

Urgent Care: Domestic Violence



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



URGENT CARE:
Domestic Violence

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Urgent Care: Domestic Violence" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: URGENT CARE. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help equip you and your leaders to minister in the crisis situations that often leave us speechless.

Urgent Care handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues relevant in your situation. All of the authors are familiar with ministry in the aftermath of domestic violence, and a certified counselor has reviewed all of this material. We hope you use the hands-on advice, theological guidance, and careful warnings of these articles in order that you may offer the best ministry possible in the toughest of situations.

These tools are specifically designed for easy and quick use by church leaders in crisis situations. If you have an urgent need, select the article most relevant to the demands you face, and follow the article's guidance. If time is on your side, use these handouts to launch a discussion and training for leaders in your church.

Select & Copy

This specific theme is designed to help equip pastors and leaders who need to minister in cases of domestic violence. Simply print and photocopy the handouts and distribute them as needed. (You do not need to ask for permission provided you are making fewer than 1,000 copies, are using the material in a church or educational setting, and are not charging for it.)

The following articles cover a variety of topics. For example, to learn the basic facts about domestic violence, read "Domestic Violence: An Overview." For advice on how churches can minister to victims, see "Ministering to the Abused." The church also has responsibilities toward an abuser. To learn more, read "Counseling the Abuser." To learn how the entire church can understand the subject, see "Faith Communities and Domestic Violence." For an overview of action steps and important concerns that need to be remembered, see "A Quick Guide for Action."

Pray

Ask God to equip your church to minister sensitively and with great hope—even in the saddest situations.

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A Quick Guide for Action

Key points for caregiving ministry.

Urgent care situations often require an immediate response from church leaders. This overview outlines major steps you should take in addressing domestic violence. These action steps are explored in greater depth and detail in the remainder of this packet.

Immediate Concerns

1. Be aware of the potential for continued or more severe violence and abuse. The victim's safety—and your own—are of primary concern.
2. A victim should not stay in a situation where violence or abuse threatens.
3. Call the police for any violence or abuse in progress, and follow their instructions.
4. Do not promise strict confidentiality. You may not be able to keep the promise.

Keep in Mind

1. Domestic violence is rarely a chosen response. It is a response born of passion and frustration. Self-hatred and poor coping mechanisms often underlie the problem.
2. Spousal sexual abuse is not something an unconsenting spouse must bear.
3. A genuine expression of guilt doesn't necessarily indicate the end of the problem. Most batterers express remorse when anger subsides, but many repeat their behavior.
4. You may not be able to resolve these issues yourself. Many cases of domestic violence require the intervention of professional counselors and law enforcement officers.

What to Say

1. Secure the physical safety of the victim.
2. Show love, concern, and warmth. Remain unshocked by what happened. The victim needs to be able to relate the story without inhibition.
3. Remove the notion that "Christians never do such things."
4. All victims need to be believed, even when the accused is a Christian.
5. Use a tape recorder with the permission of the victim.

What Not to Say

1. Do not castigate the abuser. You may lose the cooperation of the victim, who often loves the abuser anyway.
2. Do not neglect the potential for continued or increased violence in domestic fights.
3. Do not reject offhand any report of abuse. Believe first, then seek to validate.

Plan Ahead

1. Maintain a list of care providers for both the abuser and the victim.
2. Draw up a security plan to cover when the abuser or the victim may visit the church for worship or for care.
3. Be ready to provide care to friends and family of the victim and the abuser.

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Domestic Violence: An Overview

Threats to physical safety from within the household are, unfortunately, not rare.

Proverbs 30:33

by James D. Berkley

In one way, spouse abuse is like suicide: the offender can think of no other suitable act to adequately express the depth of anger and frustration. For most, it's a learned response: Dad did it to Mom. For most, it's not volitional; they wouldn't calmly choose it from a list of appropriate responses were they sober and in control. For all, it is an inadequate and damaging way to respond to a loved one.

Black Eyes Don't Lie

A pastoral counselor in a southern town tells of a couple in their early 40's. "I'd been helping them with their marital problems," he says. "They had told of previous arguments that had dissolved into name calling and even a little pushing and shoving, but nothing major.

"Then one appointment the wife walked in sporting a big black eye. She and her husband both looked rather sheepish. It didn't take long for the conversation to turn to the woman's shiner. Sure enough, in the midst of a heated argument, the man had hit her in the face."

Sometimes people come up with elaborate excuses for such injuries. One woman I know swore she had fallen onto a doorknob. A few months later it was a box that had tumbled onto her as she fell off a ladder while getting it down. Not long after that, I went with the police (as police chaplain) when they answered a domestic disturbance call at the same home. It was no accident.

