



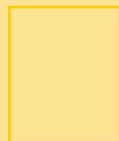
**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



**ELCIC**

*In Mission  
for Others*

# Ministry with the Abused



# Ministry with the Abused

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Jennie's story is neither rare nor unique. Stories like this can be heard all over North America. Women and men who are battered come from all walks of life, all races and ethnicities, all educational backgrounds and all religions. A battered woman or man might be the vice-president of your local bank, your child's Sunday school teacher, your beautician, pastor or doctor, or your closest friend or co-worker.

Family violence, also known as domestic and intimate partner violence, has long been a concern for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) church bodies. Both national churches have made public stands against such violence and abuse through the statements of leaders, assemblies and council actions.<sup>1</sup> Communities of faith play important roles in standing against violence and abuse, accompanying victims, advocating for just laws and helping both survivors and abusers find health and wholeness.

Stories and experiences like Jennie's call us to respond—to minister with compassion. As a congregational leader, knowing the basics and being alert for signs of family violence is critical to fostering a safe and healthy community. This resource is a starting place for you to learn more about family violence and abuse and how to make your home, congregation and community safe places.

<sup>1</sup> See "Community Violence," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1994, [www.elca.org/socialmessage/violence/](http://www.elca.org/socialmessage/violence/); "Violence Against Women," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995, [www.elca.org/socialpolicy/violenceagainstwomen/](http://www.elca.org/socialpolicy/violenceagainstwomen/); "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001, [www.elca.org/socialmessage/sexualexploitation/](http://www.elca.org/socialmessage/sexualexploitation/); and "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009, [www.elca.org/socialstatements/sexuality/](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/sexuality/).

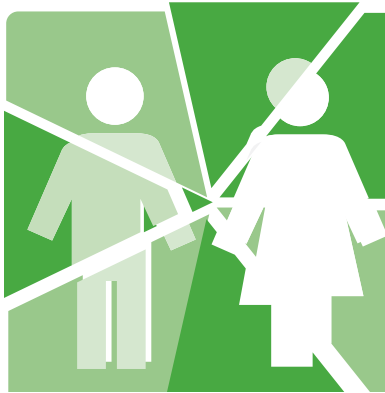
## JENNIE'S STORY

Jennie married a man who made her feel special and important. In time, however, his early attentiveness began to feel like control. Cross words gradually became angry threats underlined with shaking fists. He hit her once while she was pregnant, but after his ardent apologies, she forgave him. When Jennie quit her job to be at home with their first child, he became increasingly impatient over small things that were not done right. Nothing seemed to please him despite her best efforts. After he hit her so hard that she required medical attention, Jennie realized that she and her child were in danger and took steps to leave home.

## WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

Family violence is a pattern of behaviors that are used to manipulate, gain and/or maintain power and control over another person. This violence may include:

- Physical mistreatment such as slapping, shoving, punching, biting and battering.
- Emotional abuse such as making the other person feel insecure, doubting their abilities and playing mind games.
- Verbal abuse such as using words and name calling to hurt the other person's feelings.
- Sexual abuse such as forcing another to engage in any form of unwanted sexual behavior, including marital rape, rape and incest.
- Financial abuse such as making the other person financially dependent or controlling and monitoring how money is spent.
- Spiritual abuse such as misinterpreting scripture to gain power and control and denying access to places and communities of worship.
- Violence is not always loud, not always physical and not always seen or heard. Domestic violence comes in many forms.



Family violence, domestic violence and intimate partner violence are different ways of generally defining the same thing, a pattern of abusive behaviors one person uses to control others. Though the terms “family” or “domestic” are commonly used here, this type of abuse can and does occur within many types of relationships, including families, marriages, dating, cohabitating or “ex” couples and between friends or acquaintances.

Research on abuse in relationships today tells us that it is neither rare nor unusual.

Intimate partner violence occurs most often in the home.<sup>2</sup> Women are more likely to experience family violence than men<sup>3</sup> and that violence is likely to be more severe than violence experienced by men.<sup>4</sup> Family

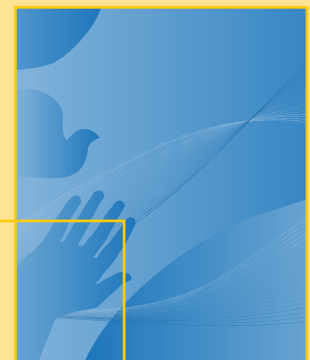
<sup>2</sup> “Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S. 2010,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, [bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/intimate/victims.cfm](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/intimate/victims.cfm). Eighty percent of abusive situations occur at or close to the victim's home or the home of a friend or neighbor.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, “Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women,” [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf), 6; “Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005,” Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2005000-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2005000-eng.pdf), 8. In the U.S., 30 percent of women and 5 percent of men were victims of domestic violence from 2001 to 2005, and in Canada, 7 percent of the total population experienced violence in the home.

<sup>4</sup> “Family Violence in Canada,” Canadian Centre for Justice, 14-15; “Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S. 2010,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, [bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/intimate/victims.cfm](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/intimate/victims.cfm).

In particular, by the end of this publication, you will be provided with:

- An overview of the common question, “What is family violence and abuse?”
- A section that outlines “Who is most at risk in our communities and congregations?”
- Information about and signs to look for in adults who experience abuse, children and young people who experience abuse and those who abuse.
- Tips on how Christian faith, congregational leaders and congregations can be resources for those experiencing domestic violence.
- Suggestions for further information and resources.



Through our baptism and the gift of Christ's death, resurrection and life, we are free to serve and stand with those experiencing abuse and violence. As part of the community of God's children, we are all called to live toward peace, justice and wholeness for all of creation. Ministry with those who are broken, hurting and healing is part of that call.

violence is underreported, which is dangerous, because it can and does escalate.<sup>5</sup>

Family violence includes sexual abuse, which broadly includes any form of unwanted or forced sexual behavior by one person on another. Sexual abuse disproportionately affects women more than men<sup>6</sup> and is also underreported. Sexual abuse is often linked to physical assault and increased severity of abuse.<sup>7</sup> Sexually demeaning actions and harassment can also potentially be considered abusive and may include:

- Offending others by telling unwelcome stories, comments or jokes about sex.
- Making unwanted sexual advances that others find harassing and refusing to stop when someone says “no.”
- Having sexual relationships that take advantage of one’s status or position.
- Engaging in any kind of sexual behavior with children or youth—such as teasing, touching or making them listen to or look at sexually explicit material.
- Believing that sex is the other intimate partner’s duty.
- Coercing one’s partner into sex against her or his wishes, also known as marital rape.

Abuse occurs across all of society, regardless of economic income, racial background or geographic area. We are all at risk. It happens in families who are regular churchgoers as well as those who do not attend. Although no person is immune from becoming a victim of abuse, some factors make some people particularly vulnerable.

### **Gender**

Women experience more intimate partner violence than men and the vio-

5 “Family Violence in Canada,” Canadian Centre for Justice, 10, 26; “Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends Canada 2006,” Statistics Canada, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-570-x/85-570-x2006001-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-570-x/85-570-x2006001-eng.pdf), 26; Tjaden and Thoennes, “Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences,” 6 and “Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.,” Bureau of Justice. In Canada, fewer than 3 in 10 victims of spousal violence incidents are reported. Violence toward a spouse accounted for 53 percent of all violent crimes committed by a family member in 2007, which does not account for underreporting. Annually in the U.S., about 4 out of 10 female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner or other family member. In Canada, 75 percent of homicides from 1961 to 2003 involved family members, 97 percent of those killed by spouses were women.

