



Walk in the way of love

Ending domestic abuse in black majority churches in the UK



A resource toolkit from the Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum

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The logo for Restored, featuring the word "Restored" in a large, bold, orange font with a distressed, hand-painted texture. Below it, the website address "WWW.RESTOREDRELATIONSHIPS.ORG" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font on a black background.

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This pack has been adapted from material produced by Restored (www.restoredrelationships.org), with their kind permission. Restored is an international Christian alliance working to transform relationships and end violence against women.

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Foreword

Black majority churches can be any denomination where churchgoers are mostly people of African or Caribbean heritage. They have been essential as spaces of safety, solace, education, employment and immigration support, fellowship, family, belonging and spiritual uplift in their more than 100-year history, from their origins in Southwark in 1906.¹ We at the Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum (BCDAF) want to encourage black-majority churches also to become change makers in their responses to domestic abuse.

The BCDAF welcomes you to this toolkit. You are reading this because you are concerned about how your church is handling domestic abuse and to learn more about how your church could improve its response to violence – whether physical or emotional.

We share this concern with you. The BCDAF is a group of black Christians, social workers, psychologists, pastors, advocates and academics who are addressing the ‘elephant’ in our congregations that is domestic abuse. Silence and tacit acceptance of domestic abuse undermines our teachings of love and corrupts the emblem of the church as a place of safety and deliverance. Domestic abuse can destroy families and lives, leaving a legacy of violence and hate. This toolkit is a rallying call to those black-majority churches that still need to develop an intentional and purposeful strategy to eradicate domestic abuse from our ministries.

This is a journey that begins with raising awareness and creating a church community that is intolerant to abuse. It continues with being able to provide the right level of support to any in the church who are experiencing abuse, and developing links with professionals who work in our communities and who have the expertise to provide the right kind of help and professional support. It is a challenge for our churches, but one to which we can no longer turn a blind eye.

In Ephesians 5:1, the apostle Paul gives the most poetic and poignant instruction:

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

We are called to be imitators of the God of love, to walk in the way of love as Christ loved us.

1. Adedibu, B. (2013). Origin, migration, globalisation and the missionary encounter of Britain’s black majority churches. *Studies in World Christianity*, 19.1, pp.93-113.

Cappel, C. (2016). Domestic abuse and black-led Pentecostal churches in the UK. In Llewellyn, D. & Sharma, S. (eds.) Religion, equalities and inequalities. *Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series* in association with the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group, pp.186-197. London and New York: Routledge.

Olofinjana, I. (2018). *The impact of Black Majority Churches in Britain*, Transmission (Spring), 11-13.
https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/explore_the_bible/bible_in_transmission/files/2018_spring/The_impact_of_Black_Majority_churches_in_Britain.pdf

Exploring domestic abuse

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1

What is domestic abuse?

The UK Government defines domestic abuse as: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality."

The abuse could be:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial, and/or
- emotional.

What does abuse look like?

Domestic abuse can be very obvious and violent – where someone is assaulted, threatened, humiliated, intimidated, harmed, punished or frightened.

However, it can also take the form of controlling behaviour that is less visible.

Coercive control

Repeated, dominating and controlling behaviour in a familial relationship is a form of coercive control and is also domestic violence. The Government's definition of domestic abuse now includes this behaviour, but it has been a criminal offence in England and Wales since 2015.¹

Financial/economic abuse

Financial/economic abuse is when someone interferes (through control, exploitation or sabotage) with their partner's/spouse's ability to acquire, use and/or maintain resources such as money, housing, transportation, food or clothing.² It can include not fully disclosing sources of income or ringing up credit card or other loans/debt in a partner's/spouse's name. Or, for example, where both partners/spouses work, only the woman's wages are used to spend on household and other expenses.



#CaseStudy

I met my ex-husband at a church conference. It was actually at the suggestion of others that we got together. People would say to us, "You two would make a very good pair". I was a little bit hesitant at first, because he's not from England. But he was really good looking, so we started talking and began a transatlantic relationship. Two months later, I went out to see him in America.

Everything went well to begin with. To be fair, we didn't have much information on him, so I didn't have much knowledge. I did hear a few negative things about him, but I didn't pay attention to most of it because I felt that maybe some of the girls talking might have been jealous.

When we were engaged, everything was fine. Obviously, we had arguments and had to work on things, because we were coming from different backgrounds – and different cultures too, even though we're both black. Black American culture is so completely different to my upbringing as a black British woman with parents from Jamaica. Things began to change when we got married. He seemed to become more insecure. He became quite verbally abusive. He would tell me that I was nothing without him, and that he had made me everything that I am. He even said that it was a good thing I was pretty because of my dark skin. We had some very odd conversations. I remember being pregnant and him questioning whether the baby was his. I was disappointed, because I really wanted to have a child and was happy to be pregnant.

Continued overleaf

1. <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/violence-against-women-and-international-law/coercive-control-and-the-law/>

2. <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/economic-abuse/what-is-economic-abuse/>

Examples of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse includes:

- constantly checking where someone is
- telling them they are ugly, too fat/thin, stupid, useless
- treating them as a servant/slave
- constantly putting someone down or criticising them (for example, telling them they are a bad wife/mother)
- preventing them from seeing friends or family
- not letting them get a job, or making them work long hours, or taking control of their wages
- not letting them leave the children alone, or not allowing them to touch or go near the children
- shouting, smashing things, throwing things, sulking
- hitting, pushing, slapping, kicking and punching
- threatening to hurt someone they care about, such as children or pets
- rape, or making someone do sexual things they don't want to do
- humiliating someone through 'sexting' (sexual messages

- and images sent by mobile phone) or revenge pornography (posting private sexual material online)
- using psychological abuse to make a woman believe the abuse is her fault (sometimes called 'gas-lighting')
- stalking and harassment (including online and texting or constantly calling)
- using Scripture to justify behaviour, for example, "I'm the head of the house and you have to submit to me"
- not giving them any money, or taking all their money from them, or checking exactly what they pay for.

Everyone has the right to feel safe, but domestic abuse sets up and thrives on fear.

Who is affected by domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse can happen in all kinds of relationships: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

It can happen between people who are dating, living together, have children together or are married to each

#CaseStudy continued

The pregnancy was when things got worse between us. He became more aloof and distant, and the verbal abuse escalated. Then when I had a miscarriage, he started being physically abusive. He would fly off the handle at the smallest thing. He slammed me into a door; he used to strangle me. I remember once I brought him a plate of food that I'd cooked. He threw it across the floor and the plate smashed. I was on the phone to someone and they heard the noise, and I tried to make something up. I said, "It's fine, don't worry".

I didn't know what to do. I thought that maybe if I tried to use sex, he would respond. At the time, nothing was happening in that department – and from the moment I got pregnant, nothing ever happened again in that arena. So I tried to make things better using sex, but it didn't work. He would tell me that I was disgusting to him. He threw me across the room, and then he got a knife from the kitchen, put it under his pillow and said that if I touched him, he would use it. That was really horrible.

He said I shouldn't wear trousers. I wasn't wearing trousers at the time, but I had a suitcase full of my old ones, and he took it and cut them all up – and left them for me to see when I came home from work. He would come to my workplace and just cause a scene – I ended up losing that job. It was really hard to live.

I wasn't telling anyone in church about this, but my friends saw bruises on my arms, and they were like, "What on earth is that?". I would say, "Oh, it's nothing" or "I fell over" – the usual kind of stories. But then, one day, things got so bad that I ran away from our home.

When I eventually did tell my dad what was happening, people in church were really surprised. We had done a really good job of not displaying what was going on at home in public. People in church were disappointed in him, but he didn't get into trouble over it. The response was more like, "Take some time to find yourself again".

As far as I know, he never got reprimanded at all over it. And I think that, in the black Pentecostal Church, it's like adultery – "these things happen" – and that's it. The church's response to me was, "You should stay with him" or "Men do hit sometimes". It was frustrating, and it led me to believe that this happens a lot more, and women just live in that situation, just praying and hoping that maybe one day the abuse will stop. My ex-husband even got some famous bishops within our church fellowship to talk to me on his behalf, and basically tried to bully me into going back to him. It was all about what I must do to make him look good. Having the support of my family really helped me to be able to let go.

The process of letting go was hard. It was only when he was out of the country that I found the strength to seek some counselling and tell my pastor what was happening. I can talk to him when I see him now, because I'm really good at letting go of people and I let go of him a long time ago. But it still makes me feel weird to think that such a thing could have happened to me. When I look back now, I can see where I could have seen certain signs in his behaviour that would potentially lead to being abusive.

I think that churches have improved since the time I went through what I went through, because a lot more people talk about it today. It's much more socially acceptable now for women to explain, or for men to come forward. Even my ex-husband now admits publicly that he did something wrong, whereas before he wouldn't admit to it. Before, he would blame me for everything, but now he admits that he did hit me, and that he shouldn't have done that. Generally, I believe things are improving in the way the black church deals with domestic abuse. But there's still much work to be done. There is a way to go, but we have come a long way. Now people talk about it openly. They share their testimony, they give advice, more marriage workshops are being held, and people are much more open – on marriage as a whole. That really helps.

other. It can happen when people live either together or separately. It can happen after the relationship or marriage has ended. It can happen to people regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or social background.

