



TIP SHEET 7

Responding to people who use violence

How should churches respond to those using violence? While our first duty is to care and protect those experiencing violence, churches also have a responsibility to respond to those using violence. How can we show pastoral care to people using family violence? We need to be prepared to respect and listen to them and gently support them in taking responsibility for their violence, engaging them to consider that change is possible and that they can make choices to not use violence.

No one wants to admit to being controlling and violent. Couples and families can get used to hiding violence due to shame. This is especially true in churches where people wish to appear “godly” and “Christian”. It is important that we realise our God is faithful and just and will forgive us (I John 1:7-9).

1. The first priority is the safety of the partner and any children

It is important to maintain the confidentiality and safety of the person experiencing violence by ensuring that you do not speak with the partner about their behaviour unless the person experiencing violence has given you permission to do so. **Never** confront the person using violence as it can cause them to disengage and become defensive (see Tip Sheets 4 and 5).

2. Listen to the person using violence

When listening to someone using violence, be aware that they are often ‘charming’. There can be a lot of talk to deny, minimise, blame other people or things (e.g. alcohol or drugs), and justify their use of violence. Examples of this include:

“Things got out of hand” - *justifying*

“It was only a light push, I didn’t hurt anyone” - *minimising*

“They pushed my buttons” - *blaming others*

It is important to respectfully listen but also name any abusive behaviours as domestic violence, including non-physical ones. Maintain a clear position that the person is always responsible for their behaviours, in a supportive and non-judgmental way. Recognise that there are always non-violent choices to resolve conflict or difficulties in relationships.

Ask questions which encourage the person to reflect on their behaviour and ability to make decisions about their actions. For example:

“Was there a different way you could have responded?”

“Do you ever act this way when you are in a different environment, like the workplace?”

It is important not to confront the person using violence as they may become defensive if they feel



they are being attacked. The safety of the person experiencing violence is the priority so whatever is said must not increase the risk to them.

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.

Holcomb, J.S. and Holcomb, L.A. ***Is it my fault? Hope and healing for those suffering domestic violence***. Moody Publishers, 2014.

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

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

Women's Legal Services NSW. ***Hot Topics: Domestic Violence***. Legal Information Access Centre, 2019. Online: legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot-topics-domestic-violence.