

DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)

Domestic Abuse refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have or have had an intimate relationship in domestic settings. It can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It is most commonly seen in a dating or family relationship. The abuse can be mental, physical, economic, verbal, spiritual or sexual in nature. It includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound someone. Domestic Abuse can happen to anyone, of any race, religion, or gender as well as all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. It may also impact a child or other relative or any other household person. The incidents of abuse usually escalate in frequency and severity and can result in physical injury or death.

THE GOAL OF THE SHEPHERD is to be able to follow easily remembered guidelines if you suspect abuse or have specific knowledge of abuse to know how to respond. If a member of your shepherding group shares a personal matter with you that could indicate some type of abuse, assure them you care very much about what they are experiencing. You are not trained to resolve this problem. However, as a lay shepherd, it is part of our compassionate calling to at least walk the first steps with them toward professional assistance. We are called by God to confront oppression, provide protection and care for the vulnerable.

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.

Isaiah 1:17

Seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Psalms 82:3-4

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

This is the heart of shepherding!

This is why we do what we do in the Mighty Name of Jesus Christ.

With that knowledge and confidence, let's continue:

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WHAT NOT TO DO:

Do not panic if you feel inadequate. Help is only a phone call away!

The greatest gift you can give in this moment is your listening and empathy skills grounded in your love for Christ.

Do not judge this person, it will only add to their pain!

Do not make any decisions for the person or assume you know what is right for them.

Do not pressure them to act.

Do not ask for proof of violence.

Do not try to rescue the person or fix the problem.

Do not break confidentiality.

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WHAT TO DO:

FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES IN YOUR CONVERSATION

LISTEN It is important to listen carefully to the victim's story. Listen to their hurts and concerns. Talk little and ask only a few questions. Abuse silences victims and renders them powerless. Listening restores dignity to the victim. Their experience may not be ordered. They may be frightened, weary and overwhelmed. You are giving them a safe place to tell a difficult story.

You might say: *"Would you tell me more about that?"*

OFFER EMPATHY AND COMPASSION Affirm them with words of encouragement. Keep your voice quiet and slow. Stay present with them in the moment. Look them in the eye. Acknowledge their courage to share this painful reality. An abuse victim often experiences threats, assaults, personal shame, fear, anguish and a belief that it is their fault. If they feel uncared for or unsafe in the moment of disclosure they might not have the courage to seek help. Look for ways to affirm them. Grieve with them and speak truth about what they describe.

You might say: *"I can't imagine how much courage it took for you to share that with me. Thank you."*

BELIEVE THE VICTIM. Abuse is traumatic but disclosing can be more traumatic if the victim isn't believed or is blamed by someone trusted to help. Do not cast doubt on their story.

You might say: *"I am so sorry this happened to you. This is wrong."*

Sometimes, you don't need to say anything. Just look them in the eyes and support with your presence. They will KNOW if you believe them and that is powerful.

VALIDATE AND SUPPORT When an individual discloses abuse this is a time to listen and validate them. Let them know what they are doing is courageous and right. Assure them that abuse is not their fault. They have honored you by coming to you. You are seen as safe, as a shepherd is meant to be. Let them know you want them to be safe and want to help them get the care they need. Check in with how they are feeling.

You might say: *"That must have been incredibly sad/scary/painful/etc."*

EMPOWER the victim. When an individual discloses abuse to you address their SAFETY first. Assure them there are resources and options to protect and assist them.

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The following needs to happen before the person leaves your meeting/this conversation ends:

1. MAKE A SAFETY PLAN

If you are speaking by phone, ask, " *Are you in a safe place right now?*"

If the answer is "**No.**" say, " *Please hang up and dial 911 or go to a safe place and call me from there. Please call me back.*"

If the answer is "**Yes**" ask, " *Do you have a plan if you need to leave?*" Assure the victim there are people and resources in place to support and help make a plan for his/her safety.

A safety plan is a personalized and practical plan on how to remain safe in an abusive relationship while preparing to leave when the timing is right and it is safe to do so. A good plan will contain all the vital information needed to help the victim address safety both at home and at work. It can be hard to think clearly or make logical decisions during moments of crisis. It could take months or longer for a victim to actually leave an abusive relationship. If a person is unsure about using a safety plan, having one in place will give them confidence if needed.

Trained advocates are ready and willing to problem solve with the victim. They will provide **CONFIDENTIAL** assistance in guiding the person in developing a personalized plan.

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2. SHARE RESOURCES

The first is a National Hotline number.

The second, the Shelter for Abused Women and Children is local to the Naples area and can provide protective shelter for the victim and children if needed.

The third number is Covenant's Counseling Center, which has a team of three Domestic Abuse Advocates ready to assist as needed.

RESOURCES LIST:

THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

1-800-799-7233 or text 2252

(SAFE)

<https://www.thehotline.org>

Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week

THE SHELTER FOR ABUSED WOMEN AND CHILDREN NAPLES FLORIDA AREA

CRISIS LINE 239-775-1101

SHELTER CALL OR TEXT 239-775-3862

<https://www.naplesshelter.org/>

Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week

COVENANT COUNSELING CENTER AT COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Charlene Richardson Counseling Director:

Email: Counseling@covenantnaples.com

Office: 239-591-4354

COVENANT COUNSELING CENTER DOMESTIC ABUSE ADVOCATES

Charlene Richardson 239-591-4354

Mary Pendleton 314-616-7444

Debra Griswold 407-902-9023

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

1-800-962-2873

www.myfamilies.com

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3. SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

The victim might feel supported if you offered to be present with them when they make a call for help.

You could support them in what they learn during the call.

Encourage them to create a safety plan with the help of one of the professionals listed, if needed.

You can encourage them to seek counseling at Covenant Counseling Center for more support.

You may contact a Covenant Counseling Center Advocate yourself **ONLY** if you have the victim's permission. Confidentiality and trust is vital in this matter.

It is the victim's choice to receive assistance.

**REMEMBER THE PERSON MUST MOVE FORWARD AT THEIR OWN PACE...
NOT YOURS.**

4. END WELL

With each contact continue to listen well, show empathy and compassion, believe their story, validate and support them in the journey they are taking to be safe. Reassure the person that no matter what they choose as a next step you are there for them. Let them know you will be praying for them. Always ask permission to **PRAY** with them and share Scripture that will support and encourage them. Then make a plan to reconnect either with a phone call or in person.

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IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CONTACT WITH THE VICTIM:

If you have received permission from the victim to contact a Covenant Domestic Abuse Advocate (listed above) you may do so.

Please provide the following information:

Name of victim

Best contact information

Description of abuse

What the victim would like to happen next or what goal they need help with.

Thank you for your willingness to walk alongside this wounded person. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the story you have been told and your experience with the victim, please feel free to contact one of the Covenant Counseling Domestic Abuse Advocates listed above. They will be happy to process your questions and feelings about the experience without names (if permission has not been given) to protect the victim's confidentiality. This ministry is about caring for our shepherds as well as our sheep.

May God bless you as you continue to minister to your flock, especially those who are vulnerable, in the Name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

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A SIMPLE REMINDER:

WHAT TO DO in ministering to victims of Domestic Violence

Listen carefully to the victim's story.

Offer support, empathy, compassion and affirmation.

Validate their experience and BELIEVE their story.

Empower the person with resources that promote safety and well being.