It can happen to people who regularly attend church and are Christians.

Women

In practice, the vast majority of domestic abuse is violence against women. In 2013, the UN reported that, globally, one in three women will suffer abuse in their lifetime.

Taking the UK's crime statistics for 2018:

- on average two women were killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales¹
- crime related to domestic abuse made up 12% of total crime,² and
- where genders were recorded, 93% of prosecutions were against men and 83.7% of victims were women.³

Men

Men can experience domestic abuse – by either men or women. UK crime statistics for 2017-18 showed that 1.3 million women and 695,000 men had suffered some form of domestic abuse.⁴

However, men are also the main perpetrators of domestic abuse. The most repeated and severe forms of abuse are carried out by men. In the UK crime statistics for 2015-2017, while 81% (283) of female murder victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner, the same figure for male victims was 13% (45).⁵

Children

A UK research project found that one in seven children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic abuse at some point in their childhood.⁶

NHS London⁷ estimated that in abusive households:

- half of the children are being directly abused by the same person who is abusing their mother
- nine out of 10 children are in the same or the next room when abuse is taking place, and
- three-quarters of children on the 'at risk' register live in households where domestic abuse occurs.

Children can be hurt or manipulated, or be victims of the abuse. They may be damaged by neglect or by being told to 'keep it a secret'. Sometimes children are forced by the



adult abuser to join in with the abuse.

Forcing a child to witness domestic abuse is now seen as a form of child abuse. Domestic abuse may bring a child to the attention of social services.

Teenagers

Young people and teenagers may also experience abuse in their relationships. The abuser may be an older partner or another young person. Sometimes, jealousy in these relationships can be disguised, or misinterpreted by the victim, as care and concern – especially a problem where someone has become isolated from their friends.

In 2009, the NSPCC reported the results of surveys⁸ carried out with teenagers from eight UK schools. They found that:

- a quarter of the girls and 18% of the boys had experienced partner violence, and
- nearly three-quarters of girls and half of boys reported some form of emotional partner violence.

The risks rose significantly, the larger the age gap between the partners.



1. Office for National Statistics. *Domestic abuse in England and Wales, year ending March 2018*. Chapter 11: Domestic abuse related specific crime types.
2. Office for National Statistics. *Domestic abuse in England and Wales, year ending March 2018*. Chapter 4: Prevalence of domestic abuse.
3. Crown Prosecution Service. *Violence against women and girls report, 2017-18*, A11.
4. Office for National Statistics. *Crime statistics, focus on violent crime and sexual offences, year ending March 2018*. Chapter 11: Domestic abuse related specific crime types.
5. Office for National Statistics, *Crime statistics, focus on violent crime and sexual offences, year ending March 2017*, p.18.
6. Radford, L., Aitken, R., Miller, P., Ellis, J., Roberts, J. and Firkic, A. (2011). *Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London*. London: NSPCC/Refuge, p9.
7. London NHS (2015), *Impact upon children*. www.domesticviolencelondon.nhs.uk/1-what-is-domesticviolence-/8-impact-upon-children.html
8. NSPCC (2009), *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*, Executive summary.



Family and friends

Witnessing or knowing about abuse can be traumatic for friends and family. They may often feel powerless to help – especially if their loved one is in denial or if they are being kept apart. But family and friends can also be a significant source of support, particularly when someone takes steps to leave their abusive partner.

Churchgoers

Abuse occurs among UK church members too, as several surveys have shown.

- In 2002, the Methodist Church found that 17% of respondents to a survey had been victims of domestic abuse – mainly by husbands and partners.¹
- In 2010, a survey by the Evangelical Alliance found 10% of women had suffered physical abuse and 7% of men admitted being violent.²
- In 2013, a survey by *Premier Christianity Magazine*, together with the Restored Christian alliance, found 40% had been intimidated and 16% had been victims of physical violence.³
- In 2013, a survey of 438 churchgoers in Cumbria, carried out by Aune and Barnes (2018), together with the Restored Christian alliance, found one in four reported abusive behaviour and 16-25% sought support from a church.⁴

Recognising the signs of domestic abuse

By raising awareness, we can begin to recognise the signs that someone is being abused, overcoming the silence, social stigma and shame that surround this issue.

Warning signs can be difficult to spot because abusers are good liars, while victims, through shame and fear, become very skilled at hiding what is happening. Sometimes they don't see themselves as victims – especially if the abuse is not physical or sexual.

However, here are some example warning signs.

- A woman may never be seen alone; her partner may always be with her.
- She may become more and more isolated, possibly moving a long way from family. She may not have any friends, or may gradually stop seeing them. She may stop coming to church.
- Her partner may talk over her or for her, and she may be reluctant to speak. Her partner may appear controlling or may regularly make disparaging comments about her.

- She may have unexplained injuries and make excuses about them. (Be aware that most perpetrators make sure the injuries they inflict can easily be covered up.)
- She excuses her partner's inappropriate behaviour in public.
- She has no access to money or suddenly loses her job.
- She has to have regular, unexplained time off work, or is often late for work.
- Her partner tells people he is the victim of domestic abuse.
- Her partner may be unsociable with her friends, family and colleagues, or he may be extremely charismatic and friendly to everyone.
- If she has children, she may find them difficult to control. They may call her names and ignore her. Or they may be extremely clingy around her.
- She may not want people to visit her at home, or not want to give her address and contact details.

What to do if you are worried

If you are worried about someone you know, don't ignore or minimise what you noticed. If you're in doubt, talk to a local domestic abuse service.

If you witness an incident or hear something worrying, phone the police on 101 (or 999 in an emergency, or if children are present). You don't need to leave your name.

Domestic abuse in UK law

The UK has criminal and civil law on domestic abuse. For free advice on taking legal action, call the National Centre for Domestic Violence on 0800 970 2070 (www.ncdv.org.uk). The NCDV can make referrals, including to a panel of specialist solicitors, who are used to getting court orders in an emergency. They can also advise on whether the victim qualifies for free legal aid.

Criminal law

Many acts of domestic abuse are criminal. If there is enough good quality evidence, the police can build a case and the Crown Prosecution service can prosecute. The victim doesn't necessarily have to consent.

A criminal court can impose a 'restraining order', making it an automatic offence for a perpetrator to contact or visit their victim for up to five years.

Civil law

Many types of abuse are not crimes in themselves, for example when an abuser tries to control a victim by obsessively contacting them, communicating with them in a way that causes emotional or psychological damage, or refusing to leave their property.

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1. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-domestic-violence-the-way-forward-2002.pdf>
 2. *How's the family?* Evangelical Alliance, 2012. www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/how-the-family.cfm
 3. <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2013/December-2013/Domestic-violence-and-the-UK-Church>
 4. https://restored.contentfiles.net/media/resources/files/churches_web.pdf

However, in cases like this, or where there is stronger evidence of abuse that has not led to criminal prosecution, the family court can grant a 'non-molestation' order. These orders can forbid an abuser from contacting, abusing or visiting the victim, or a child in the family, and stop them from going to the family home. Breaching the order is a criminal offence.

An order of this type can sometimes be used to tell an abuser they must stop living with their victim.

Clare's Law or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

Under this scheme launched in March 2014, people have the right to ask the police whether a new or existing partner has a violent past. If police checks show that someone might be at risk of domestic violence from their partner, the police will consider passing on this information.

It's important to note that the police don't know about most perpetrators.

Police protection notices and orders

The police can take action with or without the co-operation of the victim – especially if injuries are severe or there is an ongoing history of violence. They can issue a domestic violence protection notice and apply to the magistrates' court for a protection order. The order is designed to protect someone from abuse and can prevent a live-in perpetrator from returning home or contacting the victim for 28 days. Breaching the order will land someone in court.

Third-party reporting centres

Third-party reporting centres are community locations where someone can report domestic abuse safely, without having to visit a police station. Staff are trained to deal sensitively with victims and the report will be forwarded to the police and/or the council as requested.

Stalking and harassment

Following, watching, spying on, or forcing any kind of contact with someone (known as 'stalking') is illegal under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, as amended in 2012. So is harassment of other people connected to the victim.

Concerned courts can even issue a restraining order on someone who is acquitted of stalking or harassment – using section 12 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

For more information, go to the Stalking Helpline page at www.suzyplamplugh.org

'Revenge porn'

Sharing private sexual photos or videos without someone's consent, became illegal in 2015. This prevents the material being used to embarrass or distress, or to make money on revenge porn websites. A perpetrator can go to prison for up to two years, be fined, or both. A victim can go to court for a non-molestation order to prevent material being released on pain of arrest.

People with 'no recourse to public funds'

If the victim is in the UK on a temporary work permit, or a student or spousal visa, they aren't eligible to use public funds. This also applies to people who don't have paperwork. As well as denying state benefits – a problem for someone trying to restart their lives away from an abuser – it also means no access to free legal aid.

