

EQUIPPING PASTORS TO HELP THEIR CONGREGATION DEAL WITH DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

- Corney & Lind
- Eustacia Yates
- Thank you for attending
- The plan for today
 - The basics
 - How to respond when you find out domestic or family violence is occurring within your church
 - How churches can best respond to community members seeking assistance due to domestic or family violence
 - DV resources for pastors during COVID



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CORNEY & LIND
LAWYERS

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE – THE BASICS

- What is domestic or family violence?
- Summary: domestic or family violence occurs when one person in a relationship uses violence or abuse to control another person.
- There is usually an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a person through fear.



There are different pieces of legislation which contain definitions of domestic or family violence – key one is

***Domestic and Family
Violence Protection Act 2012
(Qld) (“the Act”)***

Section 8(1) Meaning of domestic violence: Domestic violence means behaviour by a person (the first person) towards another person (the second person) with whom the first person is in a relevant relationship that —

- is physically or sexually abusive; or
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive – that is, (s11) behaviour by a person towards another person that torments, intimidates, harasses or is offensive to the other person ; or
- is economically abusive – that is, behaviour by a person (the first person) that is coercive, deceptive or unreasonably controls another person (the second person), without the second person’s consent —
 - in a way that denies the second person the economic or financial autonomy the second person would have had but for that behaviour; or
 - by withholding or threatening to withhold the financial support necessary for meeting the reasonable living expenses of the second person or a child, if the second person or the child is entirely or predominantly dependent on the first person for financial support to meet those living expenses ; or
- is threatening; or
- is coercive – that is, to compel or force a person to do something or refrain from doing something; persuade an unwilling person to do something by using force or threats; or
- in any other way controls or dominates the second person and causes the second person to fear for the second person’s safety or wellbeing or that of someone else.

Examples of domestic violence as set out in the Act ...

Note: **s8(3)** A person who counsels or procures someone else to engage in behaviour that, if engaged in by the person, would be domestic violence is taken to have committed domestic violence.



coercing a person to engage in sexual activity or attempting to do so

- damaging a person's property or threatening to do so
- depriving a person of the person's liberty or threatening to do so
- threatening a person with the death or injury of the person, a child of the person, or someone else
- threatening to commit suicide or self-harm so as to torment, intimidate or frighten the person to whom the behaviour is directed
- causing or threatening to cause the death of, or injury to, an animal, whether or not the animal belongs to the person to whom the behaviour is directed, so as to control, dominate or coerce the person
- unauthorised surveillance of a person – that is, the unreasonable monitoring or tracking of the person's movements, activities or interpersonal associations without the person's consent, including, for example, reading a person's SMS messages / monitoring a person's email account or internet browser history / monitoring a person's account with a social networking internet site / using a GPS device to track a person's movements / checking the recorded history in a person's GPS device
- unlawfully stalking a person (as defined in the Criminal Code)
- causing personal injury to someone or threatening to do so

Examples of DV from the Act cont...

- following a person when the person is out in public, including by vehicle or on foot
- remaining outside a person's residence or place of work
- repeatedly contacting a person by telephone, SMS message, email or social networking site without the person's consent
- repeated derogatory taunts, including racial taunts
- threatening to disclose a person's sexual orientation to the person's friends or family without the person's consent
- threatening to withhold a person's medication
- preventing a person from making or keeping connections with the person's family, friends or culture, including cultural or spiritual ceremonies or practices, or preventing the person from expressing the person's cultural identity
- coercing a person to relinquish control over assets and income
- removing or keeping a person's property without the person's consent, or threatening to do so
- disposing of property owned by a person, or owned jointly with a person, against the person's wishes and without lawful excuse
- without lawful excuse, preventing a person from having access to joint financial assets for the purposes of meeting normal household expenses

Examples of DV from the Act cont...

