This curriculum is part of
The Alliance for Faith-Based Efforts to End Domestic Violence,
within the Institute for Family Violence Studies,
Florida State University College of Social Work
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Institute for Family Violence Studies

The Institute for Family Violence Studies strives to contribute to effective responses to the devastation caused by family violence.

By collaborating with public and private organizations, by disseminating knowledge, and by advocating for effective policies & programs, the Institute serves as a catalyst for the elimination of all forms of domestic violence.

To fulfill this mission, the Institute performs the following:

- Research family violence as it occurs in all groups, including adults, law enforcement, children, and the elderly.
- Identify and explore related research domains, including supervised visitation, homelessness, and women's issues.
- Disseminate the findings of this research at the local, state, national, and international levels.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of family violence interventions.
- Support the development of innovative programs for reducing family violence.
- Analyze legislation addressing family violence issues.
- Develop curricula that strengthen social work studies on family violence.
- Providing continuing education and training opportunities to those working in agencies which provide interventions to those experiencing family violence.
- Serve as a regional clearinghouse on resources related to family violence.
- Collaborate with the courts and community organizations on family violence concerns.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence is a crime. Church leaders – those people who are in positions of authority in a church – know that it is also a sin, and are often the first people congregants turn to for help. These leaders should be knowledgeable about the dynamics of domestic violence, and be prepared to help victims find peace and safety. This training provides church leaders with an introduction to the complex issues involved in helping victims of domestic violence. It also helps dispel myths that keep victims from seeking and finding the safety they need.

*Note: This curriculum is intended to be an introduction into the dynamics of domestic violence. It is meant to aid church leaders in recognizing signs of domestic violence and aiding victims of domestic violence. It does not address issues pertaining to how to deal with batterers. Please contact your local certified domestic violence center or other community domestic violence expert for advice in this area.*

**Who Can Benefit from this Training?**

Anyone can benefit, but especially those in leadership roles in the church, such as:

- Pastors and other ministerial staff
- Choir leaders
- Youth and college leaders
- Church childcare leaders
- Elders or deacons in the church
- Sunday School teachers or Bible Study leaders
- Anyone in a leadership role within the church working directly with congregants

Large congregations may have many leaders who should take this training, and small congregations may have only a few. Still, every church should have at least one leader who knows how to help victims of domestic violence. The Bible states that Jesus promised, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).”

**Objectives**

By the end of this training, church leaders will be able to:

- Identify reasons why church leaders should become knowledgeable about domestic violence issues.
- Define domestic violence and describe its common dynamics.
- Know what the Bible says about forgiveness and submission as they pertain to domestic violence.
- Openly address the crime of abuse.
- Discover obstacles church leaders may face when helping victims of domestic violence.
- Determine one’s own readiness, as a church leader, to deal with domestic violence issues in the church.
- Know what to do and how to help when faced with domestic violence issues within the church.
Why Church Leaders Should Know about Domestic Violence

Prevalence & Statistics

The following are some statistics on the prevalence and frequency of domestic violence:

- Domestic violence has been called “an epidemic.” Nearly 25% of American women report being raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime (CDC and the National Institute of Justice, 2000).

- From 1993 to 1998, victimization by an intimate partner accounted for 22% of the violence experienced by women (CDC & National Institute for Justice, 2000).

- It has been estimated that a woman is battered every 15 seconds in this country (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1993).

- In 2005, 1,181 women were murdered by an intimate partner (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).

- Of all the women murdered in the U.S. in 2005, about one-third were killed by an intimate partner (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).

- In 2009, the overall crime rate went down in Florida, but domestic violence increased. Domestic violence murders increased by 15%, and domestic violence manslaughters increased by an astounding 74% (Florida's Annual Uniform Crime Report, 2009). This same report revealed the following:
  - Stalking – a common precursor to homicide – increased by 32%.
  - That domestic violence-related murders account for one out of every five murders statewide.
  - More than 116,500 individuals reported a domestic violence crime during the 2009 calendar year.
  - Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers were forced to turn away more than 7,100 survivors and their children in need of emergency shelter due to a lack of beds, and hundreds more had to be sheltered in hotels.

- The “National Declaration by Religious and Spiritual Leaders to Address Violence Against Women” acknowledges that domestic violence exists in all communities, including the church, and that too often sacred texts, traditions, and values have been misused to condone abuse (Faith Trust Institute, 2006).

- Inadequately prepared individuals who deal with victims may inadvertently contribute to continued violence (Moles, 2008).

- Some professionals believe that Christian women are more vulnerable after abuse takes place because these victims:
  - Are less likely to leave because they believe that it will violate their commitment to God and marriage.
  - Are more likely to blame themselves for the abuse (Nason-Clark, 2007; Nason-Clark & Kroeger, 2004).

- Certain responses can increase the risk to a victim, especially if a church leader prioritizes forgiveness for an abuser before safety for a victim (Goodwin, 2004).
What Church Leaders Should Know about Domestic Violence

Church leaders should know about the following:

- Definitions of domestic violence
- Dynamics of domestic violence
- Effects of domestic violence on victims and children
- Biblical Perspective on abuse and healing
- Myths and Facts about domestic violence
- Overcoming obstacles to help victims
- How to help victims

Definitions & Dynamics

The following are definitions and important facts about domestic violence.

- Domestic violence is a crime.
  - According to Section 741.28, Florida Statutes, domestic violence is:

  …any assault, aggravated assault, battery, aggravated battery, sexual assault, sexual battery, stalking, aggravated stalking, kidnapping, false imprisonment, or any criminal offense resulting in physical injury or death of one family or household member by another family or household member.

- There are non-legal definitions of domestic violence that help us understand what it looks like in a home over time.
  - Domestic violence is “a pattern of assaultive and coercive behavior that may include physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse as well as economic coercion, property destruction, and/or child abuse that occurs between partners in intimate relationships.”

- Who are the victims of domestic violence?
  - Although both men and women can be victims of domestic violence, the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 85% of reported assaults on spouses or ex-spouses are committed by men against women.

- What is often the core issue of domestic violence?
  - The core issue of domestic violence is often power and control! Domestic violence is not limited to a person who physically hurts a spouse of family member because he or she cannot control his or her temper in an argument. Commonly, the core issue of domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used by an abuser to establish power and control over a spouse or family member through fear and intimidation.
    - Abusers believe they are entitled to control their victims. They believe that threats and violence are acceptable and will produce the desired results. Therefore, domestic violence is purposeful and instrumental behavior.
- The pattern is directed at restricting independent thought and action so that the victim will become devoted to fulfilling the needs of the abuser.
- The pattern is not impulsive or “out of control” behavior. Tactics that work to control the victim are selectively chosen by the perpetrator. This achievement is unfulfilling however, because the abuser can never get enough control to make him/her feel comfortable. It is impossible, despite the victim’s attempts to comply.

