

# **RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS, RABBIS, IMAMS, PRIESTS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

Remember the Goals:

1. SAFETY for the woman and children
2. ACCOUNTABILITY for the abuser
3. RESTORATION of individuals and, IF POSSIBLE, relationships  
OR  
MOURNING the loss of the relationships

## **DOs and DON'Ts with a battered woman**

DO believe her. Her description of the violence is only the tip of the iceberg.

DO reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, it is not God's will for her.

DO give her referral information; primary resources are battered women's services or shelters and National Hotline. **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**  
**1-800-787-3224 (TDD)**

DO support and respect her choices. Even if she is aware of the risks and chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive.

DO encourage her to think about a safety plan: set aside some money; copies of important papers for her and children and a change of clothes hidden or in care of a friend if she decides to go to a shelter. Plan how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent. Plan what to do about the children if they are at school; if they are asleep, etc. (This is both practical and helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Safety planning is a process that is ongoing.)

DO protect her confidentiality. DO NOT give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. Do not discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser.

DO help her with any religious concerns. If she is Christian, give her a copy of **KEEPING THE FAITH: GUIDANCE FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN FACING ABUSE**. Refer to [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) for copies of this book and other helpful info.

DO emphasize that the marriage covenant is broken by the violence from her partner. DO assure her of God's love and presence, of your commitment to walk with her through this valley of the shadow of death.

DO help her see that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.

If she decides to separate and divorce, DO support her and help her to mourn the loss to herself and her children.

DO pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.

DON'T minimize the danger to her. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for your safety . . ."

DON'T tell her what to do. Give information and support.

DON'T react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you. But don't react passively either. Let her know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and not deserved by her.

DON'T blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, try to reframe: "I don't care if you did have supper late or forget to water the lawn, that is no reason for him to be violent with you. This is his problem."

DON'T recommend couples counseling or approach her husband and ask for "his side of the story." These actions will endanger her.

DON'T recommend "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop." None of these will address the goals listed above.

DON'T send her home with just a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church, or be a better Christian wife.

DON'T encourage her to forgive him and take him back.

DO NOT encourage her dependence on you OR BECOME EMOTIONALLY OR SEXUALLY INVOLVED WITH HER.

DON'T do nothing.

DO consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response. Refer to [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) for resources.

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## **DOs and DON'Ts with an abusive partner**

If he has been arrested, DO approach him and express your concern and support for him to be accountable and to deal with his violence.

DON'T meet with him alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the church with several other people around.

DON'T approach him or let him know that you know about his violence unless a) you have the victim's permission, b) she is aware that you plan to talk to him and c) you are certain that his partner is safely separated from him.

DO address any religious rationalizations he may offer or questions he may have. DON'T allow him to use religious excuses for his behavior.

DO name the violence as his problem, not hers. Tell him that only he can stop it; and you are willing to help.

DO refer to a program which specifically addresses abusers.

DO assess him for suicide or threats of homicide. DO warn the victim if he makes specific threats towards her.

DON'T pursue couples' counseling with him and his partner if you are aware that there is violence in the relationship.

DON'T go to him to confirm the victim's story.

DON'T give him any information about his partner or her whereabouts.

DON'T be taken in by his minimization, denial or lying about his violence. DON'T accept his blaming her or other rationalizations for his behavior.

DON'T be taken in by his "conversion" experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as he proceeds with accountability. If it is phony, it is only another way to manipulate you and the system and maintain control of the process to avoid accountability.

DON'T advocate for the abuser to avoid the legal consequences of his violence.

DON'T provide a character witness for this purpose in any legal proceedings.

DON'T forgive an abuser quickly and easily. DON'T confuse his remorse with true repentance.

DON'T send him home with just a prayer. Work with others in the community to hold him accountable.

DO pray with him. Ask God to help him stop his violence, repent and find a new way. DO assure him of your support in this endeavor.

DO find ways to collaborate with community agencies and law enforcement to hold him accountable. For information addressing religion and abuse refer to [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) or contact **FaithTrust Institute** at (206) 634-1903.