- preventing a person from seeking or keeping employment
- coercing a person to claim social security payments
- coercing a person to sign a power of attorney that would enable the person's finances to be managed by another person
- coercing a person to sign a contract for the purchase of goods or services
- coercing a person to sign a contract for the provision of finance, a loan or credit
- coercing a person to sign a contract of guarantee
- coercing a person to sign any legal document for the establishment or operation of a business



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A word about Protection Orders (DVOs)...

1. A relevant relationship –

- Spousal or de facto relationship (including former spouse or de facto)
- Engagement relationship (irrespective of whether they live together or not)
- A couple relationship (including same sex)
- A family relationship, *for example*, parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, step-sibling *etc*
- An informal (not commercial) care relationship, that is, where someone is dependent on the other person for help in an activity of daily living, for example, dressing or helping with personal grooming, shopping, making medical appointments, preparing meals, assisting with feeding

2. Acts of domestic violence have been perpetrated

3. The making of the Order must be desirable and necessary.



Who can apply for a Protection Order?

- (1) The aggrieved
- (2) An authorized person for the aggrieved (someone you nominate to apply on your behalf)
- (3) The police
- (4) A person who is acting on their behalf under another Act, eg a guardian

Some other words you might hear ...

- Applicant
- Aggrieved
- Respondent
- Temporary Protection Order
- Protection Order

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING

- Reports of image-based sexual abuse to the eSafety Commissioner increased by 200% on average from March to May this year – the biggest spike in reports was over the Easter long weekend when there was a 600% increase
- 1 in 10 Australians will experience image-based sexual abuse, eg, threats to distribute nude or sexual image to deter a victim from seeking help
- By the age of 15 - Approximately one in four women (23% or 2.2 million) has experienced at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner (intimate partner = a current or previous partner with whom the respondent lives or has lived, or a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or date with whom the respondent has not lived with). •
- By the age of 15 - One in six women (17% or 1.6 million) has experienced at least one incident of violence by a partner (partner = a person whom the respondent lives with, or lived with at some point, in a married or de facto relationship).
- By the age of 15 - Three in ten women (30.5% or 2.85 million) have experienced physical violence (perpetrated by another person, irrespective of the type of relationship).
- By the age of 15 - Approximately one in five women (18% or 1.7 million) has experienced sexual violence (the occurrence, attempt or threat of sexual assault).

By the age of 15 - One in six women (17% or 1.6 million) has experienced an episode of stalking (any unwanted contact or attention on more than one occasion, or multiple types of unwanted contact or behaviour experienced on one occasion, that could have caused fear or distress).

By the age of 15 - Approximately one in four women (23% or 2.2 million) has experienced emotional abuse by a partner.

Compared to men, women are at greater risk of physical and sexual violence by a partner. Since the age of 15:

- Approximately one in four women (23% or 2.2 million) compared to one in thirteen men (7.8% or 703,700) has experienced at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner.
- One in six women (17% or 1.6 million) compared to one in sixteen men (6.1% or 547,600) has experienced at least one incident of violence by a partner.
- Women accounted for three-quarters of the people (17.3% or 1,625,000) who experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15, compared to men who accounted for one-quarter (6.1% or 547,600) of those people.
- Approximately one in five women (18% or 1.7 million) compared to one in twenty men (4.7% or 428,800) has experienced sexual violence.

On average 1 woman a week in Australia is killed by an intimate partner, and 8 women a day are hospitalized after being assaulted by their spouse or partner.

Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk factor (greater than smoking, alcohol, & obesity) for women aged 25-44.

Of women who have experienced violence by a current partner since the age of 15: only 54% sought advice or support about the violence, and 82% had never contacted police.

What about in churches?

There is very little Australian research on the nature and prevalence of domestic abuse in church communities, unlike other countries, and most is dated. As Australian National University researchers Naomi Priest, Mandy Truong and Nicholas Biddle write [in The Conversation](#): "Comprehensive, independent Australian data regarding domestic violence within churches are long overdue."

