



**Domestic Abuse:
Training for Pastors and Church Workers to
Understand, Identify, and Intervene**



In Christ, for the Church and the World.



**Prepared by
The LCMS Domestic Violence and Child
Abuse Taskforce**



In Christ, for the Church and the World.

TRAINING OUTLINE

Part 1. Identifying and understanding domestic abuse

Part 2. How to help those affected by domestic abuse



Part 2: Helping Those Affected

- A. A Dialectical Approach
- B. How to Start and Have Difficult Conversations
- C. Steps in a Helpful Conversation with a Victim of Domestic Abuse
- D. The Issue of Safety
- E. Understanding Domestic Abuse Resources
- F. Spiritual Comfort and Counsel
- G. Opening Closed Doors
- H. Issues You May Confront



A Dialectical Attitude

- “Dialectical” = operating under the assumptions of *seemingly* contradictory ideas

To summarize: Be empathic to her fear of acting to end the abuse, but realistic about the need for her to act to do so. Always remain respectful of her choices.



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

Empathy

- Being empathic means, first and foremost, listening to her
- Do not assume you know how she is feeling
 - If you were in her situation you would be afraid, angry or upset, but that does not mean she “should” be feeling those ways
- Do not assume; listen to how she is feeling



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

Empathic understanding

- Understand and accept how a person thinks and feels without evaluating the “validity” of those thoughts and feelings
- Express empathic understanding of her sense of fear and hopelessness (and anger)

Always remember that her situation
is likely fraught with danger



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

Empathic understanding (cont.)

- She is in an overwhelming, terrifying situation
- She is afraid
- She feels trapped, helpless
- She may have low self-worth, low self-efficacy
- She may blame herself



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- Empathy means understanding, but it does not mean agreeing with her thoughts
 - We hold beliefs that she might not endorse (but are understanding of why she does not)
- Beliefs
 1. Abuse is never acceptable and cannot be accepted
 2. It is not her fault she is being abused
 3. This situation can and must change
 4. She must do something to effect that change



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- We believe that she must change the situation
 - Probably not immediately
 - Probably will need help
 - To try will be terrifying
 - To try might be dangerous



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- We encourage women in abusive relationships to see themselves as capable of changing it
 - Recognize reality that she must do something, and encourage her also to recognize that reality
 - See her potential even when she doesn't



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- Empathy cannot be over-used
 - Empathize with her decisions
- What she can do and what she will do are entirely up to her
 - Respect the choices she makes
 - She is the expert on the situation, she knows the abuser better than anyone



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- Therefore, empathy is non-directive
 - Be patient, kind, understanding, and encouraging
 - Encourage, but do not direct, command or insist
 - (Be aware that encouragement might frighten her)
 - Understand and accept that it may take time and several attempts before she can do something



A Dialectical Attitude (cont.)

- To summarize the dialectical attitude
 - We understand it will be difficult or even extraordinarily difficult
 - But we also understand that for change to happen (for the abuse to end), she must do something



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Starting Conversations (cont.)

Three ways conversation will start

1. You approach her because of concerns
 - Some will be willing to talk
 - Have been waiting for someone to ask, to notice, to care
 - Others will be unwilling to talk out of fear or shame
 - Be aware of danger, be aware of a fearful reaction
 - Do not force issue (confronting it may put victim at risk of more abuse)



Starting Conversations

2. A victim comes to you

- She wants to talk
 - Might be hesitant to bring up topic.
 - Fearful of what you will think, say, do
 - Fearful of repercussions by perpetrator



Starting Conversations (cont.)

3. A couple comes to you seeking counseling, and you request (as “part of your normal routine”) an individual meeting with each of them

- Do NOT preview primary purpose
- Asking about any issues that are difficult to discuss with partner present
- Ask explicitly about anger and abuse
- If affirmed, at subsequent meeting, refer them out



Starting Conversations (cont.)

