



TIP SHEET 4

Responding to Domestic and Family Violence from a Pastoral Perspective

Safety is the most important factor for someone facing domestic and family violence. Most people think about physical safety which is always a priority. However, emotional safety is also important.

What is emotional safety?

People who experience violence are conditioned to believe that no one will care or believe their story. For a person experiencing violence, telling someone is a vulnerable and risky decision. In fact, for many people experiencing violence, staying in an abusive relationship is often easier than telling someone. People who experience violence fear the wrath of their partners. If the person using violence finds out about the disclosure, then abuse is likely to escalate and further endanger the person experiencing violence. Therefore, a person experiencing violence needs to feel that the person they are telling will provide emotional support and safety.

“Emotional safety means feeling accepted; it is the sense that one is safe from emotional attack or harm. Most people experiencing violence have probably felt emotionally unsafe or had their sense of ‘being all right’ taken away.”

If a person experiencing violence feels supported by the people around them, they are more likely to seek support.

What to do if someone experiencing abuse discloses to you

- Listen, listen, listen. It is important to not give advice or add to the persons’ story.
- Say little, except for active listening skills (things like – ‘mmm’, ‘I see’, ‘that sounds so difficult’ etc.) until the person finishes telling their story. Respond with concern and empathy.
- They are likely to ask you to ensure the confidentiality of their story before talking about their abuse. You can’t promise absolute confidentiality. Assure them that you are concerned and want to hear what they have to say, but if they or their children are at risk of harm, you have a duty of care and are a mandatory reporter. Their privacy will be maintained as much as possible.
- Ask what can be done to make them feel safer and follow through.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Provide details of the process and who you will talk to.
- Make factual notes of what was said.
- Report to the Police if the person has been physically or sexually assaulted, or if it is a life-threatening situation.
- Report to the Conduct Protocol Unit.
- Refer the person to support, both within the church as appropriate – including specialist Domestic Violence services.



And remember to look after yourself...

As a leader it can be very distressing to have someone disclose abuse.

- **Debrief:** Find some way to verbally and emotionally unload. Tell a trusted person how you feel. Do not breach confidentiality by using names or identifying details - simply express how you feel about it.
- **Counselling** is available through Jericho Road if you need further support. See website: jerichoroad.org.au/counselling-service/

If you are concerned that you or someone you know is experiencing or at risk of Domestic and Family Violence, please contact the **Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU)** and inform the *Breaking the Silence* Representative or leadership of your church.

Conduct Protocol Unit, Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW, ACT, WA, TAS)

Phone: [02 9690 9325](tel:0296909325) | Email: cpu@pcnsw.org.au | Website: breakingthesilence.org.au

SUPPORT SERVICES

1800 RESPECT - National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service

24/7 support and advice for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence or abuse.

Ph: [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732) Web: 1800respect.org.au

NSW Domestic Violence Line

24/7 information, support and referrals for women experiencing violence.

Ph: [1800 656 463](tel:1800656463)

Web: domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help

NSW Child Protection Helpline

24/7 helpline for reporting concerns for the safety of children and young people.

Ph: [132 111](tel:132111) Web: reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s

No to Violence: Men's Referral Service

National service providing advice and support for men using violence.

Ph: [1300 766 491](tel:1300766491) Web: ntv.org.au

MensLine

National service supporting men experiencing violence in a relationship.

Ph: [1300 789 978](tel:1300789978) Web: mensline.org.au

FURTHER RESOURCES

Conduct Protocol Unit. *Breaking the Silence: Foundations Training Workbook*. Presbyterian Church NSW, 2020. Online: breakingthesilence.org.au/resources

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health, *Creating trauma-informed Services - Tipsheet Series: Tips for Enhancing Emotional Safety*. August 2011. Online: nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Tipsheet_Emotional-Safety_NCDVTMH_Aug2011.pdf