

domestic
K I N D N E S S



Action Team Guidebook

The mission of Domestic Kindness is to equip churches to be part of the solution to domestic abuse.

domestickindness.org

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Introduction

Thank you for serving on the Domestic Kindness Action Team. Your help means a lot to all those who benefit from the Domestic Kindness efforts. We hope that you will find fulfillment in contributing to this ministry and that your team will be a great instrument of change in the epidemic of domestic abuse. As an Action Team member, you will have the opportunity to make a difference by representing Domestic Kindness to the church and learning to respond to and guide victims of domestic abuse.

In this Guidebook, you will learn about Domestic Kindness and the work of the Action Team. You will find information that will help you to help a victim of domestic abuse and guide you in educating the church about domestic abuse.

Some tools for educating the church are:

- The small group study, *Relational Awareness*. We hope that every small group will consider going through this eight-week study.
- Sermon and Bible teaching suggestions that you can share with your pastors.
- *Church Cares Curriculum*. We hope all church leaders will go through these twelve lessons that instruct leaders on responding to all types of abuse.

Safety and support are the two things to keep in mind when relating to a victim. You will find information to guide you in helping victims to be safe, find healing, and prevent them from becoming victims again. You can familiarize yourself with the resource page at <https://domestickindness.org/resources>.

To help you become more comfortable in talking with abuse victims, we've included some role-plays that you can practice. We also provide a list of questions to ask various resources when helping victims find assistance. Additionally, we've included domestic violence statistics to focus attention on the importance of this work.

A big part of responding to abuse is being able to recognize the difference between conflict and abuse. This Guidebook will help you identify the signs of abuse.

You will also find information on how to report cases of child, elder, or disabled abuse in case you encounter these.

We want to encourage every victim of domestic abuse to have a safety plan so we've included one that you could use.

May God bless you as you do His work.

Domestic Kindness Ministry Overview

Why

- The problem of domestic abuse is pervasive in our culture and in our world. In the USA **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 7 men** have been victims of **physical violence** by an intimate partner in their lifetime.¹
- The church is not adequately addressing the problem.
- Many victims go to Christian friends for help, with the result of being retraumatized.

Mission

The mission of Domestic Kindness is to equip churches to be part of the solution to domestic abuse.

Vision

Our vision is to see every Christian educated about domestic abuse and equipped to help those suffering.

Strategy

- To educate and support churches in learning to identify and deal with abuse as it affects those in the church and the community at large.
- To train, empower, and oversee Action Teams in churches who will hear the oppressed and connect them to intervention; and to connect the repentant abuser to separate intervention.
- To provide resources such as Bible studies, leaders' training, possible activities, and sermon suggestions.

Core Values

- Servant-minded—We are all about serving others—church leaders, church attendees, victims, and abusers.
- Holy Spirit-led—We ask God for guidance in all we do.
- Committed—We are committed to doing whatever God asks of us and we follow through with what we commit to do.
- Kind to all—We approach every person we encounter with kindness and respect. We attempt to exemplify the kindness and humility of Jesus.

¹ Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Basile, K.C., Walters, M.L., Chen, J., Merrick, M.T. "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization." National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011. MMWR 2014; 63(SS-8): 1-18.

Action Team Overview

The Domestic Kindness Action Team is a group (made up of regular church attendees) at each church that facilitates the Domestic Kindness ministries of domestic abuse education and referrals.

Education

- ***Relational Awareness Bible Study for Small (or Large) Groups:***
The Action Team asks the director of life groups or small groups to encourage all the learning groups within the church to go through the eight-lesson study. Action Team members could offer to lead or co-lead in these groups.
- ***Church Cares Curriculum:***
One person should be responsible for encouraging all church leaders to take this twelve-lesson online course (churchcares.com), which gives good instruction about dealing with all the types of abuse they could encounter. This will equip the church to respond after learning about instances of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. There is a handbook that goes along with the study.
- ***One Sermon Per Year:***
Request that the pastor give one sermon yearly about domestic abuse, preferably during October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month. (There are sermon examples at domestickindness.org/sermons and Bible teaching suggestions in this Guidebook.) Alternatively, the Action Team could offer to invite a guest speaker to give a sermon.
- ***Domestic Violence Church Policy:***
Present a sample domestic violence church policy to church leaders. (There is an example at <https://domestickindness.org/church-policy-example>.)

Referrals

- Refer victims and abusers to specialized resources. (See domestickindness.org/resources) If you'd like to add a resource to the resource page, please notify the Domestic Kindness Management Team at domestickindness@gmail.com.

- When someone approaches you regarding an abusive situation, remember that **we do not rescue or advise**. Become a supportive friend to a victim, checking in with them regularly and pointing the person to appropriate help.
- Maintain wallet-sized resource cards on the church patio. You may want to attach a small article to each card, which will change periodically. Encourage church attendees to keep one of these cards in their wallet and secretly hand it to a victim.

When interacting with a victim:

- Never give advice.
- Never suggest couples counseling, marriage books, marriage seminars, or marriage classes.
- Never suggest anger management.
- Always believe the victim.
- Listen and ask questions without interrogating.
- Refer to the ‘Working with a Victim’ section.

