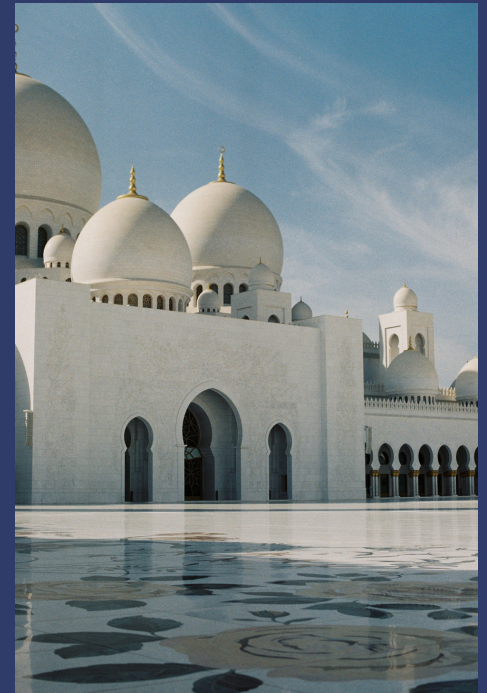


# Knowledge & Resources:

## A Companion to the Faith-Based Core Workshop

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO SUPPORT FAITH  
COMMUNITIES IN RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE



for Charleston, Dorchester, and  
Berkeley Counties

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Compiled by the Faith-Based Taskforce,  
a collaboration between Tri-County S.P.E.A.K.S and My Sister's House



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# Mission Statement for the Faith-Based Task Force

This task force aims to create a community free of interpersonal and sexual violence within Dorchester, Berkeley and Charleston counties of South Carolina. Through collaborative efforts by dedicated and passionate individuals, we seek to provide resources, prevention techniques, and information to assist local faith institutions in addressing violence culture and perpetrator accountability.

# Purpose of the Task Force

- **Provide resources** to help faith communities appropriately respond to abuse allegations -- no matter who the abuser is.
- We want to assist all local faiths and denominations **support victims** of violence and mistreatment in the tri-county area.
- Encourage members of faith communities **to gain awareness, education, and tools for prevention.**
- To help faith centers like yours **provide initial support and information to survivors** as they start the often difficult journey from an abusive relationship to a life of peace.
- To **help you establish a structure within your faith community** to shepherd those experiencing interpersonal and/or sexual violence. We want to partner with you to provide a safe space where congregants can go to report abuse and get the help they need.

# Why are we interested in working with faith communities?

- **Port in the storm:** Houses of worship provide a necessary, critical role in our community. They are where people go to find spirituality and community. They often serve as a port in the storm for those who are experiencing mistreatment.
- **Modeling healthy family dynamics:** Abuse can be generational. People who experience abuse during their childhood, whether firsthand or watching their loved ones become subject to it, often end up modeling that same behavior in adulthood.
- **Support victims:** We hope this information will support your efforts to effectively address sexual and domestic violence in your faith community while showing solidarity to victims.
- **Partnership:** We want to build this into a network of informed individuals, both within and outside of your faith community, who can help those experiencing abuse. We also want to create a dialogue between your community and ours.
- **Safe space:** Whether you go to a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, we want to help you create a space where your members feel safe and secure to disclose their abuse.
- **Secondary victimization:** One of our big goals is to avoid secondary victimization and perpetuating victim blaming. We're hoping to give you the information and tools necessary to offer compassionate, trauma-informed responses to anyone who discloses abuse to you.

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence defines domestic violence as **the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or abusive behavior as part of a systemic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.** This definition is much broader than ones typically recognized by our state laws for obtaining protective orders.

Domestic violence may differ in terms of the severity of abuse, and there are instances in which there is no physical violence at all in the relationship. The terms “family violence,” “intimate partner violence,” and “domestic abuse” are often used interchangeably to describe this pattern of power and control of one person over another within the context of a current or former intimate or familial relationship. The definition of domestic violence will vary from state to state. **In South Carolina, the definition is: a spouse, former spouse, persons who have a child in common, partners who cohabit or previously cohabited.** This was updated in 2017 to include same-sex couples.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” **Sexual violence is any type of sexual behavior or action that occurs without the explicit consent of the victim or victims.**

Any individual can be a victim of sexual violence. Although it is often described as a “women’s issue... 1 out of every 10 rape victims are male identifying” (RAINN). **Sexual assault and rape are about power and control. Perpetrators make an active choice to exert power and control over another individual's physical being.**

When someone becomes a victim of sexual violence, they often experience feelings of guilt, self-blame, anger, and shame. Some individuals may feel that people in their lives will not believe them or support them through their healing process. Responding to survivors of sexual violence with compassion and understanding is a critical first step in providing support.