## The Dynamics of Power and Control

### Power & Control

There are several ways in which an abuser can assert power over an intimate partner or family member. These are often seen as the dynamics of an abusive relationship, when an abuser uses whatever tactics work to exert control over a victim. Abusers may use several of these tactics:

- **Physical abuse**
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Psychological/Emotional abuse**
- **Economic abuse**
- **Legal abuse**

### Physical Abuse

Abusers often control victims through the intentional use of force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL ABUSE</th>
<th>Pushing, Shoving</th>
<th>Restraining, Twisting</th>
<th>Throwing</th>
<th>Grabbing, Shaking</th>
<th>Scratching, Biting</th>
<th>Strangling</th>
<th>Choking</th>
<th>Spitting</th>
<th>Slapping</th>
<th>Punching</th>
<th>Burning</th>
<th>Use of a weapon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some assaults result in physical injuries, and some do not. Victims may have broken bones, bruises, cuts, scratches, internal injuries, and other physical signs of abuse. Note that bruises sometimes take days to show up. Physical abuse may be as subtle as a purposeful overdose of medication. When a victim acts in self-defense, this is not mutual abuse. Sometimes the abuser will have scratches and cuts caused by the victim trying to protect herself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sexual Abuse**

Abusers often control victims by using non-consensual sex acts, including:

- A completed sex act.
- An attempted (but not completed) sex act.
- Abusive sexual contact.
- Non-contact sexual abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Abuse</th>
<th>Coerced sex by manipulation or threat of physical force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violent sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any kind of sex the victim does not want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex at a time the victim does not want it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forcing to watch pornography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes victims comply, hoping that the sexual abuse will end quickly. Often a victim's resistance will be punished. Some battered women are unclear whether sexual abuse is really abuse, believing it to be their duty as a wife.

**Psychological/Emotional Abuse**

Abusers often control victims by using threats through words, actions, and intimidation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Abuse</th>
<th>Threats through words:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “If I can't have you, no one will”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Your mother is going to pay”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “If you do, you’ll be sorry”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Actions:
  - Stalking
  - Brandishing a weapon
  - Standing over victim in a threatening manner
  - Suicide attempts or threats
  - Attacks on the victim's property

- Intimidation:
  - Yelling and screaming in victim's face
  - Standing over a victim during a fight
  - Reckless driving while victim or children are in the car

Perpetrators will use varying combinations of psychological abuse depending on what works on their victims.

The abuser's threats of harm may be against the victim, other people important to the victim, or even beloved pets.

Abusers psychologically abuse their victims through attacks on their property or belongings.

Attacks on property or pets are not random outbursts of uncontrolled anger - they are part of the abuser's attempts to control the victim.

Sometimes the abuser hits the wall that the victim is standing near, or smashes the victim's favorite china. The message to the victim is “You can be next.”
**EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

- Constantly criticizing the victim
- Threatening children, pets
- Mocking her spiritual beliefs
- Mocking her appearance
- Calling her names
- Challenging victim's sense of reality

**Isolation:**
- Moving the victim far away or cutting the victim off from supportive friends or family
- Claiming that victim's family or friends are “interfering”
- Not allowing the victim to use the phone or monitoring her calls
- Not allowing victim access to the car
- Not allowing the victim to retrieve the mail or answer the door without permission
- Not allowing the victim to socialize or meet neighbors

**Misinformation**
- Giving contradictory information to the victim
- Lying to the victim

**Withholding information from the victim about:**
- Resources
- Assistance
- Phone calls from friends and family

The emotional abuse dynamics in domestic violence cases is not merely a matter of someone getting angry and yelling a few nasty names. It often involves ongoing humiliation and fear.

Verbal attacks usually focus on the victim's vulnerabilities, which are well known to the abuser.

Verbal abuse is often a dynamic of an abusive relationship, but verbal abuse alone is only a crime when it involves threats of physical violence.

Abusers try to control their victims' time, activities, and contact with others. Control over the victim is gained through a combination of isolating and threatening tactics.

Misinformation tactics are used by the abuser to distort what is real or the truth. If a victim is isolated she will believe whatever the abuser tells her, since she has no other sources of information.
## Economic Abuse

Abusers often control victims by controlling the victim’s access to the family’s resources, regardless of who is the primary financial provider or if both contribute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Abuse</th>
<th>It does not matter who is the primary financial provider or if both contribute - the abuser controls how the finances are spent in order to control the victim.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Controlling victim’s access to the family’s resources such as:</td>
<td>Victims must ask permission to spend money on basic family needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Time, transportation</td>
<td>The abuser may purposely prevent the victim from becoming financially self-sufficient to maintain power and control over the victim. As long as the victim is financially dependent upon the abuser, there is no way out of the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Food, clothing, shelter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Not allowing the victim to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Not listing victim as an owner on home, car, insurance policies, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Ruining the victim’s credit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Working “off the books” or for cash so that little or no income is reported which the victim may gain access to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Threatening to take victim off of his medical insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Legal Abuse

Abusers often control victims by using the legal system, making the victim feel trapped and without any hope of real help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Abuse</th>
<th>The abuser manipulates the legal system by accusing the victim of abuse.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Threatening to have victim declared incompetent</td>
<td>When accused, the victim is reduced to defending herself instead of protecting herself from the abuser.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Falsely reporting victim to law enforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Threatening deportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Threatening to report drug use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Threatening reports to social service agencies who might cut benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Filing orders of protection against victim, making the victim look like the violent one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Instituting legal procedures the victim cannot afford to fight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Victims Respond to Victimization

It is important for church leaders to have an understanding of common victim characteristics and behaviors.

- Many victims have become isolated from friends, families, or their normal activities because of their abuser's controlling behavior.

**Traumatic Responses to Abuse**

- Shame or guilt
- Denial or minimization of the abuse
- Hyper vigilance/suspiciousness
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low self-esteem
- Numbing or depression
- Anger
- Impaired functioning in occupational, social, and parental roles
- Helplessness
- Overwhelmed
- Lack of trust

**Strategies to escape abuse**

- Legal methods such as obtaining injunctions, calling law enforcement, proceeding with prosecution of abuser, or seeking separation or divorce.
- Formal requests for help from social service agencies, religious services, domestic violence shelters or other groups.
- Escaping to a domestic violence shelter or relocating.
- Using various methods of self-defense.

**Strategies to cope with the abuse**

Examples may include:

- Feeling shock and disbelief
- Hoping the relationship will improve
- Fighting back and defying the abuser
- Pleasing and placating the abuser, complying with his demands
- Not telling anyone about the violence for fear of making things worse
● Not leaving for fear of making things worse
● Leaving to try to make things better
● Avoiding the abuser, working separate shifts
● Protecting the children by sending them away
● Searching for help, getting a restraining order, going to a shelter, trying to find help for the abuser
● Dropping her search for help as a way to protect herself
● Being “devious” as a way to survive, lying to the abuser and others
● Encouraging the abuser to drink so he’ll pass out and not hurt anyone
● Reasoning with the abuser and expressing disapproval of his behavior
● Trying to improve the relationship
● Creating an internal space that the abuser cannot touch through fantasies, etc.
● Having sex to placate the abuser and protect the children from violence
● Drinking and using drugs to numb her own pain
● Lying about the abuser's criminal activity or child abuse so that he will not hurt the victim or the children
**The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children**