Myths about domestic abuse

We all have attitudes, beliefs or ideas about domestic abuse. We may need to challenge our common misconceptions.

Why doesn't the abused woman just leave?

Abused women often lack the choice or the means to leave. An abusive man sets up a pattern of coercive control – undermining his victim until she believes she can't do without him. Sometimes leaving seems financially impossible – especially with children.

Statistically, women are most at risk of being murdered when they are trying to leave an abusive person. It's a very dangerous thing to do. Instead of asking why women don't leave, we should be asking, "Why doesn't he stop?"

It doesn't happen in our church

Domestic abuse also happens within the church community. Church leaders and prominent members of local churches have been found to be abusers. The reality for someone married to or in a relationship with an abuser in these circumstances can be horrific. On top of the abuse they are suffering, they can also feel a responsibility to the church their partner is leading, and feel compelled to stay quiet and continue to suffer.

It happened because...

Domestic abuse is commonly thought to be caused by alcohol or drug misuse; unemployment; mental or physical health problems; stress; or having lived through abuse as a child. Any of these may be a trigger, but they are not the underlying cause of domestic violence. For one thing, domestic violence is not about being angry or 'losing control'. It's about being in control.

Women are often bruised on parts of their body that are not normally visible. Or they are abused in private. A man being this selective is making a conscious choice to have control and power over another person. Other reasons given for the perpetrator's behaviour are excuses to justify the abuse.



She must have done something to provoke him

A man will often tell his partner that she 'made' him do it. Many victims are asked, "What did you do to let things get this bad?" But abuse is a choice. A woman is never responsible if a man chooses to become abusive. This myth dangerously places the blame for the abuse on the victim rather than on the abuser.

It can't really be that bad; she must be exaggerating

It is important to believe a victim of abuse. You may be the first person they have told. If you express disbelief or suggest they might have exaggerated, you may stop them seeking the help and support they need. You may risk their safety.

Most women living in threatening and controlling situations are reluctant to admit what is happening to them for many reasons, including the shame of being abused. Women can blame themselves for being 'too weak', despite having survived the abuse thus far.

He has become a Christian and is repentant, so it won't happen again

It is sometimes possible for perpetrators to change and be transformed through facing reality, being repentant, making restitution, being held to account, and doing the hard work (with God's power) of changing.

However, some perpetrators just appear repentant or appear to become Christian, so that they can carry on being abusive. If someone seems to come to faith in Christ and/or appears repentant or remorseful, we cannot take this at face value. We should watch things unfold over a long period of time and regularly consult with the victim.

Marriage is 'for better or worse'

Marriage vows endorse the idea that you are committed to staying with each other 'for better or worse'. Often, they are used to further pressurise an abused women into staying with her spouse. Some women think that if they took a vow to love him, they need to stay with him even when things go from bad to worse – and even when their life is in danger.

To dismiss or ignore a woman's suffering because she is married to an abuser, or to say that she must 'suffer' through it, not only lacks compassion but underestimates the serious nature of abuse. It is dangerous to dismiss abuse as a 'normal marital problem'.

Domestic abuse is a personal/family matter and we shouldn't interfere

Many people think that what happens in the home is private, and not their problem. Domestic violence – abusing, battering, assaulting or raping another person –

The church we went to didn't want to interfere. They thought we had 'normal marital problems'. They didn't accept there is no excuse for violence against your partner.¹

Everyone thought he was a good Christian as he regularly went to church and was involved...¹

I was asked, "What did you do to provoke him?" I was told I was to repent from being in this situation.¹

is a criminal offence and therefore a public matter, which has far-reaching social implications for everyone. It affects the victim, their children and those around them.

Domestic abuse does not happen to women who are independent and strong

Cultural stereotypes about women of African and Caribbean heritage suggest they are strong, more resilient and will not suffer the emotional consequences of domestic violence – low mood, fear and worry. These are myths that might influence women into thinking they can manage or have not been victimised.²

What healthy relationships look like

The Freedom Programme (www.freedomprogramme.co.uk) describes positive behaviours in this way:

A healthy relationship is when two people treat each other with trust and respect, which are hallmarks of a Christian marriage. In a healthy relationship, people:

- support and encourage each other
- listen to each other
- when they have a disagreement or conflict, talk about it and work it through together
- spend quality time together
- take responsibility for their own actions
- respect women and men equally
- engage emotionally and support one another.

Conclusion

When we talk about domestic abuse, it is important to talk about power. Domestic abuse results from unequal power relations between men and women. The abuse of power and control of another person stem from a choice, underpinned by the belief that one is superior to the other. We have to address this attitude if we are going to see an end to violence against women.

Reflection:

Can you think of other misconceptions about abuse that exist in your church or in society in general?

1. Quotes taken from material produced by Restored (www.restoredrelationships.org). See inside front cover.

2. Kanyeredzi, A. (2018). *Race, culture and gender: black female experiences of violence and abuse*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

#A pastor's perspective

Violence is a form of abuse that is just another of way of holding people bound in a situation that is harmful.

Whatever situation violence takes place in, the church is required by scripture to take a stand against it, especially when it takes place in the home. This is why Christians must speak out vehemently against domestic violence and act to eradicate it.

Churches must take a lead and advocate for those who experience domestic violence. But before we advocate, we must educate and raise awareness of the issue.

We need to talk about domestic violence from our pulpits: talk about why it happens and its impact on lives and families.

We must also educate members about domestic violence (DV) in the various ministries in our churches, whether it's the youth department, men's departments, women's departments – and find practical ways to support those who experience it. Practical ways for the church to ensure that its membership do what they have to do.

Often, people who go through domestic violence and abuse are emotionally blackmailed and don't feel comfortable speaking out about it. The church must create safe spaces where people going through DV can speak about it.

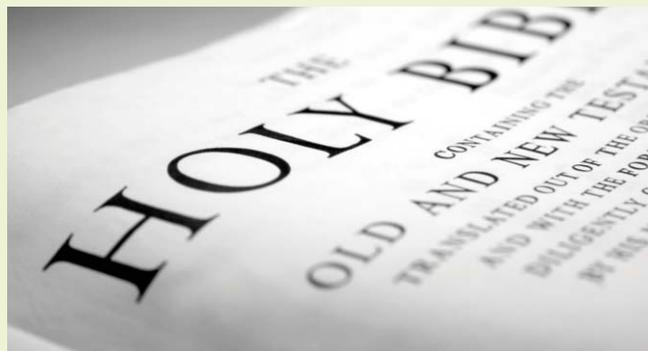
Church leaders should view themselves as advocates on domestic violence. We deal with the issue at a grass roots level and, as a result, we are informed about its causes and impacts. It is imperative we take practical steps to be a voice on the matter to statutory agencies, and the voluntary and private sector, so that when policies are being made they are relevant.

Most church leaders have had to deal with DV at some point or other in their ministry.

I recall a number of instances where I dealt with it. I once pastored a Christian man who used to beat his wife severely. I told him, if you continue this way, whilst I'm not for divorce I will advocate separation from your wife to give time for you to deal with your issues. I will not allow you to sit on your wife and beat the hell out of her.

The last time he did it, I worked, with the co-operation of the wife, for them to separate so they could deal with their issues. They went through counselling etc. They are now together and are inseparable.

There was another incident I dealt with where a husband verbally abused his wife and stated he would kill her in front of their children. The mother called me shaking. I told her to call the police and report him for what he said, because he did so in front of their primary school children. She responded, "Isn't that stretching it too far?" I replied, "You will thank me when you have done it."



So said, so done. When the children went to school, whilst playing with their friends they shared what their father had said to them and their mother. The teachers overheard and called the authorities. In no time at all, the police and social services were at the parents' home.

They told the mother they had heard about what the father had said, were there to protect the kids and wanted to know how she responded to her husband's verbal threat.

She was able to say she reported the incident to the police and show them the police report.

As a result of his threatening talk, the husband was restricted from the house for about three months until he got himself together. The social services informed the mother that if she had not taken action (i.e., phoned the police) they would have removed her children, because they would have believed she was collaborating with her husband.

When the husband left the family home, he sorted himself out and went out to pastors asking them to advocate for his wife to take him back. Today he and his wife are the best of friends. Sometimes there is a need for a breaking for a making.

I'm pleased that that the church is rightly drawing attention to the issue of domestic violence.

The Bible encourages us to strive for the wellbeing of people and communities, and that we must seek the peace of the city. Peace means tranquillity and security, therefore it is imperative upon us as a church and Christian community that we must help people feel safe and secure where they are, which includes in their homes. And one way we can ensure people feel safe is by getting rid of the blight of domestic violence and abuse

Rev. Ade Omooba

#A sister's perspective

When I started writing for *The Voice* newspaper in 1988, domestic violence was the unspoken secret within Britain's black Pentecostal churches. It took place within Christian homes, but you wouldn't know it, because no one talked about it, especially those that suffered from it. It was never preached about from the pulpits and women's ministries did not touch on the subject at all.

Fast forward to 2019, and domestic violence is a topic that is now out in the open, both in, and out of the church. Women, and a few men, now openly share their stories of the violence and abuse they have shared within their relationships, and some are demanding that the church join the discussion, engage with the issue and be part of the solution.