6 “Statistics,” Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, [www.rainn.org/statistics](http://www.rainn.org/statistics). It is estimated that 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men in the U.S. will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.

7 Dr. Judith McFarlane and Dr. Ann Malecha, “Sexual Assault Among Intimates: Frequency, Consequences & Treatments,” [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211678.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211678.pdf), 3; “Victims and Perpetrators,” U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/rape-sexual-violence/victims-perpetrators.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/rape-sexual-violence/victims-perpetrators.htm); “Measuring Violence Against Women,” Statistics Canada, 19. In the U.S., 50 to 68 percent of women who are physically assaulted by an intimate partner are also sexually assaulted by that partner, and 16 percent of Canadian women are in similar situations.

8 “Statistics,” Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

9 “Violence against Women and Girls,” Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, [www.criaw-icref.ca/ViolenceagainstWomenandGirls](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/ViolenceagainstWomenandGirls).

10 “Sexual Violence FAQs,” FaithTrust Institute, [www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/sv-faqs](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/sv-faqs).

Every two minutes, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.<sup>8</sup>

Every minute of every day, a Canadian woman or child is sexually assaulted.<sup>9</sup>

If you think you need help, seek it. Find someone you trust to help. There is help available. Start with the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3223 (TTY).<sup>10</sup>

## WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

lence is more likely to be chronic and highly physical.<sup>11</sup> Women across every economic status are at greater risk than men in the same income brackets.<sup>12</sup> Women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner.<sup>13</sup> [*Here we will generally continue with the use of the feminine pronoun since those most affected are female-Ed.*]

### Race and Ethnicity

In the U.S. and Canada, though white women and women of color experience similar rates of intimate partner violence (51 and 54 percent, respectively), U.S. American Indian and Alaskan Native women and Canadian Aboriginal women are at particularly higher rates of risk.<sup>14</sup>

### Immigrant Women

Immigrant women and families may find themselves in abusive situations as they are faced with particular difficulties in adapting to a new location often with little to no understanding of the language, legal system and community resources.<sup>15</sup> Abusers may use their partner's immigration status as a tool of control to force her to remain in the relationship.<sup>16</sup> There are U.S. and Canadian legal channels through which batterers can be penalized and held accountable and victims can be protected.<sup>17</sup>

### Marital Status

In the U.S. and Canada, married people report the least amount of intimate partner violence.<sup>18</sup>

While this seems to point to marriage as a relatively abuse-free relationship, in reality, many victims hold back from reporting or sharing about abuse because of a need to protect the illusion of a happy, healthy marriage.

### Residence and Home Situation

In the U.S., violence against women is the main cause of homelessness among women,<sup>19</sup> and in Canada, 75 percent of women in shelters are fleeing violent homes.<sup>20</sup>

If a woman and her children have no place to live and be supported other than in a home with the abuser, she may choose to stay in the abu-

11 Tjaden and Thoennes, "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences," iii-iv.

12 "Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.," Bureau of Justice.

13 Ibid.

14 Tjaden and Thoennes, "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences," 21; "Family Violence in Canada," Canadian Centre for Justice, 64-65, 67.

15 "Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence," Family Violence Prevention Fund, [www.endabuse.org/content/features/detail/778/](http://www.endabuse.org/content/features/detail/778/).

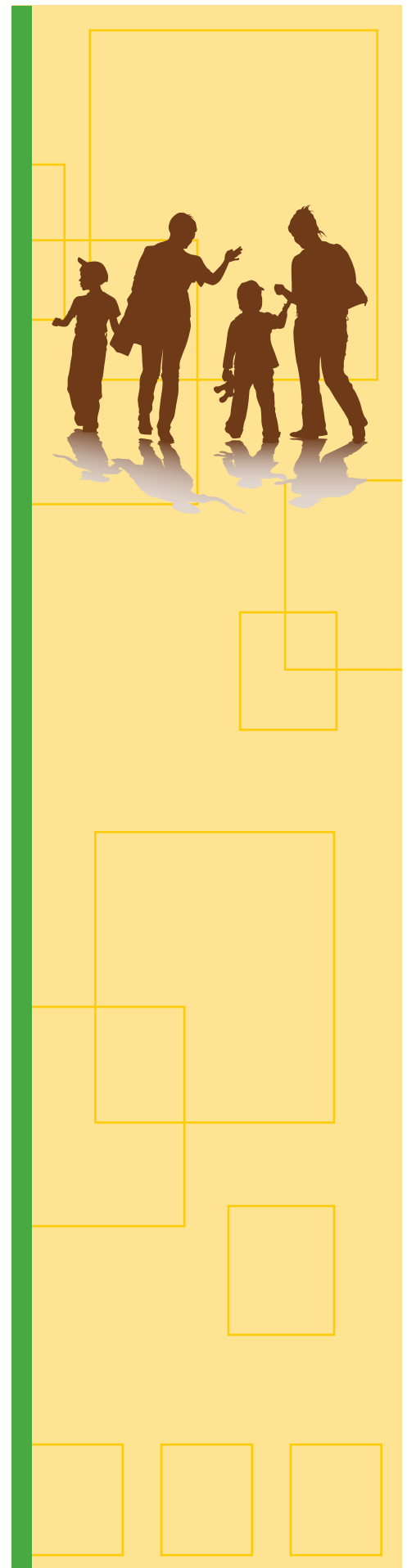
16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 "Intimate Partner Violence," Bureau of Justice; "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005," Canadian Centre for Justice, [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2005000-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2005000-eng.pdf), 18.

19 "Some Facts on Homelessness, Poverty, and Violence Against Women," National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, [www.nlchp.org/view\\_report.cfm?id=186](http://www.nlchp.org/view_report.cfm?id=186).

20 "Family Violence in Canada," Canadian Centre for Justice.





sive situation to avoid the uncertainty of being without food, shelter and financial stability.

## Age

During certain ages of life, people are more vulnerable.

### *Children*

One in 10 U.S. children has suffered from child maltreatment.<sup>21</sup> Abuse against children includes neglect, physical and sexual violence, such that 1 of every 16 U.S. children has been victimized sexually,<sup>22</sup> and in Canada, over 60 percent of all sexual assault victims are under the age of 18.<sup>23</sup>



About 1 in 5 girls ages 14 to 17 has been the victim of a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault in the U.S.;<sup>24</sup> in Canada 80 percent of assaults against children were against girls.<sup>25</sup>

### *Youth and Young Adults*

Youth and young adult women are the most vulnerable age group for intimate partner violence, and the perpetrator is most often close to their age.<sup>26</sup>

In the U.S., females ages 20 to 24 were at the highest risk for intimate partner violence,<sup>27</sup> and in Canada, young women under the age of 25 have the highest rates of sexual assault, criminal harassment and spousal homicide committed against them.<sup>28</sup>

### *Elders*

Domestic elder abuse includes abuse inflicted by others (i.e., sexual, physical, emotional abuse, exploitation, neglect or abandonment).<sup>29</sup> Up to two million Americans age 65 or older have been injured, exploited or otherwise mistreated by someone upon whom they depended for protection.<sup>30</sup>

This abuse is primarily family abuse, such that two-thirds of perpetrators

21 David Finkelhor, et al, "Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey," U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, [www.ojjdp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf), 1-2.

22 Ibid.

23 "Family Violence Initiative," Department of Justice Canada, [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fv-vf/about-aprop/](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fv-vf/about-aprop/).