This couple, however, didn't deny the cause of the black eye. The counselor continues: "The husband took responsibility for what he did. He was ashamed and couldn't begin to excuse it. It turned out he had a difficult time with anger. He didn't consider it a legitimate part of his emotional arsenal, and so he suppressed it most of the time. He had a negative self-image and felt tremendous guilt whenever that anger boiled to the surface, such as it did in the argument with his wife. With no legitimate way to recognize his anger and deal with it little by little, he was left with recurrent outbursts in which his anger exploded beyond control. I eventually referred him to a group of men who all were dealing with anger. The group therapy worked well.

"The wife, as with many victims of abuse, maintained some sense of deserving what she got. Without knowing it, she actually helped incite his outbursts and then gained a certain amount of satisfaction from being the wronged party. I helped her find a therapy group for women working on self-image.

"Of course, we talked about what the shiner meant to each person. We did a biopsy on the fight that led to the husband striking the wife. Before we were finished, they could see what caused the violence, and they had an idea of how to avoid it. I got them jointly to take responsibility for their parts in causing the problem. Then we dealt with the pain and shame both were feeling."

As both partners began to feel better about themselves, they were better able to avoid the name calling and shoving. Their pastor helped them learn how to be assertive rather than aggressive, to make pacts and keep them, and to fight fairly.

"Since violence is often picked up and acted out by children in a family where the parents fight," the counselor continued, "I included the kids in family counseling. They needed to see how families could resolve difficulties without abuse. Otherwise they'd become prime candidates for domestic troubles when they grow up."

In this instance, the husband appeared to be gaining control of his anger. Everyone agreed that it wouldn't be necessary for the wife to leave the home. "I told her," her counselor said, "that she has to make it clear to her husband that she *will* call the police if he ever strikes her

again. And it can't be a bluff; she has to intend to follow through. Otherwise she becomes an enabler, co-dependent on violence to solve problems. Spouses who fail to report physical abuse simply reinforce bad behavior. And any first-year psychology student knows that reinforced behavior continues.”

The Top Priority: Safety

Long before counselors have the luxury of trying to bring harmony to a marriage, though, they have to concern themselves with basic safety: Will the spouse be in danger of further battering? If so, then immediate arrangements have to be made to separate the couple.

Many communities provide shelters for abused wives and children. Relatives will often take in a victim. Church members may be willing. I know our spare bedroom has provided shelter for a night or two. The important factor is that the threatened spouse find a place free from the possibility of bodily harm—and not feel sub-Christian for exercising that basic right.

The Second Priority: Reconciliation

Then the work of reconciliation and rebuilding is at hand. The pastor in our example handled this phase well. He had the advantage of knowing the couple, and he benefited from their candor. His first tactic was to get them to understand what went on prior to the violence that sparked it. This helped the couple see the several points in the argument where it probably could have taken a more productive turn. It also helped the couple discover their joint responsibility for both the mistake and its positive resolution.

He did more; he found ways to build up both the husband and the wife so they could approach their marriage from strength rather than dysfunction. Involving the rest of the family also helped and, we hope, prevented the continuation of abuse into another generation.

Sexual Abuse in Marriage

Sexual abuse of a spouse often has less to do with sex than with violence, power, rage, and control. The rapist uses sex to act out violent and angry intentions against his victim. And to force one's spouse into any sexual act against his or her will is a form of rape.

Again, no man or woman, married or not, must give in to sexual demands contrary to conscience or will. Pastors can encourage the victim to seek safety first and then work toward resolution of the problem if the spouse is willing. The rest of the intervention needs to focus on the dynamics that make sexual aggression the chosen form of abuse, and those factors in the victim that have encouraged or allowed it.

Counselors, Be on Guard

Counselors need to be aware of their feelings in spousal abuse situations. The pastor who counseled the couple over the black-eye incident confessed, “When I first saw that blackened eye, I wanted to give the fellow a shiner, too! All my protective urges rush to the surface at a time like that, and I had to curb them to be able to deal effectively with the couple and not just get indignant for the woman.”

Personal safety is not a foolish concern for interveners in abuse situations. As police well know, stepping into a domestic dispute is a dangerous choice.

Fortunately, physical violence isn't the rule, even among cases into which the police are called. But wise is the pastor or leader who steps cautiously into potentially dangerous circumstances. Fear ought not preclude intervention, but neither should folly accompany it.