- You want to request a meeting out of concern
 - Share your observations of her with her, such as:
 - “You seem a bit down lately ...”
 - “I cannot help but notice tension ...”
 - Ask her if it would be okay to talk about these things
 - Ask her to come for a visit
 - Do not offer to visit her
 - If she declines, then drop the subject
 - Assure her that you are willing to meet or talk at any time



Starting Conversations (cont.)

During individual meeting, “work your way toward” topic of violence

1. Ask about the relationship
 - “How are things going with you and your spouse?”
2. Ask about disagreements
 - “How are disagreements resolved?”
3. Ask about anger
 - “What is it like when you get angry with each other?”
4. Ask about violence
 - “Has there ever been any physical violence?”
 - “Have you ever hurt each other physically?”



Starting Conversations (cont.)

- If no abuse, other will likely not be offended
 - (This includes asking her at beginning of couples counseling)
 - Communicate to both that you have an obligation always to ask
 - State these are questions you routinely ask everyone
 - Can acknowledge to partner your questions and concerns, if necessary
 - Apologize, if necessary



Having Difficult Conversations

- Personal requirements
- Practical requirements
- Active listening
- Directly asking



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Personal Requirements

- Care enough to help
- Be brave enough to talk about something that makes you uncomfortable
- Be empathic and nonjudgmental



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Practical requirements

- Time
- Space (office, room, furniture set-up)
- Confidentiality



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Time

- Time is an important thing to give victim
 - Listening empathically takes time
 - Take the time to make sure she knows that you believe her and that you are concerned for her
- Victim might be anxious about time
 - May feel bad for taking your time
 - May be fearful of being found out by abuser
 - If she abruptly expresses a need to leave, honor this
 - Be prepared to reschedule if victim needs to cancel



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

- Establish time parameters at start of meeting
 - Ask how much time she can spend with you
 - Inform if you have limited time that you have
 - Otherwise, she might assume that you are ending meeting because you don't believe or don't care
- Do not allow distractions (phone, interruptions)



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Confidentiality

- Mandatory reporting in many states for hospitals/physicians treating victims
- However, you can promise confidentiality
 - Tell her will not share what she says with anyone
 - Tell her abuser will not know of meeting
 - Can consult with experts confidentially, i.e., without revealing victim or perpetrator's name



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Space

- Evaluate meeting room before she arrives
- Leave her easy access to door (assuage fear)
- Give her space
 - If necessary, can have desk between you two
 - Probably better to sit with nothing in between
- Orientation of chairs
 - Directly face-to-face uncomfortable for many people
 - Facing each other, but at a slight angle, is comfortable for most people



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening

- Demonstrates you are engaged in conversation
- Highly effective at reassuring other person
- Communicate, “I’m listening” and “I care”
- Encourages the other person to keep talking



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening (cont.)

- Three basic active listening skills
 - Nonverbal communication
 - Facial expressions
 - Body language
 - Nonverbal utterances
 - Reflective listening
 - Empathic listening



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening (cont.)

Nonverbal communication: Facial expressions

- Relax your face (may lead to small, gentle smile)
- Nod



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening (cont.)

Nonverbal communication: Body language

- SOLER
 - Sit straight (“I am paying attention.”)
 - Open posture (willing to listening to anything)
 - Lean in (indicating an interest)
 - Eye contact (consistent but non-continuous)
 - Staring communicates dominance
 - Relaxed posture



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening (cont.)

Nonverbal communication: Nonverbal utterances

- Uh-huh, Hmmm, Tsk tsk



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening: Reflective Listening

- Repeat back, paraphrasing slightly
- Examples
 - “So the first time he hit you was years ago.”
 - “It both angered you, but it also made you afraid.”
 - “You were shocked at what happened.”
 - “You still cannot believe what happened.”
- Reflection uses same words person used



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Active Listening: Empathic Listening

- Identify feelings she is likely feeling
- Examples
 - “That must have been terrifying.”
 - “You must have felt hurt and angry.”
 - “This seems like it is really hard for you to talk about.”
 - “It sounds like you feel almost ashamed, like you did something wrong.”