Thankfully, the church is listening. And this historic toolkit resource about domestic violence for the black Christian community is the result.

Research has found that one in four women will experience DV, irrespective of their faith, background, educational attainment or profession. With this fact in mind, it makes perfect sense that this DV toolkit has been produced.

It provides insight and information that victims of domestic violence and abuse, church leaders, heads of ministries, DV advocates and other interested parties can use to learn more about the subject and how to confront and combat the issue, on both an individual and church level.



This toolkit contains important data about domestic abuse, as well as case studies of Christian women who've experienced domestic abuse, and scriptural reflections as to why domestic abuse and violence is unacceptable and should have no place within Christian marriages and relationships, or wider society.

I believe this toolkit marks a major turning point in how the black Pentecostal churches will look at and deal with domestic violence and that it offers insight, practical advice and hope for sufferers, and those who want to eradicate this major blight from within our community.

Marcia Dixon

Reflections on theology

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

A challenge for Christians

Violence against women and domestic abuse are often difficult to discuss, as they challenge our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour. Yet, to bring an end to violence against women, it is vital that Christians take the time and summon the courage to challenge ourselves and those around us.

We need to:

- listen for the voice and wisdom of God
- be open to being challenged
- be open to changing our attitudes, opinions and behaviours
- operate from a basis of love not fear
- note that it takes courage to change, and understand that it takes courage to challenge your friends, family and colleagues.

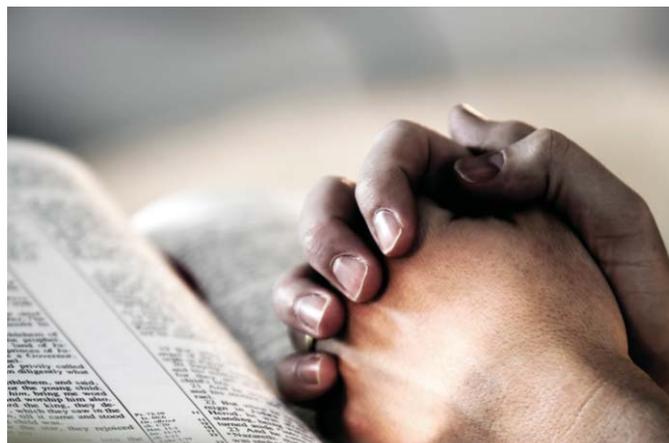
For many people, lack of awareness is a key barrier, especially as they read and interpret Scripture when thinking about this issue. The foundations for understanding the Bible's teaching on these matters are as follows.

- It is important to recognise the divine authority of the Bible: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16).
- The word of God in the Bible must be understood in relation to His incarnate Word, Jesus: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1).
- All this must be understood within the context of love: *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love* (1 Corinthians 13:13).
- For any and all actions we take, an account will be required of us: *Each of us will give an account of himself before God* (Romans 14:12).

Let's start with the fundamental issue of our identity.

Who are you?

Made in the image of God, you are wonderfully created, beautifully made, loved, adored, restored, forgiven, amazing, worth dying for, unique, an heir, part of a family, highly valuable, legitimate, God's artwork, in direct communication with God Himself.



You have direct access to the King of Kings, and you are powerful. You are loved just the way you are.¹

When we don't see ourselves the way God sees us, we can experience problems with our identity, and, in some cases, an identity crisis. This lack can create a desire in many of us to grasp for meaning and significance outside our identity in Christ. We find ourselves being influenced by the world's system of power rather than God's.

Power and relationships

Striving to find significance does not happen in isolation. When we feel a lack of power or significance, we often try to gain it through striving for things such as power over others, wealth, assets, fame, etc. A misuse of power within our intimate relationships creates a context where abuse can thrive. Therefore, when an identity crisis occurs (when we don't see who we are in God), our crisis affects and has an impact on those around us.

Let us take a few minutes to reflect on some of the following verses. Can they help us see how important it is to identify our misuse of power in our relationships?

- God is love (1 John 4:8) and Christians are commanded to love one another (John 15:12).
- Every person is made in the image of God and has value (Genesis 1:27).
- God upholds the cause of the oppressed (Psalm 146:7).

1. Psalm 139:14; Romans 8:35–39; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 3:20; 1 John 5:18; John 1:12; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Ephesians 1:5; Colossians 1:14; Colossians 2:10. Taken from Freedom in Christ Ministries, www.ficm.org.uk

#CaseStudy

I was married for 14 years to my first husband, before we separated and got divorced. In 2006, I met someone else and remarried. It was a long-distance relationship, but he was someone I'd known since childhood, so I thought it would work out – but it didn't.

The relationship started off really well for the first couple of years. But as it went on, this man started to show off his true colours. I had a house, which I sold, then moved into his, and he wanted me to buy into his property, or pay rent. I agreed to buy into his property, but it felt really formal and business-like. However, I didn't want to be seen to be taking advantage of him, so I went along with it. I've always worked part time because of my children, so I suggested that rather than buying in 50 per cent of the property, I would buy in 45 per cent until I could afford to go back to the bank to borrow the remaining five per cent. He said, "You can buy in 45 per cent, but then you must pay rent on the five per cent that you don't own".

I went along with this at first, for four or five years. Then I got to a point where I'd brought the mortgage payments down sufficiently, and I said to him, "I'm in a position now to go back to the bank, borrow the remaining five per cent and we'll be 50-50 in the property". He said, "It's not in my interest to sell to you right now, because house prices are low". So I was left in a situation where I didn't feel on principle that I should even have to pay this five per cent rent because we were husband and wife.

When I stopped paying the 'five per cent rent' as he called it, he got really, really nasty. He was very controlling. He accused me of not wearing the right clothes, and he would get stroppy with me if I put on a bit of makeup. I'm a spontaneous person; if I'm in town and decide to go on a detour to buy a loaf of bread at another store, I may be late getting home. But if I didn't say at the beginning of my day exactly where I was going, it wasn't happening. This controlling behaviour was really difficult to live with, and I'm glad to be free from it now.

There were times when he'd do things to sabotage my sleep. I know it sounds trivial, but sleep deprivation is something used in warfare; it's a tool used to break a person down. If he were having one of his days, I'd decide to sleep in the spare room. He would make sure that my sleep was disturbed; he would come into the room and turn the light on, empty all the dirty washing around me – at two o'clock in the morning! I would have to get up and turn the lights off, clear the bed and go back to bed – and then he would come up again at four o'clock and do something else. When that happened, night after night after night, I got to a point where I went to my doctor and said, "I'm really depressed; I keep crying all the time". He asked what was happening at home and I described what was going on. He said, "You're not depressed; you're just sleep-deprived because of what your husband is doing to you". I was shocked to hear someone else say it. I was trying to cope and be strong and keep going, but it was really difficult.

We had two lounges. We weren't getting on at this stage, as I wasn't paying the 'rent'. I was trying to protect my children (who aren't his) and have family time with them. I moved the furniture round in one of the lounges so that we would have somewhere nice to sit and watch television. He would keep moving the furniture back, and then he would call the police because I'd moved the furniture. At the time, I thought, "What a silly man!" The police came round my house at half past one in the morning to see if I was okay, and I said I was fine. They said, "Your husband's called because you're moving the furniture". I didn't think anything of it, but because we'd wasted police time, they blacklisted my telephone number. Then on another occasion, he grabbed my handbag off me and pushed me to the ground when I tried to get it back. I tried to get the bag again, he did the same thing. I didn't feel safe, so I called the police and they said, "Your number's been blacklisted. We're not coming; you sort it out". He knew what he was doing by calling the police for a trivial matter like moving the furniture, because he knew that they wouldn't respond to our number.

I went to Women's Aid, as it was called back then, and got some advice from them. They were fantastic. With their help and support, I also liaised with the police. I decided that I needed to move out and find temporary accommodation. With the help of the Domestic Violence Unit and the police, we moved out on an evening when we knew he was going to be out of the house. I put my stuff in storage and stayed at my sister's house for a while until I found rented accommodation.

I have now purchased a new home in my home city. I'm around my family and friends, and I've got a church, and through a very painstaking, long and expensive divorce, I managed to get my money out of the property and buy my own. My children are settled and happy. I've got myself a good full-time job, and am enjoying life. I haven't remarried; I'm single, and happily so. I feel much more fulfilled, and my children are much happier as a result.

My advice to anyone in similar circumstances would be to find someone to talk to who can give you good advice. It may not necessarily be your church minister; it might be a counsellor or an independent organisation. But don't internalise domestic abuse and think it's okay – ever. It will cause more harm to you emotionally and physically, and if you have children, you're teaching them that a dysfunctional relationship is okay. It's never okay to tolerate domestic abuse in any way, shape or form. Think about yourself, and if you've got children, think about the harm that it's causing them too. And do something about it.





- The essence of Christianity is sacrificial love and service, not power and domination (Matthew 20:16).
- The Bible instructs men to love their wives and lay down their lives for them (Ephesians 5:25).
- Our oneness in Christ is emphasised – there is no difference between male and female in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28).
- Christians are commanded to do good to all people (Galatians 6:10).
- Loving relationships in the family and in society are at the core of Christianity (John 13:34–35).