Possible Activities

- Organize an annual churchwide donation outreach to a local domestic violence shelter.
- Watch and discuss abuse videos.
- Discuss the resources and books listed at domestickindness.org.
- Go through the *Relational Awareness* study as a team.
- Go through the *Church Cares* curriculum online and with the book.
- Create and act out role plays.
- During October, wear Domestic Kindness t-shirts to church and request an information table on the church patio weekly.
- Reach out to the community through information tables at local city events.

Spiritual Requirements

Working in a ministry that pushes against one of the devil’s biggest strongholds requires a strong commitment to the mission and a strong commitment to our relationships with God.

Spiritual disciplines must be part of our lives.

- Daily personal time with God is of utmost importance. This includes meditation on God’s Word, speaking to God, and listening to what God is saying to you.
- There must be evidence of spiritual growth—becoming more like Christ.

Domestic Violence Statistics

A major source of statistical information about domestic abuse comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through an ongoing survey called National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS).

Starting in 2010, NISVS has been collecting detailed information on adult women and men ages 18 and older in the United States, collecting data on past-year and lifetime experiences of violence. This survey tracks trends in intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence (SV), and stalking among women and men in the United States.

The NISVS 2010 Summary Report presents data from the first year of data collection, based on 16,507 interviews (9,086 women and 7,421 men). NISVS data is collected randomly, representative of each state.²

- **1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men** have been victims of **physical violence** by an intimate partner in their lifetime.³
- **1 in 7 women and 1 in 25 men** have been **injured** by an intimate partner.⁴
- **On a typical day**, domestic violence hotlines nationwide receive over **19,000 calls**.⁵
- **50% of both men and women** have been victims of **psychological aggression (emotional abuse)** from an intimate partner.⁶
- In the United States, approximately **20 adults** experience intimate partner physical violence **every minute**.⁷
- Worldwide, **1 in 8 women** with partners have been subjected to intimate partner violence within **the past 12 months**.⁸

² Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Basile, K.C., Walters, M.L., Chen, J., Merrick, M.T. 2011. "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization." National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011. MMWR 2014; 63(SS-8): 1-18.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Network to End Domestic Violence. 2017. "Domestic Violence Counts National Summary." Retrieved from https://nnedv.org/mdocposts/census_2016_handout_national-summary.

⁵ National Network to End Domestic Violence. 2020. 14th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report. Washington, DC. Retrieved from: [NNEVDV.org/DVCounts](https://nnedv.org/DVCounts)

⁶ Leemis, R.W., Friar, N., Khatiwada, S., Chen, M.S., Kresnow, M., Smith, S.G., Caslin, S., Basile, K.C. 2022. *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/124646/cdc_124646_DS1.pdf

⁷ Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J. & Stevens, M. 2011. "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report." Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf.

⁸ Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. License: [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of hurtful behavior in an intimate relationship that one person uses to gain or maintain power and control over the other person. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. Abusers believe that they have an inherent right to power over the victim. Abuse is destructive. Physical abuse can kill the body. Emotional abuse can crush the soul.

How can I tell whether it's abuse or a relational problem?

Domestic abuse is more than just one argument. Domestic abuse happens over a sustained length of time.

Two elements are usually present in domestic violence:

1. The perpetrator uses unkind tactics to control or dominate the victim.
2. The victim is fearful or nervous around the perpetrator.

Signs of Abuse

Victim

- Comments about the partner's anger
- Hesitant to do anything without the partner's permission
- Isolates from friends and social activities
- Confused about the relationship
- Shows signs of trauma, such as mental instability
- A sense of hopelessness, helplessness, or despair
- Believes that they deserve or caused the mistreatment

Abuser

- Criticizes or humiliates the other
- Makes fun of their ideas
- Tells the partner what they can and can't do
- Becomes angry for no apparent reason
- Blames others for their problems
- Feels entitled to special treatment
- Uses sarcasm to put them down

Normal vs. Abusive Relationships

Normal	Abusive
Mutual	One-sided
If one person tells their partner how unhappy they are with their behavior, the partner listens and works on improving.	One partner is unconcerned about the happiness of the other and always returns to disrespectful behavior.
Conflict and arguing end with a compromise.	There is a winner and a loser in arguments.
The relationship is generally peaceful and kind.	One partner is often angry about minor things.
Decision-making is mutual.	One partner has to do everything their way.
Both partners feel safe.	One partner does not feel safe.
Both partners trust each other.	One partner cannot trust the other.
Each partner wants the other to feel good about himself/herself.	One partner wants the other to feel bad about himself/herself.
Both partners empathize with the feelings of the other.	One partner dismisses or criticizes the feelings of the other.
Communication is honest, open, and non-threatening.	One partner intimidates the other with threats and cruel words.
Each partner supports the other's relationships with friends, family, and the community.	One partner isolates the other from their friends, family, and the community.
Both partners are safe, loving, and respectful of the other.	One partner uses manipulation, control, and verbal attacks.
Both partners listen to the other without judging.	One partner puts down or judges the other.

