



TIP SHEET 10

How do we make our churches safer?

We want our churches to be safe places for those impacted by domestic abuse.

Though often unseen, we need to acknowledge that very likely that we have people in our local church who are currently experiencing domestic abuse. The most recent research in Australia has found that the rates of domestic violence in the church are about the same as in the broader community. (National Anglican Family and Domestic Violence Research Report, NCLS, 2021)

We want to communicate a message that God is opposed to abuse and violence in relationships, including marriage. Churches can play a role in a cultural shift which opposes violence against women through, attitudes, behaviours and structures.

Small, consistent and courageous actions can make our churches safer and create the cultural shift that communicates a message which says "Abuse and violence is not ok. Ever".

It starts up the front.

- **With teaching**

Teach carefully and sensitively around issues of family and domestic violence. Consider how the Bible's teaching on anger, rage, habitual sin, repentance, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, oppression and power related to abuse. Refer to Tip Sheet 1.

- **By explicitly rejecting the misuse of scripture.**

Be clear and direct in opposing the use of the Bible to manipulate, control, demean or demand and punish. When we teach on issues of gender, marriage and divorce we need to consider how the Bible may be misused in the domestic violence context or misheard by people experiencing violence.

- **By being pastorally trauma aware when teaching on 'difficult' passages**

Be sensitive to passages that may trigger those who are or have been impacted by domestic or family violence and provide a general pastoral and timely trigger warning about the proposed upcoming teaching. Ensure hearers are made aware how they can access resources and support people if they are distressed by the content.

- **By training leaders and elders in responding to domestic violence.**

Are your leaders aware of what to do if they suspect domestic violence is occurring? Do you have a domestic abuse policy in your church? Appoint one or two appropriate women in your church to offer pastoral support for people who disclose abuse, and regularly promote their



availability. Be aware of attempts by the person using violence to blame their partner or make excuses to justify their actions. Be wary of probing someone who uses violence unless you have specialist skills in working with Family Violence. Consult with the CPU beforehand if you intend to raise your concerns with a person may be using violence as it may increase risk to the person experiencing violence. Refer to Tip Sheet 3.

- **By raising awareness that domestic violence happens in churches too.**

Teach the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, about power and control dynamics and rigid gender stereotypes which perpetuate negative views of women. Encourage your congregation to seek support when they are experiencing violence. People need to trust that leaders are well informed about domestic violence, and will listen well, believing their disclosure. Display the BTS Domestic Violence tip sheets and have them available at church. Display the "Safe and Respected" poster or the tip sheets prominently around church, including in bathrooms. Pray about domestic violence at church meetings.

- **By valuing and promoting the role of women up front.**

Let the value of women be visible at church through what you say and what you model. Do women have a meaningful pathway to voice concerns and contribute at church?

It involves actions not just words.

- **The three 'R's - Recognise, Respond, Refer.**

In churches our actions should reflect the gospel. When we see or hear concerning behaviour, we need to be trusted to respond in a wise, sensitive and informed way. Refer to Tip Sheets 3 – 7 for more information on responding.

- **Speak up when you witness harmful or disrespectful behaviour.**

By asking hard questions you can communicate aggressive or disrespectful behaviour is NOT okay. If you decide to speak up, be respectful and appropriate:

- Speaking to the person affected by violence e.g. "Are you afraid at home?"
- Speaking to the person using violence e.g. "How do you think your partner felt when you ..."

- **Educate and train your church members in understanding domestic violence, how to respond and how to get help.**

Domestic and family abuse is complex. Encourage your church to complete the Breaking the Silence training and to know what to do and who to go to when they are concerned about violence in their home or impacting someone they know. Contact the CPU regarding domestic violence resources for your church.

- **Support and encourage those who make the choice to leave to seek safety.**



Welcome the single parent, the divorced parent. Support them with practical love and care. Give them space and time to settle and feel safe. Ask how church can best support them.

- **Build a relationship with your local refuge and provide practical support.** Strengthen ties with local support services, assist them and learn from them. Support those experiencing violence in our wider community in action not just word.

Foster relationships and community.

- **Life together.** Family violence is preventable. We need to create a culture where violence, aggression and disrespect is not condoned, ignored or denied, but spoken against. What can we do to make people feel safe to speak up when something is not right? Do we have structures in place to foster community and supporting one another? E.g. small groups, pastoral care.
- **Care for those at risk.** Consider how to actively care for people who are at risk of or are experiencing family violence. How can we create a safe and loving community where people are supported and can heal? This might include having a pastoral care team care for the family.

Safer churches know where to get help.

- **In our denomination:** Contact the Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) for assistance.
- **Locally:** Know the professional counsellors, behavioural change services, women's services, or women's refuge in your area.
- **Online:** Know where to get help online, such as 1800RESPECT, Kids Helpline, NSW Domestic Violence Line, and the Domestic Violence Legal Advice Line.

RESOURCES

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

Presbyterian Counselling Service

Jericho Road, Presbyterian Church of NSW

Phone: [1800 818 133](tel:1800818133) | Email: counselling@jerichoroad.org.au | Website: jerichoroad.org.au/counselling



SUPPORT SERVICES

1800 RESPECT - National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service

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

Ph: [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732)

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

Advice for men about family violence

Ph: [1300 766 491](tel:1300766491)

Mensline

For men experiencing violence in a relationship

Ph: [1300 789 978](tel:1300789978)

Web: <https://mensline.org.au/>

FURTHER RESOURCES

Breaking the Silence Foundations Training

Professional Standards Unit, *Sydney Anglican Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse*. Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 2018, Online: safeministry.org.au/domestic-family-abuse.

State Library of NSW, *Hot Topics: Domestic Violence*, Issue 87,2013, Legal Information Access Centre, Online: legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot-topics-domestic-violence

Strickland, Darby. 'Misconceptions about Abuse in our churches'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ae4DVSQJ_Zg A very helpful 12-minute video.

Strickland, Darby *Domestic Abuse: Recognise, Respond, Rescue*. P&R Publishing. 2018. A mini-book designed as a quick read for church leaders to give them a simple yet biblical road map for engaging with this issue.

Smith, C. *God's Good Design: What the Bible really says about Men and Women*. Matthias Media. 2012.

Vaughan, C., Sullivan, C., Chen, J., Vaid Sandhu, M. (2020). *What works to address violence against women and family violence within faith settings: An evidence guide*, Parkville: University of Melbourne. <https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=14100>