*—James D. Berkley is an author, editor,
and pastor in Bellevue, Washington.*

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When Words Abuse

Great damage can be inflicted by an abuser without any physical contact.

Ephesians 4:29

by Al Miles

Pastors and caregivers need to take accusations of emotional abuse within a marriage seriously. Here are insights into the situation and suggested ways to provide ministry when it arises.

Calm Surface, Violent Depths

Rarely is the issue of emotional abuse brought up to outsiders, and when it is, it can quickly degenerate into a he-said, she-said situation. Complicating the matter further, men who emotionally abuse their wives don't look like abusers; they often are regarded as outstanding citizens in the church and the community.

Emotional abuse, a form of domestic violence, does not usually occur in view of others. If witnessed, it's generally by children living in the house who may have been threatened by the perpetrator with loss of safety and security should they tell anyone. What makes emotional abuse even messier, in contrast to physical abuse, is that it never leaves physical marks. But there are some characteristics of a man who emotionally abuses his wife:

- He belittles his wife in the company of others. He makes snide comments about her intellectual abilities or physical appearance, calling her "dumb," "fat," "ignorant," "naive," "stupid," or "ugly."
- He comments negatively about females in general: less intelligent, more emotional, or inferior to males. Sometimes, he'll use derogatory or vulgar terms for women. When challenged about this, the husband will often say he is only joking.
- He does all the talking for the family even in public settings. His wife may defer to her husband before responding to inquiries.
- He quotes biblical passages to support his ordering of the sexes, especially whenever anyone suggests that females are equal to males.
- The wife seems to have no adult relationships or support system outside her husband. Domestic violence flourishes when a woman is isolated from the outside world. An emotionally abusive husband will make every effort to control all aspects of his wife's existence. He'll often force her to keep an account of all her activities, withhold finances, and dictate her relationships.
- The pastor is continually rebuffed when trying to establish a relationship with the family.

It's important to remember that not every husband who manifests these qualities is a perpetrator of emotional abuse.

Care for the Victim

The agonizing issue, though, is when and how to get involved when we suspect emotional abuse in a marriage. Here are some suggestions about caring for the victim. These are for dealing with emotional abuse, not physical abuse. Emotional abuse may also signal or lead to physical abuse, or it may not. In instances of physical abuse, much more drastic action may be necessary.

If a woman says she is emotionally abused, the best course is to believe her. What does that mean? A woman who is emotionally abused by her husband will rarely exaggerate claims of abuse. On the contrary, out of fear, shame, and for many other reasons, she will usually

minimize the abusive episodes. The way a caregiver believes a victim's stories is to reassure her. Often the victim will blame herself for the abuse, saying the abuse would not be occurring if she were a better Christian, wife, mother, sexual partner, and so on. That belief is enforced by the perpetrator and, at times, by other people as well.

Caregivers can say, "You are not the cause of the abuse that's happening to you," "No one deserves to be addressed by the degrading and vile names your husband has called you," and "Your husband's actions are in clear violation of how the Scripture instructs a man to treat his wife. His behavior is sinful and in no way condoned by God."

Here are some things not to say, for they discourage rather than encourage a victim to be forthright:

- "Are you submitting totally to your husband?"
- "Marriage is sacred, you have to do everything to keep your family together."
- "Perhaps your husband was just kidding. Are you sure you're not overreacting?"
- "Your husband is such a great guy. He wouldn't harm a flea."
- "Why did you wait so long to disclose this story?"

Someone who says she has been emotionally abused will likely feel ambivalent. At one moment she may talk about leaving her husband, and, in the next breath, state her undying love for him. Most women do not want their marriages to end; they simply want the abuse to stop.

Trying to bring the wife and husband together to "get at the truth" can be dangerous for the woman. A perpetrator often is deceitful and manipulative. He may behave appropriately (even charmingly) with the counselor, but then further punish his wife when they get home.

Just as it is impossible to discover "the truth" in a situation, it is impossible for a caregiver to invest large amounts of counseling time with any one person, so it is critical to encourage victims to seek support from other resources. Support groups, shelters for abused and battered women, and clinically trained professionals can offer comfort, knowledge, and safety. Such support helps victims break the isolation and provides them with options for achieving safety in their lives.

—Al Miles coordinates Interfaith Ministries at The Queen's Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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The Role of Family and Friends

Domestic violence affects more people than the victim and the abuser.

Matthew 12:25

by Ron Clark

Often family and friends seek help for those who are in violent relationships. Family and friends also face issues that cause them to be concerned about their loved ones. Many experience the same emotions that victims do.

