

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO VICTIMS AND ABUSERS

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WHEN PEOPLE ARE IN CRISIS THEY . . .

- ❖ Turn to what/who they know can/will help them.
- ❖ Will use the resource (the church) or it will get in their way of safety, healing, repentance, and restoration.
- ❖ The church should be a resource ready to assist families experiencing domestic violence.
- ❖ Do not ignore abuse occurring in the church. By doing this you are creating a climate for justification of abuse.
- ❖ Ask your pastor to present sermons that will educate members about various forms of abuse.
- ❖ When a crisis occurs in your church, be honest. Secrecy only plays into the hand of the perpetrator. If there is knowledge of family violence, credence should not be given to individuals who exhibit violent behaviors, present themselves as victims, and are skillful at soliciting sympathies from the church.
- ❖ Do not attempt to provide counseling or other services which lie beyond your own competence. Have a list of resources available for victims and perpetrators
- ❖ Avoid couple counseling.
- ❖ No matter what the position of the abuser, our primary obligation should be with the safety and welfare of the victim.
- ❖ Hold the abuser accountable for his/her actions. Refer to programs designed to assist perpetrators.

Pastoral Response:

To the Victim:

- Believe the victim and provide safety as quickly as possible.
- Counsel the battered woman without physically touching her.
- Acknowledge your limits. If you are not clinically trained on the issues of domestic violence, refer her to someone who can be a healing resource leading her toward recovery.
- Affirm her courageous act, that of coming to you.
- Affirm her faith no matter where she stands theologically.

- Offer her options in her search for wholeness.
- Quote Scripture passages which are liberating and which offer hope in times of suffering.
- Help her find economic assistance.
- Be with her in her suffering and in her healing.
- Assure her that all her statements to you are strictly confidential

To the Abuser:

- Couples counseling, marriage counseling does not stop abuse. Regardless of the problem, the abuser must be confronted with his abusive behavior.
- Speak directly and clearly to abusers. Body language - nodding or agreeing and helping batterers to deny abusive behavior is dangerous.
- Abusers need to hear that they are not locked into the abusive behavior that they can change, that you will support them.
- Do not assist abusers in:
 - Minimizing their behavior
 - Lying about their behavior
 - Rationalizing behavior, "I was under stress."
 - Blaming others; job, wife, children, etc. "She made me do it"
 - Going to court and being a character witness.
- Acknowledge your limits. It is wise to know how well you are prepared to deal with domestic violence. If you are not trained on the issues of domestic violence, refer him to someone who can be a healing resource leading the couple/family toward recovery.
- Be aware of your own emotional shields of protection. Examine your beliefs before giving pastoral care to perpetrators of domestic violence: Your history of violence in family of origin, your reality or perception about domestic violence, your concepts of headship, submission, the role of women and men, and your scriptural interpretation of separation.

Church Members Response:

- Believe the victim and provide safety.
- Listen with love, sympathy and a non-judgmental attitude.
- Do not perpetuate beliefs relating to stereotype. Anyone can be abusive or abused.
- Be willing to be supportive and offer necessary services.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Develop/Implement educational programs:
- Start early to train children to break the cycle of abuse.
- Teach teenagers who date early warning signs:
 - Showing little regards for their feelings.
 - Isolating them from friends.
 - Abusive to mother, sisters, and other women (or men)

- Exhibiting controlling and manipulative behaviors.
- Blaming others for their personal problems.
- Abuses substances.
- Compulsive behaviors
- Adherence to rigid and compulsive roles.
- Jealous and aggressive
- Little or no regard for partner's or other's property (pets)

Church Leaders and Administrators Response:

- Make the abuser accountable for HIS/HER abusive behavior.
- Follow state laws related to reporting child abuse.
- Remember that it is your Christian duty to help save a soul rather than the church's image.
- Assist in church/community education.
- Instead of relocating a family dealing with domestic violence, facilitate professional assistance for all its members. Remember, without intervention, the problem of domestic violence will be transferred to a new location.
- Financially support initiatives to assist families in crisis
- Be willing to make resources available to victims as well as abusers

- Long term counseling for abusers should be encouraged: (Group counseling is best)
 - They must want to stop
 - They are responsible for their own behavior
 - They must learn new ways to cope with feelings of anger and stress
 - They must learn other ways in which to vent anger and frustration

Long term counseling for victims should be encouraged.

- They must gain self-esteem and assertiveness
- They are responsible **ONLY** for their behavior
- They cannot control others.

ABUSE IS A LEARNED BEHAVIOR. WITHOUT INTERVENTION, THERE IS
USUALLY A NEXT TIME.