The example of Jesus

- Jesus warned his followers not to seek or abuse power (Matthew 20:25–28).
- One of Jesus’s purposes was to liberate the oppressed (Luke 4:18).
- Jesus brought healing and restoration (Matthew 12:15).
- Jesus respected and empowered women (e.g. Luke 13:10–13).

Following Jesus involves serving others with love, not manipulating and controlling them. He commanded us to *love one another* (John 13:34). Family relationships are meant to reflect God’s love. God grieves when a home turns into a place of fear, suffering and pain. His desire for those involved with domestic violence – both victims and abusers – is healing and wholeness. God is love and the power of love is far greater than the love of power.

Having increased our understanding of how we can wrongly draw significance from the misuse of power, let us now try to examine a few concepts and verses from the Bible and see how they relate to the issue of power and our roles as men and women of God.

There are not many verses in the Bible that relate to, still less condemn, violence against women. The story or the context is very important when looking at specific verses. We need to examine and reflect on biblical passages that are often misquoted and misused – in some contexts to justify abuse.

Take time to reflect on and discuss these eight key verses.¹

1. Other Scripture verses to explore: how does Jesus treat women in these passages: Luke 8:40–53; John 4:1–42; John 8:1–11? You will see Jesus always treats women with dignity and respect.

Verse 1: Submission

Ephesians 5:22 – *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.*

Questions: What do you think this verse says? Does it mean the wife has to obey her husband in everything?

Does it give men the right to punish or abuse their wives if they feel they aren’t being submissive? Does God abuse us if we do not submit to Him?

Take a look at the verse in context. Read the previous verse, 5:21. What does this tell us? To submit does not mean to obey; it means to willingly choose to place oneself under another. It is always done in the context of love. Can you demand submission? Did Jesus demand, or offer choices?

Thoughts: Submission is a choice: it cannot be forced; it must be chosen. Not submitting can never justify abuse.

Verse 2: Power and superiority

Ephesians 5:23 – *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.*

Questions: Does this mean that the man is the head, and therefore he has all the power and the right to assert it? What does the example of Christ as the head of the church tell us about the kind of headship a husband has to model? Does ‘headship’ mean superiority or does it mean humility and the laying down of power in sacrificial love?

Thoughts: The headship Christ modelled was never forced – it was a choice. It also meant His being willing to lay down His life for His bride, the church. The Ephesians verse goes on to say: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church* (Ephesians 5:25). How are husbands demonstrating this in their own homes?

Verse 3: Creation of woman

Genesis 2:18 – *The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*

Questions: Does this mean that women are inferior to men, as they are seen to have been made ‘second’, and therefore that women’s role is subservient? Consider the word ‘helper’ (ezer), here referring to women; this word often refers to God in Old Testament usage (e.g. 1 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 121:1–2). Is a doctor, who helps a patient, subservient to the patient?

Thoughts: Consider the suggestion of female inferiority in the light of all that has been said – does this concept still hold value?

Verse 4: Weakness and sinfulness

Genesis 3:6 – *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Questions: Eve took the fruit, and gave some to her husband. How can this reinforce the idea that some have that women are weaker and more likely to be sinful?

Consider Romans 5:12–21: *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.*

Thoughts: Man and woman were both participants in the Fall; therefore, Adam was no less to blame than Eve.

Verse 5: Ruling over

Genesis 3:16 – *To the woman he said: Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*

Questions: Is this a description of how it is between men and women, or is it that a consequence of sin is that a man will rule over his wife?

Thoughts: Is there any evidence from the creation story to indicate that men and women were not equal before the Fall? How does Jesus's redemptive sacrifice change things?

Verse 6: Understanding forgiveness

Matthew 6:12 – *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

Questions: Can we see that sin has consequences and that forgiving does not remove those consequences?

Should forgiving someone mean disregarding what they have done and maintaining the same relationship with them, regardless of whether they change? Should women continue to stay in a dangerous situation and face abuse in order to forgive their partners?

Thoughts: Forgiveness is a process and must not nullify the consequences of abuse or mean that the situation must continue as it always has. Whether a person forgives or not, there are consequences to actions. Not holding a perpetrator of abuse to account can disable repentance, and therefore prevent a change in attitude and behaviour.

Verse 7: Abuse as suffering

1 Peter 1:6 – *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

Questions: Do you think that a woman should accept abuse as being 'her cross' and that her suffering will only increase her faith? Do you think God wants abused women to be safe and protected, and not to put their lives in danger?



Thoughts: By staying in an abusive situation, a woman is risking being murdered. Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman expresses His compassion for the marginalised and wronged. Furthermore, this is an example of how Scripture can be misused or abused in order to keep a woman in an abusive situation. This passage wasn't written with domestic abuse in mind, let alone to condone it.

Verse 8: Marriage and divorce

Matthew 5:32 – *But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery...*

Questions: Is marriage a contract or a covenant? What do you understand by this? Divorce is the breakdown of that covenant.

If a man abuses a woman and she leaves him to protect herself, is she responsible for breaking the covenant? Isn't he responsible for breaking the covenant by abusing her?

Thoughts: If his wife chooses to divorce him, she is making public his breaking of the covenant, not going against what the Bible teaches.



Conclusion

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2)

God is love and gives us the freedom to have a loving relationship with Him. We can choose to demonstrate our love for Him and to reflect His love for us by having loving, healthy relationships. Just as God never humiliates or belittles us, a man who loves his partner must treat her with respect.

In conclusion, we believe that:

- all violence against women is wrong and must stop
- Scripture cannot be used to justify violence
- the church has an answer and can be part of the solution
- men and women can work together to end violence, and
- the time to act is now!

How can the church respond?

The church is called to be a place that serves the community and reflects Christ's love. We cannot underestimate the influence and responsibility we have in being salt and light, and in transforming communities.

Inspiring change

Sadly, women with Christian beliefs are often prevented from speaking out about domestic abuse. They can be reluctant to go to secular organisations that don't understand Christian teaching on relationships, but, at the same time, feel unable to approach their own church – either because of the shame and stigma, or because their abusive partner may be part of the leadership or congregation.



As churches, we can either be part of the problem or part of the solution.

Three levels of response for churches

It takes time, understanding and a calling to make a difference on domestic abuse. Not all churches will be able to provide support, but every church needs to be aware of this issue. We think there are three levels of response for churches to consider.

Level 1: Be aware

Accepting this booklet is a first step to becoming aware of domestic abuse.

- a. Believe it! For many people in church, domestic abuse is a taboo subject: "It doesn't happen here, and we don't like to talk about it." Yet, people in church will often know, or be, victims. It is vital that this subject is regularly on the agenda of the church.
- b. Use preaching and teaching to make it plain that domestic abuse is wrong and against God's plan for our lives. Model a way of life that is Christ-like.
- c. Pray for victims and perpetrators, and for domestic abuse workers.
- d. Publicly adopt and display the Domestic Abuse Charter for Churches (see page 24).
- e. Display posters, leaflets and cards with information about help available locally. Place domestic abuse cards and posters in toilet cubicles, where people can access them discreetly.
- f. Put books on domestic abuse on your bookstall or in the church library.

#CaseStudy

I got saved when I was a teenager. I started going to a local black Pentecostal church, and it was at one of their conventions that I met my now ex-husband. Back in those days, if you were courting, there was a bit of pressure not to make your courtship too prolonged, and to get married as quickly as possible. We got married in 1988, and then we moved in together. We were always churchgoers and had the support of the church. We were very committed Christians and went to church regularly.

I think on reflection now, having a long-distance courtship didn't give us enough time to get to know each other. We were always on our best behaviour when we met up – and in that sort of situation, you never get to know the real person until you actually live with them.

Our marriage started off quite well, but it got more difficult because he was commuting from where we lived to London every day, and coming home at weekends. That put a strain on our relationship, and it got more challenging when we started a family. Our children had special needs and we didn't have a lot of practical help and support.

When I talk about domestic abuse, in our case it was emotional and psychological rather than physical. There was no fighting as such, but the relationship was very much a neglectful one. When it came to going to church, my husband was the first one out of the door of a Sunday morning, and he'd leave me to cope with the children – who weren't easy to look after or manage. He was so locked into being that leadership figure, he neglected his family. He would say to me, "I'm preaching tomorrow; what are you going to do with the children?" or "I'm going to Convention; what are you going to do with the children?" I would end up going to church late because I was trying to look after these children, and then I'd be criticised for being late.

I remember being heavily pregnant and there were times when my husband would just watch me from the bedroom window while I was painting the garden fence or cutting the grass. One time, my family paid a surprise visit and found me cutting the lawn, and they were like, "Where's your husband?" He was in bed!

Continued overleaf

#CaseStudy continued

Things like that don't bode well. Yes, my husband wasn't breaking the law, but that's not how you treat your wife or partner.

