

M. SAFETY OF CHURCH WORKERS

Those who seek to provide intervention in cases of domestic abuse must not only be concerned for the safety of the victim but also for themselves. Working for the interests of the victim will often be perceived by the abuser as the Church working against them with the possibility that animosity may be directed toward those providing assistance. Leaders and workers must be aware that the greatest risk for the victims of domestic abuse is when the victim attempts to leave or immediately after separation).

- a) **Plan ahead.** Safety is the first priority for the survivor and any children. Plan ahead when possible, so that workers or colleagues are not placed in a dangerous situation and take sensible precautions to avoid putting yourself in danger.
- b) **Don't challenge directly.** It is not safe to 'check the story' with the perpetrator, or to challenge in any direct way. To do so places the survivor, children and yourself at serious risk. If it is absolutely necessary to raise the issue with the perpetrator, you should plan carefully and usually obtain professional advice before doing so. [See Appendix 9 – Personal Safety for Pastoral Carers.](#)
- c) **Observe best practice in pastoral care.** Those who meet with victims or abusers need to be aware of the nature of, and constraints of pastoral relationships. In considering safety and good practice in providing pastoral care there should always be more than one person on the premises during planned meetings.
- d) **Don't meet in isolation.** Quiet and confidential places should be available for listening, but ideally someone else should also be aware of where and when a meeting is taking place. This protection is for both listener and the one seeking help.
- e) **Know your limitations.** It is vital that those providing pastoral care be aware of their limitations and know when they need to refer to those who have the competencies they do not possess. Recognise the work of other agencies and work with them. Be able to signpost someone to services that can help. Offer to accompany them to an appointment if that would help. In certain instances, referral is mandatory (e.g. awareness of child abuse, elder abuse or other safety issues or criminal actions). See [Appendix 7 – When to Refer.](#)
- f) **Maintain professional boundaries.** It is vital that while providing pastoral care, church workers maintain professional boundaries to avoid the danger of counter-transference. It is not unusual for victims of abuse who have endured harsh treatment at the hands of an abuser, to form an emotional bond to those who demonstrate care and compassion. Survivors need consistent support. However, the goal of support is empowerment not dependence.
- g) **Share the load.** One church or one pastoral carer, should not try to support both partners in one fellowship. Trying to support both partners makes the church unsafe for the survivor and may be seen to condone the behaviour of the abuser. It should never be the survivor who has to leave the church unless this is the only safe option.

Care for the Carers

Those who provide support to victims of abuse must also safeguard their own psychological wellbeing as well as their physical safety. Carers may often be exposed to disturbing accounts of abuse i.e. rape, battering, cruelty, witness scars and bruises etc, which can be traumatising. The Church has a duty of care not only to victims and perpetrators, but also to carers, and must be intentional about providing support for the supporters where it is required.