



EMMY'S PLACE

"Giving a Voice to the Voiceless."

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What Faith Leaders and the Church Can Do

REMEMBER THE GOALS

- **SAFETY** for the victim and children
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** for the abuser
- **RESTORATION** of individuals and, IF POSSIBLE, relationships OR
- **MOURNING** the loss of the relationship

DOs AND DON'Ts WITH A BATTERED WOMAN

- **DO** believe her. Her description of the violence is only the tip of the iceberg.
- **DO** reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, it is not God's will for her.
- **DO** give her referral information; primary resources are battered women's services or shelters; National Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); 1-800-787-3224 (TDD); and/or Supportive mentor services: Emmy's Place (925) 588-3761
- **DO** support and respect her choices. Even if she is aware of the risks and chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive.
- **DO** encourage her to think about a safety plan; set aside some money; copies of important papers for her and children and a change of clothes hidden or in care of a friend if she decides to go to a shelter. Plan how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent. Plan what to do about the children if they are at school; if they are asleep, etc. (This is both practical and helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Safety planning is a process that is ongoing.)
- **DO** help her with any religious concerns.
- **DO** emphasize that the marriage covenant is broken by the violence from her partner. **DO** assure her of God's love and presence and of your commitment to walk with her through this valley.
- **DO** help her see that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.
- **DO** provide phone numbers of accountability group members to abuser's wife so she can call whenever she senses tensions building into violence.
- **DO** support her and help her mourn the loss to herself and her children if she decides to separate and divorce. **DO** consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response.
- **DO** pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.
- **DO** protect her confidentiality.
- **DO NOT** give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information onto the abuser. Do not discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information to the abuser.
- **DON'T** minimize the danger to her. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for your safety ..."
- **DON'T** tell her what to do. Give her information and support.
- **DON'T** react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you, but don't react passively either. Let her know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and not deserved.
- **DON'T** blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, try to reframe: "I don't care if you did have dinner late or forgot to go to the store, there is no reason for him to be violent with you. This is his problem."
- **DON'T** recommend couples counseling or approach her husband and ask for "his side of the story." These actions can endanger her.

- **DON'T** recommend “marriage enrichment”, “mediation”, or a “communications workshop”. None of these will address the goals listed above.
- **DON'T** send her home with just a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church, or be a better Christian wife.
- **DON'T** encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
- **DON'T** encourage her dependence on you.
- **DON'T** do nothing.

DOS AND **DON'T**S WITH AN ABUSIVE PARTNER

- **DO** approach him and express your concern and support for him to be accountable and to deal with his violence if he is arrested.
- **DO** address any religious rationalizations he may offer or questions he may have.
- **DO** name the violence as his problem, not hers. Tell him that only he can stop it; and you are willing to help.
- **DO** assess him for suicide or threats of homicide.
- **DO** warn the victim if he makes specific threats towards her.
- **DO** pray with him. Ask God to help him stop his violence, repent and find a new way.
- **DO** assure him of your support in this endeavor.
- **DON'T** meet with him alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the church with several other people around.
- **DON'T** approach him or let him know that you know about his violence unless a) you have the victim’s permission, b) she is aware that you plan to talk to him and c) you are certain that his partner is safely separated from him.
- **DON'T** pursue couples’ counseling with him and his partner if you are aware that there is violence in the relationship.
- **DON'T** go to him to confirm the victim’s story.
- **DON'T** give him any information about his partner or her whereabouts.
- **DON'T** be taken in by his minimization, denial or lying about his violence.
- **DON'T** accept his blaming her or other rationalizations for his behavior.
- **DON'T** be taken in by his “conversion” experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as he proceeds with accountability. If it is phony, it is only another way to manipulate you and the system and maintain control of the process to avoid accountability.
- **DON'T** allow him to use religious excuses for his behavior.
- **DON'T** advocate for the abuser to avoid the legal consequences of his violence.
- **DON'T** forgive an abuser quickly and easily.
- **DON'T** confuse his remorse with true repentance.
- **DON'T** send him home with just a prayer. Encourage him to join a treatment program for abusers. Provide an accountability group for him where concerned men will meet with him and ask him about his behavior on a consistent basis and pray for and encourage him to continue his treatment program.

SHARE TIME AND RESOURCES

- **DO** support other ministries and community service organizations by including them in the church’s annual budget
- **DO** donate funds to shelters and other non-profit agencies working with domestic violence victims.

“Instead of remaining silent or failing to intervene, the church needs to take a bold stand against violence in the home, and provide a safe place to tell the truth, where truth is heard with compassion, where abusers are held accountable for their actions, where safety for women and children is a priority, and where God’s grace is found in abundance.”¹

Please refer to www.faithtrustinstitute.org for resources.

Excerpt from Faith Trust Institute, 2900 Eastlake Ave. E., Suite 200, Seattle WA 98102

¹FOCUS Ministries, Inc.