Victims are not the only ones who face the effects of domestic violence in the home. Although their reactions vary, children can experience a great deal of trauma merely by being a witness to the abuse. Here are some of the effects of abuse on children at different ages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP: 0-1 YEAR OLD</th>
<th>Ways of Being Drawn In</th>
<th>Effects of Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeing it</td>
<td>Physical injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing it</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being awakened from sleep by it</td>
<td>Fright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being pulled out of mother's arms by the abuser</td>
<td>Being traumatized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having toys broken</td>
<td>Sleep disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being born prematurely</td>
<td>Eating disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being hit while in the mother’s arms</td>
<td>Being colicky or sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being thrown</td>
<td>Being nervous, jumpy, crying a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Insecurity from being cared for by a traumatized mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not being responsive/cuddly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP: 2-4 YEARS OLD</th>
<th>Ways of Being Drawn In</th>
<th>Effects of Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeing it</td>
<td>Acting out violently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing it</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to stop altercation</td>
<td>Problems with relating to other children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Becoming abused themselves</td>
<td>Delayed toileting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being used as a physical weapon against victim</td>
<td>Eating problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being interrogated by abuser about victim's activities</td>
<td>Being nervous, jumpy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being held hostage by abuser</td>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ways of Being Drawn In
- Seeing and hearing it
- Picking one parent to defend
- Physically intervening
- Calling the police
- Running to neighbors to help mother
- Being used as a spy by father against mother
- Being forced to participate in attack on mother
- Being physically or sexually abused as a way to control mother
- Being restricted from contact with others
- Being embarrassed to invite friends over

### Effects of Abuse
- Fear
- Insecurity, low self-esteem
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Running away
- Early interest in alcohol or drugs
- School problems
- Becoming an overachiever
- Bed-wetting
- Sexual activity
- Becoming caretaker of adults
- Becoming violent
- Developing problems to divert parents from fighting
- Becoming embarrassed by his/her family
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP: TEEN YEARS</th>
<th>Specific Effects on Teen Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ways of Being Drawn In</td>
<td>Effects of Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing or trying to kill</td>
<td>School problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to stop abuse</td>
<td>Social problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting parent or sibling</td>
<td>Shame and embarrassment about his/her family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming physically abused</td>
<td>Sexual activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being used as a spy</td>
<td>Tendency to get serious in relationships too early in order to escape home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being used as a confidante</td>
<td>Truancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being coerced by abuser to be abusive to mother</td>
<td>Running away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being embarrassed to invite friends over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning that male violence is “normal”</td>
<td>Becoming super-achiever at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning that women do not get respect</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly accepting violence in their own relationships</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed about being female</td>
<td>Alcohol and/or drug abuse confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming pregnant</td>
<td>Confusion about gender roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming violent</td>
<td>Becoming violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning that males are violent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to disrespect women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using violence in his own relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion or insecurity about being a man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking mother, father, or siblings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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MYTHS & FACTS about Domestic Violence

MYTH #1: Domestic violence affects only a small percentage of the population and is rare.

FACT: National studies estimate that 3 to 4 million women are beaten each year in our country. A study conducted in 1995 found that 31% of women surveyed admitted to having been physically assaulted by a husband or boyfriend. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in our country, and the FBI estimates that a woman is beaten every 15 seconds. Thirty percent of female homicide victims are killed by partners or ex-partners and 1,500 women are murdered as a result of domestic violence each year in the United States.

MYTH #2: Domestic violence occurs only in poor, uneducated, and minority families.

FACT: Studies of domestic violence consistently have found that battering occurs among all types of families, regardless of income, profession, religion, ethnicity, educational level or race. However, the fact that lower income victims and abusers are over-represented in calls to police, battered women's shelters and social services may be due to a lack of other resources and/or the increased stigma associated with domestic violence in upper class communities.

MYTH #3: Alcohol abuse causes domestic violence.

FACT: Although there is a high correlation between alcohol or other substance abuse and battering, drinking does not cause battering. Abusers use drinking as one of many excuses for their violence and as a way to place the responsibility for their violence elsewhere. Stopping the abusers' drinking will not stop the violence. Both battering and substance abuse need to be addressed separately, as overlapping yet independent problems.

MYTH #4: Domestic violence is usually a one-time isolated occurrence.

FACT: Battering is often a pattern of coercion and control that one person exerts over another. Battering is not just one physical attack. It includes the repeated use of a number of tactics, including intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, isolation, and psychological and sexual abuse. Physical violence is just one of these tactics. The various forms of abuse utilized by abusers help to maintain power and control over their spouses and partners.

MYTH #5: When there is violence in the family, all members of the family are participating in the dynamic, and therefore, all must change for the violence to stop.

FACT: Only the abuser has the ability to stop the violence. Battering is a behavioral choice for which the abuser must be held accountable. Many battered women make numerous attempts to change their own behavior in the hope that this will stop the abuse. This does not work. Changes in family members' behavior will not cause the abuser to be non-violent. Children can not stop the abuse by being better behaved. The abuser is solely responsible for his actions.
MYTH #6: Battered women are masochistic and provoke the abuse. They must like it or they would leave.

FACT: Victim provocation is no more common in domestic violence than in any other crime. Battered women often make repeated attempts to leave violent relationships, but are prevented from doing so by increased violence and control tactics on the part of the abuser. Other factors which inhibit a victim's ability to leave include economic dependence, few viable options for housing and support, unhelpful responses from the criminal justice system or other agencies, social isolation, cultural or religious constraints, a commitment to the abuser and the relationship, and fear of further violence. It has been estimated that the danger to a victim increases by 70% when she attempts to leave, as the abuser escalates his use of violence when he begins to lose control.

MYTH #7: Battering is only a momentary loss of temper.

FACT: Battering is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. The abuser uses acts of violence and a series of behaviors, including intimidation, threats, psychological abuse, isolation, etc. to coerce and to control the other person. The violence may not happen often, but it remains as a hidden (and constant) terrorizing factor. One in five women victimized by their spouses or ex-spouses report they had been victimized over and over again by the same person.

MYTH #8: It is easy for battered women to leave an abuser.

FACT: Women who leave their abusers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the abuser than those who stay. Nationally, many homeless women and children have experienced domestic violence in the home. There are nearly three times as many animal shelters in the United States as there are shelters for battered women and their children.

MYTH #9: Victims of domestic violence have psychological disorders.

FACT: This characterization of battered women as mentally ill stems from the assumption that victims of domestic violence must be sick or they would not “take” the abuse. More recent theories demonstrate that battered women resist abuse in a variety of ways (Dutton, The Dynamics of Domestic Violence, 1994). In addition, most victims of domestic violence are not mentally ill, although individuals with mental disabilities are certainly not immune from being abused by their spouses or intimate partners. In fact, individuals with mental and developmental disabilities are at the highest risk of abuse, because of their lack of opportunity to protect themselves. Some victims of domestic violence suffer psychological effects, such as posttraumatic stress disorder or depression, as a result of being abused (Dutton, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Battered Women, 1994).
MYTH #10: Abusers of domestic violence abuse their partners or spouses because they are under a lot of stress or unemployed.

FACT: Stress or unemployment does not cause abusers to abuse their partners. Since domestic violence exists at all socioeconomic levels, domestic abuse cannot be attributed to unemployment or poverty. Similarly, advocates note that if stress caused domestic violence, abusers would assault their bosses or co-leaders rather than their intimate partners. In addition, if stress were the causal factor then more women would be abusers, since women experience stress no less than men. Domestic violence flourishes because abusers learn that they can achieve what they want through the use of force, without facing serious consequences.

MYTH #11: Abusers have mental illnesses.

FACT: The vast majority of people who abuse their intimate partners or family members do not have a diagnosable mental illness. Instead, they use violence because it works.
Biblical Perspective

Church leaders are often the first people whom victims consult. These leaders represent the faith on which victims rely. Church personnel who wish to assist victims should seek both formal training from community experts on helping victims and assurance that the Bible offers help. The Bible offers insight on the issue of domestic violence. Christian principles such as submission, forgiveness, and the sin of abuse will be explored in more depth throughout this training.