My husband at the time was a doer – and probably a bit of a workaholic. I think he enjoyed being needed. So if the van needed driving, or if the church needed a Sunday School superintendent or a men's leader or someone to preach, his hand always went up. And the church took as much as they could out of him. On reflection, when you think about it, if he's a young husband with children with special needs, that was the wrong thing to do, in my opinion. All of that caused the marriage to fail. I don't think the church understood or approved of the marriage breakdown or the divorce, but then I think they didn't do much to help or support us in a practical sense anyway. When I went to my pastor and told him my marriage was in difficulty, he was very dismissive and said, "Oh, it's just a phase you're going through" and sent me away. There was no practical help from the church. When I moved to a Baptist church years later, it was a completely different experience. That congregation mobilised resources for me; they had workers who were willing and able to look after my children during the service. So, for the first time in about 10 years, I was able to sit down in a church service, and actually participate.

I hope, going forward, that many of these congregations will learn that families and marriages are to be protected and supported, and not just take people for granted and take from them but give them time to have sabbaticals and recharge as couples. I would like to see all ministers and people in leadership positions trained in safeguarding and domestic abuse, because they are key factors. We have laws, and if church leaders aren't versed in those laws and safeguarding procedures, then they're always going to be giving advice that isn't in line with the law – perhaps not even in line with God's word. How can you send a victim of domestic abuse back to her husband, not knowing whether she's safe or not?

People don't understand the different types of domestic abuse, and so they tend to think that because he isn't hitting me, it's ok. But emotional, psychological and financial abuse are all types of abuse that women or men can suffer from. We need to be mindful of this, so we can support families who are going through it, young people who are growing up, children who are witnessing it as well... It's a huge problem and it's more commonplace than we think. Even in same-sex relationships, there are victims of domestic abuse.

We do need to recognise abuse, and to understand what to do in situations where it is taking place. My motto in my marriage was: "Expect nothing, and you won't be disappointed". That was how I coped – but it's not a good motto to have.

Level 2: Engage

Make the church a safe place, with more direct action from the congregation and leadership.

a. Go deeper. Personally reflect on your own attitudes to and beliefs about domestic abuse. Consider whether any need challenging. Use our guide to theological reflection (pages 17-20). Study, read blogs and books, and use online resources to expand your understanding.

b. Educate your church using local expertise. Invite the Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum to provide presentations and/or training.

c. Set aside a special day each year for your church to focus on domestic abuse. The 25th of November is recognised as an international day of action to end violence against women. You can get support materials from the UN at www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday

d. Review your policies. Do you have safeguarding policies? Do they mention domestic abuse? Add the national helpline number and other resources.

e. Include discussion of domestic abuse in your marriage and relationship courses or resources.

- Marriage preparation – Does yours deal with the issues of conflict, power, control and abuse?
- Youth group – Are you exploring healthy and unhealthy relationships?
- Primary-age children – Are you considering what a good friend looks like? Check out Restored's resource at www.restoredrelationships.org

f. Create a space for men to discuss what it means to be a man and a disciple of Christ. Invite them to sign up to Restored's First Man Standing campaign, which allows men to be the first in their family, club, church or workplace to stand up and speak out about ending violence against women.¹

Restored propose three steps for men to follow in order to make a difference.

- Respect all women everywhere and demonstrate love and support for women and children in your family.

Pictured: Church members in Dallas attend a rally of men calling for an end to violence against women.



1. www.restoredrelationships.org/what-we-do/working-with-men/

- Challenge other men by speaking out to your friends and colleagues about ending violence and negative attitudes towards women.
- Sign up to the White Ribbon pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

Level 3: Support

Use the church to provide all-round support for survivors and/or perpetrators, in partnership with local service providers. This means intentionally prioritising this work, and handling it in a loving, inclusive, non-judgmental and professional way.

To achieve this, churches need to be clear about their role and aware of their limitations. They need to work within a good-practice framework and set up effective local referral routes. You will also need regular specialist training and for staff to get the support of good clinical supervision.

CAUTION: If your church does not work in this way, it could cause more harm than good.

At the same time, you should recognise that once the consciousness of the church has been raised to domestic abuse, the church will become more alert and people who have been silent so far may now come forward. It is essential that your church is equipped to deal with this.

You need to ensure that key people in the church – the

church leadership generally, including pastors, elders, deacons, mission and group leaders, such as leaders of the youth ministries, women’s ministries, and means ministries – are trained in the church’s domestic abuse policy and in the use of this or a similar toolkit, so that they are confident to deliver the various stages of support and action.

Working partnerships

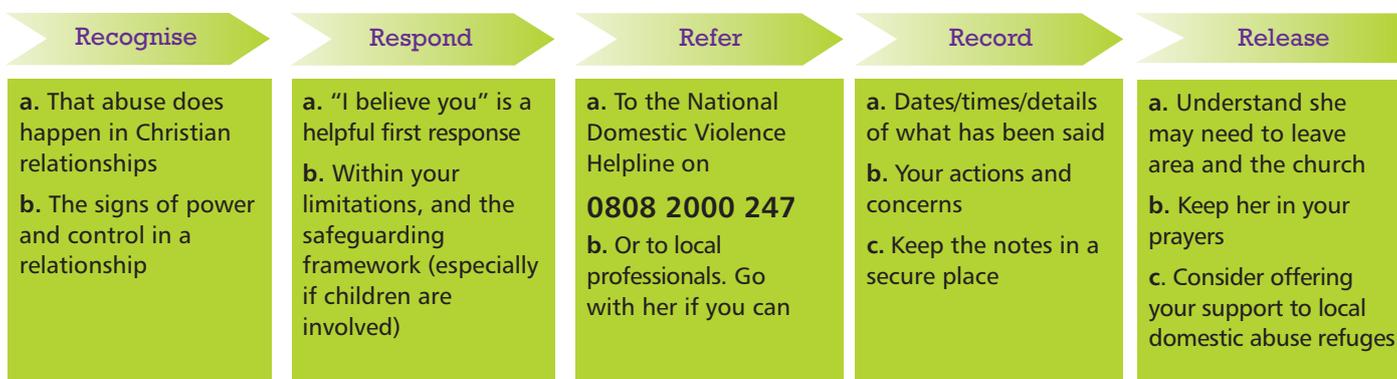
Secular agencies often have a historical mistrust of churches, while churches have often mistrusted secular agencies. It is up to churches to overcome this barrier.

Many local providers lack funding and resources. Churches can be a source of blessing to these agencies.

Working in partnership, churches need to:

- be aware that domestic abuse is a specialist area of counselling – we need to refer people to relevant agencies and provide support to access them
- have an approved and available domestic abuse policy, which covers safeguarding of women and children
- engage with local services
- consider financially supporting an agency like Women’s Aid or Refuge, or providing emergency packs of toiletries, or toys for the local refuge
- consider becoming part of a domestic abuse forum, and
- build a real relationship with local service providers.

The five Rs of responding to domestic abuse



A word on the 5th R: Release

If, for reasons of safety, a victim of domestic abuse decides to leave her home and environment, and take her children out of school, she may go to live temporarily in a women’s refuge, or with relatives or friends, or permanently relocate. In this situation she will also be leaving the church.

This will be a terrible wrench for her. In this time of trauma, she will be leaving behind the immensely valuable love and support the church can offer, and we know that such support can aid real healing for the lives of the victim and her children.

Here are some essential things to keep in mind.

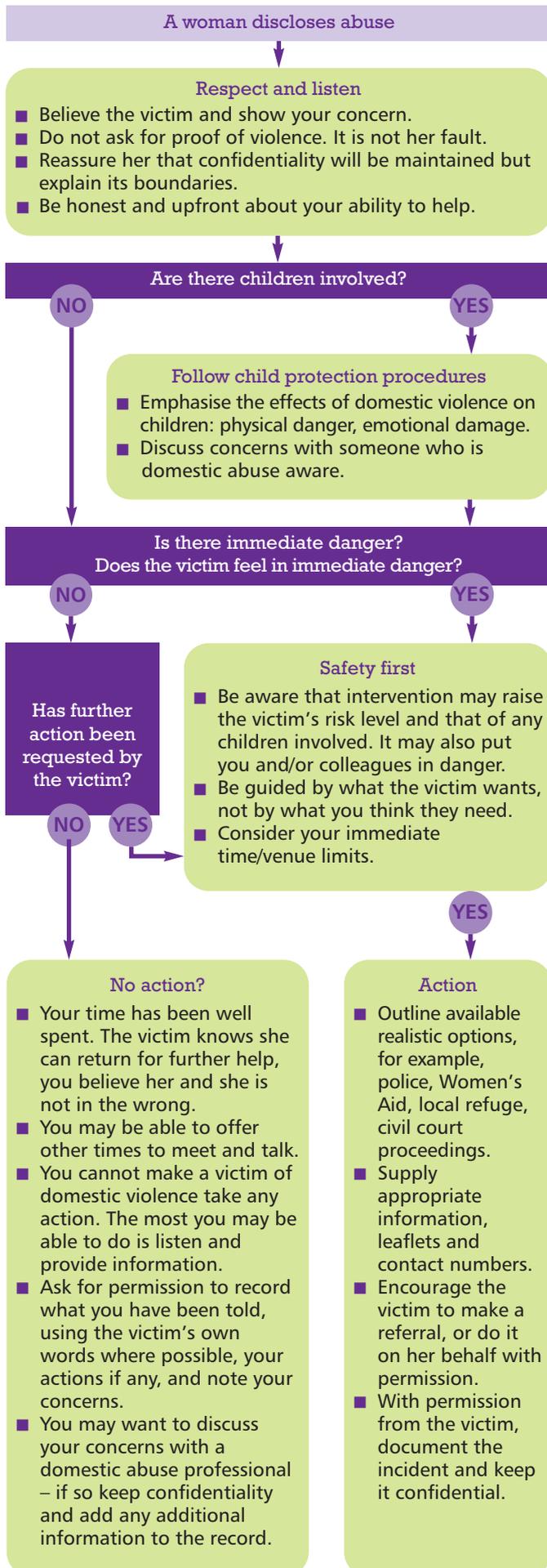
- The victim’s wishes must come first. Everything you do must be guided by what she wants.
- Whilst you may desire to offer continuing support, this

should never be offered without the guidance and involvement of the professionals working with her – the police, domestic violence services and other agencies. If she is leaving, it’s because her life is in danger and the need for her to sever all ties may be paramount. In these cases, you must respect this and keep her and her family in your prayers.