“When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear, and love dies.”—Henry Cloud and John Townsend

Working With a Victim

1. Get their contact information. Arrange a time for a phone conversation and find their preferences for mode of communication (text, email, etc.)
2. Focus on S&S (safety and support) while working with the victims:
 - a. **Safety** – Though our main focus is to be a listening ear, we also want to be sure the person is not in danger.
 - First assess the danger level by asking a few questions, such as:
 - Have you been hurt in physical ways? If so, how?
 - Tell me about the first and last time you were hurt and what happened. (Even if there's just a small amount of physical abuse, like a pinch or a slap, it is illegal, and the abuse can escalate.)
 - Is there a gun in the house?
 - Have there been any verbal threats? (The threat of murder or suicide indicates imminent danger.)
 - Have you told anyone about these things?
 - Never ask, "Why?"
 - If there's imminent danger, refer to "Receiving an Urgent Call" on page 8.
 - Note: We do not report the abuse to authorities unless we witness physical abuse ourselves. We also do not suggest that they leave the abuser. Victims can be in danger when they attempt to leave. Instead, we help them create a safety plan (refer to the safety plan on page 26 or domestickindness.org/resources under 'Victims Support Groups'). A safety plan makes a huge difference, especially in cases of physical abuse, to prevent serious harm or murder.
 - If the abuse is not physical (e.g., emotional, financial, spiritual, etc.), it's still helpful to create a safety plan (see page 26). A good book for emotional abuse is *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* by Patricia Evans.
 - When working with victims of domestic abuse, you may encounter those who are struggling with mental illness or addictions. In cases of drug addiction, Teen Challenge is a helpful program. With other addictions, Celebrate Recovery is recommended. Those with mental illnesses may not recognize their condition, in which case there is nothing we can do unless they are a danger to themselves or others. In that case, you can contact a crisis response team (988) or call 911.
 - As for children who witness physical abuse, they will need to be reported to Child Protective Services. However, if they obtain safety immediately (within a week), we may wish to postpone the reporting.

- If you become aware of abuse of elderly, children, or disabled victims, by law they need to be reported. (refer to domestickindness.org/resources under ‘National Domestic Violence Hotline’).

b. Support

- Resources
 - Check our resources at <https://domestickindness.org>. These include support groups (the most helpful support for a victim), books, shelters, counselors, and the Relational Awareness study group.
- Collaborate
 - Check in bi-weekly with other members of the Action Team to discuss ways to help the victim through organizing prayers, meals, housing or transportation, or any general/emergency needs a victim may have. If the victim attends the church, you may wish to request help from the church's Care Ministry.
- Interacting with the victims
 - *Believe them.*

Believe they are suffering. Assume they are telling the truth. Often, they are confused and contradict themselves due to trauma. We need to remember that this is severe distress they are going through.
 - *Be their friend.*

Offer them help and support. Offer to go through a study with them (*Love Does No Harm*, by Judi Noble). Offer to go to appointments with them. Offer to talk with them weekly. Our job is not to tell them what to do, but to show them the options, and point them to the resources. We can help do some leg work, like helping them call shelters, help arrange transportation, or talk to the people who can provide guidance and help. Look for sources to help them. We are the bridge.
 - *Empower them.*

Make them aware of their situation by asking good questions like:

 - How does your partner treat you?
 - Do you feel controlled or isolated by your partner?
 - When the two of you argue or fight, what happens?
 - Do you feel safe to speak freely to them?
 - How do they speak to you when they are angry or frustrated?
 - What happens when you express an opinion that is different from theirs?
 - Do you feel afraid of them?

Encourage them not to isolate themselves but to find healthy individuals and groups to connect with, such as domestic abuse support groups.

○ *Empathize with them.*

Tell them encouraging words such as:

- You are brave to talk about this.
- You have done the right thing.
- You are not alone.
- No one deserves to be mistreated.
- You have done nothing to deserve what was done to you.
- God wants you to be safe.
- I support your choices.

We don't want to come across as judging them in any way.

○ *LUV them (Listen, Understand, Validate)*

We want to hear everything they want to tell us. Ask about their feelings. Keep what they tell you confidential except when they agree that you can share information with the Action Team for prayer.

○ *What not to do*

- Don't interrogate (avoid the 'Why' questions).
- Don't offer advice ('You should do this... or that...'). If they ask for advice, you can suggest that they begin documenting anything the partner does that they feel is disrespectful.
- Don't pressure them into making a decision.
- Don't judge them (rather, believe their experience).
- Don't suggest couples counseling (this makes things worse).
- Don't use the words 'abuse' or 'victim' if possible. The victim may not understand what the words mean or may not recognize their situation. Name the specific behavior as wrong.
- Don't allow them to rely on you for rides regularly (now and then is good).
- Don't allow them to stay at your house.
- Don't talk to the abuser.

What happens if they go back?

On average, victims go back to their abuser seven times. There's still a bond between the victim and the abuser. Empowering them and helping them be aware of their situation is key. Continue supporting them no matter what decisions they make.

Remember, we are not their rescuers, but we can offer support and help them feel safe, valued, and cared for.

Receiving an Urgent Call⁹

If you receive a call from a victim who has just been assaulted or is in imminent danger, ask:

- Are you or your children in danger right now? Has the assault ended?
- Where are you and the children right now? (Suggest locking and barricading the door if he/she is in a room away from the abuser.)
- Can you safely escape through a door or window?
- Where is the batterer right now?
- How much time do you have to talk?
- Have you called the police? Would you like me to call them for you?
- Are you injured? Dizzy? Disoriented?
- Where were you hit? Are you bleeding?
- Do you want to leave?
- Do you have a place to go? Do you have transportation?
- Is there someone you want me to call?
- Is there a gun in the house?

If the phone call is interrupted by the abuser or you hear sounds of violence, call the police immediately.

Do not go to the home unless accompanied by the police.

Do not talk to the victim about long-term decisions until after the emergency is over.