But there is clear evidence it exists inside church communities. There are three Australian surveys, and one relevant analysis. These found:

At least one in five husbands who abuse Christian wives go to church regularly.

A 1992 study of 1,704 women who were part of Anglican and Uniting Churches undertaken by Glenys Conrade of the University of Queensland found 3.3 per cent reported they had been abused in the past 12 months.

Twenty-two per cent of perpetrators went to church regularly, and 14 per cent were part of the church leadership; a majority never went. Dr Conrade concluded: "The number of victims who had spoken to ministers of religion about the abuse suggested that the clergy were inextricably involved with this issue."

The only other Australian study shows a higher rate of church attendance among perpetrators than the 1992 study.

In 1993, Dr Conrade studied 766 males and 1,284 females who attended mass in Catholic churches in the Brisbane Archdiocese. She found about 40 per cent of perpetrators (male and female) attended church regularly and a "very small minority" were part of leadership. (The smaller proportion of domestic abusers in leadership may relate to the fact that in the Catholic church priests are not allowed to marry.)

[An anonymous survey of 148 Sydney Anglican rectors](#) by the Sydney Diocese's Domestic Violence Task Force in 2016 asked rectors how many cases of domestic violence they'd seen in the past five years (2.25 per rector), and how many had involved a pastoral response (1.5 per rector). Rectors reported eight in 10 perpetrators were male.

Analysts assume abuse occurs to the same degree inside the church as outside.

In the absence of quantitative Australian data, one [academic](#), Leonie Westenberg of the University of Notre Dame, suggests we apply the UK model here, based on qualitative research.

In 2006, a study by the UK Anglican Archbishops' Council [found](#) that the "incidence of domestic abuse within church ... congregations is similar to the rate within the general population".

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In a paper titled [When She Calls for Help —Domestic Violence in Christian Families](#)** , published in Social Sciences in Oct 2017, Ms Westenberg finds that, "abused Christian women are more likely to remain in or return to unsafe relationships, citing religious beliefs to support avoidance of 'family break-ups' despite abuse."

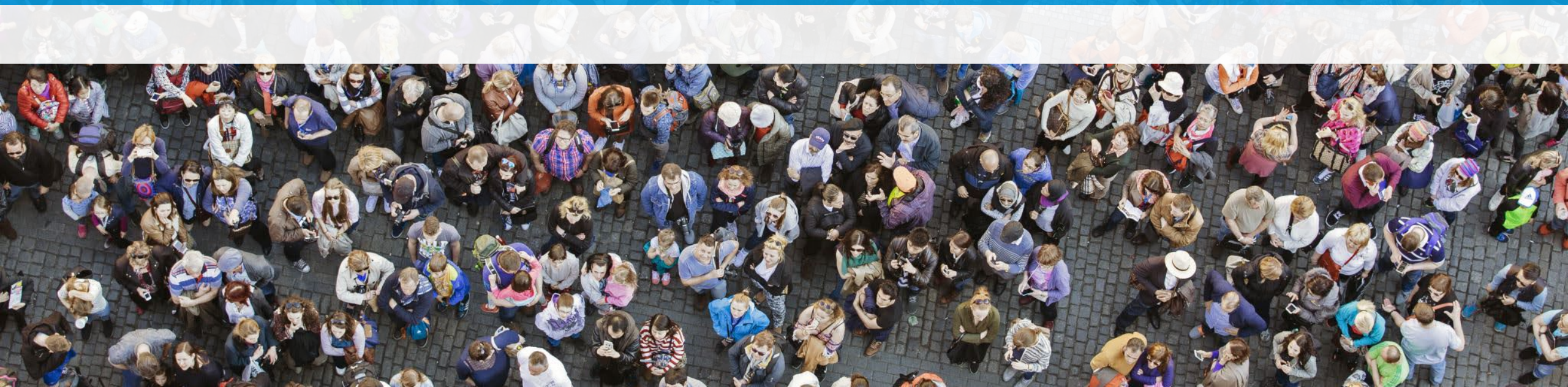
She outlines the fact that quantitative research on the prevalence of domestic violence is fraught because of definitional and methodological issues — along with, we'd add, confusion about the definition of risk factors and related terms like "sporadic", "regular" or "nominal".