## TYPES OF ABUSE

Below are some examples of the manipulative and coercive tactics that abusers may use in a domestic violence relationship:

### PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

This includes **verbal**, **emotional**, and **mental abuse**. It is typically how abuse begins in unhealthy relationships and can be very hard to identify. It is pervasive and intersects with many other types of abuse.

- Calling you names; insulting you; continually criticizing you
- Refusing to trust you; acting very jealous or possessive
- Trying to isolate you from family or friends
- Monitoring where you go, who you call, and who you spend time with
- Demanding to know where you are at all times
- Trapping you in your home or attempting to prevent you from leaving
- Using weapons to threaten, intimidate, or harm you
- Punishing you by withholding affection
- Threatening to harm the children or pets
- Damaging your property when they are angry (throwing or breaking objects, punching walls)
- Gaslighting: a form of emotional abuse and mental manipulation that leaves the recipient questioning their own reality and wondering if they are in the wrong in nearly every argument <sup>2</sup>
- Humiliating you in any way
- Blaming you for the abuse
- Accusing you of cheating and often being jealous of outside relationships
- Serially cheating on you and then blaming you for their behavior or attempting to justify it
- Cheating to prove that they are more desired, more worthy
- Attempting to control your appearance or what you wear
- Telling you that you will never find anyone better, that they are lucky to have them, or that no one will ever love them the way they do
- Disregarding your feelings
- Sabotaging you in any way (such as outside relationships, goals)
- Threatening to harm themselves if the victim leaves or tries to leave
- Threatening to report victim to child protection services
- Threatening lengthy court battles if victim tries to leave
- Ignoring restraining orders or child support orders



## **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Any kind of abuse that causes obvious physical injury, including but not limited to: spitting on, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hitting, elbowing, kneeling, biting, kicking, punching, strangling, smothering, burning, stabbing the victim.

There are other types of physical abuse that may be indirect in nature yet still cause physical harm. Less obvious examples include, but are not limited to:

- Preventing you from eating
- Interfering with your sleep
- Driving recklessly with you in the vehicle
- Abandoning you in unfamiliar surroundings
- Forcing you to use drugs or alcohol (especially if you've had a substance abuse problem in the past)
- Refuses to allow medical attention for injuries, conditions, or routine care

## **SEXUAL ABUSE & COERCION**

It is important to note that sex is an important piece of a healthy relationship. Even within a marriage, each partner has the right to say no and should respect their partner if they do say no to any sexual act. Being married does not allow you unlimited access to someone sexually.

- Abuser feels entitled to sex and refuses to take "no" for an answer
- Abuser makes the victim participate in forced sexual acts that are shameful, demeaning and often painful to the victim
- Withholding sex or intimacy as a form of punishment or emotional blackmail
- Forcing you to dress in a sexual way
- Demanding sex when you are sick, injured or tired
- Involving other people in sexual activities without your consent
- Ignoring your feeling regarding sex
- Reacting negatively with sadness, anger or resentment if you say no or don't immediately agree to something
- Trying to normalize their sexual expectations

## **ECONOMIC ABUSE**

- Abuser maintains control over all household income (ie. Gives an allowance, monitors where money is spent, demands receipts)
- Makes the financial decisions and withholds money from the victim
- Harasses the victim at work to get them fired
- Prevents victim from working
- Steals money from victim
- Opens accounts or credit cards in the name of the victim without their knowledge
- Confiscates tax returns or any other financial stimulus payments
- Refuses to pay for shared necessities and expenses (ie. Food, transportation, medical bills)

## **REPRODUCTIVE ABUSE AND COERCION**

- The abuser refuses to use birth control
- Breaking or removing a condom during intercourse
- Not allowing use of birth control or sabotaging birth control method
- Withholding finances needed to purchase birth control
- Monitoring your cycles to ensure their partner becomes pregnant (without the partner's knowledge or consent)
- Forcing pregnancy or forcing an abortion
- Threatening or acting violent if you don't comply with their wishes to end or continue a pregnancy
- Pressure, guilt, and shame from an abusive partner (ie. Constantly talking about having children or making you feel guilty for not wanting children, especially if you have children from a previous relationship).