Having Difficult Conversations (cont.)

Directly Asking

- Sometimes, you need to ask directly
 - Sometimes, if you don't ask, they won't say
 - Most women recognize the importance of asking about domestic violence, even if there is none
 - Example questions
 - “Have there been instances of violence?”
 - “Has he ever pushed or slapped or otherwise hurt you?”



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Attend to Safety

- Communicating with you might be dangerous for her
 - Ask her about present safety (e.g., “Does he know you are here?” “When do you have to be home?”)
- Promoting safety might mean doing nothing
 - She cannot do anything without a safety plan
 - Might be safer for a victim to stay in predictable (and potentially violent) situation than trigger a crisis



Attend to Safety (cont.)

- State you will do nothing without her permission
 - During conversations, you are likely to show that you are upset and alarmed
 - Might communicate to her that you want to do something
 - This might alarm her, causing her to fear that you will act and put her in danger



Attend to Safety (cont.)

- Assure her that she decides what you do
 - Communicate that you understand her situation
 - Communicates respect of her autonomy
 - “I hope it is obvious that I am concerned, but I will do nothing at all unless you want me to”
 - “I will do nothing and say nothing to anybody until you ask me to do so.”
- If victim is ready to act, do and suggest nothing
 - Refer her to professionals
 - Professionals can offer her needed resources and consultation (including safety planning)



Safety Issues

- Calling the police in emergencies
- Basics of safety planning (or, Why you will defer to the experts)
- Making a safe referral to resources



Calling the Police

Call police when necessary

- Violence is *happening* or is *imminent*
- Witnessing violence
- Victim tells you of current violence or immediate danger
- Do not hesitate, call 911
 - When violence is *manifest*, hesitation *guarantees* harm
 - Can be done anonymously
 - Police are professionals trained to secure someone's safety



Why “Safety Planning”?

- Violence in a relationship can be unpredictable
 - Seems to preclude possible planning
- However, it might be necessary to escape
 - During a crisis (i.e., in immediate danger)
 - Based on a decision (i.e., separation or divorce)
- Attempts to escape or end abuse greatly enhances danger
 - Can reduce danger by planning



What Is “Safety Planning”?

- Safety planning is more complicated than it looks
- “Safety planning” is best conducted with experts
 - Entails an individualized, detailed strategy to help the victim avoid or escape dangerous situations
 - Experts have learned from decades of hard experiences what to do and what not to do
- Safety planning issues include ...



Safety Planning: Escape Routes

- Where?
 - Where are safe places you can go?
- Who?
 - Who are safe people who can and will help?
- When?
 - Consider best (i.e., safest) day, time
- How?
 - Picture/visualize how you will leave (the route, the destination)



Grab and Go Bag

- A bag, safely hidden (probably off premises, with trusted friend), with necessities, that can be easily accessed and taken in an emergency
 - Necessities of survival
 - Cash, personal bank accounts, credit cards
 - Medications (prescriptions) and insurance card
 - Spare keys, license, car registration, car insurance
 - Phone numbers: doctors, family, friends, hotline



Grab and Go Bag (cont.)

- Copies of legal documents
 - Restraining orders, custody orders
 - Rental contracts
 - Birth certificates, Social Security cards
 - School and medical records
 - Welfare identification, passports, work permits
- Precious possessions
 - Photos, photo albums
 - Jewelry



Other Issues Related to Victim Safety

- Code words to communicate to others when in danger, when they should call 911
- Using computers and phones safely
- Post office box



Safety of Children

- Keeping children safe is top priority for victims
 - Reason many stay in violent relationships
- Complicates things greatly
 - Legal issues
 - School issues
 - Emotional/psychological issues
 - Social/Family issues: Sports, Friends, In-laws