Ms Westenberg writes:

"This failure to provide an accurate picture of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) relevant particularly to research on Christian families. For example, Knickmeyer et al. (2016) describe the failure of studies on religious affiliation and domestic violence in Canada and the US to identify the role of patriarchy in IPV, focusing instead solely on denominational relationships, if any. However, qualitative research (see, for example, research by Knickmeyer et al. (2016) with women from different Christian denominations; data collected by Levitt and Ware (2006) in the Memphis, Tennessee area of the US; and Nason-Clark (2009) in Atlantic Canada) supports the findings [that]... the prevalence of domestic violence in Western Christian families correlates with the prevalence of such violence in the general population. What differs, however, is what has been called the added "vulnerability" of Christian women, who speak of both abuse and marriage in spiritual overtones (McMullin et al. 2012). Such women use religious language to describe why they remain in or return to relationships that involve domestic violence, citing the undesirability of divorce, the need to love and honour husbands, and the power of forgiveness and prayer to generate change in the abuser. It is the religious language that perpetuates and/or tolerates domestic violence (Nason-Clark 2009)."



HOW TO RESPOND WHEN YOU FIND OUT SOMEONE IN YOUR CHURCH IS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC OR FAMILY VIOLENCE

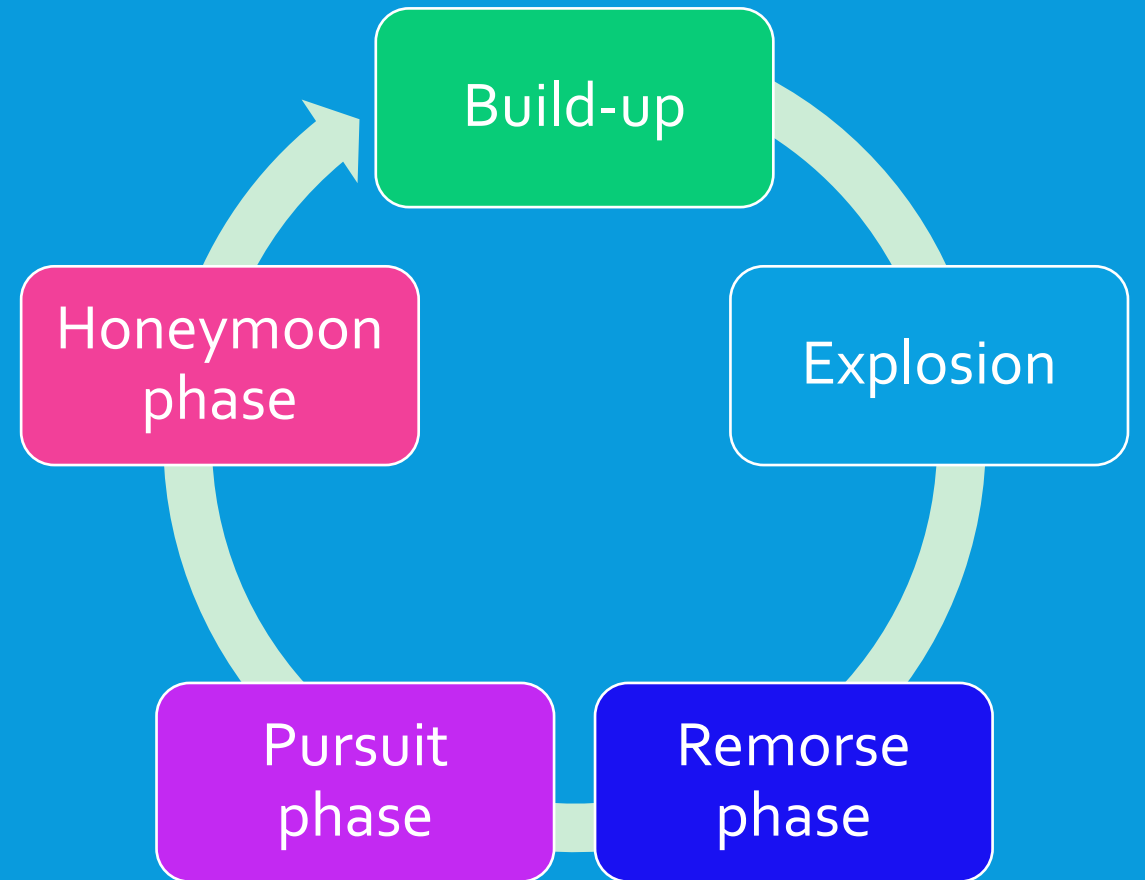


DISCLOSURE, DISCOVERY, OR SUSPICION

Be ready to respond.

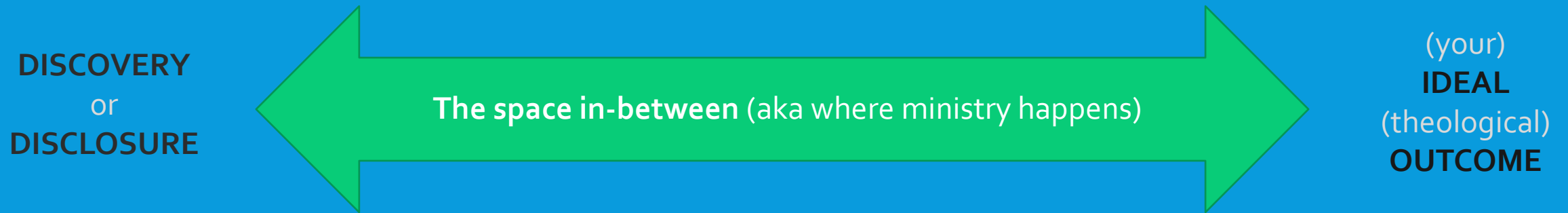
1. Know the basics

- become informed about this huge social issue
- understand what constitutes domestic or family violence
- understand the cycle of violence – understand the difference between remorse and repentance



Be prepared to respond cont...

2. Understand how your own “context” impacts on your response to both perpetrators and victims of domestic or family violence

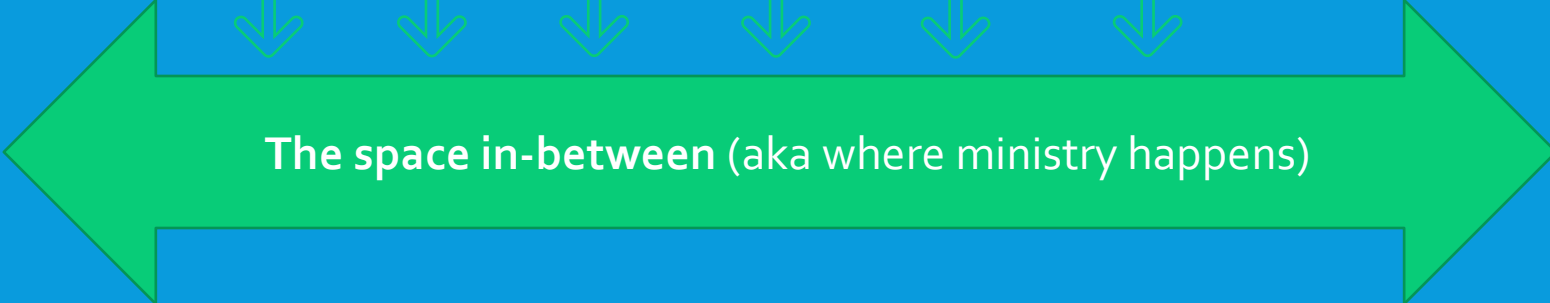




family or origin * personal beliefs * theological training * assumptions * denomination * life experiences *