Tell the victim that if they **press charges** you will go with them.

Signs of Imminent Danger

- The abuser has threatened the victim's life.
- The abuser has had dreams involving murder.
- There are weapons in the house.
- The abuser has locked the victim in the house.
- The abuser has killed or injured a pet.
- The abuser has injured the victim in the past, especially by strangulation or extreme violence.
- The victim has recently left or has threatened to leave.

⁹ www.focusministries1.org

Role-Plays (Discussions with Victims)

Here are some role-plays you could practice. (Meet in a quiet, private space if possible.)

#1: Liz

You: Hi Liz, thank you for trusting me enough to talk about this. I'm really glad you reached out. I want you to know that I'm here for you and that you don't have to go through this alone.

Liz: Thank you. My husband, Edward, has abused me for five years. I am very scared and I can't take it anymore. The last time we fought he told me he hated me and called me bad names. I called the police and he was arrested but released due to a lack of evidence. Edward won't give me money and I don't have keys to our apartment. He is very abusive when he is drunk. We met at AA and he became really close with my two kids.

You: I can only imagine how difficult this must be for you. Your safety and well-being are the most important things right now. Have you had a chance to think about what might be the safest way for you to move forward?

Liz: No, I don't know what to do.

You: It's completely okay if you're not sure yet. There are resources and support available that can help you make decisions about your next steps. They offer confidential support and can help you create a safety plan. Would you like me to share some of these resources with you?

Liz: Yes, thank you.

You: I recommend calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Their number is 800-799-7233. There are also some resources listed at domestickindness.org. Would you like me to be with you while you make some calls? Could you meet me in my car at a grocery store when your husband is at work and your kids are at school?

Liz: Yes. I can meet tomorrow at Walmart at 10 am. Will that work?

You: Yes, I'll see you then.

[Meeting to make calls]

You: I know this can be overwhelming, but taking small steps can help. Remember, there's no rush and no pressure. Would it be okay with you if I share your situation with a confidential Domestic Kindness group who will pray for you?

Liz: Yes, okay.

You: I'm here to listen, support, and help in any way I can. Please reach out whenever you need support or just want to talk. You're not alone in this. Would you like me to call you in a week?

Victim: Yes, please. Thank you for all your help.

#2: Jordan

You: Hey Jordan, I've noticed you've been going through a really tough time lately. If you feel up to it, I'd really like to talk and see how you're doing.

Jordan: (Hesitant) I'm not sure. It's been really hard.

You: I understand. Just know that I'm here for you. Your feelings are important, and I want to support you in any way I can.

Jordan: (Nods) I just don't know where to start.

You: That's okay. Maybe we can start by talking about what's been happening, if you want to. You don't have to share anything you're not ready to, though.

Jordan: (Takes a deep breath) It's just been getting worse at home. I don't feel safe, and I don't know what to do.

You: I'm so sorry to hear that. Your safety is the most important thing right now. Have you been able to think about what might be the safest thing for you to do?

Jordan: (Shakes head) I don't know. I'm scared to make things worse.

You: That makes a lot of sense. It's important to think about safety first. Some organizations and professionals can help with safety planning and offer support. Would it be okay if I helped you find some of these resources?

Jordan: (Reluctant) Maybe. I don't know if I can trust them.

You: It's okay to be cautious. These organizations are trained to help people in situations like yours and provide support confidentially. You don't have to make any decisions right now; you can just explore your options and see what feels right for you.

Jordan: (Nods slowly) Okay. I guess I could look into it.

You: I can help you with that. Here are some numbers and websites for local support services. (Gives Jordan a Resource Card) If you ever need someone to talk to or need help navigating these resources, I'm here to help.

Jordan: Thank you. I appreciate it.

You: Of course. And remember, you don't have to go through this alone. If you ever feel that you're in danger and need immediate help, please call emergency services. Your well-being is really important to me.

Jordan: (Smiles faintly) Thanks. It means a lot to know someone cares.

You: You're welcome, Jordan. Anytime you want to talk, just let me know. Would it be okay if I check back with you in a week to see how you're doing?

Jordan: Sure.

You: Great! I look forward to talking to you again.

#3: Gloria

You: Hi Gloria, I'm really glad you could come over today. I've been thinking about you and wanted to check in. How are you and the kids doing?

Gloria: (Nervous) We're managing, I guess. Things at home are just... hard.

You: I'm so sorry to hear that. If you feel comfortable, I'd really like to hear what's been going on. I'm here to listen and help however I can.

Gloria: (Hesitant) It's just... Roberto has been so unpredictable. Sometimes he's okay, but other times he's really harsh. I feel like I can't do anything right. I feel like the kids and I have to walk on eggshells. He's hit me a few times when things aren't perfect, and if he doesn't like what I say, he'll hurt me to make me quiet. And if I wear something he doesn't like, he ruins my clothes by bleaching them.

You: That sounds incredibly painful and frightening. Your safety and well-being are the most important things right now. Have you thought about what might make you feel safer?

Gloria: (Sighs) I'm afraid to call the police. He told me that if I ever did that he would lie to the police and have me deported. What would my kids do then?

You: I understand that you're in a very difficult situation. It's okay to feel scared. Some organizations and services specialize in helping people in situations like yours. They can offer support, including help with safety planning, legal advice, and sometimes even emergency housing. You don't have to go through this alone.

