

**Kirkcaldy  
Congregational  
Church**

*Domestic Abuse*

# Domestic Abuse

## Introduction

There are many myths and falsehoods about domestic abuse, its prevalence and the Christian way to respond to it. Rather than shying away from these challenging and sometimes heartbreaking issues, the church should be a safe, non-judgemental environment where all who are exposed to domestic abuse can find refuge and support.

This guide is for everyone in the church, and particularly those who have responsibility for, or involvement in, the pastoral care of others.

## What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined 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.”  
(Home Office 2015)

This can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.

Controlling behaviour is:

“a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.”  
(gov.uk 2015)

Coercive behaviour is:

“an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”  
(gov.uk 2015)

Domestic abuse is not just between married couples or partners. Family members include mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents: directly related, and in-laws or stepfamily. This definition of domestic abuse includes honour-based violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

## Church culture

Churches have a unique opportunity to offer support those affected by domestic abuse. It is not just the minister's role or for those in church leadership - it is the responsibility of the church community as a whole.

Sadly, churches have not always responded well to incidents of abuse when people have found the courage to ask for help. This has partly been due to a lack of understanding about domestic abuse and its impact, and partly due to a paternalistic (mis)use of the bible to justify and perpetuate abuse, particularly against women.

There are several ways in which the church can act as a place of refuge and safety for those who have experienced or are currently experiencing domestic abuse in any form:

- We will seek to ensure that information and contact details for local domestic abuse support agencies are available.
- We will ensure that there is space within the church building for people to talk in confidence and that conversations that warrant privacy are not held over coffee where sensitive information may be overheard.
- We will be sensitive to those experiencing domestic abuse by speaking clearly through worship and teaching so as to raise awareness and give "permission" to raise issues.
- By ensuring greater sensitivity in the language and concepts used within worship, such as God as our Father or Jesus as a lover, which can be difficult for those who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.
- We will recognise that the traditional Christian emphasis on particular family structures may not be helpful for those from abusive family settings. Also occasions such as Mothers' Day or Fathers' Day can be difficult for some.
- We will seek to address issues through our teaching of young people and during marriage preparation.

In circumstances when both perpetrator and victim come under the pastoral care of the church, the church's primary pastoral responsibility will be to the victim. However we will seek to support the perpetrator in pursuing professional help to address their behaviour

## Who can experience domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone. It is not determined by gender or sexuality, socio-economic group or ethnicity, age or disability.

Domestic abuse can be against men, women, children and young people, although statistically women are more likely to be abused than men. Looking at perpetrators of domestic abuse, statistics show that the vast majority of domestic abuse is inflicted

by men against women, but whoever the abuser, their motivation is largely a desire for power and control. It is often the physical force, or threat of it, that is used to remind the victim who is in control. Societal attitudes, sadly often reinforced by the Christian Church, have often accepted and even supported this power and control.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse, like their victims, come from all walks of life. It is not always easy to recognise perpetrators of domestic abuse, as they can be charming and friendly in public, yet nasty, abusive and violent behind closed doors. Christians, including Christian leaders, are capable of domestic abuse.

Very little research has been done into domestic abuse in LGBT relationships, and there are few services which help and support those experiencing abuse within same-sex or transgender relationships. Once someone experiencing domestic abuse in a LGBT relationship seeks help they may struggle to find the necessary support. They may have to 'out' themselves in order to report the abuse.

## **Forms of abuse**

- Emotional (mocking, bullying, belittling, ridiculing)
- Physical (hitting, shaking, kicking, burning, suffocating, imprisoning)
- Sexual (rape, assault, unconsented acts, inappropriate photography)
- Financial (theft, refusing access to funds, ownership of property)
- Neglect (obstructing health care, starving, lack of warmth/ shelter, denying social contact)
- Spiritual (forcing religious ideas, misuse of sacred texts, demands for obedience)

## **The impact of domestic abuse**

People will respond to domestic abuse in different ways and assumptions should not be made about how serious or damaging various forms of abuse are. The impact of domestic abuse on a person will be specific to them and their experiences.

As well as physical harm, the effects of domestic abuse may include:

- fear
- depression or poor mental health
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- anxiety or panic attacks
- low self-esteem
- trouble sleeping or nightmares
- a sense of isolation
- dependence on their abuser

Contrary to many peoples' perceptions, victims of domestic abuse are not weak or submissive. They must adopt all kinds of strategies to cope and survive living with an abusive partner or family member.

## **Staying in an abusive relationship**

It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner or family member, and some victims will never leave. In reality, there are many practical and psychological barriers to ending a relationship with an abusive partner or family member.