DISCOVERY
or
DISCLOSURE



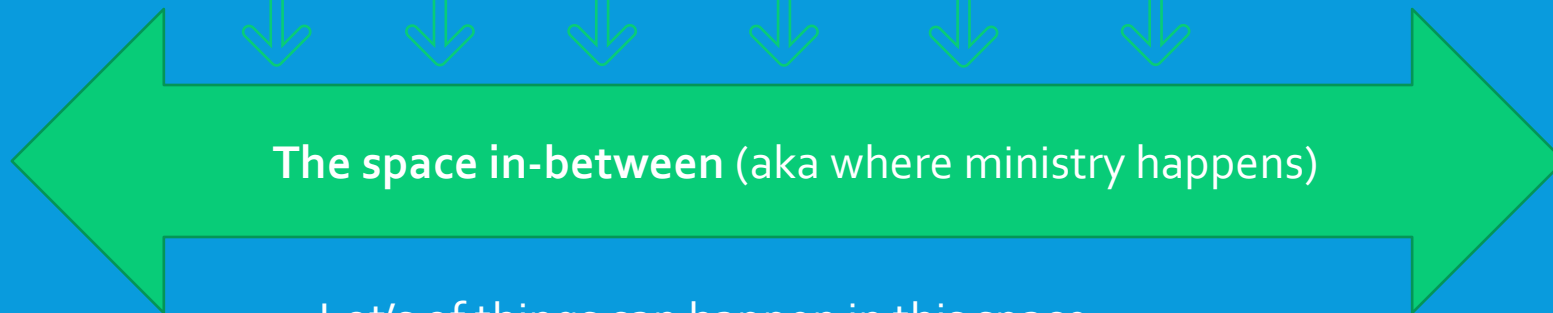
(your)
IDEAL
(theological)
OUTCOME

1. Know the basics – what constitutes domestic or family violence.
2. Understand how your own “context” impacts on your response to both perpetrators and victims of domestic or family violence

family of origin * personal beliefs * theological training * assumptions *
denomination * life experiences * cultural context



DISCOVERY
or
DISCLOSURE



The space in-between (aka where ministry happens)

(your)
IDEAL
(theological)
OUTCOME

Lot's of things can happen in this space ...

- Discussions
- Counselling
- Sermons
- Referrals
- Small groups
- Practical Support

******Churches are uniquely positioned to do a lot of good in this space. Which also means they are uniquely positioned to do a lot of harm.******

People may not always make a disclosure that violence is occurring.

In other circumstances, you suspect abuse or violence is occurring. Discernment is required as there may be another explanation.

Some possible signs of abuse are ...

- get seriously involved very quickly
- seem afraid of their partner, or someone close to them
- try to hide bruises or injuries (e.g. by wearing long sleeves in summer, or giving unlikely explanations for injuries)
- have little or no say about how money is spent
- stop seeing friends and family and become isolated
- become depressed, unusually quiet, or lose confidence – they are 'not themselves'
- show signs of neglect, especially if they are older or have a disability
- have a partner who frequently accuses them of cheating or continually checks up on them
- may be reluctant to leave their children with their partner
- suspect they are being stalked or followed
- have low self-esteem
- cancel appointments or meetings with you at the last minute
- drop out of activities they would usually enjoy
- are often late to work or other appointments
- exhibit excessive privacy concerning their personal relationship
- not sleep well

Whether you suspect it, or there has been a disclosure of some sort, be aware that they may be in greater danger if:

- there is a history of domestic and family violence
- violence has escalated within the relationship
- their partner is stalking or monitoring their movements
- they separate or plan to separate from their partner
- they start a new relationship or their ex-partner believes they have
- there is conflict within the broader family
- there are issues about child custody or access to children
- they are pregnant
- there is financial hardship or unemployment
- the partner/family member/carer has a history of physical violence, mental illness or access to weapon

A complex issue ... Church attendance and participation in ministry roles

How to respond when you find out that someone in your church is experiencing domestic or family violence

If you or another person are in immediate danger, call 000, irrespective of whether there are Court Orders in place.

