



TIP SHEET 5

How to respond when someone you know is experiencing Domestic and Family Violence

Your support can make a difference

It can be really worrying when someone in your church is at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse. Yet, there is much you can do to support the person you are caring for.

Sometimes in a church it is easy to think that someone else might look after the person at risk of violence. But research tells us this is not true. Sometimes people think "someone else will do that," and so do nothing. There is a term for this – it is called the "bystander effect". The bystander effect occurs when the presence of others discourages an individual from intervening in an emergency. So, it is important that as a church we are aware of this effect and take steps to reach out and support people experiencing violence, because what you do is important.

What you do is important

"I wasn't sure who to tell, or who was safe to tell. I ended up speaking to a friend at church. She never judged me. She helped me to think about what to do and where to get support. It can't have been easy on her, but it made all the difference." – Sharon

Recognising Domestic and Family Abuse

For a definition of Domestic and Family Abuse please see Tip Sheet 2 on the [DFV Resources page](#).

SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MAY BE EXPERIENCING ABUSE

The following signs may indicate domestic abuse. Please check with the person if you notice these indicators and seek further assistance from the Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU):

For the person experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse they may:

- Start to see friends and family less and become withdrawn and isolated.
- Talk about relationship difficulties, and the partner's 'jealousy', 'bad temper' or 'possessiveness'.
- Report that their partner uses emotional manipulation.
- Become anxious, depressed, unusually withdrawn or confused.
- Become overly anxious about pleasing their partner.
- Often seems "on edge" - fearful and/or flighty.
- Often has physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc.)



- They make excuses (e.g. "I tripped over the kids' skateboard") for the injuries in order to conceal what happened.
- Report that the partner pressures or forces them to do sexual things.
- Have children who seem afraid of the person using violence and may have behaviour problems, be withdrawn or anxious.
- Be reluctant to leave the children with the person using violence.

The person using violence may:

- Often criticise or humiliate their partner in front of other people.
- Take advantage of (and misuses) Bible verses that speak of submission, as a way to control the partner (see Tip Sheet 1 on the [DFV Resources page](#)).
- Often insists on making all the decisions (e.g. controlling all the money, controlling who they see and what they do).

WHAT TO DO

- If you notice some of the above signs in someone you know, please check that they are okay. Perhaps invite the person to your home or other neutral place (e.g. café) and provide them with an opportunity to talk where they feel supported and safe. Do not do it in their home where the partner using violence may be present.
- If someone experiencing violence discloses abuse, then listen, listen, listen, and do not add anything. Don't say much - just use active listening skills ('yes', 'mmm', 'ok', 'ahh' etc.) until the person finishes telling their story. Seek to use open body language which encourages others to feel safe.
- Respond with concern and empathy.
- A person experiencing violence is likely to ask you to ensure the confidentiality of their story before talking about their abuse. You can't promise absolute confidentiality. Let them know that you are concerned and want to hear what they have to say, but that if they or their children are at risk of harm, you have a duty of care and are mandated to report to relevant authorities, but will ensure confidentiality as much as possible.
- Ask if they are safe and what can be done to make them feel safer and follow through.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Let them know that you will continue to support them. Depending on the person's safety, you may need to inform your minister and if appropriate relevant services (e.g. Police, child protection services).
- Inform the CPU.
- Pray for the person experiencing violence and their family. Pray for other support services if involved.

If someone is at risk of violence and has not disclosed violence but you are **concerned that abuse may be occurring**, please raise your concerns with your *Breaking the Silence* representative, church leadership or the CPU.



AND REMEMBER TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF...

It can be very distressing to have someone you know be a victim of domestic violence. It's important to debrief. That is, find some way to verbally and emotionally unload. Tell a trusted friend about your feelings. You can share how the situation is impacting you without breaching confidentiality or revealing details. If you are involved in supporting a victim longer term – seek support and self-care.

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. Further support can be accessed through the Jericho Road Counselling Service – see jerichoroad.org.au/counselling-service. There are counselling services that can be of assistance and the Presbyterian Church wants to support you.

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, 2023. Online: breakingthesilence.org.au/resources.

Renew Book: Australian Guide for Christian Women Survivors of Domestic Abuse, Anglicare Sydney, 2022.

Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims, Darby A Strickland, P&R Publishing, 2020.