24 Finkelhor, et al, "Children's Exposure to Violence," 1-2.

25 "Family Violence in Canada," Canadian Centre for Justice, 11.

26 "Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.," Bureau of Justice.

27 Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.," Bureau of Justice.

28 "Measuring Violence Against Women," Statistics Canada, 36.

29 "Frequently Asked Questions," National Center on Elder Abuse, [www.ncea.aoa.gov/NCEAroot/Main\\_Site/FAQ/Questions.aspx](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/NCEAroot/Main_Site/FAQ/Questions.aspx).

30 "Survey of Recent Statistics," American Bar Association: Commission on Domestic Violence, [www.abanet.org/domesticviolence/Pages/Statistics.aspx#immigrants](http://www.abanet.org/domesticviolence/Pages/Statistics.aspx#immigrants).

are adult children or spouses;<sup>31</sup> female elders in the U.S. and Canada are more likely to be victims of abuse than male elders.<sup>32</sup>

## THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE ABUSE

Abuse occurs in all of society, regardless of economic income, racial background or geographic area. We are all at risk.

*What are some signs to look for in a person who you suspect may be experiencing abuse?* Knowing and reading the signs wisely is the first step in obtaining help for people of all ages who are experiencing abuse.

Clergy and other congregational leaders are in key positions with families to sense when something is wrong and to intervene. Follow these guidelines:

- **Trust your instincts.** If you think a family or individual is in trouble, you may have detected something that is not right. Do not downplay your feelings.
- **Be alert.** Simply acknowledging that abuse is likely occurring in the congregation will help heighten your awareness to identify these situations.
- **Look for changes in personality or behavior.** These should serve as warning signs to look further; ask questions or seek assistance in determining whether or not the person needs help.
- **Look for a pattern.** No single behavior can be considered definitive evidence; any behavior may have several different causes that may be unrelated to abusive situations.

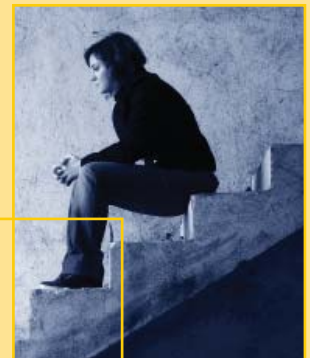
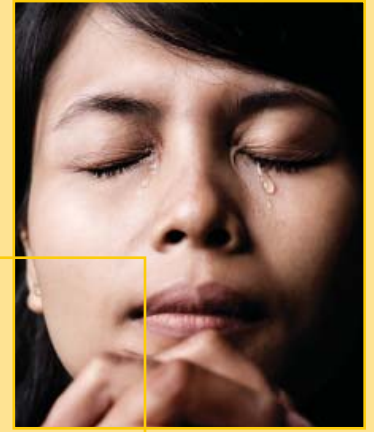
Possible indicators of abuse are listed below, but do not necessarily constitute proof of abuse. Just as often, there could be no signs. The suffering is often in silence, because the abuser often pressures the abused to hide or deny the abuse.

Consider the possibility of abuse when an **adult**:

- Shows signs of injuries such as bruises, burns, emergency room visits
- Attempts to hide injuries with long sleeves, dark glasses, heavy makeup
- Frequently feigns headaches or illnesses
- Isolates her- or himself from normal social activities
- Is depressed, longs for death or attempts suicide
- Suffers from emotional shock, confusion or dazed expressions
- Cannot focus on outside tasks or events; is internally preoccupied
- Is startled by noise, light or touch

31 "National Elder Abuse Incidence Study," National Center on Elder Abuse, [www.aoa.gov/AoA-Root/AoA\\_Programs/Elder\\_Rights/Elder\\_Abuse/docs/ABuseReport\\_Full.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/AoA-Root/AoA_Programs/Elder_Rights/Elder_Abuse/docs/ABuseReport_Full.pdf).

32 Ibid; "Family Violence in Canada," Canadian Centre for Justice, 11.



- Experiences intense fear, guilt, shame or hopelessness, often generalized
- Displays exhaustion, fatigue, insomnia
- Appears pale, weak or underweight
- Experiences a miscarriage
- Is belittled, threatened or controlled physically, socially or mentally by spouse
- Has a strained or tense relationship or frequent arguments with spouse

#### *Why do they stay?*

“Why do they stay?” is the most frequently asked question about victims of family violence, especially about women who are battered. There are many reasons the abused person stays. People who are abused are often frightened and ashamed, hope or believe that the abuse will end and find hope in periods of relative calm. Still others are encouraged or coerced to stay by their families and/or religious communities.

Adult women may also be trapped by society’s harmful messages about marriage and family that:

- they deserve the violence or that it is their fault;
- they are abused because they are bad people;
- they are alone in their experience;
- their abusive situation and forced submission is simply the reality of what family life is like;
- children need two parents even if one is abusive;
- they might lose the children;
- they are bound to live out their wedding vows by continuing to “try to make the relationship work.”

In addition to the above messages, victims may also stay because of real logistical concerns:

- they have nowhere to go or stay and no money to get them to a safe place or to pay for necessities;
- they are reluctant to get a partner “into trouble” with the law;
- they doubt that the police can help them or will believe them;
- they are afraid of leaving, since leaving is the most dangerous time—often to fatal effect.

Even asking the question “Why do they stay?” puts the responsibility on the victim. By re-phrasing to ask, “Why do they abuse?” attention is drawn to the systemic nature of violence against women as something based on harmful assertions of patriarchal power and control.

*How does the person experiencing abuse get help?*

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

If the danger is not immediate or you are looking for additional information and resources, contact one of the resources below.

In the United States of America:  
**National Domestic Violence Hotline**

[www.ndvh.org](http://www.ndvh.org)

1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233)

1-800-787-3224 (ITY)

An anonymous, confidential 24-hour hotline with assistance for victims, survivors and abusers available in over 170 languages. Visit the Web site for additional information and resources.

In Canada:

**Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention**

[www.casp-acps.ca/crisiscentres.asp](http://www.casp-acps.ca/crisiscentres.asp)

Canada does not have one central and national hotline for domestic and family violence. Visit the site above to find crisis services in your area.

**National Clearing House on Family Violence**

(Operated by the Public Health Agency of Canada)

<http://origin.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/>

1-800-267-1291 (8am-8pm EST)

1-800-465-7735 (ITY)

Email: [ncfv-cnivf@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:ncfv-cnivf@phac-aspc.gc.ca)

This is Canada’s resource center for information on violence within relationships of kinship, intimacy, dependency or trust. Resources and information are available in both French and English.



## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE ABUSE

The distortion of power and control in relationship is the defining factor of family abuse. In relationships between children or young people and adults, the adult maintains the responsibility to create and maintain safe, healthy, accountable boundaries in which to have relationship. It is abusive when an adult takes advantage of his or her power over a child or teen or fails to ensure safe boundaries.

More recently, teen dating violence and violence within non-marital relationships and between peers has become more serious.