Shock and disbelief: Most family members have attempted to accept the abuser into their family and have been manipulated into thinking that “he has a few rough edges, but nothing serious.” Others have accepted the victim into their family and are shocked that someone would ever mistreat someone they love. Much of this shock and disbelief happens because we demonize abusers rather than understand that they are products of a dysfunctional system.

Shame: “How could I have been so blind” is a common response. In retrospect, they believe that they ignored red flags and begin to feel responsible. Others saw it coming and feel that there was more that they should have done. Some are embarrassed that their children are having marital problems or are caught up in family violence. For dysfunctional families, this is a threat to their honor and is seen as something to be quieted: “We need to take care of our own, and it is our responsibility to set the abuser straight.” This type of thinking further contributes to the problem.

Anger: In Genesis 34, Shechem raped Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. Dinah’s brothers decided to manipulate and take vengeance on Shechem and his village by slaughtering all of the men in an act of vigilantism. The brothers’ anger may have been justified in their minds, but Dinah was never consulted and the Scriptures give no indication whether or not she was helped or validated. Vigilantism is a response by people who feel powerless over the fact that justice has not been achieved.

Those working with families need to remind them that abuse is not about the family; it is about helping those directly affected by the violence. Victims need understanding, patience, peace, and safety, not vengeance. Abusers need accountability, not anger. Children need a safe place to process what is happening. While it is difficult to stay calm, listen, and not react angrily, these are what family and friends need to practice. The faith community must see the deeper issues in domestic violence. The church is not God, but a representation of God. God judges; the community empowers the family to heal. Victims must be supported, protected, and validated. Abusers must be confronted and called to see the needs of others, rather than their needs. Children need a place to unwind and feel safe. Family and friends need to learn how to help the family heal as a relational and emotional system.

—Ron Clark is the preaching minister of Metro Church of Christ in Gresham, Oregon, and leads training workshops on domestic violence.

*Adapted from *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology for Domestic Violence* (Cascade Books, 2005). Used with permission.*

The Basics of Helping Battered Women

Here are some of the principle ways to respond if someone you love is abused.

1 Peter 3:7

by Corrie Cutrer

What can battered women do to get help when they are under siege? What can Christians do to respond when they notice a problem? Here are insights gleaned from an interview with Brenda Branson, co-founder of Focus Ministries, and Don Stewart, a retired police sergeant who has investigated hundreds of domestic assault cases. They are both active in educating churches about this issue. Here are the warning signs they teach and their recommendations for how to respond:

From Verbal to Physical: Warning Signs

- A husband says such things as “If you ever left me, I’d kill myself,” or “If you don’t do exactly as I tell you, I’m going to beat the daylights out of you.”
- A husband starts damaging household property that has sentimental value to his wife.
- A husband's comments intensify to the point he says something such as, “If you ever leave me, I’m going to kill you and the kids,” or “I’m going to burn the house down.”

Evidence of Abuse

- Isolation of the victim from family, friends, or church.
- The husband constantly monitors the wife’s whereabouts.
- The woman completely covers her body with clothing, even when it’s hot outside.
- The woman uses a lot of makeup, perhaps to cover a bruise.

Approaching the Victim

- If you’re friends or even have a good casual relationship, invite her to breakfast or for coffee, and approach the subject gently.
- Express concern about the situation and offer your availability to help.
- If she opens up, emphasize that she isn’t causing her husband’s abuse.
- Consider making an appointment for the two of you with a pastor, social worker, or law enforcement officer.
- If she’s unwilling to do anything about it, you also need to consider the option of calling the police for her.
- Be careful not to criticize an abused woman, because until you’ve walked in her shoes, you can’t appreciate the unbelievable hardship she lives in every day.

What the Church Can Do

- Understand that domestic abuse requires specialized counseling, and most individuals will need counseling and care on an individualized basis.
- Realize batterers can be manipulative.
- Work to dismiss misinterpretations of Scripture. As 1 Peter 3:7 reminds us, no man has a God-given right to punish or retaliate against his wife under any condition.

Reaching Out to the Abused

- Order training materials or invite someone in your area who's qualified to speak at your church to promote awareness.
- Find out what local support groups are available for abused women and have that information readily available.
- Organize a list of resources within your church you can utilize if you need to help an abused woman flee from a violent situation.
- Work to establish a relationship with your local women's shelter.

*—Corrie Cutrer, a TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN regular contributor,
lives with her husband in Illinois.*

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Ministering to the Abused

Battered women have physical, spiritual, and emotional needs the church can meet.

