



What churches need to know about pastoral support for abusers

Guidance for ministers and pastoral workers
who are working with domestic abuse

part of the Dignity initiative



Safety first

- a) The safety of the person being abused must be a priority, highlighting issues such as respecting the need to keep confidences about addresses, information about children and schools etc, where and when it is safe to contact the person who is being abused. It is important not to undertake to pass on letters from the perpetrator. The woman knows where he lives and can contact him if she wishes.
- b) Leaders and workers must be aware that one of the points of greatest physical risk is at the time of separation or immediately after separation.
- c) Children know much more than parents suspect and 90% are in the same room or next room when abuse occurs. Children who see a parent being abused may be injured trying to intervene, and in any event are at risk of emotional and psychological abuse.

Safety of Ministers and Church Workers

- a) Good practice in pastoral listening, whether by the minister, a lay leader, or another member of the community, means that ideally there will always be more than one person on the premises during planned meetings, **but** it may also be important to have a lone worker policy.
- b) Quiet and confidential places should be available for listening, but there should also be someone else aware of where and when confidential listening is taking place. This protection is for both listener and the one seeking help.
- c) It is important that those who listen know when it is essential to say that they must talk to someone else, whether it is for their own need, or for that of the seeker or when it is mandatory (e.g. awareness of child abuse or other safety issues or criminal action).
- d) Those who are listening need to be aware of the nature of, and constraints of, pastoral relationships.

What about working with abusers?

- a) This is extraordinarily difficult work, and it should not be assumed that ministers are able to do this. Despite what a perpetrator might say, it is better for this to be undertaken by someone with specialist training, and a proven track record; and for appropriate pastoral support to be in addition to this, preferably with the knowledge and co-operation of the specialist, or agency concerned.
- b) Challenging perpetrators to take responsibility for their attitudes and actions is part of demonstrating that the church considers domestic abuse unacceptable.

c) Perpetrators will need pastoral care too, but this is best provided by a church and supporters who are not at the same time providing care and support for the victims or survivors.

Further guidance

a) Time for Action has reproduced Pastoring Guidance from the Code of Practice for the Diocese of Southwell, for those who support sexual abusers, which emphasises the view that *'most professionals who work with perpetrators (of child sexual abuse) believe they will need maintenance counselling for the rest of their lives. In theological terms, recovery from the 'sin' of sexual abuse is a daily ongoing process'* (Time for Action Appendix 1 page 156). Some of the proposals are also appropriate in the context of domestic abuse, and have been used as a basis for those outlined here.

b) Those who are providing support should feel able to work alongside agencies or services working with the individual on a validated, accredited intervention programme, with the knowledge of the individual concerned. (This may, for example, be a probation officer)

c) It should be clear that it is expected that individuals who are known to be perpetrators will accept whatever discipline the church has agreed.

d) There should be clear guidelines on recruitment and discipline with reference to domestic abuse (for example, who is limited in holding specific offices) as there are for child abuse and for sex offenders. If this means worshipping at a different church, not attending particular groups, not taking leadership roles, then this should be seen as part of the acceptance of the need for repentance and the desire to lead a new life in a different way.

e) Desire to see the best in people must not cloud realistic expectations and perceptions.

f) Those who are providing support will need their own ongoing support, and opportunity to ensure they remain comfortable with that role, and the issues which may be raised.

g) It may be appropriate to draw up a contract between the church and the perpetrator, which outlines any activities, roles or behaviour which are proscribed and any agreed activities. The contract will be known only to the minister, those who are providing support, any essential officers of the church, and to whoever is working immediately with the individual concerned (eg probation officer).

Respect

RESPECT is the UK association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services, with members from the voluntary, private and statutory sectors.

The Respect Phonenumber is set up as a service for men who are looking for information and advice to stop their abusive or violent behaviour towards their partners. They are also available for female perpetrators and those in same sex relationships.

The Respect Phonenumber will also give information and advice to professionals who come into contact with perpetrators in their work.

The Respect Phonenumber: 0845 122 8609 (Open Monday-Friday 9-5)

Email: **info@respect.uk.net**

Website: **www.respect.uk.net**

Other leaflets in this series for ministers and pastoral workers:

- P1 *When the silence is broken... what does the law say?*
- P2 *When the silence is broken... prepared to listen*
- P3 *When the silence is broken... marriage... where do you stand?*
- P4 *Why do women stay? Towards a spiritual understanding*
- P5 *What churches need to know about pastoral support for abusers*
- P6 *Agencies which may be able to help*

Other resources:

Time for Action, Sexual abuse, the churches and a new dawn for survivors.

A CTBI book available from **www.ctbi.org.uk** (in this context see especially Appendix 1)

Domestic Violence: What every Pastor needs to know

The Revd Al Miles, Fortress Press **www.augsburgfortress.org** (in this context see Chapter 4)

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