*What are some signs to look for in a child who is experiencing abuse?* Consider the possibility of abuse when a **child**:

- Shows signs of physical trauma such as bruises, burns, broken bones, difficulty walking or sitting
- Fears adults in general, or one in particular, or is indiscriminately affectionate with adults
- Has delayed development
- Displays extremes in behavior such as hyperactivity, disruptive behavior, over-compliance or demanding behavior
- Runs away, lies, is cruel to others, vandalizes property, steals or cheats
- Demonstrates inappropriately adult behavior such as parenting other children, a precocious knowledge of sexual behavior or inappropriately infantile behavior such as frequently rocking or head-banging
- Is withdrawn, depressed, lacks emotion or is anxious
- Exhibits destructive behavior: bites, hits, or cuts self or others
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite or unexplained gagging and nausea
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Expresses a lack of attachment to the parent
- Has or develops a speech disorder such as stuttering
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Has unexplained absences, tardiness and fatigue
- Protests or cries when it is time to go home

In addition to the signs for children, consider the possibility of abuse when a **youth**:

- Runs away from home or is reluctant to return home
- Retreats from school or activities
- Fails classes
- Has excessive household responsibility or is overly restricted by parents



Due to the proliferation of electronic devices (i.e., cell phones, lap top computers, etc.) and social networking sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.), young people have more access and are more connected than ever before. Help your child or teen name some of their own safe rules and guidelines for online friendships and relationships.

- Uses seductive behavior to get attention
- Uses alcohol or drugs
- Demonstrates suicidal behavior
- Is pregnant or has a sexually transmitted disease
- Displays risk-taking behavior or sexual promiscuity
- Cannot form good peer relationships
- Makes changes in daily rituals or clothing
- Experiences isolation from friends
- Wears clothing inappropriate for the weather in order to hide marks
- Spends excessive amounts of time with the person he or she is dating
- Hides or refuses to share text messages, e-mails and other online communication (such as Facebook) with a trusted adult

*What is a “mandated reporter”?*

In many states, pastors are mandated reporters, meaning they are required to report suspected child abuse to the authorities. *Know the laws in your state and the policies of your synod.* Most states have mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse. Generally, in Canada all cases of abuse or suspected abuse must be reported. To learn what your state requires, visit: [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/index.cfm).

As a mandated reporter, tell the child that you must report what they have shared and to whom you must report. If the abuse is current, ensuring the child’s safety through protective services is the first priority. Inform or help them understand the processes that will unfold and accompany them in that time. Offer to help the child or teen make the call if they are old enough to do this on their own; otherwise, you will need to make the call yourself.

*How does the child or young person experiencing abuse get help?*

**If you or a child or young person you know is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

If the danger is not immediate or you are looking for additional information and resources, refer to the resources below.

In the United States of America:  
**National Child Abuse Hotline**  
 1-800-4-A-CHILD  
 (1-800-422-4453)  
[www.childhelpusa.org](http://www.childhelpusa.org)

**National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline**  
 1-866-331-9474  
 1-866-331-8453 TTY  
 Online chat is available at  
[www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org).

In Canada:  
**Kids Help Phone**  
 1-800-668-6868  
[www.KidsHelpPhone.ca](http://www.KidsHelpPhone.ca)  
 An anonymous, confidential, 24-hour hotline for children and teens.

**ADULTS WHO WERE VICTIMIZED AS CHILDREN**

With increased publicity about domestic violence, many adults are becoming aware that they experienced abuse while growing up. In fact, most victims reach adulthood without ever having disclosed the abuse. They often “forget” as one means of getting free or may have thought that their experience was “normal.”

Seeing a film, hearing a speaker or a sermon, or talking with another victim may provoke traumatic memories. They may experience terrifying flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, and other symptoms that make them feel afraid and crazy. As a congregational leader and member raising this issue, you and your congregation should take steps to be prepared for such responses from members. The symptoms are painful but normal; they are the first step in the healing process. Be prepared with professional assistance. For more information on how to help, see the section, “Christian Faith as a Resource.”

## ELDERS WHO EXPERIENCE ABUSE

Domestic elder abuse includes the harmful use of power and control (i.e., sexual, physical, emotional abuse, exploitation, abandonment and neglect) by someone that the elder trusts and depends on for care. Even though elders may depend on many different people, including medical professionals, eldercare staff and family members, domestic elder abuse is primarily abuse by family members.<sup>33</sup>

*What are some signs to look for in an elder who is experiencing abuse?* Consider the possibility of abuse when the **elder**:

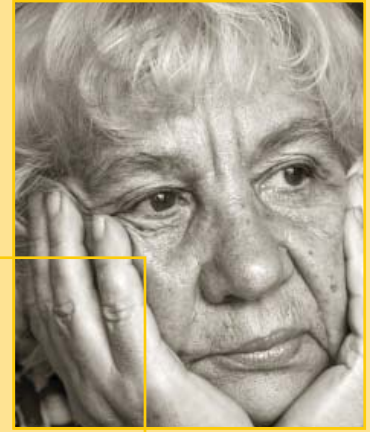
- Is missing dentures, glasses, hearing aid or wears dirty, torn or inappropriate clothing
- Appears dehydrated, has bedsores or poor hygiene
- Refuses to allow social services into the home
- Has untreated medical problems or misses medical appointments, sometimes on the advice of family
- Has medication withheld or is over-sedated
- Is extremely passive or will not make eye contact
- Reduces or lacks mental, social or physical activities
- Displays ignorance of their medical condition though cognitively aware
- Lacks necessities or comforts which would be affordable to the elder
- Experiences sudden or unusual changes in financial status, such as new poverty or the changing of a deed or will or unauthorized use of or missing property
- Is denied oversight of their financial affairs or pressured to loan or give money or property to others

*What about self-neglect?*

Self-neglect is a serious concern for elders in the community, since the majority of cases reported to adult protective services are of self-neglect. Often times, the problem is paired with declining health, isolation, Alzheimer's disease or dementia or drug and alcohol dependency. Self-neglect indicators can be similar to those of abuse.

Elders have varying needs and capabilities, which may range from full self-sufficiency to the provision of care by various sources in the community (i.e., family, friends, spouses or partners, elder care homes, etc.) In some cases, elders will be connected to support in the community that allows them to continue living on their own. Some conditions like depression and malnutrition may be successfully treated through medical intervention. If the problems are severe enough, a guardian may be appointed. Congregations can be important resources during these times of change for elders and their families, alike.

<sup>33</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," National Center on Elder Abuse. Two-thirds of perpetrators are adult children or spouses.



*How does the elder experiencing abuse get help?*

**If you or an elder you know is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

If the danger is not immediate or you are looking for additional information and resources, refer to the resources below.

In the United States of America:  
**National Center on Elder Abuse**

1-800-677-1116

[www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)

Call the eldercare locator for state reporting numbers if you suspect elder abuse, neglect or exploitation.

In Canada:

**Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse**

[www.cnpea.ca](http://www.cnpea.ca)

Visit the Web site to learn more. Resources are available in English and French.

## THOSE WHO ABUSE

As with their victims, individuals who batter and abuse fall into no specific categories. They come from all class backgrounds, races and ethnicities, and religions. They may be unemployed or highly paid professionals. The batterer may be a sober and upstanding member of the community and even a respected member of his congregation. Some were abused themselves as children; others were not.

The only one unifying factor is that **abusers use power and control to manipulate others.**

Abusers often deny and minimize harm and project responsibility for the abuse onto the victim. Always be aware of the disposition of abusers to manipulate others into sharing their view of the abuse.

For example, a red flag that the abuser is blaming the abuse on the victim's action might be a phrase like, "She forgot to pick up the kids, and I was so scared for them and mad at her, I just lashed out and hit her. It was just an accident."

*When entering a situation of abuse as an outside party, naiveté about the manipulation of power and control most abusers use is dangerous and can be deadly for the abused person.*

Some of us respond to abusers with deep horror, disdain or emotional turmoil. Be aware of these feelings, while remembering that abusers are people who are in need of particular assistance.