Judges 9:51

by Donald Stewart

A woman caught in the nightmare of domestic violence and severe verbal abuse has a very difficult time breaking free from the bonds of fear and doubt that enslave her broken heart and tortured mind. Helping her get back on her feet will require a concerted effort by a dedicated and skilled group of supporters and a committed prayer ministry.

It's time that every church in America becomes proactive in this area. We need to be able to provide the support structure each woman needs so she can lovingly hold her husband accountable for his behavior. If we, the church, provide for her physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual needs, her husband cannot hold her hostage to his threats to ruin her or force her back home. She will be able to make wise decisions about her life and relationship, and she will remain strong and confident as God works on her behalf.

The Needs of Battered Women

- *Shelter.* Is there someone in the church who has an empty apartment or a spare room they can let her use for free? If not, is the church prepared to pay for an apartment until she's back on her feet again? Is that location secure so she will feel safe, and is the landlord trustworthy?
- *Transportation.* Does the woman have a car? If not, how is she going to get around? Is there someone who will loan or give her a car to use? Is her residence on a bus route, or is there someone who can taxi her around?
- *Household goods.* Does the church have a thrift store so she can find decent clothes for herself and the children? Does the church have a pantry so she can acquire food? What about cooking utensils and toiletries? You will need to provide almost everything she and her children need to survive for weeks or months.
- *Security.* If her husband is on a mission to find his wife and harm her, who will go with the victim to file a restraining order? If you need to call the police, which agency will respond to your call for help?
- *Counseling.* What type of mental health counseling is available, and where is it?
- *Legal assistance.* Do you have an attorney in your congregation who will work pro bono to ensure that if a divorce takes place she will rightfully receive what she is entitled to? Will the same attorney also handle child custody issues that are surely going to arise?
- *Medical care.* If the woman or her children become physically ill and need medical treatment or hospitalization, who will care for them?
- *Employment.* If she is unemployed, is there anyone in the congregation who will hire and/or train her?
- *Education.* Will her children have safe access to education, or will they need to be home-schooled?
- *Finances.* Does the church have cash in a benevolence fund to handle an emergency like this, or is there a donor you can call on short notice?

Partner with Women's Shelters

Build a bridge to your local women's shelter and draw from their experience and training in this area. You may be amazed at how much the church has in common with these caring

crisis workers. They have access to many different programs to help get women plugged into a variety of community resources that will meet the needs just listed. I believe they will gladly help if you approach them with a proper attitude and ask them to partner with you. I would also suggest that the church take out a liability insurance policy in the event you are sued. It's a small price to pay if things go bad.

Potential Reactions to Ministry

Your short-term goal should not be reconciliation, but rather safety for the woman and her children. Be prepared for disappointment, setbacks, and failure. Some women will accept what you are trying to do for them until the storm is over, and then they will go back to the abuser. Two years later you may see the same woman again, worse off than she was before. Others will accept help until they are strong enough to go it alone, and then they will leave the church out of shame and embarrassment. Others may use you by falsely alleging abuse in order to get even with a husband who may have been found to be unfaithful or uncaring. Others will want you to fix all their problems.

Set Boundaries

Set boundaries as to what you can and will do for the victim. Think with your head as well as your heart. The abused should assume some responsibility for herself as she gets stronger—for instance, job searching, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, returning to school, volunteer work, and so on. Insist on regular participation in a small group and weekly counseling.

If the abused will not comply with your safety plan, at some point you may have to give them an ultimatum and let them go. Either they are committed to recovering, or they are not.

—Donald Stewart is a police officer, domestic violence investigation trainer, and Promise Keeper Ambassador.

Excerpted from *Refuge: A Pathway Out of Domestic Violence and Abuse* (New Hope Publishers).
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Counseling the Abuser

Confront those who commit violent crime against their spouses.

Hebrews 13:4

by Donald Stewart

Men should be told that domestic violence is a crime against God and humanity, that a man or woman who resorts to violence is guilty, and that the spouse is innocent of complicity (contradicting those who say or imply, “You must have some something to deserve it.”).

But abusers also need to hear that God loves them, is aware of the internal struggles they have, and offers reconciliation and healing for every abuser who is willing to surrender his heart and marriage to God’s tender care.

