

A Statement from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory

July 2023

Statement on Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) 2023

Domestic and family violence is defined as actions that involve violent, harmful, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by a partner, carer or family member to control or dominate another family member. This may include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, or other types of abuse. Domestic and family violence can use someone's personal faith and church involvement, including misquoting and misusing biblical texts.

God is opposed to abuse and violence in marriage and in the family. He particularly warns husbands to be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect (Ephesians 5:28–30; 1 Peter 3:7). The model of love in the Bible is Jesus' suffering for others, the very opposite of abuse.

Any attempt to use the Bible's teaching as a pretext for abuse or oppression is a distortion of its message. The Bible's teaching that a wife should submit to her husband is not a basis for a husband to force submission or to seek to control his wife or to dominate her or cause her to fear. Similarly, the authority of parents over children gives them a responsibility to love and protect and gives no basis for abuse or violence. Acts of domestic violence and abuse are heinous sins.

Humans are prone to distort God's good ways into evil, and this can happen with the Bible's teaching on marriage. Churches, ministers and elders and other leaders should actively teach against domestic and family violence.

Ministers, elders and church leaders involved in pastoral care should be alert for signs of domestic and family violence. They should do all they can to protect those who are harmed by it, including children living in a family system impacted by it.

A Session should identify to the congregation several people, including women, whom members could approach for pastoral care and support if they are facing domestic and family violence.

When a minister, elder or church leader is aware of domestic and family violence within a church family they should follow the guidelines Breaking the Silence. The Conduct Protocol Unit should be notified of any concerns about possible domestic and family violence in the church community.

In response to the report of the Committee on Gospel, Society and Culture, brought to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW in July 2023, the Assembly resolved to adopt this statement on "Domestic and Family Violence" and circulate it to all sessions (GANSW 2023 BB Min 44 (4)).

For more information about The Gospel, Society and Culture committee see www.gsandc.org.au.

For more information about The Conduct Protocol Unit of PCNSW, and Breaking the Silence, see www.breakingthesilence.org.au.



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