Summary of “Safety Planning”

- It is not necessary for you to be an expert
 - It is probably not possible for you to handle this situation with competence, which means attempting to do so would endanger the victim
- Many professional resources
 - Private and governmental agencies that have expertise in this
- If put in situation where you are only resource, consult with experts



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Your Task Is to Refer to Experts

- Understand limits of competence
 - You are not competent to treat all problems
- Understand competence of other professionals
 - God gives us healthcare professionals
 - Jesus refers to the value of doctors
 - Paul likewise calls Luke “the beloved physician”
- Consider self “starting point” or “front line”
 - Your task is to get her to resources and experts



Steps to Helping

- Things that you want to communicate
 1. You believe her (assurance)
 2. You are concern (caring)
 3. Abuse is always wrong, condemned by church
 4. Information about law and resources
 5. You want to help, but expertise is needed to make sure she and children are safe
 6. Referral information
- These are consistent with dialectical attitude
- Based on internal/external factors constraining her



Communicate Assurance

- Believe her *and* tell her you believe her
 - Have no hesitation whatsoever
 - Most victims wait years to disclose
 - She has been told repeatedly that the abuse is not really happening, is not that bad, or is her fault
- Say something like:
 - “I believe you”
 - “I’m so sorry that you are going through this”
 - “This is a terrible and terrifying situation for you”



Communicate Concern/Caring

- Express your concern for her
 - Will show you understand her dangerous situation
 - Will communicate that abuse is an awful experience
 - Will show that you care, which will be salutary in itself
- Say something like:
 - “I’m really concerned about you.”
 - “I’m worried about your welfare.”



Communicate Concern/Caring (cont.)

- Encourage her to understand she is not alone
 - Many others have been in her situation
 - You believe her
 - You are available to her (“If it helps, you can talk to me any time.”)
- Encourage her to see you want her to get help
 - Help is available
 - Many women, some that she knows, have gone from victim to survivor



Communicate Wrongfulness

- Confirm/reassure that abuse is sinful
 - The abuser is sinning against her and against God
 - The Christian faith considers all forms of domestic abuse to be sinful
 - Victim might not realize this
 - Might be contrary to what she has previously heard from abuser and perhaps others



Communicate about Law

- Communicate that all violence is unlawful
 - Police and courts can protect her
 - Be ready to “debate” this
 - Abuser has attempted to persuade her that he is outside law, that law doesn’t apply, that what he is doing is not unlawful
 - Don’t argue; empathize
 - Advise her to communicate with resources



Communicate about Competence

- Tell her you want to help
 - Victim will not ask for help unless you bring it up
 - “If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know and I will if I can.”
 - If she declines, reassure her that you will not do anything without her permission
- Tell her expertise is needed to ensure her safety
- Offer to stay involved within your competence (spiritual comfort and counsel)



Communicate about Resources

- Communicate resources that are available
 - Numerous national, state, local resources
 - Encourage her to realize she is not alone, that other victims have become survivors
- Determine if she knows how to get help
 - Be prepared to refer to resources
- Respect her decisions, even if reluctant to accept help



Encourage Treatment-Seeking

- Acknowledge the limits of your competence
- Refer, but don't defer or deflect
 - Offer your expertise in spiritual comfort and counsel
 - Offer it into the future
 - Indicate your desire to stay involved
 - Assure that you are not embarrassed for her, or uncomfortable with topic, or disgusted with her



Encourage Treatment-Seeking (cont.)

- Be empathic and non-directive
 - Empathize with her fear and feelings of hopelessness
 - Accept that she may be incapable of acting at present
 - Safety concerns
 - Internal and external factors
 - Do not give directives, do not insist on any behavior
 - Do not act on her behalf (besides calling 911 if necessary)



Encourage Treatment-Seeking (cont.)

