



# ILLINOIS COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One Mission, One Voice

## FAMILY VIOLENCE AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

Domestic violence or spouse abuse is a hidden reality. It is a problem which traditionally has been minimized, ignored, or denied, despite the fact that researchers estimate that up to 4 million women in the United States are beaten in their homes each year by their husbands or partners.

Abusive and violent behavior occurs among people in urban and rural communities who are of all nationalities, ethnic groups, and religions, whether the couples are married, living together, or have an existing or prior intimate relationship.

Families who have experienced abuse--especially battered women--have very special needs. Faith leaders are sometimes the first people a family violence victim will contact. They need to know that help and support are available to them. They need information and sensitive people whom they can confide in and go to for advice. The abusers must be made aware that violence toward their partners is wrong and will not be tolerated. The children need help to deal with their fears and confusion. As a member of the faith community, you can help.

This resource will help you respond to the needs of battered women and their family members in your religious community. At the same time, it will give you information to help you become an involved leader in addressing your community's response to family violence.



# WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

***“A pattern of coercive control that one person exercises over another.”***

Domestic violence is about power and control; its purpose is for the abuser to control the victim in whatever form(s) it takes. It can include but not be limited to the following:

***Physical Abuse***—Slapping, pushing, hitting, strangling, kicking, grabbing, using weapons, twisting arms, tripping, biting, spitting, restraining and standing over the victim.

***Verbal Abuse***—Repeated or excessive name calling or put downs either privately or publicly, verbal threats of abuse to harm family, friends and pets.

***Sexual Abuse***—Teasing you about your body parts. Treating you like a sex object. Manipulating you to do sexual things when you do not want to. Making you feel dirty.

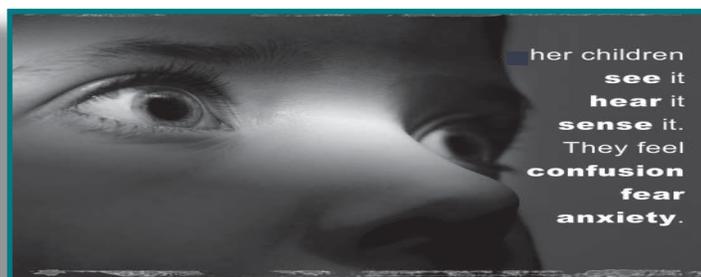
***Emotional Abuse***—Putting you down, making you feel bad about yourself, calling you names, making you think you’re crazy, playing mind games, humiliating you, making you feel guilty, putting down things you are proud of.

***Stalking***—Following the victim around by car or in person, monitoring victim’s whereabouts through a variety of methods-computer, phone, GPS, etc. Sending excessive or unwanted faxes, emails and making several phone calls throughout each day. Having family or friends do any of the above as well.

***Financial (Economic) Abuse***—Preventing you from getting or keeping a job, making you ask for money, paying for something and holding it against you later.

***Neglect***—Preventing you from taking your medication, depriving you of food and water, locking you outside without protection from the elements, refusing to allow you to get medical attention or prenatal care if needed.

***Spiritual Abuse***—Not allowing you to attend worship services, using passages from religious writings as validation for the abuse, making fun of your spiritual beliefs.



# MYTHS AND FACTS

**Assess your attitudes toward family violence and family violence victims by increasing awareness of common myths.**

## **MYTH**

Family violence occurs when men and women assault each other. Women are just as violent as men.

## **FACT**

Family violence occurs in a relationship when one person coerces, intimidates, and dominates another. It cannot be assessed by asking, "Who hit whom how many times?" More importantly, you must ask "Who is terrified, hurt repeatedly, and afraid to speak or go to school or get a job?"

## **MYTH**

Stress causes family violence.

## **FACT**

Most people who are living under severe stress do not batter. Stress may be a contributing factor, but reducing stress will not necessarily reduce violence in the family. Violence is the problem and it is not a symptom of stress.

## **MYTH**

Drugs and alcohol cause battering.

## **FACT**

Drugs and alcohol are frequently a component of battering episodes. However, battering and substance abuse are two separate problems. Elimination of substance abuse does not necessarily eliminate battering.

## **MYTH**

Family violence victims are masochistic; they provoke the violence.

## **FACT**

Battered women and men are not a personality type. They do not enjoy being assaulted. Victims may act in ways that their partners do not like, but this should not be confused with provocation. Disagreement does not justify assault.

## **MYTH**

What goes on within a family is nobody else's business.

## **FACT**

Violent crime is everybody's business. The harmful, hurtful, and dangerous behavior that we have outlawed in public places should not be tolerated in our homes. Victims of family violence need support and assistance, and abusive partners should be held accountable for violating criminal laws.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

Before providing counseling and pastoral care to a victim of family violence, ask yourself these questions:

- What are my attitudes, feelings and thoughts about family violence and battered women?
- What counseling assets do I have for helping battered women?
- What are my limitations?
- What resources are available to help victims of family violence in my community?