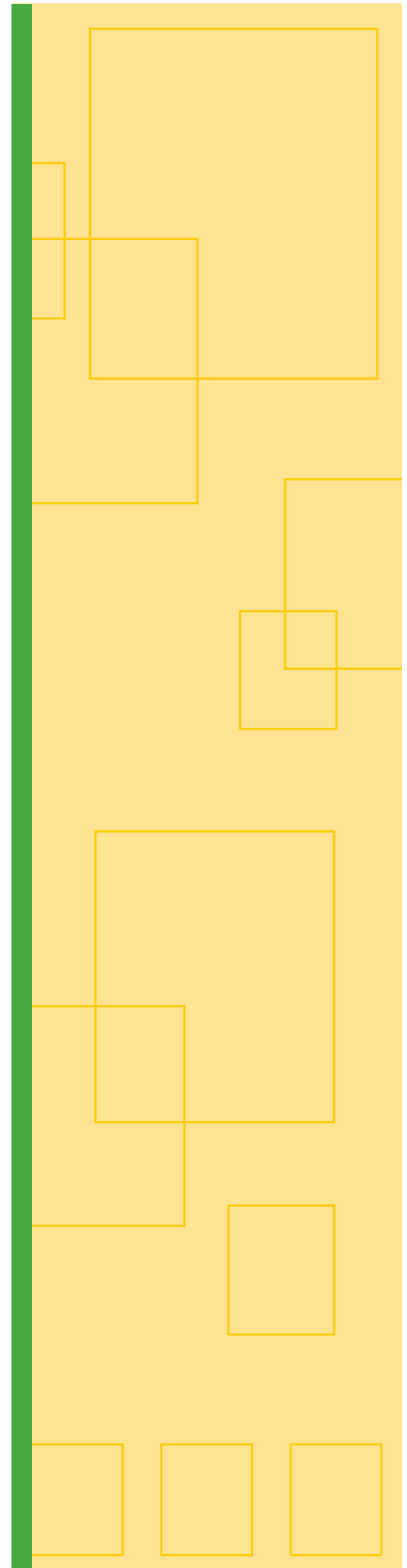
*What are some signs to look for in a person who is abusing?*

Clergy and other congregational leaders are in key positions with families to sense when something is wrong and to intervene.

Follow these guidelines:

- **Trust your instincts.** If you think a family or individual is in trouble, you have detected something that is not right. Do not downplay your feelings.
- **Be alert.** Simply acknowledging that abuse is likely occurring in the congregation will help heighten your awareness to identify these situations.
- **Look for changes in personality or behavior.** These should serve as warning signs to look further, ask questions or seek assistance in determining whether or not the person needs help.
- **Look for a pattern.** No single behavior can be considered definitive evidence; any behavior may have several different causes that may be unrelated to abusive situations.

Possible indicators of abuse are listed below, but do not necessarily constitute proof of abuse. Just as often, there could be no signs. The suffering is often in silence, because the abuser often pressures the abused to hide or deny the abuse.



Someone might be an abuser if he or she:

- is extremely jealous
- controls or tracks partner's activities
- uses putdowns, criticism or threats to affect partner's (or other family member's) behavior
- uses physical force to solve problems
- believes that he is the head of the household and should not be challenged

Consider the possibility that an adult is abusing children when the adult:

- Gives implausible or conflicting accounts of injuries to the child
- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical or verbal discipline with the child
- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members
- Constantly blames, belittles or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

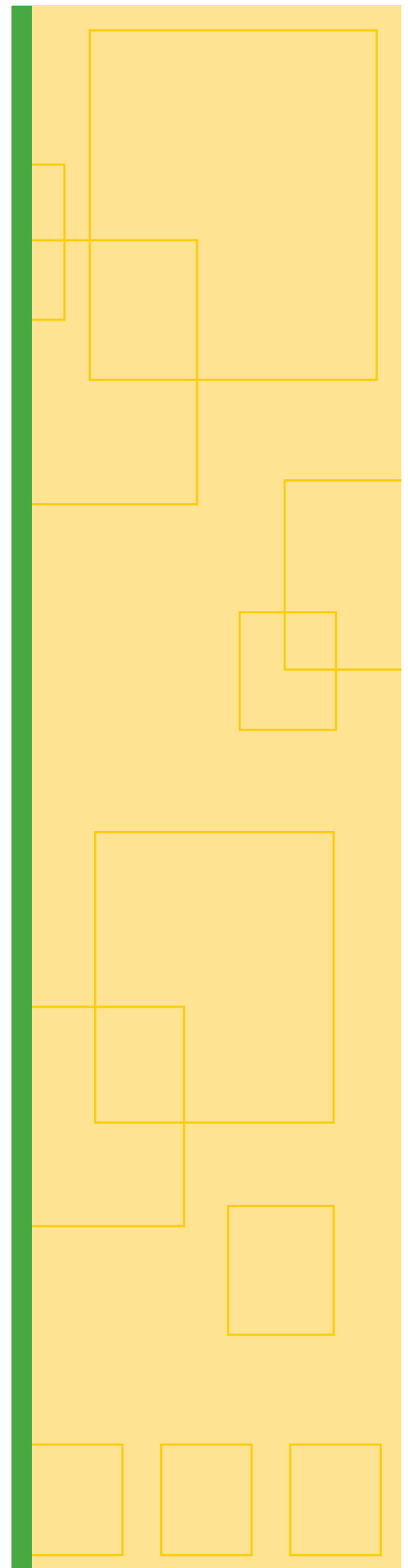
If a person does any of these things, he or she is probably hurting the people around him or her and should get help from someone who will hold him or her accountable so he or she might acknowledge the abuse and have the courage to seek help.

#### *Why do they abuse?*

Men and women who batter do not batter because they have anger management or substance abuse problems. People batter and abuse because they want power and control over other people. In particular, men batter women because the choice is theirs to make. This grows from a sense of entitlement centered in male privilege, which in most North American societies demeans and devalues women in visible and invisible ways. The lack of social, legal and financial consequences in society enables batterers and abusers to continue abusing without punishment or a sense of accountability.

The causes of abuse are complex. Sexism, the privileging of male power, identity and control over females, is one contributing factor to domestic and sexual abuse.

The ELCA Justice for Women program is mandated to assist this church to address sexism, which it does through theology and education. For more, please visit [www.elca.org/justiceforwomen](http://www.elca.org/justiceforwomen).





*How does the person abusing get help?*

Abusers, whether they abuse a spouse or child physically or sexually, need to seek help. They need to be held accountable for their actions. They need to look for treatments options and learn new ways of acting that are not damaging. This work is difficult. For many abusers, though their behaviors and relationships can be closely monitored, full “recovery” is not possible. Indeed, abuse, and sexual abuse of children in particular, tends to be a recurrent behavior with high rates of repeat offenses, also known as recidivism. In a study of imprisoned sex offenders with fewer than two known victims, the offender had an average of 110 victims and 318 offenses of abuse before being caught.<sup>34</sup>

*Since the kind of help needed is complicated, counseling abusers is a job for professionals.* Whether you are a pastor or a lay person, *do not attempt to counsel an abuser on your own.* Unless you are a specialist in this field, you may do additional harm. Urge and help abusers who speak to you to find a reputable treatment program and stick with it. Treatment programs for abusers are available.

Once the abuser has entered a program, the person may want and need a spiritual counselor during this time. You may want to be part of the team of professionals in your community who will work with and help the abuser during this time. Working in partnership with the community experts helps ensure the most holistic approach to guidance and care for the abuser.