However, as a church you may be able to offer support to Christian women in refuges who have had the same experience of trauma, because they have had to leave their church homes. Your church may be able to provide that love and support that she has left behind.

This can only be facilitated with the agreement/approval of the local refuge and police as necessary, as there will be important safeguarding and other confidentiality issues that will need to be established.

Disclosure of abuse flow chart



Domestic abuse is everyone's business

If you witness an incident or hear something worrying, phone the Police on 101 (or 999 in an emergency, or if children are present). You don't need to leave your name.

#CaseStudy

I am from the Caribbean. I lived there of all of my life, and I am blessed with three children. I got saved at the age of 11 and my Christian faith is one of the most important things in my life. I love God very much; my desire and goal are to please him.

I was 21 when I got married, which is very young. I felt that I was doing the right thing; a lot of the young people I knew were just living how they wanted, but I decided that as a Christian I wanted to do what's right – and that meant I had to get married. However, I've grown to learn that even if you are a Christian, that is not the basis for finding a partner. You've got to make sure that basically you're compatible with the person. I've learned that now in my later years.

My husband was very involved in church; he preached and taught adult Sunday school. As time went by, things came up that I did not approve of – but I felt that as a Christian, when you've made a decision, you have to live with it; as we say back in the Caribbean, "You've made your bed; you've got to lie in it". That's what I would tell myself. But as time went by, I started to feel uncomfortable. I started to feel a longing for more in my life. The things my husband and I used to do when we were dating had ceased, and there seemed to be no more enjoyment or passion in the relationship. I began to feel a bit lonely and discouraged, but I just got on with life.

I wanted to pursue things in my life; I wanted to study, elevate myself and do things to improve my life. His response to that was, "One of these days we'll do it". That was not enough for me. When I reached the point where I'd had enough of that mentality, I decided to step out and start to do things on my own. This seemingly made him uncomfortable, because I was taking a different step. He was not a person that constantly was abusive; he was not an abusive man – but a different side of him emerged.

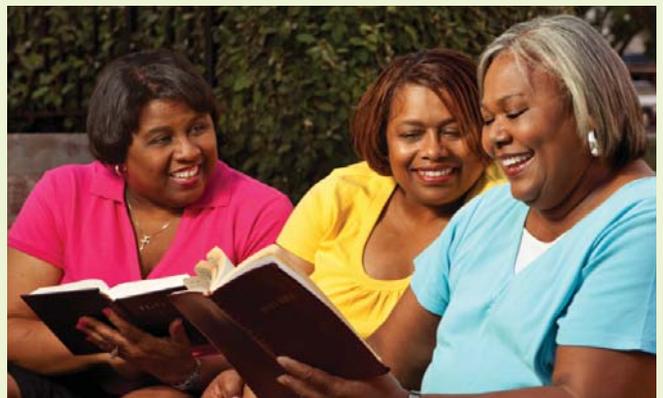
On the day he assaulted me, he displayed a lot of anger. I had to go to the police and to the hospital. He was not happy that I did that, and he built up lots of resentment and bitterness towards me. He didn't care that I was hurt, or about the state that I was in; he was only concerned about his reputation and how things seemed out in public. I was very devastated with that, because I was hoping for a different response. I felt that there was no way that someone could really love and care for someone if they were only into themselves and only seeking their own interests. And so I decided that the only thing that would make me feel at peace would be to get out of this marriage and pursue my own life. That is where I am today. I am raising my three children on my own here in England, going to church, serving God and living for God – no longer feeling threatened or afraid.

My advice to any woman in a similar situation is that abuse is not something that you are supposed to endure. I do believe that all of us are made an image of

God, and that he wants the best for us. He doesn't want women to be battered or broken; he died so that we can have life and have it more abundantly – and you cannot have life if someone is trying to take it away from you. The only person that takes life is the enemy because God's Word says that the enemy comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. If you find yourself in an abusive situation, I would suggest that you get out of it. Staying in an abusive relationship is not healthy. Some people might think they have the strength to go through it – but mentally you can become very disturbed and lonely. If the abuser has a position in the church, people will look at you differently as well. They might think that Brother So-and-so could not do what you're saying he did to you, because of the position that he holds.

Look for some counselling and encouragement. As Christians, everybody wants to see marriages work and survive, and sometimes we go to great lengths not to let everyone know a marriage isn't working. But I'm just saying that if you are in danger; if you do not feel safe; if when you go to bed at night you're wondering what will happen, then that is not a good position to be in. I got to a place where I would go to sleep with a knife under my pillow because of fear – and yet the Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of love, power and a sound mind!

I'm not dictating to anyone. If you know your relationship is working, that's good to hear. But if you feel deep down that you can no longer maintain it and you need your safety and sanity, I would advise you to seek the necessary help to leave that relationship.



Do's and don'ts when responding to victims

Do's

- Find a safe place to talk.
- Invite someone else – if the woman agrees.
- Allow her time to talk.
- Listen to what she has to say – and take it seriously.
- Believe her. This is probably the tip of the iceberg.
- Prioritise her safety and the safety of any children.
- Empower her to make her own decisions.
- Support and respect her choices, even if she initially chooses to return to the abuser. However, be ready to overrule this choice if children are unsafe.
- Give information about support agencies. If she wants this, offer to contact them on her behalf and do so in her presence. Or offer a safe, private place where she can contact them herself.
- Use the expertise of people who are properly trained.
- Reassure her that it's not her fault, she doesn't deserve this, and it's not God's will for her.
- Let her know that the abuser's behaviour is wrong and completely unacceptable.
- Be patient with her.
- Protect her confidentiality. Keep any information in a secure place and consider coding it.

Don'ts

- Don't judge her or what she tells you.
- Don't make unrealistic promises.
- Don't suggest that she should 'try again'. Victims experience several incidents before seeking help.
- Never minimise the severity of her experience or the danger she is in.
- Don't react with disbelief, disgust or anger at what she tells you, or react passively.
- Don't ask her why she did not act in a certain way.
- Never act on her behalf without her consent and/or knowledge (unless children are involved).
- Don't expect her to make decisions quickly.
- Never make decisions for her or tell her what to do.
- Don't suggest couples counselling, family mediation, marriage courses or healthy relationships courses.
- Don't encourage her to forgive and take him back.
- Don't send her home with a prayer or directive to submit to her husband, or be a better Christian wife.
- Don't contact the person at home, unless she agrees.
- Don't endanger her by asking her partner for his side of the story.
- Don't pass on details about her or her whereabouts.
- Don't discuss the situation with church leaders.
- Don't encourage her to become dependent on you, or become emotionally involved with her.

Do's and don'ts when responding to perpetrators

Do's

- Put the victim's safety, and children's safety, first.
- If meeting him is appropriate, do so in a public place or in the church with other people around.
- When not in his presence, pray for him. Ask God to help him stop his violence and live differently.
- Understand that he alone is responsible for his behaviour and that being abusive is his choice.
- Never lose sight of the abuse he has perpetrated. Be aware he may claim that he is also a victim.
- If he is still in the relationship, only speak to him if he has been arrested or challenged by other agencies.
- If he is no longer in the relationship, only speak to him if his partner is in a safe place and agrees.
- Stay alert to the danger he may pose to you, other people, the victim, her children and her wider family.
- Research treatment programmes and services such as RESPECT to help him change his behaviour.
- Find ways to collaborate with the police, probation and other services to hold him accountable.
- Address any religious rationalisations he may offer.
- Name the abuse as his problem, not hers. Tell him only he can stop it. Offer or refer him for help.
- Take seriously any murder threats and inform the police, the victim, her children or her family.
- Share any concerns you have with a properly trained professional.