Gloria: (Worried) But what if Roberto finds out? I don't want to make things worse.

You: Many organizations offer confidential support. They can help you explore options to keep you and the kids safe without directly involving Roberto. Also, there are legal protections in place for people in situations like yours, and you might have more options than you think. Maybe starting with a safety plan could help you feel more prepared. This could include finding a safe place to go if you need to leave quickly and keeping important documents and essentials ready.

Gloria: (Nods) That sounds like a good idea, but I don't know where to start.

You: I can help you with that. Another option is to use this online interactive safety plan that you can type and print out (<https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-your-personal-safety-plan/>) You'll be safer if you hide all of this information from Roberto. Here are some numbers and websites for local domestic violence support services. They can offer confidential advice and assistance. Is it okay if I share your situation with a confidential Domestic Kindness group who will pray for you?

Gloria: (Takes the information) Thank you. Yes. I really appreciate your help.

You: Anytime, Gloria. I'm here for you and the kids. You can reach out to me whenever you need to talk or need help with anything. Would you like me to call you in about a week to see how you're doing?

Gloria: Okay. Thanks.

You: Of course. You're not alone in this.

Role-Play Scenarios

As a group, come up with role-plays based on these scenarios:

#1: Cher

It started with a verbal argument. Bart, the father of our daughter, threatened to lock me out of the house. Then he said he would take our daughter away and I would never see her again. The police were called and came to the house. I am afraid for my safety because Bart isn't taking his medication and his behavior has been scary.

Bart is always controlling and jealous. We had a fight last week where our apartment got trashed. Our daughter was very upset that night and cried a lot. I called the police that night too but no one was arrested, even though we were both bleeding. Bart works but my daughter and I don't see a dime of it and I have to go to the food bank. He spends all of my county money on liquor and going to bars with his girlfriends. I have tried to keep what I get from the county but he's my ride to and from my employment plan meetings so he knows when I have money. Bart is waiting for me in the parking lot right now.

He is very abusive when he is drunk. I do not want my daughter alone with him.

#2: Mai

I need to leave my husband Lee. We have three children together. I stay at home with the kids while Lee works for his cousin's business on the side. I don't know how much he makes. All I know is that I get \$50 a week to make ends meet.

Lee has always hit me but I am a strong woman. But when he hit me in front of my children, I knew I had to leave. I never want to see the look in my children's eyes after they saw that.

My husband and I have gone to our church elders several times about this and we always get back together. His family promises he will stop and mine tells me to focus on being a good wife.

I'm scared of leaving my husband. I don't know what he will do... and my family... it's not an option.

#3: Esther

The father of my son, Mahmoud, is from East Africa. Even though we come from different cultural backgrounds we hit it off right away when we met at school. When I got pregnant, I dropped out of school and got a part-time job. Mahmoud stayed enrolled part-time and worked part-time. We were making it work.

He used to tell me how beautiful I was but now he calls me a fat cow and that I am lucky to be with a man like him. The verbal abuse got worse but I wasn't going to give it up.

This last weekend he dragged me into our bedroom and started kicking me in the stomach. He saw that I had bought pregnancy tests and was accusing me of sleeping around. While I was on the ground, he grabbed our son's passport and locked me in the bedroom. He was yelling that he was going back home and that I would never see our son again. I didn't know who to tell.

Screening Resources

If possible, visit the resource location that is within driving distance.

Questions to Ask Batterers Intervention Programs:

The answers to these questions should be 'yes' unless specified otherwise.

- Will the victim be warned if threats of violence are made against him/her?
- Does the batterer sign a contract before beginning the program that he/she will:
 - Commit to perfect attendance?
 - Refrain from abuse of alcohol and drugs?
 - Be non-violent?
 - Sign a waiver of confidentiality on issues involving the safety of the victim?
- Will treatment be in a group setting with a male/female team or two male facilitators (when the batterer is male)?
- Do you do couples counseling or recommend it? (*This answer must be 'no'.*)
- Do you interview victims separately to gather information about patterns of abuse?
- Does your curriculum focus on power and control issues rather than anger management?
- Are consequences for non-compliance clearly stated and enforced?
- Does successful completion of the program require being violence-free for a set amount of time? How long?
- Does the program last at least 24 weeks and include an additional period of follow-up which includes individual counseling when necessary?

Questions to Ask Support Group Leaders:

- What are your qualifications to lead a support group? (training, experience, etc.)
- Where are you located?
- Can victims/survivors join at any time?
- How can a victim/survivor join the group?
- Do you focus more on victims or survivors?
- What's the structure of your meetings?
- How long can the victim/survivor stay in the group? Can they leave and return at any time?
- Is the group one gender or mixed?

Questions to Ask Legal Assistance Resources:

- What type of legal services do you provide?
 - Protection Order
 - Divorce
 - Child Custody
- Where are you located?
- How do victims/survivors qualify for these services?
- Can victims/survivors just show up or do they need to call ahead?
- Are there any fees for your services?

Questions to Ask Domestic Abuse Counselors:

The answers to these questions should be 'yes' unless specified otherwise.

