

N. PASTORAL SUPPORT FOR PERPETRATORS

Pastoral carers will often struggle with the tension between supporting the victim of domestic violence and their responsibility toward the abuser. It is vital that the victim does not get the impression that the minister is an ally of the abuser. Pastoral workers must make clear that their role towards the offender is one of accountability in the first instance.

Congregations caught up in the situation may need help. Holding the tension between those who are “on the side of” one partner or the other can be very difficult. This is where the support of wider the church or outside agencies can be invaluable. It is important to remember that abused and abuser cannot both be supported in the same church community nor can they be supported pastorally by the same person.

Challenging perpetrators to take responsibility for their attitudes and actions is part of demonstrating that the church considers domestic abuse unacceptable. However, working with perpetrators is extraordinarily difficult work, **which ministers, and other church workers are not trained to do**. Offering support and protection involves recognising the need for work with perpetrators to be undertaken by someone with specialist skills, and where pastoral support from the church and specialist agencies like [The Domestic Violence Intervention Project \(DVIP\)](#) and [Respect](#) can be offered alongside.

1. DOs and DON'Ts with a Perpetrator of Abuse

DO:

- a) **Do hold the perpetrator accountable for their actions.** It should be made clear that it is expected that individuals who are known to be perpetrators will accept whatever discipline the church has agreed. It may be appropriate to draw up a contract between the church and the perpetrator, which outlines any activities, roles or behaviour which are proscribed and any agreed activities. For example, the perpetrator may be required to worship at a different church, not attending particular groups, not taking leadership roles etc. This should be seen as part of the acceptance of the need for repentance and the desire to lead a new life in a different way. The contract will be known only to the minister, those who are providing support, and any essential officers of the church.
- b) **Do appreciate that while perpetrators can change, the vast majority do not.** Desire to see the best in people must not cloud realistic expectations and perceptions. One body of research indicates that around 90% of perpetrators will not avail themselves of the help needed to change.
- c) **Do accept that perpetrators require specialist help from trained professionals.** Abusers tend to be masters of manipulation who specialise in deception. Even clinical councillors without specific training in working with abusers may be limited in their ability to influence change. Research indicates that the most effective form of intervention is perpetrator support groups. Those who are providing support should feel able to work alongside agencies or services working with the individual on a validated, accredited intervention programme.
- d) **Do be realistic about the levels of support that can be offered to perpetrators.** There are not many intervention programmes working with perpetrators, and those run by the probation service work mainly with men who have been convicted. Communities will need to be realistic about the level of support which can safely and effectively be offered to perpetrators who do not have external support.
- e) **Do assess the person abusing for suicide ideation or threats of homicide.** If you are concerned that there is a serious danger that the individual might harm themselves, call the police or social services. Warn the victim if specific threats are made towards them.
- f) **Do realise that change is a long-term process.** In the Christian context, the ultimate goal of working with abusers is not just the cessation of abuse, but the heart transformation of the abuser. Conversion and change are not events, but are processes that require Divine power, time, and consistent support over the

long-haul. The responsibility for overseeing change in the abuser should never rest on the shoulders of one individual.

- g) **Do practice self-care by accessing some form of personal supervision.** Those who are providing support will need their own ongoing support, and opportunity to ensure they remain comfortable with that role, and the issues which may be raised.
- h) **Do pray with them.** Ask God to help them stop their abuse, repent and find a new way. Do assure them of your support in this endeavour either directly or through the support of others.

DON'T:

- a) **Don't meet with them alone.** Meet in a public place or in the church with several other people around (not necessarily in the same room, but in close proximity). If you are going to confront the abuser, take a colleague with you ([Appendix 9 – Personal Safety for Pastoral Carers](#)).
- b) **Don't collude with, excuse or minimize their behaviour.** Perpetrators will latch on to any excuse to justify their behaviour or minimise the consequences of their actions. Don't allow religion to be used as an excuse for their behaviour. Don't be taken in by the abuser's lies or manipulation.
- c) **Don't be taken in by a "conversion" experience.** Don't confuse their remorse with true repentance. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as the abuser proceeds with accountability. If it is false, it is only another way to manipulate you and the system/church and maintain control of the process to avoid accountability.
- d) **Don't approach the abusive person or let them know that you know about the violence unless** a) you have the victim's permission, b) s/he is aware that you plan to talk to the abuser and c) you are certain that the abused person is safely separated from the abuser.
- e) **Don't try to investigate or offer/provide treatment.** Leave treatment to those professionally trained.
- f) **Don't recommend courses in anger management or conflict resolution.** Anger is not the cause of abuse, it is a tactic that the abuser uses to maintain power and control. Conflict resolution is for parties who have an equal investment in a relationship and suggests that both parties are culpable. Domestic abuse, by definition, is an abuse of power. Perpetrators need individual work to address their value systems and the decision making.
- g) **Don't provide a character witness in any proceedings.** Avoid being involved in any processes which may seem as if the Church supports their position. Do not advocate for the perpetrator to avoid the legal consequences of their violence.