Don'ts

- Don't go to him to confirm the victim's story.
- Don't meet him alone and in private.
- Never approach him or let him know you know about his violence. This should only be done by a trained professional, with the victim's permission, when she is safely separated from him.
- Don't allow him to use religious excuses.
- Don't recommend couple counselling for him and his partner if there is violence in the relationship.
- Never give him any information about his partner or her whereabouts, if she has left him.
- Don't be taken in by his minimising the abuse, denying he was abusive or lying about the abuse.
- Never accept it if he blames the victim or anything or anyone else.
- Don't be taken in by his 'conversion' experience. If it's genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as he proceeds with accountability. If it isn't, it is another way of manipulating you, to stay in control.
- Don't advocate for the abuser to avoid the legal consequences of his violence.
- Don't provide a character witness for court.
- Don't forgive an abuser quickly and easily.
- Don't confuse his guilt, sadness or remorse with true repentance.
- Never just send him home with a prayer.

Further help and advice

Support with domestic abuse: national

Emergency services: Dial 999

National Domestic Violence Helpline
0808 2000 247 (24-hour freephone)
Run by Refuge and Women's Aid.

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk
Supports women, children and men with services including refuges.

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk
Working to end domestic abuse against women and children.

Northern Ireland Women's Aid

02890 331 818
www.niwaf.org
info@womensaidni.org

Scottish Women's Aid

0800 027 1234
<https://womensaid.scot>
helpline@sdaafh.org.uk

Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 80 10 800
www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

Jewish Women's Aid Helpline

0808 801 0500
www.jwa.org.uk
Support for Jewish women across UK.

Support with domestic abuse: local services in London

African Women Care

020 8969 8389
<http://africanwomenscare.org.uk>
info@africanwomenscare.org.uk
Crisis intervention and support for women living in the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster.

Angelou Partnership

0808 801 0660 or 020 8741 7008
advice@wgn.org.uk
Support in boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster. Run by specialist partner organisations (some listed elsewhere on this page).

Camden Safety Net

(Also known as *Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advisory Service*)
020 7974 2526

Services for survivors of domestic abuse or sexual violence and their families in Camden. Drop-in for clients at Holborn Police Station, 10 Lamb Conduit Street, WC1N 3NR. Or visits elsewhere in borough.

Claudia Jones Organisation

020 7241 2094
gbvinfo@claudiajones.org
Gender-based violence service based in Stoke Newington. For women of African and Caribbean heritage.

Gaia Centre

020 7733 8724
lambethvawg@refuge.org.uk
One-stop support for women and men living in Lambeth and experiencing domestic abuse.

Kiran Women's Aid

020 8558 1986
www.kiranproject.org.uk
infokiranawa@ukonline.co.uk
Support and refuge for Asian women. Based in Waltham Forest.

Latin American Women's Aid

020 7275 0321
www.lawadv.org.uk
info@lawadv.org.uk
Has two refuges for Latin American and other BME women. Based in Hackney.

London Black Women's Project

0808 2000 247 (24-hour freephone)
www.lbwp.online
info@lbwp.online
Practical and therapeutic support for BME women experiencing abuse. Based in Plaistow.

Maya Centre

0207 281 8970
www.mayacentre.org.uk
Free counselling service for women living or working in Islington who have experienced gender-based violence, abuse or neglect. For women with benefit-level incomes.

The Salvation Army

020 7367 4500
www.salvationarmy.org.uk/domestic-abuse
info@salvationarmy.org.uk
Confidentially-located community service, with temporary housing and ongoing support. Also provide The Link Café (support for women who have left abusive partners/spouses) at 21 Crown Lane, Morden, SM4 5BY. 020 8648 8029.

Solace Women's Aid

0808 802 5565
www.solacewomensaid.org
advice@solacewomensaid.org
Advice and support for women in London.

Southall Black Sisters

020 8571 0800 (helpline)
www.southallblacksisters.org.uk
Support for African-Caribbean and Asian women, based in west London.

Women and Girls' Network

www.wgn.org.uk
Free counselling, advocacy and advice for women and girls who have suffered gendered violence in London.

Support with domestic abuse: local services outside London

Angelou Centre

0191 226 0394
<http://angelou-centre.org.uk/>
Supports BME women across the north east. Based in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Eve Domestic Abuse

01604 230311
www.eveda.org.uk
Christian family refuge in Northamptonshire.

The Haven Project

0800 194 400
www.havenrefuge.org.uk
info@havenrefuge.org.uk
Provides refuges and support in Wolverhampton area.

Safe Arms

(No phone number)
www.safearms.org.uk
info@safearms.org.uk
Based in Dartford, Kent. Deals with domestic abuse in the UK and Africa. Offer Christian retreat and survivors' forum: forum@safearms.org.uk

Shakti Women's Aid

0131 475 2399
www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk
info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk
Support for women in Edinburgh, Fife, Dundee, Forth Valley.

Support with domestic abuse: for men

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327
www.mensadvice.org.uk
info@mensadvice.org.uk
For men experiencing domestic violence.

Respect

0808 802 4040 (for people who hurt the one they love)
0808 801 0327 (for male victims)
www.respect.org.uk
Works with perpetrators of domestic violence and male victims. National helplines. Workshops held in Dalston.

Support with domestic abuse: for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

Broken Rainbow

0300 999 5428
www.brokenrainbow.org.uk
help@brokenrainbow.org.uk
Domestic violence charity for people in the LGBT community.

Rape helplines and support

Lifecentre

0808 802 0808 (helpline)
07717 989 022 (text messages)
www.lifecentre.org.uk
Based in Chichester. Supports women and men who are survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Christian-led.

Rape Crisis

0808 802 9999
www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Solace Rape Crisis Helpline

0808 801 0305
www.solacewomensaid.org
rapecrisis@solacewomensaid.org
Helpline and support for women in North London.

Legal support

Civil Legal Advice

0345 345 4 345
https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice
Free legal advice if you qualify for legal aid. Government-funded service.

National Centre for Domestic Violence

0800 970 2070
www.ncdv.org.uk
A free, fast emergency injunction service offered to all survivors of domestic violence.

Rights of Women

020 7251 6577 (England & Wales)
020 7608 1137 (London)
https://rightsofwomen.org.uk
Free legal advice provided by female legal professionals.

Support for children and young people

ChildLine

0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk
National helpline for children.

The Mix

0808 808 4994
www.themix.org.uk
Advice and support for under-25s.

NSPC

0808 800 5000
www.nspcc.org.uk
Help for adults worried about a child.

Trauma Recovery Centre

www.trc-uk.org
admin@trc-uk.org
Help children to recover from trauma, abuse, trafficking and other issues. Based in Bath and Bristol.

Other support: national

Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Violence

07768 386922
www.aafda.org.uk
For bereaved friends and family.

Crimestoppers

0800 555 111
www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit

020 7008 0151
www.gov.uk/forced-marriage

Gingerbread

www.gingerbread.org.uk
Charity supporting single parents.

Mothers Apart from Their Children

0800 689 4104
www.matchmothers.org

Muslim Community Helpline

020 8904 8193 or 020 8908 6715
http://muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk

MWN (Muslim Women's Network)

0800 999 5786 (freephone)
0303 999 5786 (usual call rates)
07415 206 936 (text messages)
info@mwnhelpline.co.uk
www.mwnhelpline.co.uk
Support Muslim women with a range of issues, including domestic abuse.

National Association for People Abused in Childhood

0808 801 0331
www.napac.org.uk

National Stalking Helpline

0808 802 0300
www.suzylamplugh.org

Network for Surviving Stalking

www.scaredofsomeone.org
Advice and information on website. Does not provide individual support.

Refugee Council

020 7346 6777
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services
See website for links to services.

Samaritans

116 123 (24 hours)
www.samaritans.org
Someone to listen, whatever people are going through.

Shelter (England)

0808 800 4444
www.shelter.org.uk
For housing advice and online resources.

Shelter (Scotland)

0808 800 4444
https://scotland.shelter.org.uk
For housing advice and online resources.

Victim Support

0808 168 9111
www.victimsupport.org.uk

Other support: local services

Barking and Dagenham Somali

Women's Association

020 8594 3730

www.bdsomaliwomen.org.uk

Free information and support. Work across east London.

The Boaz Trust

0161 202 1056

www.boaztrust.org.uk

info@boaztrust.org.uk

Christian organisation,
accommodating destitute asylum
seekers in Manchester area.

Chinese Information and Advice Centre

0300 201 1868

www.ciac.co.uk

Based in London's Chinatown.

Snowdrop Project

www.snowdropproject.co.uk

Supports survivors of human
trafficking. Based in Sheffield.

The Domestic Abuse Charter

This church:

1. Understands domestic abuse to be the abuse of a person physically, sexually, psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, socially or financially within an intimate or family-type relationship, which forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'.
2. Holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and irreconcilable with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.
3. Accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem, which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
4. Undertakes to listen to, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse.
5. Will always place the safety of women and children affected by domestic abuse as the highest priority.
6. Will work with domestic abuse support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways, and will publicise their work.
7. Believes in a God of love, justice, mercy and forgiveness.
8. Will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image.
9. Will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin.
10. Will seek to appoint advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and to keep the church informed about the implementation and development of these guidelines.



National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247