Overcoming Obstacles to Help Victims of Domestic Violence in the Church

In the past, some church leaders have misunderstood the terrible plight of domestic violence victims. Read the following conclusions which Jim Alsdurf found in 1985:

The Alsdurf Study

One of the most comprehensive studies on domestic violence in the church was conducted in the mid-1980s (Barnett and LaViolette, 1993).

Clinical psychologist Jim M. Alsdurf is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary.

He sent questionnaires to 5700 Protestant pastors in US and Canada. The findings revealed that many pastors may have endangered victims further by encouraging them to stay with their abusers, instead of helping them find safety.

Alsdurf’s findings:

- 26% of the pastors said they normally tell a woman who is being abused by her husband that she should continue to submit to him, “and to trust that God would honor her action by either stopping the abuse or giving her the strength to endure it.”

- 50% said it is better for a woman to tolerate some level of violence in the home – even though it is “not God’s perfect will” – than to seek separation that might end in divorce.

- About 25% said a lack of submissiveness in the wife is what triggered the violence in the first place.
● 71% said they would never advise a battered wife to leave her husband or separate because of abuse.
● 92% said they would never counsel her to seek divorce.
● This data suggests that many pastors were more dedicated to the concept of marriage than the woman’s physical well-being and safety within that marriage.

While many churches have made progress in the past 25 years in their understanding of the very serious risk that exists for those who are forced to stay with their abusers, there are still many church leaders who believe that women should never leave their abusive spouses.

What obstacles exist for victims who seek help within the church?

● Mistaken Definitions of Submission
● Placing Forgiveness before Safety
● Lack of Accountability for the Sin of Abuse
● Commonly held myths regarding issues of domestic violence
● Lack of understanding regarding abusers and victims
● Confusion between Forgiveness and Reconciliation

**Christian Principles of Submission**

The most commonly used argument for staying with an abusive husband is the biblical concept of submission.

**Ephesians 5:22-24**

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

According to these verses alone, a wife does not appear to have a choice. However, this is not a complete look at what the Bible says on this issue.

**Submission in its Biblical context:**

Church leaders should also look at the verses that both precede and follow Ephesians 5:22-24.

**Ephesians 5:21**

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Submission among all Christians is meant to be mutual and an act of respect to Christ.
Ephesians 5:25

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her…”

Christ’s love for the church was a sacrificial love which resulted in the ultimate act of submission, His choice to die. Christ gave up His own desires for the benefit of His church. This is the kind of love the Bible instructs a husband to have for his wife.

Colossians 3:19

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

A further mandate to husbands to be respectful and appropriate in their behavior towards their wives.

These are the characteristics of a husband to whom the Bible instructs wives to submit… someone who is gentle and sacrificial in their love toward their wives.

If a husband is abusive to his wife, he is being disobedient to God and according to scripture (Matthew 18:15-17), should be held accountable by the church.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

Submission is not:

- A husband’s superiority or domination over his wife.
- Blind obedience of a wife to her husband.
- The implication that a wife is less valued by God.
- An obligation on the part of a spouse to be beaten, threatened, and humiliated by a partner.
- Slavery or total passivity.

The Christian Concept of Forgiveness as it Relates to Abuse

Colossians 3:13 says, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” One of the most important principles in Christianity is forgiveness. Jesus taught it in many sermons and through many parables. Christians are supposed to forgive the people who do wrong to us, just as Jesus forgives those who did wrong to Him. Unfortunately, many have taken this Christian mandate to “turn the other cheek,” as instruction to stay in abuse.
How do we address concepts such as “turning the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) when in the context of domestic violence?

Matthew 5:39 “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

“Turn the other cheek” should not be interpreted to mean “endure more abuse.” During the time and the culture in which this concept was written, turning the other cheek would force your attacker to strike you backhanded, which was considered a cowardly act, causing the person to lose face and be shamed. Therefore, taken in context, turning the other cheek means allowing shame to be brought to the attacker by his own actions, not to ask for more injury. (Andersen, J. (2007). Woman submit! Christians and domestic violence. Auburndale: One Way Cafe Press.)

**WHAT ABOUT FORGIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF ABUSE?**

- Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

  Forgiveness is an internal response and choice of one individual in regards to another. Reconciliation implies two people choosing to resolve their differences for the purpose of continued relationship. Domestic violence is the fault of the abuser alone. It is the abuser who chooses to use violence.

  Reconciliation can be dangerous for victims of domestic violence because of the complex dynamics of power and control, the lack of accountability for the abuser, and the safety of the victim.

  Forgiveness can (and, often in domestic violence situations, must) happen at a distance. A victim's forgiveness should never mean she has given up her right to be safe.

- Denying or forgetting is not the same as forgiving.

  Church leaders cannot ignore abuse, nor should they encourage a victim to deny its occurrence or its affects.

  Where denial thrives, abuse persists.

  Abusers often beg for forgiveness, but continue to hurt, threaten, injure, and control the victim.

- Forgiveness takes time.

  Sometimes church leaders are tempted to move the victim past the pain into forgiveness too soon – remember safety must come first.

  It can be very damaging to the individual to rush her into forgiveness before she has had the opportunity to properly acknowledge that the abuse was not her fault and process the feelings of anger and betrayal which are inevitable.

- Forgiveness is often the last step in the process of healing.

  Forgiveness should be encouraged *only after* ensuring the victim's safety and allowing an appropriate amount of time for processing the trauma (which is different for each person).
Again, forgiveness is not for the purpose of reconciling the relationship. Rather it is forgiveness that allows a person to move past the trauma, releasing her from the power that the abusive relationship has had over her.

Forgiveness may take time. This should not make the victim feel guilty or ashamed.

**Forgiveness does not require a victim to stay with an abusive spouse.**

Analyzing Scripture: The Sin of Abuse

Authority for condemning domestic violence can be found in Galatians 5:19-21:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Using this verse as a guide, domestic violence is clearly a sin.

- **Jealousy**
  
  Jealousy is often the first sign of a controlling personality.

- **Fits of rage**
  
  By raging and threatening, an abuser gains power over a victim.

- **Selfishness**
  
  Abusers are very selfish, seeking to have their own needs met, often at the expense of the other person. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church…sacrificially.

- **Drunkenness**
  
  Alcohol is not a cause of domestic violence, but it is often present in domestic violence situations.
Abusers frequently use alcohol/drugs as an excuse to batter, saying they “made him lose control.”

Victims may abuse alcohol, too, to cope with their plight. They can be guided to help overcoming addictions, but only after they have achieved real safety from the abuse. Safety should always be the first priority in helping victims.

- Dissensions and discord
  As stated earlier, physical abuse does not have to be present for there to be domestic violence. Threats of abuse are often a part of the abuser’s control.

  Psychological and emotional abuse destroys relationships and marriages.

- Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery
  Sexual abuse is also common in domestic violence situations. Sex between husband and wife is never meant to be coercive or hurtful.

  Abusers will sometimes engage in affairs or pornography to feed their addictions and also to further hurt or demean their partners.

![Image of a person holding a book]

**Scriptural Support**

The following verses can be used for further study on what the Bible says about abuse, as well as scripture support for church leaders when working with victims, abusers, and families.