- Never underestimate cruelty and vindictiveness of perpetrator
 - What you hear about abuse will shock, but it is only the tip of the iceberg
 - She is likely only aware of some aspects of her lack of privacy (e.g., tracing computer and phone usage of which she is unaware; tracking and stalking)
 - It is okay to be more paranoid than she is!



Encourage Treatment-Seeking (cont.)

- Have ready a list of resources (next topic)
 - Refer to a resource that you know personally
- Referring safely
 - Beware of writing things down
 - Do not use regular phone/computer

Paradoxically, it is important to get her to resources, who can help her establish and maintain this privacy, safety and security.



Follow-Up (Maybe)

- At the end, ask for another meeting
 - Express your wish that she would call you or meet with you again at sometime in the future
 - She might decline
 - If willing but immediate scheduling not possible, ask her to call you as soon as she can schedule one
- Do not suggest that you follow up with her
 - Doing so could endanger her
 - If she asks you to initiate a follow up phone call or visit, discuss with her a safe way for you to do so



Beware of Implying a Necessary Course of Action

- Probably okay to express hope for reconciliation
 - But must then acknowledge that it might be impossible
 - Terminating relationship only option for some
 - Abuser refuses to change
 - Damage extensive and reconciliation impossible



Beware of Implying a Necessary Course of Action (cont.)

- Likewise, never imply leaving is only option
 - May not be ready or able to act
 - May feel misunderstood, embarrassed, alienated
- Either implication (must stay/must leave) will make returning for help from you very difficult



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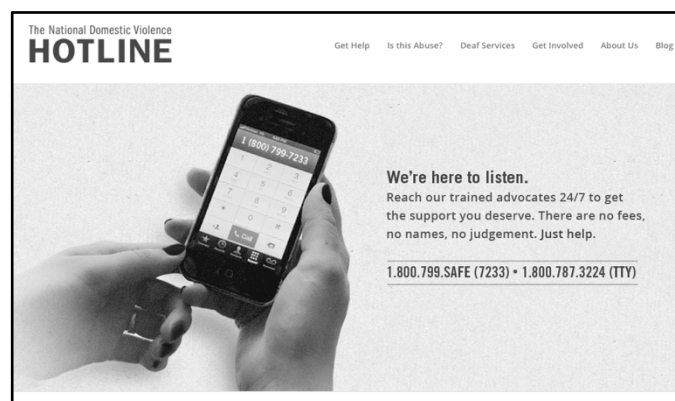
Overview of Resources

- Google “domestic abuse resources” returns 23 million pages
 - National resources
 - Most communities have local resources



National Resources

- Numerous national resources
 - 24/7 availability for consultation
 - The National Domestic Violence Hotline



National Resources (cont.)

- Immediate safety is first concern
 - First page opens with this box



Local Resources

- Can easily find local resources



Chicago



Boston



San Diego



Local Resources (cont.)

- Local resources/experts are happy to consult
 - Can instruct about services as you are learning to deal with issue
 - May be able to provide training
 - Consultation about safety planning, other resources
- Bottom line
 - Experts are available (services are free)
 - Duty is to be prepared to refer victims to experts



Finding Local Experts

- Actively seek out resources
 - Google
 - Licensing boards, Professional organizations
 - Parishioner recommendations
 - Recommendations from fellow church workers
- Call them and/or ask for a visit
 - Identify self
 - State you are seeking a referral resource
 - Ask them about competencies



Finding Local Experts (cont.)

Competent mental health professionals will ...

1. Be respectful (even appreciative) of religious beliefs
2. Refer back to you for issues related to faith
3. Be willing to answer questions about experience, therapeutic approach
4. Be willing to collaborate with you, if permission is given by parishioner/client (victim)
5. Recognize own competence (e.g., experience and expertise in domestic violence)



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A Christian Perspective on Domestic Abuse

- The taskforce created a document, entitled “When Homes Are Heartless”
- Available online at the taskforce website
- The following is a brief summary of highlights



The LCMS Perspective on Domestic Abuse (cont.)