The Role of the Pastor

I do not recommend that pastors or church leaders get involved in trying to single-handedly counsel a violent abuser for the following reasons:

- The complexity of what ails the abuser is probably very great and will require significant time and skill to work through.
- Some abusers have a criminal mind, criminal history, a known past of violence, drug and alcohol addictions, varying degrees of mental illness, or emotional instability. Few pastors have the time or skill to counsel with men like this.
- The abuser will likely try to manipulate his wife by relaying messages to her through the pastor, if she is in hiding or is protected by a restraining order. If the pastor refuses to cooperate, his safety may be threatened.
- If the abuser decides he isn’t getting anywhere with the pastor and begins to believe his wife may not come back to him, the pastor may become the object of his anger.
- If the abuser feels that he is being treated as an outsider by the church and is kept at arm’s length, he may return on a Sunday morning and initiate a confrontation in church.
- If the husband has abused his wife because of her religious beliefs or because she belongs to a church he doesn’t approve of, then the pastor should be very careful in considering counseling with this person at all.

Very few abusive men will agree to counseling or submit to a reconciliation plan. Still others, knowing that many churches believe in instant conversions, will wait until the opportune time and announce, “I’ve found Jesus.” The pastor may begin to extend to the abuser undeserved credibility, believing that the abuser has significantly changed because of his conversion.

Believing this, pastors and leaders have sometimes been known to pressure the wife to meet her husband “halfway” and return home. Eventually, if the wife doesn’t respond submissively to the church’s pressure, she will undergo a role reversal and be viewed as the sinner responsible for not cooperating with the plan. A violent abuser who attends two or three counseling sessions is not in therapy. He needs to have one-on-one counseling with a qualified mental health professional over an extended period of time. This is in addition to spending time in a group with other abusers. Even then, therapy is successful only 30 percent of the time.

Be Aware of the Cost

If your church is going to minister to an abuser who claims he’s a Christian, then you need to know that, by ministering to him, you’re going to pay a price in terms of time, money, and emotion. This is a ministry that should be entrusted only to mature, levelheaded people who

have the time, skill, and fortitude to stay the course. Untrained laypeople should never work in this ministry, and those who are trained should be subject to regular oversight by an elder, pastor, and professional counselor.

There is potential physical danger any time you start to pull an abuse victim away from her abuser, because the abuser knows that if his victim gets well, she's going to expose him for the fraud he really is. The abuser fears the prospect of closing his punching bag and having to live alone. He may also resent the prospect of having to pay alimony and child support and, therefore, will take his wrath out on the church. At the very least, he will try to manipulate the church the same way he manipulated his wife through lying and deception. Leaders need to be on guard for this.

The spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs of the abuser may be long term, depending on a variety of circumstances and factors. Any church leader, but especially untrained lay leaders, needs to guard against burnout.

An ideal ministry team would consist of a pastor, two middle-aged men who are willing to make a long-term commitment to the abuser, and a psychologist or licensed counselor, all within the context of a small group. Depending on the circumstances, the need can range from 90 days to one year or longer.

How to Confront

The pastor should ask the violent abuser to come to his office during the week at a time when the abuser's wife is not there. Once he arrives for the meeting, have at least two elders or pastors present. Tell the abuser:

- That you are concerned for him and want to help any way possible to bring about reconciliation, but not on his terms.
- That you are prepared to report him to the police immediately if he continues the verbal abuse, mind games, control tactics, and intimidation.
- That you view his wife's statements as truthful and are committed to her.
- That you need to refer him to a qualified health care professional for treatment and will agree to visit with him concerning his spiritual life while working in tandem with the health care provider.

Let him know that if he wants to restore his marriage, he will have to submit to a reconciliation plan that includes counseling, small group involvement, mentoring with an older Christian man or husband and wife team, and possible psychological testing and treatment if deemed appropriate.

If he has physically assaulted his wife and she has not called the police, call the police on her behalf and report him. The police will interview his wife and, if there is enough probable cause, they will arrest him. Jail is a good place for abusers. But don't abandon him if he is placed in jail. That may be the very best time to visit him and show your concern by letting him know that God wants to have a personal relationship with him and that your church is willing to be a part of that process.

What to Tell the Abuser

The abuser needs to hear that his behavior is sinful and is a crime against God and the church. If the physical abuser is a pastor, elder, deacon, choir director, or the head of a ministry, order him to step down immediately until he has complied with the program and his marriage is restored. Tell him that he is not to attempt to move back into the house with his wife until he has satisfactorily completed counseling and his wife agrees to it. That may take

up to a year or even longer, depending on how motivated he is to change and how badly he has abused his wife. It also depends on whether or not his wife wants him back at all. I do not believe the church has the right or the spiritual authority to try to pressure, coerce, or convince a battered woman to go back to her abuser. This occasionally happens, and the results can be tragic.