## **DIGITAL/TECH ABUSE**

- Tracks mileage on the victim's vehicle
- Monitors the victim's phone calls and computer usage
- Controls or attempts to control who you are friends with on social media
- Demands to read messages or look at pictures
- Sends negative, threatening or insulting emails or messages
- Steals or insists on being given passwords
- Constantly texts or calls and makes you feel as though you must answer immediately

## SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Spiritual abuse tactics can inflict considerable harm on victims of domestic and sexual violence, making them question their spiritual values and beliefs. Here are some examples of spiritual abuse used by a perpetrator:

- Abusers cite scripture to justify abusive, dominating or oppressive behavior;
- Abusers deny their partners the freedom to practice the religion of their choice;
- Abusers force their partners to violate their religious beliefs;
- Abusers shame or belittle their partners for their religious practices;
- Abusers make oppressive demands based on their interpretation of scriptures or other religious teachings (e.g., “the scriptures say that you need to obey me because you are my wife”).
- Abusers instill religious guilt for not doing what they want them to do (e.g., “How can you call yourself religious if you don’t forgive me?”);
- Abusers’ sense of marital entitlement causes them to justify their sexual demands, including forced sex (i.e., marital rape);
- Abusers involve or force children to witness ritual abuse (e.g., sacrificing pets).
- Abusers manipulate others in their religious communities to control and ostracize their partners.

Because abusers will misuse scriptures to justify physical, sexual and other abuses, spiritual leaders must guard against unwittingly corroborating an abuser’s claims that they are “head of household” without expounding upon their responsibilities in this role. They should be encouraged to model respect, mutuality, and nonviolence.

While prayer is a powerful and valuable tool for supporting victims, pastors should also encourage safety planning and connection to resources and support systems for safety.

**Victims of domestic and sexual abuse need to hear that their faith tradition does not condone violence against them, and that their physical and spiritual well-being is just as important as the family’s wholeness. Using violence is a choice that abusers make and it is important that faith leaders understand this and differentiate between other marital conflicts.**

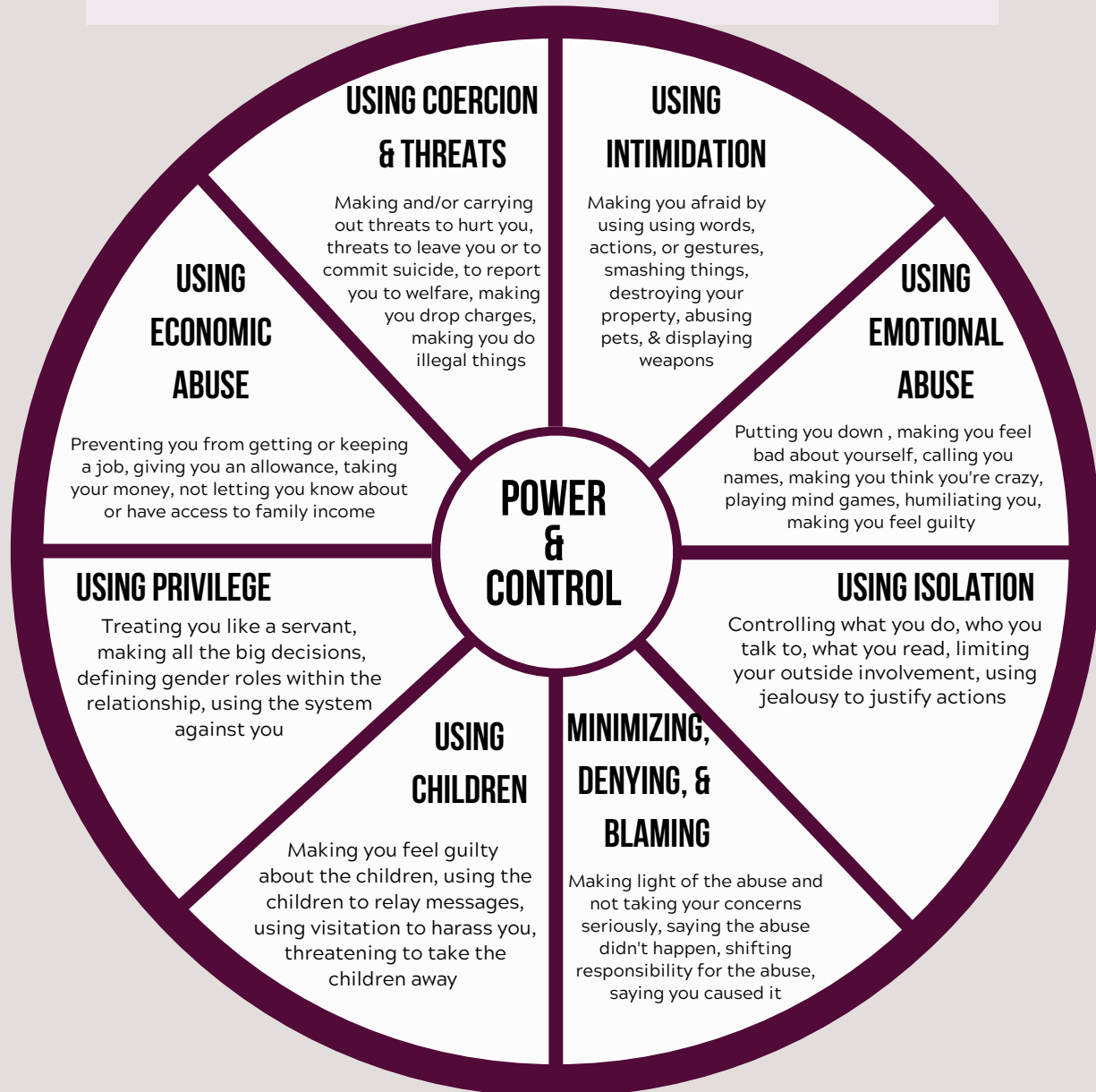
An abuser may change, but it takes a lot of work. Abusers must acknowledge the choices they made that caused harm to their partner (and children if present). Abusers must take responsibility for their past actions and choices. During this time, it may not be safe for their partner and children to be together as a family. Community agencies and resources like Tri-County S.P.E.A.K.S. or My Sister’s House, which provides safe shelter, should be utilized when safety is at risk.



# POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

Domestic violence is rooted in the abuser's desire for power and control.

The power and control wheel shows the actions and ways abusers manipulate and instill fear in victims.



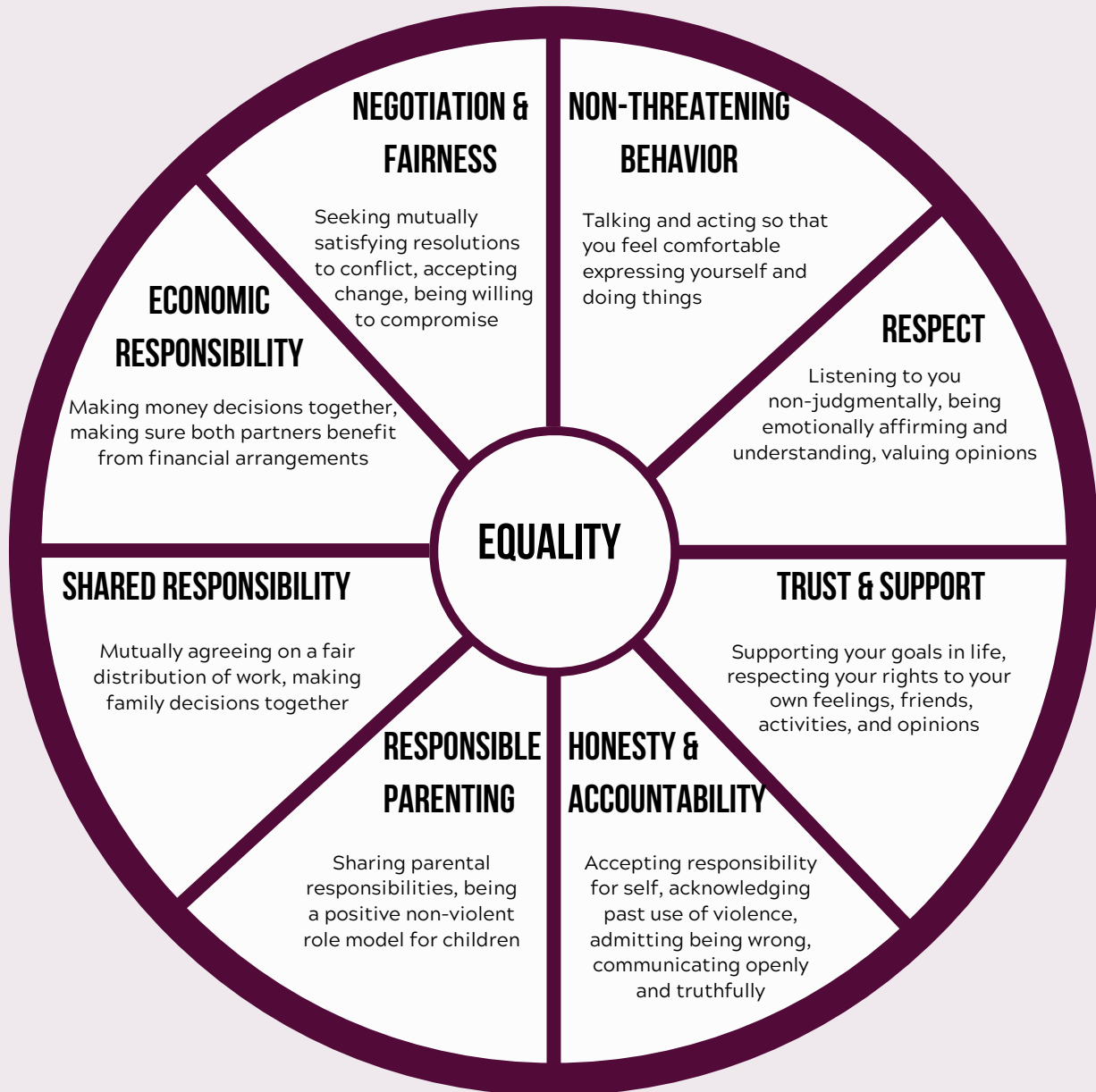
**LEARN MORE WITH THE MSH EDUCATION & TRAINING TEAM**

Please contact us at **843-225-6397** or [sydney@mysistershouse.com](mailto:sydney@mysistershouse.com) to discuss bringing this important information to your business, church or community organization in Berkeley, Charleston & Dorchester County.

# EQUALITY WHEEL

A healthy relationship is based on equality and does not include violence.

The equality wheel shows the different aspects of a healthy relationship (in contrast to the power and control wheel).



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# Clergy as Mandated Reporters

Understanding the duty of clergy to report suspected child abuse and neglect and when communications are protected by the clergy-penitent privilege

## Clergy's Duty to Report

In South Carolina, members of the clergy who are at least 18 years old are mandated reporters and are required by S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-310 to report suspected child abuse or neglect. While state law does not provide a definition of "clergy," it does specifically identify regular or duly ordained ministers, Christian Science practitioners, religious healers, rabbis, and priests as clergy.

As mandated reporters, clergy members must report when in their professional capacity they have received information which gives them reason to believe a child has been or may be abused or neglected as defined in S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-20.

The mandate to report child abuse or neglect does not require the reporter to know for certain that a child has been abused or neglected. The duty to report is triggered when the mandated reporter has the reasonable belief that a child has been or may be abused or neglected.