Historically the church in almost all its branches and traditions, encouraged women to remain in abusive relationships. This cannot be allowed or excused, and any use of the bible or any other teaching to reinforce dominance of one over another is contrary to the loving purposes of God.

We will challenge the misuse of sacred texts to reinforce violence in any form, and will support and encourage any victim to seek their safety and the safety of their children.

## **How to respond**

Domestic abuse is to be treated as seriously as any other form of abuse which may come to light in the life of the church. The church's safeguarding policy can guide the church's response.

Potential signs of abuse:

- people have injuries which are unexplained or inconsistent with the explanation.
- people may be embarrassed or attempt to hide injuries – keeping themselves fully covered at all times, even in hot weather.
- people may have a quiet or frightened demeanour in their partner's presence or become unusually quiet or withdrawn.

Immediate responses on disclosure:

- gently question with indirect questions
- listen and believe, do not judge or trivialise
- reassure
- ensure that they are safe
- support, but do not try to control
- do not investigate
- keep confidentiality (though it may be necessary to contact statutory authorities)
- recognise your limits, and encourage sharing with experts

## Adoption

Church Secretary:	David Fairgrieve
Signed:	
Date adopted:	18 November 2018
Review due:	November 2019

## Appendix 1 – Seeking Support

### **24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline 0808 2000 247**

Police - 101 (or 999 in an emergency)

<http://www.scotland.police.uk>

101 provides a service for non-emergency issues and will connect you to your local Police force, wherever you call from in the UK (including Scotland)

Fife Council

Phone Public Protection Unit: 01592 418460

Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre

Phone: 08088 010302 (lines open 6pm – midnight)

E-Mail: [info@frasac.org.uk](mailto:info@frasac.org.uk)

Fife Women's Aid

Phone: 0808 802 5555

E-Mail: [info@fifewomensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@fifewomensaid.org.uk)

Samaritans - Call 116 123

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Providing a listening service for any worries or concerns.

Men's Advice Line

Phone: 0808 801 0327

Email: [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)

Broken Rainbow UK: 0300 999 5428

[www.brokenrainbow.org.uk](http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk)

LGBT support for victims of domestic abuse.

Living without Abuse: 0300 356 0112

<http://www.lwa.org.uk/>

Help and support for anyone suffering from or perpetrating abuse (covers physical, sexual, emotional, financial, domestic)

**Other agencies will be discovered through searching  
online or in a local directory**

## Appendix 2 – A guide to supporting children and adults who have been sexually abused

### Support for adults

NAPAC: 0808 801 0331

<http://napac.org.uk/>

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) have a support line which is staffed by trained volunteers, who can help you come to terms with what happened and finding ways of repairing the harm.

### The Survivors Trust

0808 801 0818

<http://thesurvivorstrust.org/>

The Survivors Trust is a national umbrella organisation, for over 135 specialist rape, sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse support organisations throughout the UK and Ireland.

### SurvivorsUK: 0203 598 3898

<https://www.survivorsuk.org>

SurvivorsUK helps men who have been sexually abused and raises awareness of their needs. NOTE: Sexual violation includes both childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault/rape.

### Rape Crisis

<http://rapecrisis.org.uk/>

National Charity and umbrella body for a network of independent rape crisis organisations.

### Survivors Scotland

<http://www.survivorscotland.org.uk/>

Scottish government website providing a directory of support for survivors of childhood abuse.



**Support for children or concerns about children:**

Childline: 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Support for children throughout the UK, for a range of problems and concerns.

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Providing support and advice for keeping children safe from harm and abuse.

**Support for parents:**

MOSAC: 0800 980 1958

[www.mosac.org.uk](http://www.mosac.org.uk)

Supporting non-abusing parents of sexually abused children. Offers interpretation service for 170 languages.

## Appendix 3 – A guide to sexually harmful behaviour

Stop it now! 0808 1000 900

[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

Providing help, advice and support for people who are displaying or considering sexually harmful behaviour or for those concerned about another's behaviour, either a child or adult.

Respect Helpline: 0808 802 4040

[www.respectphoneline.org.uk](http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk)

The Respect Helpline offering information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners.

Lucy Faithfull Foundation: 0808 1000 900

<http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/>

The only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. Working with families that have been affected by sexual abuse and includes adult male and female sexual abusers, young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours, victims of abuse and other family members.

**If you have concerns about a child displaying sexually harmful or inappropriate behaviour, please consult with:**

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000

Young Minds – 0808 802 5544

Local Authority Social Care/Early Help Team.

Contact details will be available on the internet.