## COUNSELING CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to talk with the victim alone. Many experts in the family violence field concur that counseling the couple together is not effective once the presence of family abuse has been established. Joint counseling often threatens the victim's safety and the batterer's presence may also hinder their ability to openly discuss the abuse.

Most family violence victims are relieved when asked to tell their story. Encourage them to openly discuss their situation. Ask them to describe how they feel. They may express feelings of isolation, shame, confusion, guilt, fear, and powerlessness.

Most family violence victims minimize their situation to make it bearable or because they have been taught by society that this type of violence is tolerated. It is important to understand that these victims are more likely to understate the situation rather than exaggerate it.

A family violence victim may find it difficult to make decisions and assess their situation. You can help them assess personal strengths, resources, and support systems. Providing answers and making decisions for them is NOT as empowering as presenting them with information and options. Let them know that you support their decisions, even if it means breaking up the family. ***The victim's safety and the safety of the children must be secured before work to preserve the family can begin.***

A family violence victim may struggle to understand the abuse in light of their religious beliefs. They may believe that they deserve the punishment because of their sin or that suffering is the way to salvation. Recognize their inner conflict. Be willing to discuss the religious questions they may ask. Address their guilt by emphasizing that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the abuser.

Safety is the main priority for family violence victims and their children. Constructing a safety plan that is feasible and works best with their situation is a high priority. Domestic violence programs are excellent resources to use when helping a family violence victim develop a safety plan. They can also provide information and support for you and the family violence victim. Services that are provided by domestic violence programs can include much of the following:

- 24 hour shelter or safe housing,
- 24 hour crisis hotline,
- Referral to emergency medical care,
- If applicable, assistance with getting crime victim compensation,
- Counseling or psychological services,
- Emergency transportation,
- Legal advocacy when obtaining an order of protection,
- Educational arrangements for children, Information about training for and seeking employment,
- Housing information,
- Community education,
- A referral system to existing community services, and
- A volunteer recruitment and training program.

## RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE...

### WHAT THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY CAN DO

Religious communities provide a safe haven for women and families in need. In addition, they exhort society to share compassion and comfort with those afflicted by the tragedy of domestic violence. Leaders of the religious community have identified actions to create a unified response to violence against women.

- **Become a Safe Place.** Make your church, temple, mosque or synagogue a safe place where victims of domestic violence can come for help. Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area. Publicize the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TTY).
- **Educate the Congregation.** Provide ways for members of the congregation to learn as much as they can about domestic and sexual violence. Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Sponsor educational seminars on violence against women in your congregation.
- **Speak Out.** Speak out about domestic violence and sexual assault from the pulpit. As a faith leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.
- **Lead by Example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.
- **Offer Space.** Offer meeting space for educational seminars or weekly support groups or serve as a supervised visitation site when parents need to safely visit their children.
- **Partner With Existing Resources.** Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects. Adopt a shelter for which your church, temple, mosque or synagogue provides material support, or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.
- **Prepare to Be a Resource.** Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to family violence and receive training from professionals in the fields of sexual and domestic violence.
- **Intervene With Respect to Victim Safety.** If you suspect violence is occurring in a relationship, speak to each member of the couple separately, but caution is advised here for the safety of the victim. Help the victim plan for safety. Let both individuals know of the community resources available to assist them. Do not attempt couples counseling.



- **Support Professional Training.** Encourage and support training and education for clergy and lay leaders, hospital chaplains, and seminary students to increase awareness about sexual and domestic violence.
- **Address Internal Issues.** Encourage continued efforts by religious institutions to address allegations of abuse by religious leaders to insure that religious leaders are a safe resource for victims and their children.

## CONGREGATION AND COMMUNITY

As a spiritual leader you are an important role model and part of a community response that conveys the important message to others that family violence is not acceptable. Family violence affects every individual in a family and every segment of society. The community and its leaders play an important role in addressing and coordinating responses to family violence. As a trustworthy member of the community, you are often the first to be contacted by a family violence victim in a time of crisis. Hopefully, this introduction to family violence will help you to address the many complex issues associated with family violence.

## HELP FOR THE BATTERER

A batterer can present one face to the community and another at home. They can be outwardly charming and congenial and may be an active member in their religious community. However, in the privacy of their own home, they can be controlling, cruel and violent. They blame others for their violence and often deny responsibility for their behavior.

Working with batterers is a complex and difficult task. Partner Abuse Intervention Programs (PAIP) can be an effective form of help. There are several PAIP's in Illinois. Domestic Violence programs, and the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence can provide information and referral for batterers.

Religious teachings support the belief that people can and do change. If the batterer chooses not to change, maintaining the family unit may need to be reconsidered. Family unity cannot super cede any one person's right to live in safety and free of violence.

## RESOURCES

The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) is a not-for-profit membership organization that works to eliminate family violence throughout Illinois. Domestic Violence and Partner Abuse Intervention programs can be found on their website. [www.ilcadv.org](http://www.ilcadv.org)



Voice: 217-789-2830

Fax: 217-789-1939

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

FaithTrust Institute is a national, multi-faith, multi-cultural training and education organization with global reach working to end sexual and domestic violence.

Voice: 206-634-1903

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