- Are you state-certified in domestic violence (40-hour training)? If not, how many hours of training have you had in domestic abuse?
- Do you always believe the victims, even if they contradict themselves? (Trauma causes confusion and inconsistency.)
- Do you ask questions to assess imminent danger?
- Are you patient with a victim (not blaming him/her) who stays in an abusive relationship?
- Do you listen to the victim's story without interrogating or judging?
- Do you do couples counseling when there is abuse or coercive control in the relationship? (*This answer should be 'no'.*) Why?
- Do you ask the victim what his/her part is in the relational conflict? (*must be 'no'*)
- Do you help the victim work out a safety plan?
- Do you offer ideas without putting pressure on the victim in any way?
- Do you let the victim know that he/she does not deserve to be treated with disrespect by an intimate partner?
- Do you talk through the Duluth Model's Power and Control Wheel (<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>) with the victim?
- Do you discuss what a healthy relationship looks like?
- Do you help victims to forgive themselves for allowing the abuse?
- Do you use trauma-informed care and allow the client to control the pace of therapy?
- Do you help the client build back a sense of self-worth?
- Are you knowledgeable about the domestic abuse services in your area?

Go to the therapist's office with an abuse survivor to see if it feels safe for a victim. If the therapist's chair is between the victim and the exit, it is not safe.

Questions to Ask Shelters:

- Do you have a room available any time a victim is ready to leave an abuser?
- Can you disclose what city you are located in?
- Do you take kids or pets?
- Do you offer schooling options? Childcare options?
- Can you guide the victim from the home to your shelter?
- Do you provide legal services?
 - Protection Order
 - Divorce
 - Child Custody
- Do you offer substance abuse counseling?
- Do you offer support groups or victim counseling?
- How long can the victim stay? Can you help with transitional housing after that?
- Do you provide job assistance?

*Relational Awareness Bible Study*¹⁰

One of the most important tools we have for educating Christians about domestic abuse is the *Relational Awareness* Bible study. This study lays out the differences between healthy and abusive relationships and shows what we can do to respond to abuse. Every believer can become more enriched in their relationships and more effective in reaching out to those who are hurting all around us.

Relational Awareness is Domestic Kindness' first Bible study on relationships and domestic abuse. This eight-lesson study will take you through some fundamental principles in the Bible. These principles have the power to revolutionize your relationships and your heart. Whether in marriage, dating, work, friends, or family, the lessons will equip you to honor and glorify God in your interactions with all those around you. Each lesson is full of practical exercises and reflective questions, encouraging readers to apply the teachings daily.

Relational Awareness opens your eyes to identify red flags that hurt relationships. This study is a needed resource for churches to learn signs of abuse and overcome biases that inadvertently further victimize those reaching out for help.

What are some of the specific tools, skills, and knowledge you will be equipped with in this *Relational Awareness* study?

Through this study, you will:

- Be inspired to evaluate your character and apply these principles.
- Be more equipped to identify “red flags” in relationships—signs of ungodly, dishonoring, or unsafe behaviors and attitudes that necessitate protecting yourself or others in various ways.
- Be able to discern between healthy relationships and unhealthy ones more readily.
- See how the proper reading and application of God’s Word—which results in mutual honor and peace—contrasts with the manipulative misuse of scripture intended to oppress or control others, which is counter to the character of God and his design for humankind.
- Learn what to do when someone you know is harming or being harmed by someone they love.
- Explore what you—and what we together—can do about the epidemic of domestic abuse.

¹⁰ domestickindness.org/studies

“Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused”

Curriculum

Domestic Kindness encourages all church leaders in any capacity to go through this curriculum at least once. It is very helpful in equipping a response to all types of abuse any church might encounter.

This training curriculum includes a handbook, an introductory video, and 12 lesson videos. It brings together top experts from various fields to help leaders understand and implement the best practices for handling a variety of abuse scenarios at church, school, or ministry. Using the handbook and videos together provides the most comprehensive training. This curriculum is available at **churchcares.com**.

Curriculum Contributors

Members of the teaching team represent **a variety of perspectives and areas of expertise:**

Survivors, social workers, law enforcement, attorneys who have represented survivors in the legal process, trauma counselors, abuse counselors, batterer interventionists, and pastors who have cared for abuse victims well.

The curriculum explains the issues connected to abuse disclosure and reporting and provides practical wisdom for leaders to navigate complex situations. It is not intended to be legal counsel.

Curriculum Content

The outline for this curriculum breaks into two sections:

Key Concepts *for* Pastors and Ministry Leaders

1. Ministry Context: The Church’s Response to Abuse Is Grounded in the Gospel
2. Ministry Tension: Matthew 18 Complements (Doesn’t Compete with) Romans 13
3. Ministry Responsibilities: Abuse Against a Minor vs. Abuse Against an Adult
4. Ministry Partners: Awareness of Key Professionals in Victim Advocate Roles

Key Responses *from* Pastors and Ministry Leaders

5. Key Responses to Sexual Abuse
6. Key Responses to Physical Abuse
7. What Happens When You Call CPS? Don’t Avoid What You Don’t Understand
8. Non-Criminal Forms of Abuse (Verbal and Emotional)
9. Pastoral Care After Reporting: Reporting Is *Not* a Ministerial Hand-Off
10. Pastoral Care and Correction for an Abuser
11. Response to Abuse by a Church Leader
12. Seven Next Steps After This Training

Bible Teaching Suggestions

One important way of making churches safe places for victims and survivors of domestic abuse is to make sermons safe. We suggest having one sermon per year about how the Bible speaks against domestic abuse. These sermons need to make it clear that violence and coercive control are never acceptable. At domestickindness.org, we have a list of recommended domestic abuse sermons that Pastor Jeff Crippen presented. If a pastor is uncomfortable giving such a sermon, the Action Team could invite a guest speaker to deliver a sermon.