- Scripture Support for Victims of Abuse
  “Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men.” Psalm 71:4

  “I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.” Jeremiah 15:21
“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:29-31

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28

- Scripture Support for Peace at Home

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Ephesians 4:29-31

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1:19-20

- Scripture Support for Holding Abusers Accountable

“The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.” Psalm 11:5

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil.” Psalm 37:8

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered…” Proverbs 22:24

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.” Proverbs 29:11
**Victim Demeanor**

Sometimes outsiders see a victim's demeanor as an obstacle. Not all victims of domestic violence seem timid, fragile, and sympathetic. For example, some victims abuse substances as a means of self-medicating and coping with the fear of violence. Victims may drink alcohol, appear mentally ill, and generally seem quite unsympathetic to church leaders. These emotional reactions are normal, but they may result in a church leader mistakenly assuming that the victim is at fault, instead of the abuser. Abusers are often skilled at making the victim appear inept, “crazy”, and/or emotionally unbalanced.

**Abuser Demeanor**

For various reasons, abusers are often more “believable” and sympathetic than their victims. Therefore, it is very important for church leaders to have an understanding of common abuser characteristics and behaviors.

- Frequently, abusers deny responsibility for their abusive behavior by minimizing, denying, or lying about it, blaming their partner for it, or attempting to justify their abuse.
- Abusers may blame alcohol or drug use for their behavior, yet research indicates that they are abusive even when not using substances.
- Most abusers are not mentally ill.
- Abusers can also exhibit good characteristics – they are not abusive all the time, in all places, or with all individuals. Many times abusers have a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality. They can be very loving and charming at times. Unfortunately, this is another way in which they manipulate their victims.
- Some, but not all, abusers may have been abused as children.
- Abuser behavior is not caused by anger management problems or stress. Remember, an abuser chooses to use violence. Domestic violence is a choice. It is not simply a person getting out-of-control. It is about a person using control. It is a crime and a sin.
Case Scenario One

Miranda Jessup is the 34 year old mother of three children, ages 10, 6, and 4. She is pregnant with her fourth child, and recently moved into town with her family and husband, Robert, 36. The family attends New Life Baptist Church. Pastor Feldon’s wife, Mrs. Feldon, runs the church daycare. When Robert and Miranda drop off their children at youth Bible study, Mrs. Feldon has heard Robert call Miranda “stupid” and “a pig.” On one occasion, she has seen him shove Miranda roughly when she was not walking fast enough. Mrs. Feldon tells the pastor what she has seen. Mrs. Feldon also mentions that Miranda doesn’t have many friends, and she seems “snobby.” Miranda has asked Pastor Feldon for marital counseling, but Robert does not accompany her to their first appointment. When she arrives, she has bruises on her arms, and she has a broken finger. She confides that Robert has been drinking lately to cope with his stress, and she has aggravated him by not keeping the children quiet when he is resting. He has hit her, she admits, and has choked her, but she assures Pastor Feldon that Robert is a wonderful husband most of the time. He is just under a great deal of stress because of the economy, she explains, and he “does not realize how strong he is.” Miranda asks Pastor Feldon to speak to Robert to return to the Lord and stop hitting her and her ten year old son, Roy, who has started to intervene when Robert hits Miranda. She also asks the Pastor to help her pray to become a better wife and mother so that she will not aggravate Robert so much.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the signs of domestic violence in this case?
   Answers: Shoving, bruises on arms, broken finger, Miranda conveying that Robert has choked and hit her as well as their 10 year old son.

2. What are some of the dangers to Miranda and her children in this case?
   Answers: Miranda’s 10 year old son, Roy, is now also being hit by Robert. The other children are witnessing the abuse and are undoubtedly suffering the effects of such. Miranda is in serious danger because she believes she is to blame for “aggravating” Robert and is convinced she needs to be a better wife and mother. It is not in her power to stop the abuse.

3. What might be some obstacles to Miranda getting help?
   Answers: She appears “snobby” which makes her seem less approachable. (It is common for abused women to be withdrawn or cautiously distant.) She is adhering to her misguided understanding of submission. She is minimizing the abuse and excusing his behavior. Pastor
Feldon may be tempted to blame the abuse on alcohol and stress, and excuse Robert’s behavior. Robert may beg for forgiveness but simply continue his abuse.

4. Might Miranda be responsible for Robert’s violence?

Answers: No. The only person responsible for abuse is the one who abuses. Robert likely experiences aggravation at work with his boss, but he is likely not abusing his boss or fellow employees. He alone is responsible for his actions and should be held accountable for them. Miranda is not to be blamed, as no one “deserves” to be abused.

5. What can Pastor Feldon do to help Miranda?

First, he can assure her that Jesus wants her to be safe. Then he can pray with her for the strength that she will need to escape the violence. Feldon can also explain how domestic violence centers work, and provide her with information and link her to resources.

Note: In this scenario child abuse is occurring with Roy, the 10 year old son. Everyone is mandated by law to report child abuse. The SAFETY of the mother and the children is the priority! 1-800-96-ABUSE

**Case Scenario Two**

George McBride comes to pray with Elder Farris, who leads the Garden Baptist Choir. George tells Farris that he has made mistakes in his marriage, and admits to Farris that he has struck his wife, Denise, who has obtained a temporary injunction for protection and wants a divorce. Farris prays with McBride and makes him promise that he will never hurt Denise again. He believes that families should always stay together. George confides that Denise is a “drama queen” whose family has spoiled her by giving her everything she wants, which undermines his role as breadwinner for the family. This frustrates him, but he swears he loves his wife and wants to save his marriage. He asks Farris to convince Denise to dissolve the injunction so he can move home. Farris calls Denise and tells her that McBride is truly sorry. Denise cries on the phone and agrees to withdraw the injunction. Two weeks later, Denise shows up at choir practice with a busted lip, bruises on her face, and a bald spot on her head where George pulled her around the living room by her hair.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the signs of domestic violence in this case?

Answer: Denise has a busted lip, bruises on her face, and a bald spot after reconciling with George.
2. What mistakes did Elder Farris make in handling this situation?

Answer: Elder Farris prioritized his desire for George and Denise to reconcile over Denise’s personal and physical safety. He encouraged Denise to forgive George while doing little to offer George accountability for his violent nature, only “making him promise” not to hurt her again. He did not offer Denise any information on certified domestic violence centers or who she might talk to about making a safety plan. Her safety, *above all*, should be the first priority.

3. In what ways did George present himself as a sympathetic character?

Answer: He admitted to one physical offense and confessed to making mistakes. He also indicated he wants to make the marriage work while Denise is seeking divorce. He described Denise as spoiled and a “drama queen,” making her appear to be overreacting to the situation. He sought prayer and swore he wanted to save his marriage.

4. What can Elder Farris do to help Denise

Answer: First, he can assure her that Jesus wants her to be safe. Then he can pray with her for the strength that she will need to escape the violence. Elder Farris can also explain how domestic violence centers work, and provide her with information and link her to resources. He can drive her to the certified domestic violence center, or arrange transportation for her. He can insist that George attend a batterer intervention program to deal with his violence, without forcing Denise to come home. He can support Denise’s decision to obtain an Injunction for Protection Against Domestic Violence.

**Leadership Readiness**

**Church Leaders Should Ask Themselves, “Am I Ready to Lead Anti-Violence Efforts?”**

Matthew 7:4 asks, “How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?”