The abuser should not be “let off the hook” without extensive, expert treatment and a careful plan to hold him accountable once he returns to church, the community and especially if he returns to the family situation. Pastors and congregational leaders can encourage abusers to understand that God’s grace enables them to be accountable and to get the help and eventual healing they seek and need.

With abusers of children, you may experience serious personal conflict between the confidentiality of what is shared with you and the priority of protecting the child. If you are a pastor, you may be a mandated reporter. Think through how you will address these issues and consult a trusted expert in the field before being confronted with such cases.



<sup>34</sup> In the study by S. Ahlmeyer, P. Heil, B. McKee and K. English, imprisoned sex offenders with fewer than two known victims, the offender had an average of 110 victims and 318 offenses of abuse before being caught. Additionally, S. Ahlmeyer, K. English and D. Simons found that sex offenders committed sex crimes for an average of 16 years before being officially caught and processed in the U.S. justice system.

*What about forgiveness?*

Pastors in particular may be approached by abusers for confession and forgiveness.

Forgiveness may also be a tool of control used by the abuser to keep the abused in the destructive relationship.

Forgiveness is not a substitute for counseling by an experienced professional and **cannot** be considered until the victim is physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually safe.

These potential misinterpretations of such powerfully healing faith concepts raise many complex issues and should be thought through by pastors before the issue comes up.

# RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A RESOURCE

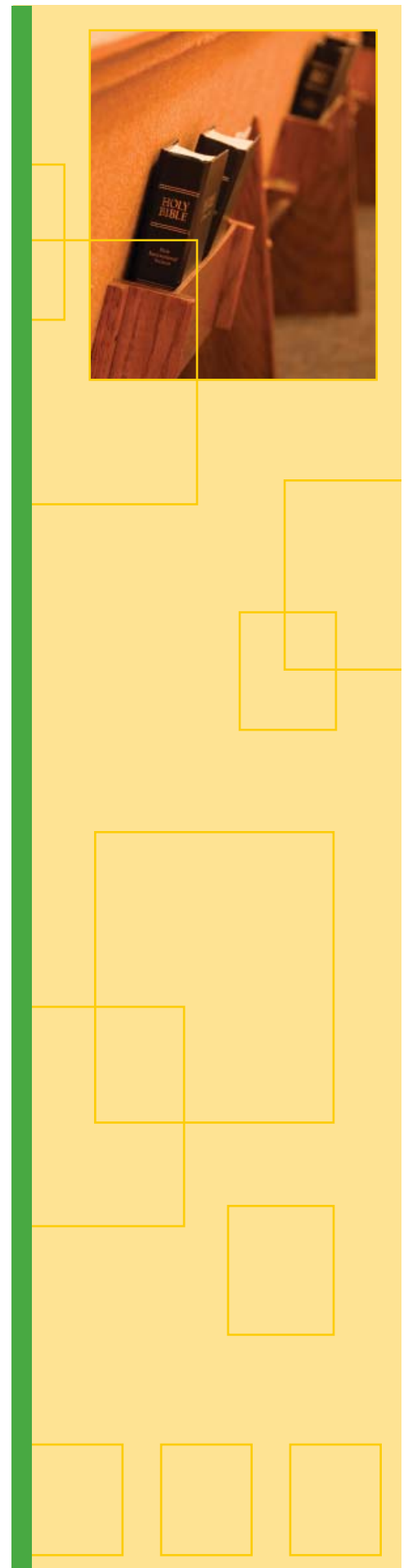
A victim of abuse have many theological questions and crises. Her interpretation of the Bible and theological understanding may shape what she believes about her situation and abuse. She may have heard that a woman is to be subordinate to her husband; children may have been taught the Fourth Commandment—Honor your father and mother—without any reference to family abuse. Others may believe that God has sent this abuse to punish them for their sins or as a test of faith. They may be angry with God (and with the church) for letting this happen to them. They may feel abandoned by God. They may ask, “How can God allow such things to happen?” If victims belong to families that attend church regularly, the crisis may be complicated by feelings of hypocrisy.

*The responses of both pastors and lay people can be deeply important resources for victims. In addition to the key measure of seeking professional help, congregational leaders may find the following guidelines helpful:*

**Listen closely.** Listening attentively can help you discern what is important to the person in crisis. Sit with the victim. Listen to her story and her theology. How is she explaining her own experience? Do not tell her how to feel or react. By listening carefully, you are ministering through presence. You may want to repeat things back to her for clarification. Also by listening, you are learning about the victim’s own theology, which may help identify what might be holding her back from freedom and what might call her toward it. However interesting that may be, always be sure to discuss theological underpinnings only when the person is not in crisis.

**Support faith statements that address the victim’s safety, well-being and empowerment.** A victim may say, “I believe that God never sends us anything we can’t handle.” This sincere belief may be both an obstacle and an opportunity. On one hand, it implies that God has sent this abuse, that it is God’s will and that she must put up with and endure the “cross that God has seen fit to lay upon her.” This first implication could stand in the way of the victim’s safety. On the other hand, it also implies that God knows this person has resources for dealing with the abusive situation. It may be more helpful to affirm this part of the statement and say, “Let’s name the resources you think God has given you to deal with it.”

**Respectfully offer alternatives to faith concepts that are keeping victims trapped.** A good way to do this is to make your statements “I” statements. If you say, “I believe God loves you and wants you to be safe and whole,” you may be heard as offering new possibilities to victims, rather than shaming and blaming them for believing the wrong thing. If you accompany these faith statements with concrete assistance and relationship, they will be more believable.



**Realize that the doctrine of sin commonly appears among the obstacles in the religious struggles of victims.** Victims asking, “Why me?” may indicate that they believe that they have sinned in some way and that the abuse is a punishment from God. Whatever your views, or the victim’s views about original sin, it needs to be firmly detached from responsibility for the abuse, which rests on the abuser and not the victim. “I do not believe God is punishing you for sin,” may be a helpful response that opens closed doors for victims.

**Explore the concept of “forgiveness” with care.** Many victims feel or are told by family or faith leaders that they must forgive the abuser and therefore stay in the abusive situation. Respectfully observe that forgiveness is *not* always or only dependent upon apology or repentance. Sometimes, and certainly when there has been no specific treatment for the abuser, forgiveness is not a legitimate option. It may be helpful to assist the person to explore what it means to forgive, how forgiveness might bring healing and what healing is possible given the reality of a situation.

Grace is present in healing, new life and deliverance. Whatever we may say about many aspects of victims’ spiritual struggles, one thing is certain: victims need not live forever in abuse. This process of becoming free can be dramatic and deeply moving. It is assuredly a sign of God’s action with us today. We can celebrate the courage and resourcefulness of survivors in seeking well-being and safety, and we can praise God who brings “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

## CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS AS A RESOURCE

Today, there is help for those who experience the pain and confusion of family violence. Shelters for battered women, crisis hotlines and social service agencies have become skilled and resourceful in offering help to abused individuals of all ages and situations. As a congregational leader, you can also be part of this growing response to human need. Both lay people and pastors can offer immediate, concrete assistance to victims of family violence by following these guidelines.

*If you see signs of abuse:*

**Be attentive and make it easy for the person to talk.** Shame, self-blame and fear make it difficult for victims to disclose their situations, so the first step in counseling is to speak to the victim privately, assure confidentiality when possible and then ask about what they are experiencing at home.

**Avoid using strong labels such as “battering” and “incest.”** You may wish to say, “I have noticed changes in your behavior and interactions here at the congregation, such as (name a few factual things you have noticed). How are things going at home?” Although the victim may not wish to disclose the situation at that time, your direct, nonjudgmental question may make it easier to speak later.