Reporting to a supervisor or person in charge of an institution does not relieve a mandated reporter of his or her individual duty to report, and the duty to report is not superseded by an internal investigation within an institution.S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-310(C).

## Reporting Requirement Exception

The only circumstance in which clergy, including Christian Science practitioners and religious healers, are exempt from being required to report suspected child abuse or neglect occurs when a clergy member's only knowledge of the abuse or neglect is based on information received:

- from the alleged perpetrator of the abuse,
- during a communication protected by the clergy-penitent privilege provided for in §19-11-90. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-420.

## Clergy-penitent Privilege

The clergy-penitent privilege is the protection of confidential communications between clergy members and their church members or other individuals. To be protected by the clergy-penitent privilege, a communication must meet the following four conditions of S.C. Code Ann. §19-11-90:

- It must be confidential;
- It must be disclosed to a regular or duly ordained minister, priest, or rabbi;
- It must be entrusted to the clergy member when acting in his or her professional capacity; and
- It must be one that is necessary and proper to enable the clergy member to discharge the functions of his or her office according to the usual course of practice or discipline of his or her church or religious body.

## Failure to Report

A clergy member who knowingly fails to report, in an effort to resolve the matter internally with the parties involved, could face criminal and civil liability. A mandated reporter who knowingly fails to report is guilty of a misdemeanor and if convicted, may be fined up to \$500, or imprisoned for up to six months, or both. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-410.

## Additional Information

For a detailed overview of mandated reporter requirements and how to make a report, see the Mandated Reporter Guide found on the Children's Law Center website at <http://childlaw.sc.edu>.

To schedule a free training for clergy on mandated reporting, contact the Children's Law Center at 803-777-1646.

