

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 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.)
 - 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" (next section).
- 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 domestickindness.org/resources under 'Victims Support Groups'). A safety plan creates safety for the victim whether they choose to stay or to leave the abuser. Having a plan in place can 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. 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).

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 Resource Team to discuss ways to help the victim through 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.*

Assume they are telling the truth. Often, they are confused and contradict themselves due to trauma. We need to remember that they are experiencing severe distress.
 - *Be their friend.*

Offer them help and support. Offer to go through a study with them (such as *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:

 - 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.
 - *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 Resource Team for prayer.

- *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.

- *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 talk to the abuser.
- It's recommended that you not allow them to stay at your house unless it's just for a few days.

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 Call¹

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.

¹ www.focusministries1.org