Recommended responses:

- Are you safe? Do you need a safe place to stay? Do you want me to come and collect you/the children/the dog?
- Do you have a plan to keep safe? How can I help?
- Offer reassurance that you will support and care for the person.
- Be **very** cautious about advising victims of DV about withdrawing protection order applications or returning home.
- Consider any mandatory reporting obligations.

Do –

- Keep up-to-date records of contact details for members and regular attendees
- Ensure appropriate risk management protocols are in place for staff, members, and church activities
- Appropriately document any incidents and/or interactions
- Believe them
 - The majority of those who do report, will only do so once
 - For those who do report again, there is likely a long time period between reports
 - False reporting is believed to be around the 2% mark
 - Listen
 - Reassure – this is NOT your fault, this behavior is NOT OK
- Offer appropriate referrals

How to respond when you find out that someone in your church is experiencing domestic or family violence

Do –

- Refer an abuser to a men's behaviour change program
- Resist any temptation to re-frame the abuse as a relationship issue
- Set clear boundaries of self-care and avoid setting up a dynamic in which the victim feels you are colluding with the abuser
- Help the abuser understand that their desire or need for everyone to forgive, forget, and move on is controlling and a mis-use of spiritual teachings – help the abuser understand that forgiveness and restoration is a long process and belongs to the victim

Remember – “supporting” perpetrators must always increase the safety of victims, and hold them accountable for their behaviour.

REFER. REFER. REFER.
KEEP AN UP-TO- DATE
REFERRAL LIST FOR YOUR
LOCAL AREA

At a minimum, I would suggest having a list of referrals for the following service providers:

- Counselling services
 - Doctors / Health Services
 - Food Banks
 - Emergency Accommodation Services
 - DV services
 - Community Legal Centres
 - Law Firms
 - Transport Services
 - Divorce recovery groups
 - Pet minding services/volunteers
- Note: This might be a good volunteer task!

In addition to local practical support services, please make sure you refer them to a specialized service:

For example:

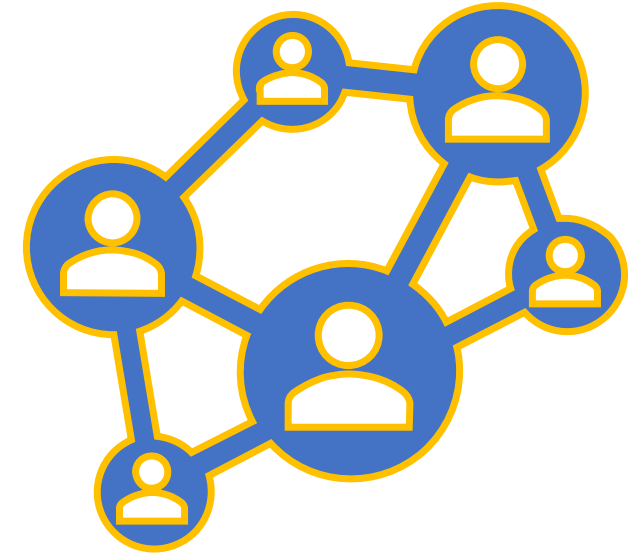
- DV Connect Mensline
- DV Connect Womensline
- Elder Abuse Helpline
- Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (BDVS)
- Caboolture Regional Domestic Violence Service
- Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS)
- Legal Aid Queensland
- Queensland Association of Independent Legal Centres
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (QIFVLS)
- Seniors Legal and Support Service (SLASS)
- Suncoast Cooloola Outreach Prevention and Education (SCOPE)
- Toowoomba Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Service
- Reports of image-based sexual abuse can be made to the eSafety Commissioner at www.safety.gov.au
- www.police.qld.gov.au/domestic-violence

