



TIP SHEET 3

Responding to Domestic Violence from a Leadership Perspective

Domestic and family violence is a reality of our fallen world, affecting also churches. As churches we have a duty of care - both moral and legal, towards those experiencing domestic violence.

Special position of leadership

When the church appoints a person into a position of leadership, it is saying, “We trust this person to represent God’s church.” This privilege is not something to be taken lightly. If you are minister, elder, Bible-study leader or have another leadership role you are legally considered to be in a position of authority within the church. You have a responsibility to protect others from any abuse, and to notify the Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) should someone be at risk of domestic and family violence.

Ministers, elders and church leaders need to recognise domestic and family violence (see Tip Sheet 2) and teach congregations that abuse is wrong and requires a response.

You must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You must not misuse or abuse your position of authority.

Please make yourself aware of the provisions in *Breaking the Silence*.¹ In particular, you should make yourself familiar with the section of the *Breaking the Silence* training which relates to domestic violence.

Leaders will:

RECOGNISE AND SUPPORT

- Appoint from within the congregation several trustworthy people, which must include women, whom members could approach for pastoral care, support and disclosure of domestic and or family violence. Make these people known to the congregation in both written and verbal forms.
- If information is from a third party; seek to contact the person at risk of violence as soon as possible to clarify the situation.
- **DO NOT** approach the person using violence as this may endanger the person experiencing violence. Seek advice if the person experiencing violence asks you to.
- Listen carefully to the person experiencing domestic violence (see Tip Sheet 4 for further information on how to do this).
- Respect that people experiencing violence may need time and support in order to make decisions to increase their safety. This may mean providing information and support while they consider their options. Peoples experiencing violence need to feel supported to make choices according to their

¹ Conduct Protocol Unit, *Breaking the Silence Foundations Training Workbook*, 2020. Online: breakingthesilence.org.au/resources.



own situations and timing. It is important to empower persons experiencing violence given domestic violence seeks to disempower them.

- Do not promise absolute confidentiality where the person experiencing violence or others are at risk of harm (see Tip Sheet 4 for more information).
- Recognise that safety and support is paramount for the person experiencing violence and their children.
- Ask the person experiencing violence what can be done to increase their safety and take steps to make them safer.
- Be cautious and keep an open mind when the person using violence claims to be experiencing violence. People who use violence will seek to gain sympathy from others and often misrepresent their partner, making them out to be mentally ill, hysterical or incompetent.²

REPORT

- Report domestic violence to the CPU. The CPU will provide support and oversight in ensuring the church responds appropriately to abuse, and that persons using violence in positions of authority are dealt with under *Breaking the Silence* policy and church's constitution. The safety of individuals will be the paramount consideration.
- Consider mandatory reporting to Child Protection Services in your state or territory if children are involved. The CPU can provide support. If you are in NSW, is advisable to complete the Mandatory Reporters Guide - reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg.
- Encourage the person experiencing violence to report their concerns to the Police and support them in doing so. You can ask to speak to the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer.
- Contact the Police directly if someone is in danger, or they have knowledge which would assist authorities to apprehend or convict a person of a serious offence, or the incident involves either physical or sexual assault. Seek advice from the CPU if there is a Police investigation.
- Remember, it is not a leader's role to investigate or to decide who is telling the truth.
- Be aware that people who use violence will often try and win leaders to "their side" (Tip Sheet 7).

REFER

- Encourage the person experiencing violence to seek appropriate support agencies. If you are not aware of services in your area call 1800RESPECT - 1800 737 732.
- Seek consent of the person experiencing violence to inform appropriate leaders within the church so they can provide care and support. Ensure that all support persons maintain confidentiality.

REVIEW THE APPROPRIATENESS OF RECONCILIATION

- If the person using violence is a leader in the church, then church discipline may be appropriate. Church discipline aims for repentance and restoration of relationship but this restoration depends upon genuine repentance. For further information on how to identify genuine repentance see Tip Sheet 7.
- No person who has experienced domestic and family violence should be pressured to remain with or reconcile a relationship with a person using violence. The safety of the person experiencing violence

² Rodney Vlasis, *Guidelines for Identifying and Responding to People who cause Family Violence*, Inner North West Primary Care Partnerships, 2018.



is always paramount. Any move towards reconciliation is the decision of the person experiencing violence and needs to be done with safety as the highest priority. There will be times where restoration of relationships is neither possible nor appropriate.

“Our God is one who will not tolerate injustice. As leaders in His church we serve as ones who must be attuned to this responsibility of care.” - Akos Balogh, *The Gospel Coalition Australia*

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.

Vlais, Rodney. ***Guidelines for Identifying and Responding to People who cause Family Violence***. Inner North West Primary Care Partnerships, April 2018. Online: hwpcp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Final-Guidelines-for-identifying-and-responding-to-people-who-cause-family-violence-harm_April2018.pdf.