Let the abuser know that he is welcome to come into the church during the week by appointment or by pre-arranged schedule if that is where his counseling or participation in an accountability group requires him to be. He is not to attend service at your church if that is where his wife still attends until such time as his wife feels comfortable with him being there. Make arrangements for the abuser to attend a different church, if need be.

—Donald Stewart is a police officer, domestic violence investigation trainer, and Promise Keeper Ambassador.

Adapted from *Refuge: A Pathway Out of Domestic Violence and Abuse* (New Hope Publishers).
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Couples Who Fight Physically

Learn the ways to respond when a domestic dispute escalates beyond words.

Psalm 4:4

by David K. Switzer

Another form of domestic violence, one different than battering, is when couples both actively participate in physical fighting. It is helpful for caregivers to know the differences and to be aware of what they may encounter should they be called into such a situation.

Anatomy of a Fight

The physical fighting may be by hitting, throwing objects, or sometimes attacks with more deadly means. Even when these occurrences are not frequent, the mutual fighting reaction takes place from time to time and can be predicted under certain circumstances. In battering, the primary victim usually doesn't fight back, or does so only occasionally and/or minimally.

For the physically fighting couple, there may be an immediate outburst of anger followed by an attack and either vigorous physical defense or counterattack by the other. Or there may be an accumulation of anger over time. These accumulations can lead to a point when the anger can no longer be contained. The person who is the target of that violence doesn't understand, feels wronged, and responds violently.

Entering into Danger

Ministers and other helpers need to realize that if they are called into a situation where a fight is underway, they're going into a situation of potential danger to themselves. Many people in this kind of anger are truly out of control. Unless representatives of the community of faith are very sure of having a good relationship with the persons involved, it's best that the police intervene prior to their arriving on the scene or are assured by one or both of the partners that the violence has stopped. Police realize the danger since a high percentage of the acts of violence committed against them take place in these circumstances, including sometimes being attacked by *both* of the fighting partners.

Getting Their Stories

If the fighting has not yet escalated to violence, or if the partners have been subdued in the sense that this particular violent episode is over, persons intervening in this emergency will get the best results by talking with each person separately while the other is as far away as possible within the home (or is outside). Getting each person's story without interruption is helpful in diminishing the intensity of that person's feelings, the person's gaining a sense of support, and giving the helper a clearer picture.

Long-Term Care

Most clergy and laypeople don't have the necessary training to be the most effective primary, long-term counselors for couples who fight physically with one another. Clergy can be especially important in clarifying for the persons the necessity of specialized help, the need for the physical fighting to stop in order for other approaches to be helpful, the supporting of at least temporary separation if that's necessary for the fighting to stop, in guiding the couple to the appropriate sources of counseling, and in helping arrange child care when that's necessary.

Continued pastoral visitation can be extremely useful in terms of the possible discussions of the individual's faith and relationship with God. Such discussions can support the decisions to participate conscientiously in programs of personal growth and behavior change and can contribute significantly to the increase of their sense of self-worth.

Battered and batterer, fighters with one another, often feel shame and guilt and worthlessness. Their already low self-esteem is made even lower by their involvement in these relationships of violence. God *does* love even them, and it's important for them to have such love communicated to them in our helping acts and continued relationship, encouraging and supporting them in whatever openness to change they have and in the necessary procedures they may be participating in to help bring this change about.

—David K. Switzer is emeritus professor of pastoral counseling at the Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas.

Adapted from *Pastoral Care Emergencies* (Fortress, 2000). Used by permission.

Faith Communities and Domestic Violence

The church has a responsibility to provide protection and counseling.

Matthew 11:28–30

by Ron Clark

Faith communities have a great opportunity to help families caught in domestic violence. This begins with the willingness to accept all people and help them to heal. This healing comes as an empowerment for any human to stand before their creator and praise God for the Spirit of life.

When working with domestic violence, this means that the church must be diligent in protecting victims from abusers. Counseling victims separately is the best way to validate them and to remove the temptation for the abuser to control the partner and the church. It is also important that a congregation only work with one of the individuals and refer the other to a strong community that will accept them. Each individual has the right to come to worship without being distracted by the other. Each individual has the right to develop their faith before God, without the other affecting their spiritual formation.

Understanding the Victims

For victims, faith communities must be supportive, protective, and empowering for the family. This will demand patience and understanding. Understanding that victims have played a role in an emotional system will be valuable in guiding them to be strong and confident. Validating their pain and suffering is necessary for them to grow in Christ.