Also, we request that you preach sermons to congregations in a way that validates the experiences of the abused and doesn't make them feel as if God requires them to tolerate abusive behavior from a spouse. Here are a few topics that can cause trauma for a victim unless explanations of exceptions are given.

Turn the other cheek—Matthew 5:39

The message of this passage is 'don't retaliate.' In a marriage, finding safety rather than fighting back is better. You could mention that God does not want a spouse to be a punching bag.

Submission—Ephesians 5:21-22, 1 Peter 3:1-6

The church can submit to Jesus because He is love. Wives can submit to their husbands if the husbands are loving. Ephesians 5:21 tells all of us to submit to each other. Submission is mutual. Pastors can tell congregants that God never tells a spouse to submit to the evil actions of an abusive spouse.

Divorce—Matthew 2:16 (sending away a loyal wife)

God hates violence more than He hates divorce. God loves His daughters more than a human father loves his daughters. A loving father doesn't want his daughters to be abused. Jesus came to set captives free (Luke 4:18). God values individuals more than the institution of marriage. You could mention that God approves of divorce in cases of abuse.

Withholding intimacy—1 Corinthians 7:3-6 (don't defraud each other)

This passage demonstrates the mutuality of the sexual relationship. The husband's body belongs to the wife and the wife's body belongs to the husband. This is assuming the couple is living in peace. Verse 15 says "God has called us to live in peace." We can tell the congregation that living in peace is more important than a sexual relationship.

Suffering—Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4

We are meant to suffer for the sake of God, not for the sake of evil. You can mention that God never intended marriage to be a source of suffering.

Forgiveness—Luke 17:4 (forgive someone 7 times a day)

When we teach about forgiveness, the victim thinks, “I guess I need to keep forgiving him, no matter what he does.” The abuser thinks, “This is great! I can do whatever I want and she has no choice but to forgive me.”

God never meant forgiveness to be a ‘get out of jail free’ card for abusers. When we teach about forgiveness, we can mention that victims of abuse need to be in a safe place before attempting to forgive their abuser.

Headship—Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 11:3

Headship in Ephesians is not about authority, but about operating in unity as a single body would. 1 Corinthians is not about authority but about honoring based on cultural sensitivities. Headship is about sacrificing and serving as Jesus demonstrated. Congregants could be told that there can be no unity in a relationship if one person tries dominating another.

Die to yourself—Luke 9:23, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3

When we are told to die to ourselves, the idea is that we give up living to serve ourselves and instead rely on the Holy Spirit to give us what we need and lead us in following what God wants us to do. It doesn’t mean that we should rip ourselves apart and accept mistreatment from those we love. We can tell the church that dying to ourselves brings joy and peace because the Holy Spirit has filled us. If we deny ourselves for the sake of an abuser, we will not experience joy and peace. That is not God’s design.

Put others before yourself—Philippians 2:3-4

God wants us to put others before ourselves when we see needs around us that are greater than our own. His idea is not that we neglect our legitimate needs to bail out someone who abuses what they have, but that we honor the intrinsic value of each person. When we speak about this, we can remind victims that they have an equal amount of value as their abuser and need to honor God by allowing their own needs to be met equally.

Winning a husband to Jesus—1 Peter 3:1

Peter was writing to a patriarchal society. Women were treated as the property of their husbands. Peter advised Christian women married to non-Christian men to treat them with honor, respect, and cooperation. They would ease the tension in the home by complying with traditional societal hierarchies. Our culture is not the same today. If a victim stays with an abusive man, he may increase rebellious behavior and hardness of heart against God. Pastors can explain that winning a spouse to the Lord is not a reasonable expectation in cases of domestic abuse.

Reporting Child Abuse

All states in the USA have laws for mandatory reporting of child abuse and systems to investigate reports of abuse. **These laws are consistently updated or changed over time so it is important to consult with legal counsel regarding the application of the laws.** Your local Child Protective Agency has current reporting law information.

In some states, everyone is a mandated reporter; in others, there is a list of mandated reporters. For example, in California, mandatory reporters include members of the clergy, medical personnel, mental health providers, social workers, childcare providers, school employees, law enforcement, and others. In all states, everyone is allowed to report even those who are not mandated reporters.

What must be reported: reasonable suspicion of physical, sexual, or mental abuse or neglect. It includes witnessing physical domestic violence between parents. It does not include mutual fighting between minors.

The penalty for failure to report is a misdemeanor.

Many states accept anonymous reports of alleged child abuse and neglect. All states are required to preserve the confidentiality of all child maltreatment reports, except in certain limited circumstances. (Check with your local child welfare department.) Confidentiality refers to protecting the information from public view, including the identity of the person reporting from the person suspected of abuse or neglect.

Each state has trained professionals to evaluate the situation and determine whether intervention and services are needed. Most states have a toll-free number to call to report suspected abuse. Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, provides an organization list of state child abuse reporting numbers. (See their website: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/states-territories-tribes>.)

Another resource for information on how and where to file a report of suspected child abuse and neglect is the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (800-422-4453).

Reporting Elder or Disabled Adult Abuse

How should I report abuse?