Lutheran Christian theology affirms and celebrates the family in many ways. We speak of the family as the foundation of society and personhood. If we are serious about the theological importance of families, we must learn to minister with and to victims. As members of the body of Christ who bear one another’s burdens, a person experiencing abuse needs us, and it is our vocation through baptism to be with them. God calls people of faith to stand with one another in active ministry.

When an adult relates a story of abuse to you, respond in ways that can lead to safety and healing:

**Believe the story.** This is *essential*. Victims may fear that you will not accept the fact that such things could be happening to them. If you know the offender, they may fear you will not believe them. Give positive comments: “I know it has been hard for you to talk about this, but thank you for sharing with me.”

**Validate feelings.** Victims are often afraid they are losing control of their lives and feelings. Their nightmares, fears, exhaustion and depression often make them feel close to a breakdown. Flashbacks and memories of abuse in the past can also make a victim feel terrorized. These feelings are normal reactions to traumatic stress. Accept and validate these feelings.

**Emphasize safety.** Often victims minimize and deny the threats and risks they are living with—a survival mechanism to help them cope. Help the victim understand that without intervention, abuse often escalates and that you are concerned about his or her safety.<sup>35</sup> Your emphasis on safety can help victims to make safety a priority for themselves as well.

**Keep confidentiality.** Never tell an abuser that the victim has spoken to you. Confidentiality in battering situations is one basic step in empowering the victim and keeping her safe.

**Affirm that the victim is not to blame.** Abused individuals may feel the abuse is their fault. Abusers often tell victims so. Say firmly, “You do not deserve that abuse and behavior. This is not your fault.” For those who have lived with abuse for a long time and whose self-concept has suffered as a result, it is often helpful to say, “Just because bad things have happened to you does not mean that you are a bad person.” Also, victims may feel as though God is punishing them. As a person of faith, you may wish to say, “It is not God’s will that you are being abused.”<sup>36</sup>

**Respect, support and empower.** Your natural concern for the victim’s safety may make you want to remove her from danger immediately. She may be confused about what she wants; she may not want to leave just to have the abuse stopped—she may not be ready. Her home may be her only security and livelihood. If you tell her what to do, you are contributing to the control she already experiences.

**State your support for the decisions she makes,** even if you are not happy with them. If she chooses to remain in the home, resolve not to abandon her. You may say, “I am concerned about your safety if you go back home. But I’ll still be here for you when you need me.” Avoid giving ultimatums (i.e., “if you leave...then, I will...” or “if you don’t leave...then, I will...”).

<sup>35</sup> “Domestic Violence FAQs,” FaithTrust Institute, [www.faitrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/dv-faqs](http://www.faitrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/dv-faqs).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.





**Affirm her skills and resources.** Abusers undermine the self-esteem of victims in many ways, telling them they are bad or incompetent. In fact, victims are strong and courageous. They employ many creative skills to survive. Ask how she has survived in the past; then name her strategies as skills and resources. By affirming her good qualities, you help to enable her to develop new ones for her own safety.

**Help her develop a safety plan to make herself and her family safe.** Practically, help her pack a bag. Include her important papers (i.e., birth certificates for herself and the children, Social Security and identification cards, school and health records, marriage certificate, etc.). Help her plan and know an escape route. Call a domestic violence hotline or agency for assistance. Trust her judgment.

**Seek expert assistance.** Refer victims to specialized domestic violence counseling programs, not to couples counseling. Refer her to professional care and counseling for victims of violence and abuse. Offer to accompany her, but let her accept or reject your offer each time. Help connect her with a shelter, safe home or advocacy resources to offer her safety and protection.<sup>37</sup>

**Let the victim express her anger** and even her grimmest fantasies about what she wishes she could do to her abuser. She can only be relieved of the terrible guilt about having these fantasies by speaking of them.

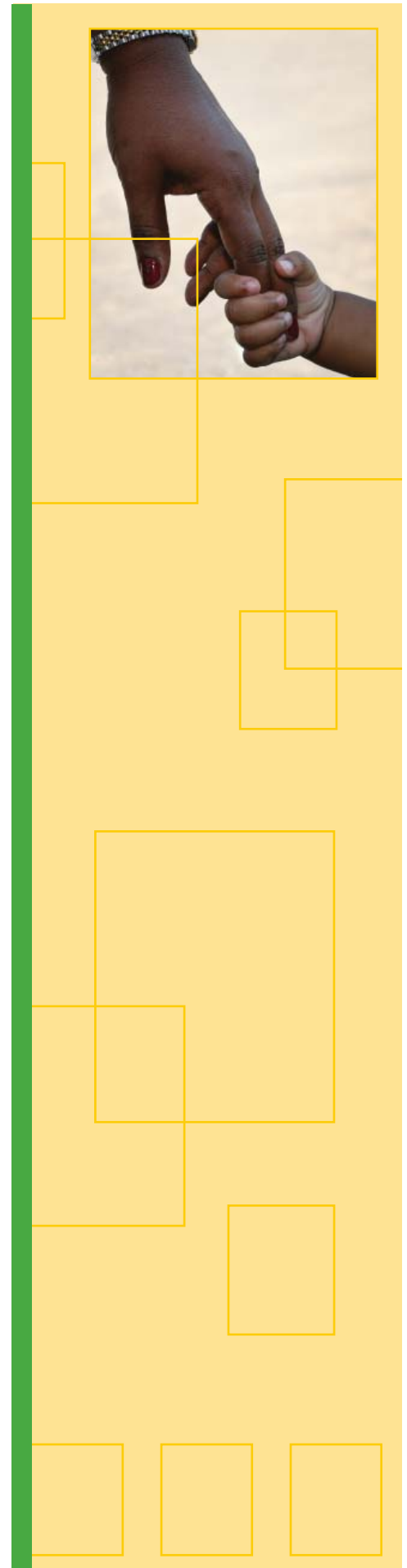
**Remember other family members.** “Non-offending” parents and other family members are also suffering. Children of a battered woman experience trauma from witnessing battering. Relatives of incest victims suffer from the distorted family dynamics in the home (secrecy and taboo). In your concern for the direct victim, do not forget those indirectly affected by the abuse. They may be bewildered, betrayed, angry, ashamed and in crisis. If the offender is a “breadwinning” parent removed from the home, the family may find itself without a source of income. In such instances, families may pressure a victim to take back stories of abuse or they may minimize the hurt and harm that all have suffered.

**In the case of a child, contact protective services.** Children may want you to speak only with their parent, but your first priority is to protect the child/ren from further harm. Remember, in many states, *pastors are mandated reporters*. Know the laws in your state and the policies of your synod.

If it is the case, tell the child that you are obligated to report: “We want the abuse to stop, but we can’t do it alone. We need help.” Assure the children that you will accompany them through the processes that will unfold, and then follow through. Do not make promises to children that you cannot keep. Your continued presence can be deeply important. Offer to help the child make the call to report by dialing the number, introducing your connection to the situation and sitting with the child as they report the experience.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.





Remember, it is worth harming relationships with parents to protect the child. The abuser needs to be confronted, but without proper training, you may cause more harm than good. *Always involve protective services.*<sup>38</sup>

## THE CONGREGATION AS A RESOURCE

Ministry is more than counseling or responding after abuse has occurred. Congregations can be open, supportive and informed allies with victims and survivors of violence. They can be educators and advocates for better policies, laws and services as well as partners with local organizations. These are some things that can be done:

**Educate yourself as a congregation.** Form a study group or sponsor a series of forums on family abuse. Invite professionals in your community, such as shelter workers, social workers, counselors and police officers to speak.