- God’s want marriage to be a blessing
- But the church is not exempt from sin
- God’s creation of marriage and the family can be not only damaged but destroyed by sin
 - “Some divorces are unavoidable—for instance, where a spouse abandons the marriage, or persists in stubborn infidelity, or physically drives away the other spouse through abuse.” (CTCR Creator’s Tapestry 2011)



From: *When Homes Are Heartless: An LCMS Perspective on Domestic Violence* (CTCR, 2014)



The LCMS Perspective on Domestic Abuse (cont.)

- In cases of violence, Christians should seek the protection of police and courts
- Also, too often there has been a form of support that enables unrepentant sin
 - Some women have been urged to maintain the marriage despite continuing fear of abuse, her sense that repentance is not genuine, and the reality that repeated patterns of abuse have included numerous apologies and promises “never to do it again.”



From: *When Homes Are Heartless: An LCMS Perspective on Domestic Violence* (CTCR, 2014)



Spiritual Needs

- Victim and children will have *tremendous* need for the counsel and comfort of their church
- If victim gives permission ...
 - “Can we talk about this more in the future?”
 - “I’m going to refer you to some experts, but I’d like to stay involved to the extent you are comfortable.”
- ... stay involved by following up
 - Ask about and encourage treatment



Spiritual Needs (cont.)

- Anticipate and empathize
 - She may think that abuse is God's punishment for her sins
 - She may think that God has abandoned her
 - She may believe that He lacks understanding of her situation



Spiritual Needs (cont.)

- Assure her
 - God has not abandoned her
 - God promises to be with her always (Matthew 28:20)
 - God does understand what she is experiencing
 - God knows all about her pain and suffering
 - God loves her so much that He sent His Son to suffer and die for her (Romans 5:15, 1 John 4:9-10)



Spiritual Needs (cont.)

- Assure her
 - Abuse is not God's punishment for her sins; Abuse is not the result of her behavior; She does not deserve to be abused; This is not God's will
 - "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11)
 - Jesus endured all punishment deserved for her sins; He paid in full, once and for all (1 Peter 3:18)
 - She is doing or has done the right thing by seeking to end the abuse



Spiritual Needs (cont.)

- Encourage her
 - Do not give up
 - Do not cut herself off from His Word or the church
 - Attend church regularly
 - Pray regularly and study the Bible
 - Find someone strong in the faith to support her
 - Cling to the cross of Christ; God's promises are true; He will not forsake her (Hebrews 13:5)
 - She can hope for a better life.



Spiritual Consolation with Survivors

- Survivors are likely to be angry
 - At abuser
 - At God
 - At church, previous pastors
- Assure her
 - Angry feelings are normal
 - Anger is a human emotion common to us all



Spiritual Needs (cont.)

- It is a Christian obligation to forgive others as we have been forgiven
 - Might be very difficult for her
 - Be patient with her
 - Her lack of forgiveness is a forgivable sin
- “In your anger, do not sin ...” (Ephesians 4:26a).
 - Express feelings of anger to someone she trusts—a friend, her pastor, a family member or a counselor.



Spiritual Consolation with Survivors (cont.)

- Survivors are likely to be ashamed
 - Reassure her that domestic abuse is commonplace
 - She is not alone
 - Perhaps encourage her to help others
- Survivors are likely to be divorced
 - Might be angry about this
 - Might be angry that church discouraged this and, in her view, perpetuated the abuse



Regarding the abuser ...

- Do not confront
- Do not broach the topic
 - Do not, even if certain about abuse
 - Tearing away the veil of secrecy could endanger the victim and her children



Regarding the abuser ... (cont.)