- Are you ready to address this issue if someone in your church comes to you seeking counsel?
- Church leaders who have engaged in any activity that meets the definition of domestic violence under Florida Statutes are not qualified to provide leadership to prevent domestic violence within the church.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have others said that you try to control your spouse/partner?</td>
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<td>2. Have you ever noticed that you become easily angered and are unable to control your responses towards others?</td>
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<td>3. Do you sometimes make accusations against your spouse/partner because you feel jealous?</td>
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<td>4. Do you think you often place pressure on your partner to do things your way, even if your spouse/partner does not want to?</td>
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<td>5. Does your spouse/partner complain that you are trying to control his or her life?</td>
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<td>6. If you treat others poorly, do you consider it the other person's fault?</td>
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<td>7. If you treat others poorly, do you blame your behavior on alcohol, stress, or family problems?</td>
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<td>8. Do you feel that women are not as worthy of respect as men?</td>
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<td>9. Are you often afraid that your spouse/partner will be unfaithful?</td>
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<td>10. Has your spouse/partner ever told you that she or he is afraid of you or afraid of what you might do when you are angry?</td>
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<td>11. Have your children ever told you that they are afraid of you? Have they ever acted afraid of you because they have seen how you sometimes use violence or threats of violence at home?</td>
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<td>12. Do you sometimes say things that make your spouse/partner feel uncomfortable, such as insulting him or her, or calling him or her names?</td>
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<td>13. Have you ever damaged your spouse/partner's personal property (clothing, furniture, personal belongings, or car) when you were upset?</td>
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<td>14. Do you feel that you cannot live without your family and tell your spouse/partner that?</td>
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<td>15. Do you think that you might consume more alcohol than you should?</td>
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<td>16. Do you make the final decisions about most of your spouse/partner's daily activities (i.e. who your spouse/partner can be friends with, when your spouse/partner can see his/her family, how much money your spouse/partner can use, or when your spouse/partner can use the car)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Do you call your spouse/partner's job frequently to check up on him or her?</td>
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<td>18. Did you grow up in a family that used violence as a means of control? If yes, have you found that you sometimes imitate that example as an adult?</td>
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</table>
If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have unresolved issues or problems that would interfere with your ability to lead others in the church's violence prevention efforts. You (and partner/family) may benefit from addressing these issues.

If you answered yes to more than one of these, you may have unresolved problems that could endanger your partner/family and interfere with your ability to serve them as Christ would have you. These issues should be addressed immediately.

Consider consulting a fellow trusted church leader, private counselor, or mental health professional immediately for a referral. Every single family deserves to be healthy and safe.

**WHAT CHURCH LEADERS SHOULD DO ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**AVOID BLAMING THE VICTIM**

As important as it is to hold the abuser accountable for his sin, it is also important that church leaders help the victim understand that the abuse is not her fault. There are many things that church leaders should avoid saying so that a victim does not feel wholly or partially responsible for abuse. When this happens, it is called victim-blaming. Victim-blaming intentionally or unintentionally implies that the victim did something to endanger her/himself, or did not do enough to avoid the danger.

- Examples of Victim Blaming Statements:
  
  “Were you nagging at him before he hit you?”

  “If this has been going on for 2 years, why are you just saying something about it now?”

  “Maybe if you made sure the children were quiet when he got home he wouldn't get so upset and hit you.”

  “I know this man and his family. He wouldn't act this way unless there was something else going on.”

These statements all excuse the behavior of the abuser and place responsibility on the victim. When blame is placed on the victim, the abuser is not held accountable for the sin of abuse. Victim blaming behaviors imply (or even directly state) that the victim somehow deserved to be victimized, when in reality no one deserves to be victimized.

In order to combat these thoughts and behaviors, everyone must understand that *victimization is never the fault of the victim.* The abuser is the only person at fault; he or she made the decision to harm another person. Any person can become a victim of any crime. Church leaders should make a conscious effort to redirect any hostility or negative feelings about a victim toward the person at fault – the abuser. Church leaders should focus on holding the abuser responsible for the sin of abuse, and ensuring that the victim is safe. Instead of asking what the victim could have done differently, insist that the abuser be held accountable and stop the violence.

*Victim-blaming communicates that a victim somehow deserved the crime that he or she has endured.* (The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2009)
Below are some examples of victim-blaming statements, explanations of how they hurt victims, and replacement statements that church leaders can use instead. Please review these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Victim-Blaming Statements</th>
<th>How they Hurt Victims and Excuse Abusers</th>
<th>Replacement Statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you try hard enough to stop him?</td>
<td>These questions and questions like them imply that the victim should have fought the abuser. Not all victims fight back. It is not safe for all victims to fight back. The bottom line is that nobody should be placed in a situation where they are forced to make a decision to fight back.</td>
<td>You did what you had to do to protect your safety. Nobody should be put in that situation, but you made the right choice because you are here with us. Jesus' message of love, safety and provision of human needs also includes physical safety and emotional wellbeing. Violence towards another person is disrespectful of Jesus' message and the Christian faith. It is wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why don't you have any defensive injuries?</td>
<td>These questions, and questions like these, imply that the victim in some way provoked the abuse. No matter what events occurred before the abuse, the abuser made a decision to commit a crime. No victim can be held responsible for the decision of an abuser. Nobody deserves to be put in this situation.</td>
<td>There is nothing you could have done to prevent this abuse. This is not your fault. No matter what you did before the attack, he made a decision. You could not control his behaviors. You are not responsible for his decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should have fought back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This probably wouldn't have happened if you weren't intoxicated. You shouldn't have yelled at him like that, it probably provoked him. What did you do to make him do this to you?</td>
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</table>
### Examples of Victim-Blaming Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>How they Hurt Victims and Excuse Abusers</th>
<th>Replacement Statements</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you wait so long to leave him?</td>
<td>These questions, and questions like these, imply that the questioner knows the situation better than the victim. The victim is the only person that knows when it is safe to leave or to stay. No person can accurately predict how they will react in a domestic violence situation. Every person needs to withhold judgment and trust that victims did what they needed to do to remain safe. Instead of questioning the actions of a victim, we should all be questioning the actions of the abuser.</td>
<td>You made the best decision for your situation. Your situation is very complicated. It would be hard for anyone to decide what to do. No one knows your family better than you do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once you left him the first time, you shouldn't have gone back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How could you put your children in that situation again?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you try talking to his family first?</td>
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### Case Scenario Three

Lynn has been married to her husband, Bobby, for 13 years. They are active members of Grace Lutheran Church. Bobby and her husband seem to have the perfect family, with their 2 children, ages 7 and 10. One day Lynn confides in her Sunday School teacher that Bobby gets very angry when she makes any noise while he is watching ball games on TV and “really gives it to her” after. The Sunday School teacher laughs off this comment and encourages Lynn to prepare all the food before the game and wash the dishes after to help reduce the noise during the game. The next week Lynn comes to class walking with a limp and a swollen lip. Lynn tells the teacher that she accidentally dropped a vase during the game last week and Bobby got very angry. The teacher tells Lynn that she knows this is Bobby’s pet peeve and maybe she should just watch the game with Bobby in the future and only do housework when he’s at work to avoid future dilemmas.

**Questions:**

1. What signs were there that Lynn was the victim of domestic violence?

   **Answer:** Lynn stated that Bobby “really gives it to her.” She came to class with a limp and swollen lip and reveals that Bobby hurt her.

