

Journeying with Victims of Abuse: Part 1

Domestic violence is a dynamic of power and control, which may manifest as physical, emotional, or financial abuse of an intimate partner. Behaviors that may initially look like care, such as frequent checking on the whereabouts of a loved one, may develop into more controlling and isolating behaviors, such as not allowing a partner to visit family or friends because they are needed at home.


Also, individuals often love their abusing partners and may share children with them, which makes recognizing the behaviors as abusive difficult and makes leaving the relationships complicated. Your support and resources may provide a window out of danger and fear.

How you care for the individual, whether they disclose abuse or you suspect abuse, is an opportunity for you to provide them with care and support, as Christ comes close to us in our experiences of pain.

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

If you need help assessing whether it is an abusive or violent situation, please refer to this [Redeemer Counseling Tool](#) from June 2018.

1. **Safety first.** Assess immediate safety by asking some of the questions in the [Stanford Safety Plan](#). Also help them safety plan in advance as, in a crisis, it can be very difficult to know how to act. Guiding someone to consider where they might go, how to get there, whom to call and what things to take when feeling threatened could be a very valuable exercise. [Hotline Safety Plan](#)
2. **Provide emotional support.** Do not underestimate emotional support. It is one of the most important ways that you can help someone experiencing abuse in an intimate relationship. Validate the feelings of fear, confusion, anger, hurt and other emotions that the individual shares. Affirm their courage in speaking up if they disclose they are being abused. Let them know they are not alone. Affirm that the abuse is not their fault, as they may have been conditioned to feel that they are responsible for it.
3. **Be aware that any individual may be capable of abuse.** Individuals that perpetrate abuse are often well-liked and gifted; they may be prominent leaders and pastors. Knowing this can help you stay calm when someone you might not expect is suspected of abuse or domestic violence.
4. **Be trustworthy and patient.** The individual has experienced violations of trust and may find it difficult to rely on another person. The person may be isolated and have no other support because of the abuse and controlling behaviors that may have limited their interaction



with others. It may take time to make plans or decide what to do and they may change their mind many times. Be consistent in your care even when they change their plans.

5. **Facilitate corrective experiences.** A person's self-esteem may take a heavy toll after months and years of on-going criticism or implied denial of their value. Their view of God may look a lot like their view of their partner. Your compassionate and steady support can help create a corrective experience for them that helps their view of God and themselves begin to shift from negative to positive.
6. **Be nonjudgmental in your responses.** There are many reasons people stay in a relationship where they are being abused. We do not need to understand to be a support. Even while you are validating their feelings, do not criticize or malign the one allegedly perpetrating the harm. The person needs to feel that you will support them regardless of what they decide to do. If you criticize their partner, they may feel that they will lose your support if they decide to stay.
7. **Be discreet.** Leaving a violent partner can be a very dangerous decision, so guarding the information surrounding such a decision is critical.
8. **Offer concrete resources.** Provide hotline numbers and websites which help identify abuse and offer safety. If you suspect that an individual is experiencing abuse, provide them with some resources and counselor referrals, and walk with them until they get connected to someone trained to respond to domestic violence.
 1. [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) - 1- 800 - 799 - SAFE
 2. [Safe Horizon](#)- A New York City-based victim assistance organization
9. **Take care of yourself.** Supporting an individual experiencing relationship abuse is a very difficult role. Make sure you take care of yourself and have the emotional support that you need to walk this path. Stay connected to God as you process hard realities.

November's Toolkit will continue this topic, specifically offering tips to help churches and organizations develop their own policies around domestic violence and abuse.