

Domestic Abuse Policy

Our church has created this domestic abuse policy to protect intimate partners, children, and others residing in the homes of our church members and attendees when domestic abuse occurs within those homes.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated by accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual, and/or psychological means.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification—to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term “domestic violence,” is pervasive in our culture. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse is just as likely to exist in EFree Church as it is in the culture outside the church, so we must be on alert.

Domestic violence in any form is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the victim. Domestic abuse severely damages the relationship and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ’s self-giving love encourages flourishing, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim’s autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear. Given this acknowledgment, EFree Church affirms the following:

- Domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living. (Mark 7:20-23, Eph 5:28-30, 1 Pet 3:7-9)

- All abuse is spiritually damaging for both the victim and the abuser and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family, and close friendships.
- Domestic abuse is a serious problem that occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
- Domestic abuse is not an anger problem or a marriage/relationship problem, but rather a sin problem. (James 4:1-3, Eph 5:11-14)
- Statistically, domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men against women and children. (Eph 5:15-6:4)
- We will listen to, believe, support, and care for those affected by domestic abuse. (Judges 2:18, Ps 9:9, 18:16-19, 103:6, 146)
- We will ask at least one domestic violence expert to help determine whether a relationship is experiencing domestic abuse or marital conflict.
- We will urge abused persons to consider their safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling, and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage/relationship in which the abuse occurs.
- We do not have the legal authority or the ability to investigate charges of abuse but will consult with professional counselors who specialize in domestic abuse, legal counsel, and, if necessary, law enforcement, to determine the best course of action regarding both the abused person(s) and the perpetrator of the abuse.
- We will stand with victims in seeking legal remedies should that be their decision.
- We will discipline members who are abusers, including by removing them from the church if they are unrepentant. (Matt 18:15-17, Rom 16:17, Titus 3:10-11)
- We will work with local domestic violence support agencies, will learn from them, and will support them in appropriate ways.
- We will teach that domestic abuse is a sin. (Mark 7:20-23, Rom 1:29-31, Eph 5:25-33)

- We will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity, and worth. (Gen 1:26-27, 9:6, Matt 19:3-6, Gal 3:28)
- We will train all pastors/elders, staff, deacons, and lay leaders in domestic abuse awareness.
- We will seek to utilize trained professionals to encourage best practices and keep church members and leadership trained on and informed about the implementation of this domestic abuse policy.

Responding to Domestic Abuse

In domestic abuse cases, we will seek first to care for and protect the victim(s). We will discipline the perpetrator and, if appropriate and desirable to the victim(s), seek to reconcile the marriage/relationship. We also will notify law enforcement when necessary for the protection of the victim(s) and when required by law, as in the case of domestic violence involving a minor, elderly persons, or disabled persons.

Domestic Abuse Protocol

Victim Care

- Safety of the victim(s) is paramount.
- Listen to and believe the victim(s).
- Recognize the signs and ask questions.
- Reporting to law enforcement is required by law if abuse involves children under 18, elderly persons, or disabled persons. Otherwise, consider the victims' wishes regarding reporting.
- Assure the victim(s) it's not their fault.
- Assist practically as desired by the victim(s).
- Professional counseling as desired by the victim(s).
- Counseling should be individualized, aimed at trauma/abuse recovery (not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation).