- If abuser comes to you and confesses
 - Offer absolution
 - Offer spiritual consolation
 - Refer to qualified professionals
 - You are not qualified to treat this
 - Most mental health professionals are unqualified to treat
 - Requires special training



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“Seeing” Domestic Abuse

- Domestic abuse is shameful to both abuser and victim
 - Shame drives both to try to hide the abuse
 - To uncover domestic abuse, then, one needs to search for it

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)



See Domestic Abuse by Looking for It

- Ask about domestic abuse at beginning of any counseling
 - If a female seeks your help for any reason
 - If a couple seeks consultation with you about a relationship issue, insist on individual meetings



Outreach to Victims

- Reaching out (i.e., “outreach”)
 - In some situations, people in distress (e.g., victims of abuse) need others to reach out to them
 - Shame, stigma, secrecy make it extremely difficult to seek help
 - Your church can commit to outreach efforts

Outreach acknowledges that domestic abuse happens to Christian women, which will reduce shame, trigger hope and encourage her to seek help.



Outreach to Victims (cont.)

- Biggest single barrier to helping is victim not asking for help
 - Silence is based on fear of consequences, on shame (self-blame), on embarrassment about what others will think (i.e., stigma)
 - Silence is based on belief that change is impossible
 - Her silence might be reinforced by her church’s silence



Outreach to Victims (cont.)

- Practical actions
 - Prayers for victims of abuse, for unrepentant abusers, for professionals who work with victims and perpetrators
 - Identify resources in bulletin or church leaflets
 - Identify female resources in church (or nearby)
 - In sermons, identify all violence, including against wives, as a sin
 - Premarital counseling: ask about (identify) current abuse; discuss domestic abuse



Educating Other Church Workers

- Educate your church staff
- Gently confront misunderstanding of other church workers (e.g., other pastors)
- Advocate for victims of DV



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Who's telling the truth?

- May be asked by either or both to distinguish between contradictory statements
 - First, don't try
 - Second, realize you don't have to do so
- Always refer woman who states she is being abused to professional resources
- If abuser asserts he has been wrongfully accused, you can accept this as true while still referring her



Accusations by Abuser

- Abuser may accuse you of having or seeking to have an affair with victim



Victims from Other Churches

- May have requests from members of other churches
 - Dissatisfied or potentially endangered by advice of another pastor
 - Suggest calling other pastor if and only if he understands issues of safety
 - Same ideas, attitudes and approach apply, that is, refer to resources and experts



Couples Counseling: A Very, Very Bad Idea

- Couples counseling
 - Abuser might insist they go together (not her alone)
 - Victim might suggest couples counseling under wrong (but commonplace) assumption that domestic abuse is caused by problems in the relationship
- A competent counselor will start by asking each, in private, about domestic abuse
 - If uncovered, counselor should then encourage the victim to contact appropriate resources
- Should refuse to conduct couples counseling



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Couples Counseling: A Very, Very Bad Idea (cont.)

- Why?
 - Abuser will not allow the victim to talk about abuse
 - If she does he will punish her severely afterwards
 - “Anger management” not needed, since abuse is not committed in anger
 - Conflict resolution strategies not needed, as there is not mutual conflict but abuse by the abuser

Conducting couples counseling in an attempt to end domestic abuse assures that abuse will continue



Conclusion and Recommendations



Key Points and Recommendations

- Your church has victims and survivors
 - Instigate outreach efforts
- Develop your empathy
 - Find a survivor and talk with her about experiences
- Safety means referral to competent experts
 - Develop relationship with experts and resources
- Beware of compromising safety by confronting abuser or attempting couples counseling
 - Be aware of your own impulse and desire to help
 - Recognize what it means to help (i.e., refer)



The Role of Mental Health Professionals

- Mental health professionals are not all trained in this work
- Need to find and refer to specialists



Your Role

- Spiritual consolation and comfort of victims and survivors, and their children
- Spiritual reconciliation with repentant abusers



Questions, Comments and Discussion

- We hope that ...
 - You are more aware
 - You feel more competent
 - You know and respect your limitations, as well as the necessary expertise to help victims
 - You now know how to refer, including finding referral resources, establishing relationships



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** Soli Deo Gloria **