## IMMEDIATE STEPS AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

If you or someone you know was sexually assaulted within the past 120 hours (5 days), these are recommended next steps:

- Address immediate safety concerns.
- Contact a trusted friend/family member for support or call the Tri-County S.P.E.A.K.S. crisis hotline at 843-745-0144 for emotional support and available next steps.
- You can be examined and cared for in the emergency room.
  - If the assault occurred within 120 hours (5 days), you can receive a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) at MUSC's Adult Emergency Department **for free**.
  - The SAFE is conducted by a trained forensic nurse.
  - During the exam, evidence will be collected. You will also receive medical attention for any injuries, and you will be offered preventative medication for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
  - **You do not have to make a police report to receive free medical attention.**
- Try not to shower, bathe, eat/drink, smoke, change clothes, or use the restroom, if possible, to preserve evidence.
  - If possible, do not change your clothes. If you have already changed, put your clothes in a clean paper bag, and bring those clothes with you to the hospital.

**The adult emergency room at MUSC (Medical University of South Carolina) in downtown Charleston is currently the only medical facility that offers Sexual Assault Forensic Exams for adults. It is located at 96 Jonathan Lucas Street, Charleston, SC 29425. There is a parking garage across the street, and you can get your parking validated at the emergency room's front desk.**

If you choose to get a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam, your insurance will not be billed. A TCS advocate can accompany you through this process.

## REPORTING OPTIONS FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

### Police Report

Making a police report is one of the many options that victims of sexual violence have. If someone chooses to make a police report this entails getting the police involved at any point in the reporting process. After the assault, a survivor can call the dispatch number for the local police department and inform them that they have been assaulted. The officer will take a written statement of the assault and create a case. The officer will then recommend that the victim go to MUSC for a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) for evidence collection. After the exam, the police will send the kit for testing. Testing for a sexual assault kit can take about 18 months (about one-and-a-half years).

Once the kit is processed, investigators will choose whether they have enough evidence to prosecute. It is important to note that sexual assault is seen as a crime against the public health not the individual. This means the victim is not pressing charges directly against the perpetrator, but that the police or local prosecuting office decides whether a case goes forward or if it is dropped.

It is important to remember that making a police report is not the best option for every victim. The criminal justice system often fails survivors of sexual violence. Based on statistics provided by RAINN, "out of every 1,000 sexual assaults, 975 perpetrators will walk free." If investigators have enough evidence to move a case forward the entire process can take about 2-4 years depending on criminal proceedings. We recommend connecting survivors with a local rape crisis center that can help them navigate this process.

### Anonymous Report

Anonymous reports are an option for people who are not sure if working with law enforcement is the right choice for them. Through an anonymous report, victims can still receive a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam at MUSC. This means they receive a free head-to-toe exam, evidence collection, and sexually transmitted infections prophylaxis/emergency contraceptive if they choose. Anonymous reports are kept confidential and are stored at a facility for one year to allow the victim time to decide on whether they want to involve law enforcement. It is important to note that sexual assault kits are only processed at SLED if the victim makes a police report. Without a police report, the evidence will remain unprocessed and destroyed after one year.

### No Kit Taken Report

Victims of sexual assault also have the option to have a no kit taken. This is an option for individuals that want to receive a head-to-toe exam and medications. With no kit taken, there is no evidence collection.

### Military Report

Military personnel have two additional reporting options. Any military member or spouse of a family member can utilize any of the civilian reporting options but, they have additional options known as restricted or unrestricted military reporting.

- **Military Restricted:** Similar to a civilian anonymous report. Allows the victim to confidentially disclose the assault to certain people without an investigation being opened. Evidence is collected and stored for five years. The report itself is stored for fifty years.
- **Military Unrestricted:** Similar to a civilian police report. Law enforcement and the commanding officer are informed of the report. The official investigation process is initiated and cannot be changed.

## **STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON SEXUAL ASSAULT**

The statute of limitations is the span of time someone must report a crime like sexual assault. In South Carolina, there is no statute of limitations, meaning that someone can report an instance of sexual assault at any point in time.

The only exception to the statute of limitations is if the perpetrator is a spouse. If someone's perpetrator is their spouse, then they only have 30 days to file a police report. For more information on marital assault and reporting times, please contact Tri-County S.P.E.A.K.S. at 843-745-0144.

## **HARASSMENT**

The EEOC defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. Harassment is not always sexual in nature but, can include offensive statements regarding a person's sex or gender. It is important to remember that the victim or harasser can be any gender and of the same sex.

