



## **Guidelines for Supporting People Who May Be Experiencing Domestic Abuse**

*This is a copy of the guidelines developed by the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service for England and Wales. It was last updated in May 2016. For further information please visit [www.csasprocedures.uk.net](http://www.csasprocedures.uk.net)*

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Given our current knowledge of the levels of domestic abuse within society based upon both research and reported incidents, it is likely that domestic abuse is prevalent in every parish community.

Such incidences may be recognised or brought to the attention of priests, religious, employees, volunteers or members of the parish community. In order to be able to respond appropriately, sensitively and effectively it is important to have an understanding of domestic abuse and of your role in supporting a survivor.

### **SCENARIOS**

Domestic abuse manifests itself in a variety of ways:-

- A lone parent experiencing bullying and intimidation from a teenage child.
- A partner in a marriage dominating and controlling their spouse.
- Regular and repeated physical abuse within a marriage.
- An older relative being physically or emotionally abused.
- An elderly relative being financially exploited.

(And see definitions of domestic abuse in Specific Guidance – Domestic Abuse)

### **BASIC FACTS**

- One in four women in England and Wales experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives (Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2012/14)
- Each week in the United Kingdom two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner (Office for National Statistics, 2015).
- 2.6% of the elderly population experience mistreatment from a relative, friend or care worker. If acquaintances and neighbours are taken into account this figure rises to 4%. (2007 study by Dept of Health)
- Every person has a right to live their life free from violence, abuse, intimidation and fear.

- Domestic violence accounts for 22% of all reported violent incidents (reported by participants in the BCS (Home Office, July 2002)) .
- Domestic abuse is not confined to any socio economic class, race or age. Women however are more likely to be subject to domestic abuse than men.
- Where domestic abuse occurs it is entirely the responsibility of the abuser. There are no acceptable excuses.
- In nearly all scenarios there are steps that can be taken to increase safety for the survivor and other members of the household, such as children, who may be affected.

## **YOUR ROLE**

If you become aware that someone within your parish or religious community is experiencing domestic abuse then ***a response is always required.***

If you do not feel able to respond yourself, you should bring it to the attention of someone who may be able to help: a priest or deacon, a member of the parish council or pastoral team, the Diocesan or Religious Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

Whoever does respond must be clear about their role. This is:-

- To focus on the safety of the survivor and any children where they are involved. *NB: Where there are children in the household, concerns must be passed to the statutory authorities. This can be done via the Safeguarding Co-ordinator.*
- To provide a safe space for survivors to disclose abuse.
- To support and reassure with non-judgemental attitude.
- To provide information about sources of support or how to refer to relevant agencies.
- Where appropriate to provide religious guidance emphasizing aspects of our Catholic beliefs which prioritise equality, the dignity of our lives, the rights to be free of violence and intimidation.

## **THE ROLE IS NOT:-**

- To instruct or advise about a particular course of action. Rather to encourage the survivor to examine and explore options.
- To act as a caseworker. You can help a survivor access appropriate help from relevant domestic abuse services.

## **DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK**

If you are concerned that a person is experiencing domestic abuse do not be afraid to ask direct questions.

People who experience this type of abuse are often reluctant to name their experience or may indeed not realise what is happening to them.

Do not assume that people will be offended about being asked. For example, research has shown that over 90% of women who were asked sensitively were not offended even when the question did not apply to them.

Even where someone may respond in an upset or hostile manner that does not mean you should not have raised the issue. They may come back to you when they are ready to discuss the matter. Questions should be non-judgemental such as:-

- Are you having problems at home?
- Do you ever get frightened by what someone in your family says or does?
- How do you sort out arguments in your family?
- Has anyone ever been violent towards you?

If someone answers yes to these types of questions you should check to see if they want support or help from e.g.:-

- A refuge or local domestic abuse agency if it is a partner in a marriage or relationship.
- Adult Social Care agencies if it is an older or elderly person being abused or exploited.
- Children's Social Care Services should always be informed if a child is involved.

It is important to realise that patience is called for. People experiencing domestic abuse, especially those in a marital relationship or partnership where their partner is the abuser, can only discuss or accept help in their own time.

You should never take sides but should let them know you are there if they want to talk or want help and support to contact helping agencies.

If they do want to talk through their experience, these gentle, non-judgemental questions may assist.

- What can I do to help?
- How is this affecting you?
- How have you been coping with the abuse?
- What can you do to make yourself safer?
- Do you know when an incident is going to happen? Is there a pattern?
- What are your worst fears for yourself/your children?
- Who else is around to help you cope (support networks of friends and family for instance)?
- Can I help you find out information about what choices you may have?

- Would you like me to go with you to find out some more information?

## **PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY**

All conversations should be conducted in private and reassurance should be given that any disclosures will be treated confidentially (*unless children are involved when there is an obligation to report*).

It is important to create safe time and places for people to have an opportunity to disclose what is happening to them. For this to happen will also be dependent upon whether you are perceived as someone who can be trusted. This trust is often about being able to keep information to yourself and only share it when permission has been given or where safety reasons override this.

You should be clear to the person when explaining limits to confidentiality.

Information should never be shared for the sake of it, only where either:-

- Consent is given.
- The need to protect children overrides confidentiality.
- To enable a professional/agency to work safely to support the survivor.

## **SUPPORT SERVICES**

The range of services available will depend upon the circumstances of the domestic abuse and where the individual lives. Please visit the cedar website for a list of support services: [www.cedar.uk.net/helplines.htm](http://www.cedar.uk.net/helplines.htm)

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