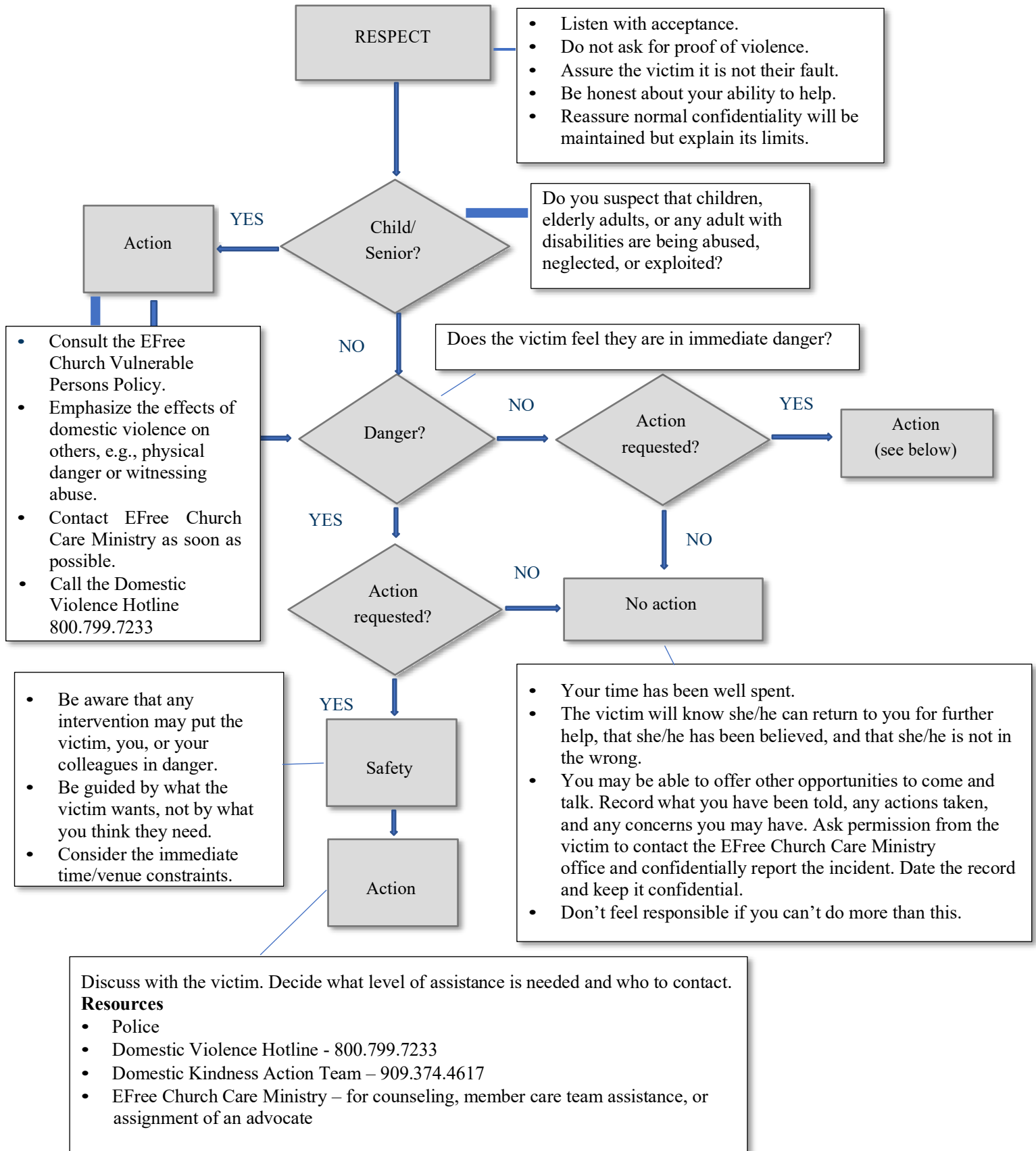
Abuser Discipline

- Confronting the abuser should only occur at the request of the victim, after safety has been established, and after consideration of whether to involve law enforcement. If law enforcement is or becomes involved, consult with and defer to law enforcement's instructions regarding confronting the abuser.
- Provide education/accountability if the abuser is open to it.
- Professional counseling should be individual counseling aimed at heart issues underlying abusive behaviors, such as power/control, entitlement, previous abuse, etc., not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation.
- Repentance is the goal. It will take time to discern, and in the short term, worldly sorrow can sometimes appear to be godly sorrow. Over time, genuine repentance always becomes evident. We move faster with care and slower with confrontation and discipline.

Marriage/Relationship Reconciliation

- Reconciliation to God is a necessary step before the Church can support reconciliation of the marriage/relationship.
- Reconciliation of the marriage/relationship is only recommended when both parties and their counselors agree.

Incident Action Flowchart



Adapted from The Shepherd's Church Domestic Violence Policy, Cary, North Carolina