Although the law does not prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments or isolated incidents, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision such as being fired or demoted.

As a member of this Faith Initiative, we suggest you review your sexual harassment policy. If you do not have one, we can help you develop one that ensures the safety and respect of each member of your institution. We can also offer a more in-depth training on this topic for members of your congregation if you are interested.

## **WARNING SIGNS**

While every abuser is different, they might employ some of the same types of abusive and controlling tactics. Here are some signs to look for:

### **Warning Signs for Domestic Violence & Sexual Violence**

- Extreme jealousy: often mistaken for love, it is really indicative of a lack of trust
- Need to control: often explained as concern for the partner's safety, it is actually a tactic meant to isolate partner from her or his support system
- Forcing sex with others
- Expectation of rigid gender roles: frequent use societal expectations of men's and women's roles and negative stereotypes to control their partners. Gender roles and expectations can be used in both heterosexual and same sex relationships.
- Refusing to use protection when having sex or sabotaging birth control
- Possessiveness: abuser views the partner as an object to be owned
- Verbal abuse: meant to build up the abuser by tearing down the partner
- "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" personality: a manipulative method to get power and control over an intimate partner with alternating threats and kindness
- Looking at or acting in ways that scare the person they are abusing
- Controlling who the victim sees, where they go, or what they do
- Preventing the victim from making their own decisions
- Telling the victim that they are a bad parent or threatening to hurt, kill, or take away their children
- Threatening to hurt or kill the victim's friends, loved ones, or pets
- Intimidating the victim with guns, knives, or other weapons
- Pressuring the victim to have sex when they don't want to or to do things sexually they are not comfortable with
- Pressuring or forcing the victim to use drugs or alcohol

### **Warning Signs for Sexual Violence**

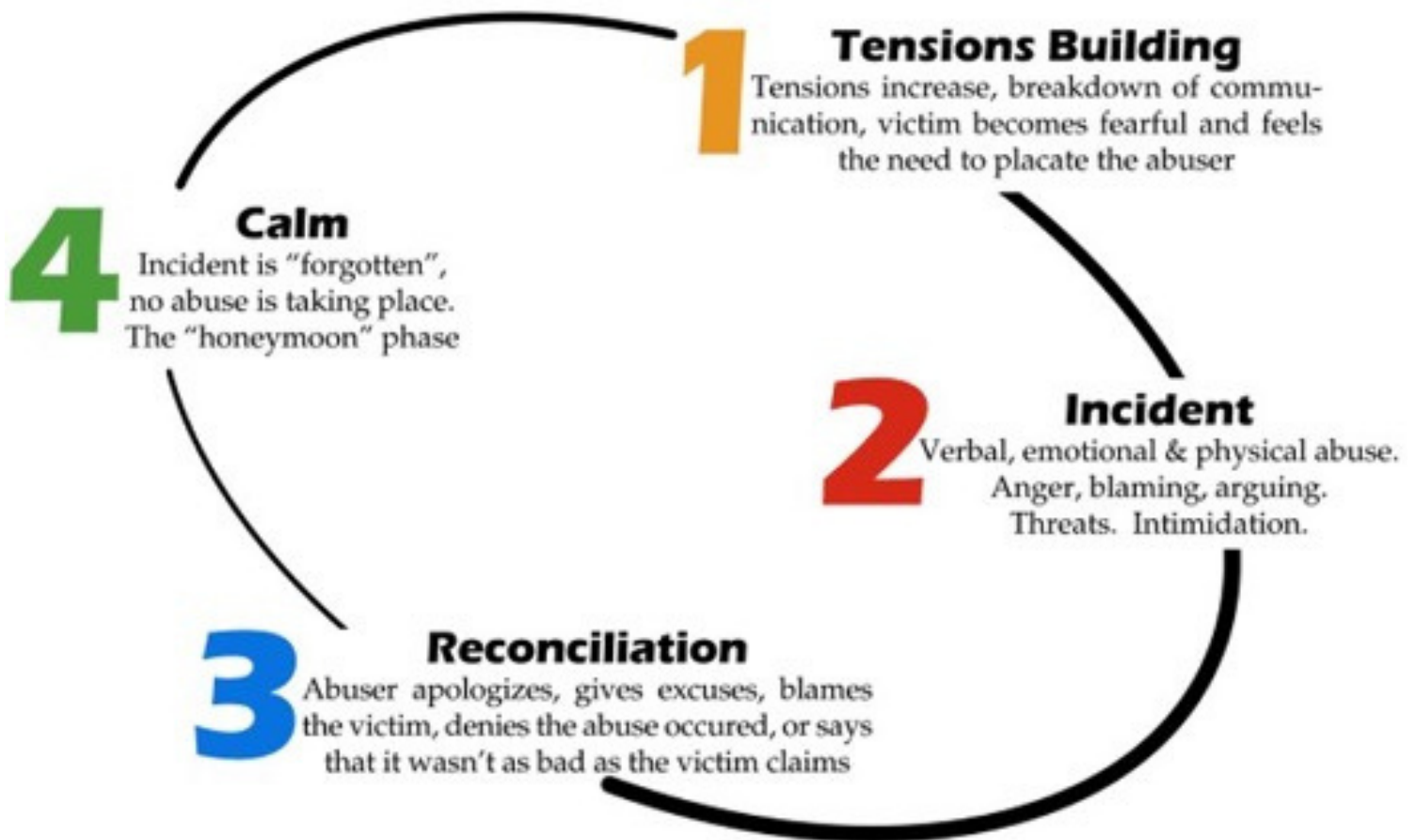
- Signs of depression, such as persistent sadness, changes in sleep, lack of energy, changes in appetite, feeling 'down' or withdrawing from normal activities
- Self-harming behaviors
- Low self-esteem
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Anxiety or worry about situations (Hypervigilance)
- Avoiding specific situations or places
- Increase in drug or alcohol use
- Unusual weight gain or loss
- Unhealthy eating patterns
- Changes in hygiene, appearance, or fashion
- Expressing thoughts about suicide or suicide behavior