DO –

- offer practical support where it is safe to do so. I urge you to consider how your church can support people in practical ways, particularly by way of co-ordination:
 - Grocery shopping
 - Transport – for the person or their children
 - Assistance with making appointments
 - Mail service
 - Home cleaning
 - Emergency meals
 - Emotional support
 - Assistance them to link in with existing church activities and groups, for example home groups/youth groups/playgroups /men’s shed etc
 - Invite them for a meal / take them a meal
 - Court support

Questions to ask:

- *What do you need? Could you use ...? Would you like me to pick you/them up? Can I send that email for you? Would you like me to go with you/arrange for someone to go with you? Can I look after the dog/cat/fish/bird for a few weeks?*



Please don't ignore practical needs in favor of trying to achieve a desired theological outcome such as reconciliation.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith [or the best, most well-thought out theological position on marriage] but has no deeds? Can such a faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food? If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," ["marriage is sacred, return and live with love for your husband"] but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

James 2:14-17 [with my inserts]

IS YOUR CHURCH A SAFE PLACE FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC OR FAMILY VIOLENCE?

- <https://www.saferresource.org.au>

Safer

A resource to help Australian churches understand, identify, and respond to domestic and family violence.

Help us distribute this resource by [making a donation](#)



DON'T -

- Be complicit in a criminal act, for example, breaching or assisting someone else to breach a Protection Order
- Act as an inter-mediator
- Give legal advice. This includes advising them to withdraw applications for Protection Orders, or advising them to return home.
- Judge them, or minimize what they are telling you. You certainly won't know everything, and most likely they will not tell you the worst of it.
- Don't give advice with the "theological end goal" in mind
- In cases of DV, don't be neutral: For example, *"I'm not sure I should get involved"*, *"I don't want to take sides"*, *"we must be careful to love both of you"*, *"how do I know if you (or him?) is telling the truth?"*

"It is not possible to be truly balanced in one's views of an abuser and an abused woman. As Dr. Judith Herman explains eloquently in her masterwork *Trauma and Recovery*, "neutrality" actually serves the interests of the perpetrator much more than those of the victim and is not neutral. Although an abuser prefers to have you wholeheartedly on his side, he will settle contentedly for your decision to take a middle stance. To him, that means you see the couple's problems as partly her fault and partly his fault, which means it isn't abuse."

- Lundy Bancroft, textbook used [Why does he do that? Inside the minds of Angry and Controlling Men](#) for the QUT Graduate Certificate in Domestic Violence.

- Offer or recommend couples counselling if you are aware there is abuse in the relationship
- Refer a perpetrator to anger management therapy
- Offer or promise absolute confidentiality or secrecy
- Minimize or excuse their behaviour
- Allow the abuser to justify abusive behaviour with scripture
- If you suspect abuse, don't confront the abuser unless you have the victim's permission and a safety plan

DON'T -

Collude with an abuser, for example:

- Minimising or mutualising the abuse, e.g. "they have an angry communication style"
- Using couples' therapy where abuse continues to be present
- Positioning the violence and abuse as caused by reasons other than power and control, e.g. "he has a diagnosis of depression, anxiety or anti-social personality," or "he has an alcohol problem"
- Becoming involved in dialogues that blame the victim for the abuse, e.g. "she took out an AVO just so he couldn't see his kids," or "she had an affair"
- Engaging in dialogues that agree with the view that men who use violence are also victims in some way.
- Acting as a messenger for the abuser
- Reinforcing the spiritual guilt placed on the victim by the abuser, e.g. "all Christians are called to forgive".

"But they are such a nice person and I've never seen any behaviour like that!" Be aware of the grooming process that can occur with church leaders, and understand the



HOW CHURCHES CAN BEST RESPOND TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS SEEKING ASSISTANCE DUE TO DOMESTIC OR FAMILY VIOLENCE

How can churches best respond to community members seeking assistance due to domestic or family violence?

- Safety First
- Refer. Refer. Refer.
- Offer practical help where possible
- Education



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