Any concerned individual can report suspected abuse on the Adult Protective Services (APS) hotline: 877-477-3646. This line is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Reporting can also be online by Mandated Reporters: <https://fw4.harmonyis.net/LACSSLiveintake/>. To report a suspected abuse in a long-term care facility, please call the Long-Term Care Ombudsman: at 800-334-9473. All reporting is completely confidential.

If the abuse includes serious physical injury, contact local law enforcement first. In addition to calling, you must also file a written report.

How APS works

Adult Protective Services (APS) provides a system of in-person response to reports of abuse and self-neglect about developmentally disabled adults, physically and mentally disabled adults, and the elderly who may be victims of abuse.

What is elder/dependent adult abuse?

Elder/dependent adult abuse is any intentional or careless act that causes harm or serious risk of harm to an elderly or dependent adult. The term includes physical abuse, abandonment, abduction, isolation, financial abuse, neglect, and self-neglect.

What should I expect when I call to report abuse?

An intake worker will ask you to provide information regarding the incident. You should be prepared to provide as much relevant information as possible, including the name and location of the victim, the name and phone number of the suspected abuser, and the names and phone numbers of any other parties involved, etc.

Can I receive an update on any report I make to APS?

The social worker will not be able to provide ANY information regarding the APS client/investigation. If you obtain any further relevant information, you should contact APS and make another report.

Personalized Safety Plan¹¹

Although you can't control an abuser's use of violence, you can plan how you will respond to future abusive or violent incidents, prepare for the possibility of an incident happening, and plan how to get to safety. It is your decision if and when you tell others that you have been abused, or that you are still at risk. This is a form that will help you create your plan. Another option is to use this online interactive safety plan that you can type and print out: <https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-your-personal-safety-plan/>

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. When I have to talk to the abuser, I can _____.
2. When I talk on the phone with the abuser, I can _____.
3. I can make up a "code word" for my family, co-workers, friends, and counselor so they know when to call for help for me. My code word is _____.
4. When I feel a fight coming on, I will try to move to a place that is lowest risk for getting hurt, such as _____ (at work), _____ (at home) or _____ (in public).
5. I can tell my family, co-workers, boss, counselor, or friend about my situation. I feel safe telling _____.
6. I can screen my calls, texts, emails, and visitors. I have the right not to receive harassing phone calls, texts, or emails. I can ask friends, family members, or co-workers to help me screen my contacts. I can ask these people for help: _____.
7. I can call any of the following people for assistance or support if necessary and ask them to call the police if they see the abuser harassing me.
Friend: _____
Relative: _____
Co-worker: _____
Counselor: _____
Shelter: _____
Other: _____
8. When leaving work, I can _____.
9. When walking, riding, or driving home, if problems occur, I can _____.
10. I can attend a victim's/survivor's support group with the Domestic Violence program, like _____.

¹¹ Adapted from "Personalized Safety Plan," Office of the City Attorney, City of San Diego, California, April 1990.

11. Contact Information I Need To Have:

Police Department: _____

Domestic Violence Program: _____

Sexual Assault Program: _____

Attorney: _____

Counselor: _____

Spiritual Support/Clergy: _____

Other: _____

Safety when preparing to leave

1. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____ so I can leave quickly.
2. I will keep copies of important documents at _____.
3. I will open a savings account by _____ (date).
4. If I require immediate financial assistance for basics like food, shelter, or medical assistance I can contact the county helpline 211.
5. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 800-799-7233. I can seek shelter and counselling here or get immediate crisis support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I can also contact my local shelter directly at _____.
6. I can get a different cell phone to keep my telephone communications confidential.
7. I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
8. I can leave extra clothes with _____.
9. I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ to plan the safest way to leave the residence. _____ (support worker or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan.
10. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.
11. If my child goes missing, I will call the police.
12. If I need to call the police, I will give them the following information about the abuser: his birth date _____, his physical description including height _____, weight _____, hair color _____, facial hair _____, tattoos and/or scars _____, the type of vehicle he drives _____, and his license plate number _____.
13. I can assure the confidentiality of certain documents by using a PO Box or alternate address or setting up a password with certain institutions to ensure only I can access my personal information. The documents I will change include: bills _____, utilities _____, car registration _____, taxes _____, bank accounts _____.

Safety and my emotional health

If I feel down and want to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can

_____.

When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can

_____.

I can tell myself, " _____."

whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.

I can read _____ to help me feel stronger.

I can call _____ and _____ for support.

I can attend workshops and support groups or _____

to gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people.

Items to take when leaving

You may give extra copies of documents and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case you have to leave quickly. Items with an asterisk (*) on the following list are the most important to take. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. These items might best be placed in one location so that if you have to leave in a hurry, you can grab them quickly. Check off items on this list as you make your plans.

When I leave, I should take the following items for myself and my children:

* Birth certificates	* Social Security card
* Driver's license and registration	* School and vaccination records
* Health cards	* Passports
* Money	* Checkbook and bankbooks
* Debit and credit cards	* Bus pass
* Keys – house/car/office	* Medications and prescriptions
* Court orders, protection orders, and custody documentation	* Citizenship or immigration documents
* Work permits	Medical records
Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage papers	Assistive devices (e.g., glasses, dentures, walkers, canes, hearing aids)
Insurance papers (car, home, health)	Address/telephone book
Divorce papers, marriage certificate	Children's favorite toys and/or blanket
Pictures of abuser and children/grandchildren	Valuable or sentimental items such as jewelry