2. What statements did the teacher make that were victim-blaming?

   **Answer:** The teacher encouraged Lynn to prepare the food before the game and tells her she knows that these behaviors are pet peeves of Bobby’s.

3. What could the teacher have said that would have been more understanding and less victim blaming?

   **Answer:** Tell Lynn that her safety is paramount. Ask if she would like information about the domestic violence shelter or help preparing a safety plan.

4. What should the teacher do after she realizes Lynn is the victim of domestic violence?

   **Answer:** The teacher could tell Lynn that violence towards another person is contradictory to Jesus’ message of safety and is wrong. The teacher then could discuss a safety plan with Lynn and provides her with information about her local domestic violence center.
What Church Leaders Should Do about Domestic Violence
(continued)

Resources

The most important thing to remember is that there are resources and professionals to which churches can link victims. Here are a few easy resources that can be helpful when working with domestic violence victims.

- This site offers a list of Florida's certified domestic violence centers. Know where your local center is! http://www.fcaadv.org/centers.php
- List of Christian Domestic Violence websites
  5. http://www.bcdvi.org (Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute)
- See Appendix A for an article on what a victim can expect when checking into a certified domestic violence center.
- For more free training, visit the Clearinghouse website: http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu

Safety Planning

The primary concern for all church leaders dealing with a victim of domestic violence is to make sure that the victim is physically safe. Church leaders should encourage, but not coerce, a victim of domestic violence to contact the local certified domestic violence center to help develop an individualized safety plan. They are the most qualified individuals to complete this step.

The certified domestic violence center will help the victim create a unique safety plan for many different situations. Please review the following situations to learn more about the unique barriers to safety a victim may experience and how you can help a victim begin preparing for safety.

Safety in the Home

During a violent event

- If an abuser is threatening to become violent, or is being violent, there are things a victim should consider to help minimize the effects of violence.
  - Stay away from the kitchen (there are many potential weapons in the kitchen, such as knives, pots, and pans)
  - Stay out of the bathroom or other small spaces (these usually only have one entrance/exit, so a victim can become trapped. Also, the doors can easily be kicked in, putting the victim in danger)
  - Call 911 as soon as possible; run to a safe friend or neighbor's house, and document any injuries (include date and time, photos, etc.)
In general at home

- Learn where to get help and memorize important phone numbers
  - Plan an escape route out of different areas of the house and practice in times of low stress
  - Have a bag packed and ready to go in case you need to leave the house suddenly

When trying to leave

- Have originals or copies of important documents, such as:
  - Children's birth certificate
  - The victim's birth certificate
  - Social security cards
  - School and vaccination records
  - Keys - house/car/office
  - Welfare identification, work permits, Green card
  - Passport(s), Divorce papers
  - Medical records
  - Lease/rental agreement, deeds, mortgage payment book
  - Bank books, Insurance papers
  - Pet licenses, vet receipts or paperwork establishing your ownership
  - Password to any online accounts
  - Court papers
  - Medicines

- Have the following easily available in a wallet:
  - Personal identification
  - Money (cash)
  - Checks, ATM cards
  - Credit cards
  - Driver's license and registration

**Safety for Children**

Children are vulnerable to being harmed when there is violence in the home. It is important that their parent teach them how to be safe and how to help mom get to safety.

- Teach children not to intervene during a fight and instead to call 911.
- Help children memorize important phone numbers to call when there is a violent situation (a family member, friend, or neighbor).
- Teach children an escape route in case they need to leave the house safely.
**Safety on the Job**

If the victim has a court order for protection, there are things the victim can do in her place of employment to help minimize the risk of violence.

- Keep a copy of the court order at work.
- Make sure all colleagues know what the abuser looks like and what to do if they see him.
- Ask a security guard or coworker to escort the victim out of the building if he attempts to enter.

**Safety in Public**

Victims of domestic violence are also at risk of becoming victims of stalking by their abuser, especially if they are separated from their abuser. They should take precautions when in public to help reduce their risk of violence. Encourage the victim in the following ways:

- If you have an order for protection, always carry it on you.
- Change your regular travel routes so it is more difficult for the abuser to predict where you will be.
- Change where you shop, dine, and bank so that the abuser cannot easily find you.
- Always carry a cell phone and have it easily programmed to dial 911.

**Technological Safety**

There are many technological advances that make stalking and tracking of activities very easy. Victims should be aware of these advances so they can navigate safely.

- Personal computers can easily be programmed to store everything a person does. This even includes the letters a person types. An abuser can program the internet to keep a history of every website visited. To ensure safety, a victim should avoid using a personal or work computer to access information regarding domestic violence. Instead, the victim should do these activities at a place with public access computers (such as the library).
- Recording devices can be inserted onto cell phones to record conversations or track numbers dialed. When a victim is calling somebody regarding their domestic violence situation, they should use a phone that is not traceable (pay phone, disposable telephone).
- GPS, tracking devices, and recording devices can easily be installed into a vehicle. A victim should consider having any vehicle inspected by an independent mechanic (not the abuser’s normal mechanic) for any bugging devices.

**Financial Safety**

Lack of secure finances is often a reason victims cite for not being able to leave an abusive situation. There are steps a victim can take to help ensure financial independence and increase safety.

- Use cash as often as possible to avoid the abuser knowing the victim's location and tracking any purchases.
- Open an independent banking account so the victim can access funds without the abuser’s permission or without fear of the abuser closing the account.
- Have enough cash on hand to cover several days’ worth of expenses, including unexpected stays in hotels, meals, and other necessities.
- Check credit rating regularly to make sure the abuser has not opened any lines of credit without the victim’s approval.

When considering the safety of a victim, there are certain behaviors that a church leader should be aware of that increase the risk of danger. Please see Appendix B-the Danger Assessment- to review these behaviors.

### The First 8 Steps toward Prevention & Intervention

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<tr>
<th>✓</th>
<th>Prevention Effort</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Designate at least one person, or a team of people in larger congregations, to lead the church’s anti-domestic violence efforts. Call the team “Peace at Home” or a similarly descriptive name.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Obtain the contact information for the local certified domestic violence program and post it in a conspicuous place on church bulletin boards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Contact the local certified domestic violence program and invite a staff member to come speak to the pastor or to a group of church leaders about the services of the program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Ask the Pastor to plan a future sermon or study that preaches safety at home, beginning with nonviolence.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Have a lesson on the importance of non-violent behavior in the youth and/or college groups.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Include in the pre-marital counseling sessions information and curriculum on non-violent behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Be sure brochures about domestic violence are freely available to congregants in public places.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ask to name a church representative to the local domestic violence coordinating council, or local anti-violence community group, if one exists. The Director of the local domestic violence center will know how to contact such a group. Invite the church representative to share news of the council or group with other church leaders at leadership meetings.</td>
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APPENDIX A
WHAT A WOMAN CAN EXPECT WHEN CHECKING INTO A CERTIFIED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER

– By Laura Cassels Summerlin

Introduction

It is important that church leaders understand what happens after they refer victims of domestic violence to certified domestic violence centers. Remember, it takes an enormous amount of courage to leave an abuser, and it can be intimidating for a battered woman to consult someone in the church for help. When church leaders share their understanding and knowledge with victims, it can make the difference between a victim staying with what is familiar (and very dangerous) or leaving to face the unknown. In this article, we use The Refuge House (a certified domestic violence center which serves families in all 8 counties of the Big Bend Area of North Florida) and a fictitious woman (Samantha) and her child (Lisa) to describe the process a woman can anticipate should she seek the services offered by a domestic violence center. For a complete list of Florida's certified domestic violence centers, go to www.fcadv.org.

