in these situations.**

The norms of relationships don't apply. The nature of abuse makes all sorts of things impossible. I couldn't do counselling with my then-husband. Any attempts to discuss the issues led to an escalation of abuse. When my pastor accidentally broke my confidence in discussion with my then-husband, I

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/article/walking-through-it-a-family-violence-survivors-reflection>

was placed in harm's way, and again received a tirade of abuse that left me trembling and sobbing. Thankfully, my pastor learned from that and was very careful not to inadvertently break my confidence again. **He was also willing to listen to the advice of those who had more training in abuse than he did.** It is an area which requires knowledge and understanding, and I know that his willingness to listen and learn from his mistakes had positive outcomes for me.

**4. I needed professional help to recover.**

I drew near to God, and dug deep into my Bible, but I am indebted to the Christian counsellor I worked with for many years, and still work with today. Romans 12:2 talks of not being conformed any longer to the world, but renewing our minds, so that we can work out what God's will is. God used my counsellor mightily in that. So much in my thinking had been warped by abuse that I needed to re-evaluate everything I had ever learned or thought I knew about marriage, submission and headship. The process of sorting through what the Bible actually said and what had been twisted was long and arduous. The process still continues, and probably always will.

**5. I needed, and still need, clear and unambiguous teaching on these points.**

In renewing my mind, I didn't and don't want secular views to form the basis of my understanding. I don't want to abandon biblical teachings on headship, respect, submission or divorce. I want my views and understanding to be rooted in the Bible and nothing else. Marriage is God's good plan, and His intention and design for it are what I want and need to understand. Abuse is not part of His plan, and it has warped my understanding. My last letter was a plea for ministers to understand that they can help immensely in this. I want to hear from preachers who've thought, prayed and read deeply about abuse and marriage, and can steer me past the rocks and the pitfalls that abuse created, and for which my often faulty prior understanding laid the groundwork. The best help I have in my recovery is understanding what God actually says about me, about the way I was treated and about marriage in general.

**6. It was the compassionate and faithful teaching of a pastor which God used to begin open my eyes to the truth of my situation.**

I had no idea I was being abused, but I was hurting over what was happening in my marriage, and desperately wondering if the problem really was me. I wondered if I really was being called to submit to this, and what if anything, I could do to make things better. I wondered if this was normal. Over the years and months before I finally left my marriage, this pastor preached through various books of the Bible. Every single time something about marriage or the roles of men and women came up, he took the time to gently and compassionately point out what those passages *didn't* mean, as well as what they did. His was the sole voice of hope I heard, and it was powerful because he was an authority figure. Abuse is isolating. I was afraid to discuss my marriage with anyone else and afraid to read or research on the subject. God used the voice of this pastor to remind me that the way I was being treated wasn't His will, even though I was a long way from leaving or even understanding that it was abuse. His voice called me back to God, back to prayer and reading the Bible, rather than hardening me against God in my pain.

**7. The people who truly comforted me were okay with the mess and didn't try to fix it.**

My life was in tatters. My mental and physical health was breaking under the strain of what was happening, and the torrent of abuse that leaving unleashed. The people who truly gave me comfort loved me in the midst of that. They sat with me, they looked after me. They let me cry when I needed to, and listened to my doubts and fears and anger. They didn't see my anxiety and depression as a spiritual failure on my part, but as the direct and natural result of my experience. They encouraged me to seek help. They prayed with me, for strength and courage and reliance on God in the midst of the mess. They never gave me platitudes, and their faith was not rocked by my suffering. When they offered the occasional Bible verse, it was because it was something they had *lived*, and had helped them. In the manner of 2 Corinthians 1:3—4, they comforted me with the comfort they had been given and continually drew my eyes to the God of all comfort.

**8. Some people were really uncomfortable with my suffering and wanted to offer quick fixes.**

One woman listened sympathetically, and then told me that Romans 8:28 meant that God would put my marriage back together again. She couldn't conceive that the "good" God was working for was to

make me more like Christ, and that didn't necessarily come with a fairy-tale ending. Another implied that I was giving way to negative thinking and outlined what I needed to do to win the battle of my mind. The hearts of both were in the right place, and I loved them for their intent, but it wasn't at all helpful. I didn't need to be offered false promises that were a distortion of God's Word. I didn't need to feel blamed for my mental health crumbling under the strain, and feel like it was being attributed to some lack of discipline or sin on my part. The reality was, I was walking with God more closely than I ever had before, and I believed that the "good" Romans 8:28 promised could only be defined my God, not dictated human desires. I was clinging to that verse, but trusting God for what it would look like.

**9. I equally distrusted those who were willing to rewrite the Bible so that I wouldn't be hurt, and those who applied it rigidly and legalistically, without compassion.**

It was a very long time before I asked my leadership team if I could seek divorce. They never pushed me about it one way or another, but gave me space to ask when and if I was ready. I watched, and listened to everything they said, and every sermon they preached. I'd seen the way that they took care to show compassion while still preaching the truth. I didn't ask the question until I was certain that their desire for obedience to God was as strong as their compassion for His flock. I needed them to have both qualities in equal measure to feel safe asking. If they had told me I had to remain unmarried, I would have submitted to that, but I needed to know that they would understand what they were actually asking of me, and understood the pain it would cause. I needed to know they would be there if I had to live out that path. When I did ask, they gave me clear, reasoned answers from the Bible; answers that I will not detail here, as to do so would require more detail of my circumstances than is safe to give.

**10. The decision to walk away from my marriage was the most painful one I have ever made.**

I had prayed so hard over the years, and done everything I could do to have the quiet and gentle spirit that 1 Peter 3 talks about. I had wrestled with God over injustices and hurts, begged for change and railed at Him over the circumstances. I was repeatedly brought lovingly to my knees in repentance as He chose to deal with MY heart within the marriage. At the point when it became untenable and I left physically, I had long since learned that in my particular case God was going to deal with MY sinfulness with me, regardless of what my spouse was doing. He was going to make me like Christ, and I would need to trust Him in the journey, because He loved me. He would deal with my spouse in His time, not mine. It was hard, and I struggled with it often. When the crisis point came, I was taken by surprise.

**11. God is incredibly faithful.**

The more I reflect on my journey, the more I see His merciful provision to me, both in practical supports and emotional and spiritual ones. He drew close to me, and when I feared that I would lose absolutely everything I held dear, I learned that He is truly enough, and that His gift of salvation is the one thing that cannot be taken from me. Much in my life looks different than I had hoped, but the deep knowledge of His faithfulness and love is a gift beyond words.