The community of faith must validate their suffering by letting them know that what has happened to them is wrong and unjust. Their abusers must validate them by confessing that they have been abusive, that they have sinned, and that they will do whatever it takes to change and give back to their intimate partners.

Confronting the Abuser

Victims cannot truly be free until they are validated and able to confront their abuser. God is relational and confronts his children when they sin. Why? God wants relationships to be restored. God wants to be respected and honored.

When the relationship is unbalanced, the abuser also needs to be held accountable for his actions and selfish attitudes. This means that outsiders need to confront abusers and challenge them to change their behavior. Outsiders should not side with the abusers or allow themselves to be manipulated into becoming another servant of the abuser. Outsiders should also refrain from condemning and humiliating the abuser. The community of faith can work with trained professionals to provide a safe place for abusers to heal and learn to practice shared power in their relationships.

Promote Shared Power

The community of faith can also promote shared power between couples. The church has the right and responsibility to empower victims to heal and to confront those who violate them. Helping former victims set healthy relational boundaries gives them the chance to feel a sense of power. The community has the right and responsibility to call abusers to submission, accountability, and self-control.

Likewise, every abuser should be called to face those that they have hurt and hear their pain and cries. In order to heal, they have to acknowledge their sinfulness and the effects that their abuse has had on others. The community of faith has a great opportunity to send abusers back into their community to heal and allow others to heal. It also has the responsibility to protect and validate victims so that they can see that they are in God's image and worthy of love and respect.

Teach Men to Model the Nature of God

The community of faith can also prevent abuse by teaching men to model the nature of God. Men's classes and fellowships can keep men in accountable relationships with other men. Abusive men usually do not have many male friends. Men's groups can hold them accountable and provide the opportunities to develop the friendships that many men resist. We must also redefine masculinity on biblical grounds. Masculinity is not as narrowly defined as in our culture, but rather it is as diverse as God. God *is one* and practices behavior that is valid for both male and female. Masculinity is not seen in opposition to women; it is seen as a complement to femininity.

Faith communities can help families caught in violence by understanding the dysfunctional family system, empowering members to change, and helping each member learn how to balance power in their relationship. While this takes an emotional investment by members of the community, it is an act of love and compassion for families seeking help and strength in a world that seeks God.

Churches can focus on identifying power and control issues in marriage classes, pre-marital counseling, and youth groups. Family classes can help families develop healthy relationships skills. Youth ministries can work with teens to address dating violence, family violence, and the need to hold each other accountable for abusive behavior.

—Ron Clark is the preaching minister of Metro Church of Christ in Gresham, Oregon, and leads training workshops on domestic violence.

Adapted from *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology for Domestic Violence* (Cascade Books, 2005).
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Further Exploration

Books and resources to help your church address domestic violence.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “Shepherding Others” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Giving Help to the Hurting” Assessment Pack
- “Counseling Church Members” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Launching a Lay Counseling Ministry” Practical Ministry Skills

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

PreachingToday.com. A website that offers practical advice, illustrations, and sample sermons for preachers—including several resources on grief.

Celebrate Recovery. An 8-step recovery program developed and distributed by Saddleback Church. www.celebraterecovery.com/

Focus Ministries. Provides care for women who find themselves in difficult situations, including domestic violence. www.focusministries1.org

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. This organization provides care to battered spouses and works to raise awareness about the issue. <http://www.ncadv.org/>

Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse by Grant L. Martin. Presents practical tools for dealing with crises resulting from domestic violence. (Nelson Reference, 1994; ISBN 978-0849936104)

Crisis Counseling: What to Do and Say During the First 72 Hours by H. Norman Wright. Offers guidance for pastors, counselors, and friends in the immediate wake of a traumatic experience. (Regal Books, 1993; ISBN 978-0830716111)

Family Abuse and the Bible: The Scriptural Perspective by Aimee K. Cassidy-Shaw. Provides biblical advice to women in abusive situations. (Haworth Pastoral Press, 2002; ISBN 978-0789015761)

Finding Your Way through Domestic Abuse: A Guide to Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Healing by Constance Furre. Written by a survivor of domestic abuse, this book offers advice to help victims move through this difficult experience. (Ave Maria Press, 2006; ISBN 978-1594710766)

Refuge: A Pathway out of Domestic Violence and Abuse by Donald Stewart. The author shares insights gained as a police officer with more than two decades of experience on domestic cases. (New Hope Publishers, 2004; ISBN 978-1563098116)

Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology for Domestic Violence by Ron Clark. Offers ways to bring God’s peace and wholeness to victims, abusers, and their families. (Cascade Books, 2005; ISBN 978-1597524247)