**Communicate your concern about abuse.** Display posters and phone numbers for shelters and crisis lines on your church bulletin boards. Be sure the pastor's discretionary fund is available to assist those experiencing abuse.

**Encourage pastors to express concern for the abused in sermons and prayers.** When domestic violence is mentioned in the pulpit, victims come forth. Naming the problem helps overcome initial denial and isolation.

**Reveal theological support for mutuality and respect during premarital counseling and marriage services.** In premarital counseling, pastors may explore the ways the couple and their families handle conflicts and suggest that biblical readings during marriage services focus on mutuality rather than on the submission of women.

**Help those in need in practical ways.** Assist people in crisis by connecting them with the agencies, professionals, and resources needed to be safe, including shelter, food, transportation and childcare.

**Hold the abuser accountable.** Don't minimize the abusive behavior. Support the abuser in seeking specialized batterers' counseling. Continue to hold him accountable and to support and protect the victim even after he has begun a counseling program.<sup>39</sup>

**Provide help through direct services or contributions.** Shelters, safe-home networks or crisis hotlines need your donations of food, clothing, money, furniture and volunteer time. Contact the local organizations to find out what the specific needs are in your community.

Experience shows that when a congregation creates an atmosphere of openness and support for people to disclose their stories, victims will come forward. Those who work with victims may experience many of the same theological struggles as the victims themselves. These crises, doubts and confusions are not a sign that one's faith is lacking. They are normal experiences of spiritual growth through which God accompanies us.

<sup>38</sup> Maria Gargiulo, *Hear Their Cries: Religious Responses to Child Abuse*, CD-ROM, FaithTrust Institute.

<sup>39</sup> "Domestic Violence FAQs," FaithTrust.

**Encourage your local police to initiate a policy of nondiscretionary arrest.** In domestic disturbance cases, such arrests mean that a police officer has no choice but to arrest if he or she believes violence has occurred. Such programs have proven effective in reducing battering. Find out if your city sponsors community intervention projects along with mandatory arrest such as where female and male volunteers provide immediate counseling for both victims and offenders.

**Work together with local agencies since victims may need services beyond the crisis point.** Those who are rebuilding their lives after abuse have practical needs like accessible, low-cost housing, information and advocacy about social services, child care and job training.

**Advocate for local hotlines.** For example, hotlines for abusing parents to call before they hurt their children are available in many communities today. If your region has not begun such a service, consider initiating one.

**Obtain training and volunteer at crisis lines and women's shelters.** Pay attention to your emotions as well as to the information. Both facts and feelings are essential to learning about abuse in the family.

**Educate everyone on child sexual abuse and exploitation and the ways to prevent it.** Introduce coloring books or video programs for children. Ask your church's Sunday school to consider making a prevention emphasis an annual event. Contact Cherish Our Children to learn more at 612-280-1259 or online at [www.cherishchildren.org](http://www.cherishchildren.org).

**Provide programs for teens.** For many, the teen years are the time when boys learn that to be "manly" is to be tough and in control, and girls learn that to be "feminine" means to be nonassertive. Sexual assault and battering among teenage couples are now being recognized as serious problems. Confirmation classes, youth meetings, and teen church school classes can be important places for prevention programs.

**Support services for adolescents in your community.** During their teen years, victims of child abuse struggle desperately to get free. Centers for runaways, teen prostitutes and chemically dependent adolescents testify to the massive numbers who have been victims of incest or physical abuse.



Through our baptisms and the gift of Christ's death, resurrection and life, we are free to love and serve the neighbor. It is that freedom that gives us purpose and hope to confront the sin of violence and abuse in all relationships, especially in the relationships of families. Let us work together as part of the larger constellation of this church, fulfilling the call to denounce and combat domestic violence and violence against women.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "Violence Against Women," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995, [www.elca.org/socialpolicy/violenceagainstwomen](http://www.elca.org/socialpolicy/violenceagainstwomen).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

### United States of America

#### **ELCA Justice for Women program**

*[www.elca.org/justiceforwomen](http://www.elca.org/justiceforwomen)*

The causes of abuse are complex. Sexism, the privileging of male power, identity and control over females, is one contributing factor to domestic and sexual abuse. The ELCA Justice for Women program is mandated to assist the ELCA to address sexism, which it does through theology and education.

#### **FaithTrust Institute**

*[www.faitbtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faitbtrustinstitute.org)*

FaithTrust is a leader in educational, faith-based domestic violence resources, including training and consultation. Dedicated to multicultural and inter-faith work, FaithTrust helps groups gain the tools and knowledge necessary to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse.

#### **Lutheran Services in America**

*[www.lutheranservices.org](http://www.lutheranservices.org)*

Within this network of over 300 health and human service organizations, locate services in your area.

### Canada

#### **The Rave Project**

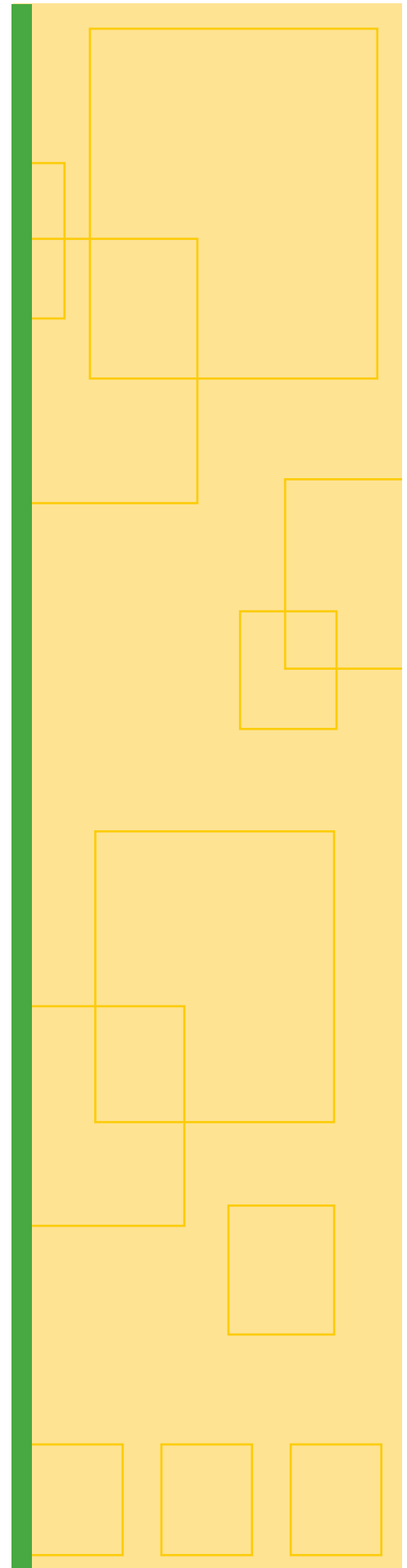
*[www.theraveproject.org](http://www.theraveproject.org)*

Rave (Religion and Violence e-Learning) seeks to equip religious leaders to respond to domestic violence, build bridges between the steeple and the shelter, to walk alongside victims and survivors and to hold abusers accountable for their actions.

#### **PASCH (Peace and Safety in the Christian Home)**

*[www.peaceandsafety.com](http://www.peaceandsafety.com)*

Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (PASCH) is a loose coalition of academics, professionals, clergy and lay people who are alarmed by domestic violence in the Christian home and are interested in solving the problem of abuse in the Christian home.



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