Admission into the Center

Samantha is in an abusive relationship with her husband of eight years—a relationship from which she is desperate to escape. Her daughter, Lisa, is five years old and has begun witnessing the abuse. One morning, she waits for him to go to work and calls the Florida Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-500-1119). Upon calling the hotline she is connected to an answering service that gives her instructions in 3 languages (English, Spanish, and Creole), explaining that if she is in immediate danger she should hang up and call 911. Otherwise, she is told to stay on the line for further options. If she is seeking information about certified domestic violence centers and services near her, she should press 2, information on injunction assistance press 3, and resource library for FCADV press 4. Samantha presses 2 and is immediately transferred to the Refuge House, which is the certified domestic violence center nearest her. She then speaks to an advocate at the Refuge House who determines through a few gently-worded screening questions that Samantha is being abused, she and her daughter are in need of safe shelter, and they are eligible for admission. The Refuge House will take children up to 17 years of age.

Safety Plan

The advocate goes over a safety plan with Samantha, instructing her on the items she should attempt to quickly locate and pack in a bag. These items include some clothes, her driver's license or other form of ID, a birth certificate for herself and Lisa, money, credit cards and check book, medications and medical records, Social Security cards for herself and Lisa, insurance information for herself and Lisa, and copies of any police or hospital reports associated with the violence. Due to the time limitations she is advised to get as many of these things as she can find immediately.

Arriving at the Shelter

The hotline advocate explains to Samantha that they currently have space for her and her child. The advocate then asks Samantha if she and Lisa are arriving at the center alone. If so, she will direct Samantha on how to get to the entrance of the center. Samantha does not have a car that she can use, so the advocate explores other options with her, such as getting a ride with a friend or
taking the bus. Samantha states that she has a friend who can drop her and Lisa off. The advocate arranges for them to be met by a Refuge House staff member at a designated area near the center and brought in to the Refuge House, so as to keep the location of the center confidential from her friend.

**Intake**

Upon arriving to the Refuge House, Samantha and Lisa are greeted by a staff member who then sits with Samantha in a room, allows her to take a moment to relax, and conducts an intake. During the intake process, Samantha is asked a series of questions, including her age, where she is from, information on her abuser, and what type of abuse she has suffered. Samantha is then assigned a room and a bed and given items she will need while at the center such as linens, any toiletries she does not have with her, and food to last until she can buy some for herself. She is also given a voucher to take to the Refuge House thrift store where she can pick up anything else she might need, such as clothes for potential job interviews, shoes, etc. A person working in the child care area of the Refuge House also comes and does a brief intake with Samantha and Lisa so that there will be child care for Lisa during the day while Samantha looks for employment.

**Case Management**

The advocate assigns Samantha to a case manager who schedules to meet with her within 24 hours of her arrival. The case manager provides Samantha with education and assistance in getting back on her feet. She is given information on community resources to help her with finding a job and affordable permanent housing. The case manager works with Samantha in setting up a budget and a plan for the next 45 days, so that she can be empowered to live on her own and provide for herself and Lisa once her stay at the center is complete.

The case manager continues to go over safety planning throughout Samantha’s stay in the Refuge House. Having a plan will reduce risks and surprises. Some guidelines Samantha should adhere to while designing a personal safety plan are the following:

- Know how to get away (best route to take, method of transportation)
- Know where to go for certified domestic violence center services and help
- Know how to stay in contact with helpers
- Know what to do for children’s safety
- Know how to stay safe while at work and play
- Know what to do with family pets—there are people who can help
- Know what each member of the family should do to leave safely
- Know what must be taken if leaving quickly
- Know what to do if confronted by an abuser (e.g. in court or in home)
- Know that it may be necessary to change services (bank, doctor, etc.)
- Know that help is available
- Know that it is safer to travel with another, non-abusive person
- Know that it may not be best to take children to any meeting with an abuser
- Know that the abuser’s main objective is to get partner to return
Injunction Assistance

Samantha’s case manager educates her on her options in regards to legal assistance should she choose to take such action. The Refuge House has an office at the courthouse where Samantha can file an injunction against her abuser which, if approved by a judge, will legally prohibit her husband from coming within 500 feet of her. This is entirely up to Samantha as it is not a requirement in order to stay in the center. If she fears for the safety of her child, she can also file an injunction on behalf of Lisa prohibiting her husband from approaching Lisa at school or elsewhere.

As is typical of abusers, Samantha’s husband uses power and control over her to manipulate her. Therefore while she is with the Refuge House, she will be provided with tools and skills she will need to be successful, but ultimately it will be up to Samantha to determine her progress, placing her in charge of her own life and empowering her to make her own decisions.

Support Groups and Counseling

Throughout Samantha’s residency in the Refuge House, her case manager provides counseling and opportunities for Samantha to talk about and process her experiences. She is also given opportunities to join support groups led by staff and attended by other women in the center. Through this process she gains awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence and is able to connect with other women who are struggling with similar issues and all of the feelings that are associated. The women are strengthened by one another and learn coping skills that will increase their self-esteem and their own sense of value and self-worth. Counseling and domestic violence education is also offered to the children staying in the center and in the community.

Conclusion

It is the desire of all certified domestic violence centers to prepare women like Samantha, no matter what form of abuse they have suffered, for life without their abuser. As a result of the services they are provided while in the center, many women will be able to better understand the dynamics of domestic violence, acknowledge that it is not their fault, recognize the strengths they possess, identify with a support system, and carry on to live productive and healthy lives, as well as provide those same opportunities for their children.

For more information:

• www.fcadv.org

• http://www.refugehouse.com/about.html
### Appendix B

## Danger Assessment

Below is a list of factors that show a strong association for increased violence or even lethality to occur. Church leaders should consider these factors when assessing and planning for safety. All of these factors are problematic and may indicate that the victim is in danger and should seek safety. The more factors present, the greater risk of harm for the victim. Factors indicated by asterisks (**) indicate a heightened risk of harm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>In the past 12 months, there has been an increase in the level of physical or other types of violence.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The victim has been choked or her partner has attempted to strangle her. **</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Abuser has recently acquired guns or knives.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Abuser has become more threatening with guns or knives which he previously possessed.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Abuser has stalked or attempted to use other surveillance tactics to monitor partner in the past 30 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Abuser has threatened to kill himself in the past 30 days. **</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Abuser has threatened to kill the victim in the past 30 days. **</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Abuser has threatened to kill the children in the past 30 days. **</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Abuser has criminal charges pending.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Abuser has violated victim's order for protection. **</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Abuser has failed to appear for final hearing or order for protection. **</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Abuser has threatened to harm or has harmed family pets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Abuser has mental health conditions which increases violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Abuser has destroyed victim's or child's personal property (clothing, furniture, personal belongings, car) in past 30 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Abuser has threatened other family members or neighbors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Victim has filed for divorce and/or requested custody of children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Victim is pursuing criminal charges against the abuser.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Abuser has tried to stop the victim from seeking help from law enforcement, domestic violence centers, supervised visitation program, court, or other agencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Abuser has locked the victim in the home or otherwise imprisoned her against her will in the past 30 days. **</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Victim is currently in a domestic violence shelter or has made other efforts to leave the abuser.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Abuser has told the victim he cannot or will not live without her and their children. **</td>
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