## Warning Signs for Domestic Violence

- Cruelty to animals: shows a lack of empathy and complete disregard for another living being's pain.
- Accusing the victim of cheating
- Telling the victim that they can never do anything right
- Showing jealousy of the victim's family and friends and time spent away
- Keeping or discouraging the victim from seeing friends or family members
- Embarrassing or shaming the victim with put-downs
- Controlling every penny spent in the household
- Taking the victim's money or refusing to give them money for expenses
- Dictating how the victim dresses, wears their hair, etc.
- Stalking the victim or monitoring their victim's every move (in person or also via the internet and/or other devices such as GPS tracking or the victim's phone)
- Preventing the victim from working or attending school, harassing the victim at either, keeping their victim up all night so they perform badly at their job or in school
- Destroying the victim's property
- Pet and animal abuse is cited as an early indicator for domestic violence. Abusers will often use violence against family pets and animals as a way to abuse their intimate partner and/or children. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, "...numerous small studies have indicated that in homes where victims of domestic violence keep animals, anywhere from 70 to 80 percent of the animals have been abused or threatened with abuse." Many victims may not want to leave their animals behind or with the abuser out of fear of the animal being harmed or even killed. It is important to acknowledge that many people have attachments to their pets and may even consider them part of the family. **If a victim needs or wants to leave a violent relationship, My Sister's House has partnerships in the community to help them with a temporary placement for pets.**



# Cycle of Abuse



More in-depth information about what domestic violence is and isn't, the cycle of violence, the impacts and warning signs can be found in our follow-up educational modules on abuse and building healthy relationships. Please contact Tri-County SPEAKS and My Sister's House to schedule one of these workshops.

## **MAKING THE DECISION TO LEAVE**

Leaving is a process, not an event. Victims often need to overcome a number of issues when coming to a decision to find safety apart from their abuser. Victims may feel that they have to justify leaving someone they and the children may love. Victims also have to overcome social, cultural and religious constraints of their relationships. Then they must find all of the economic resources and support systems necessary to make it on their own.

Many victims who are parents finally decide to leave because they recognize that their children are hurting from the abuse that they are being exposed to and are potentially experiencing firsthand.

However, when the courts become involved through protective orders or divorce actions, abusers may be given equal rights to their children — and victims may feel that they cannot protect their children when they are alone with the abusers. When victims realize that they are powerless to protect their children in these circumstances, they often make the difficult decision to stay.

Leaving an abusive relationship is often the most dangerous time. That is when the abuser has lost control, and is willing to do anything to gain back the power and control. The majority of domestic violence homicides occur after the victim has left the relationship.

Due to the extreme risk when leaving an abusive relationship, it is critical that it is done as safely and with as much planning and support as possible. My Sister's House provides safety planning for individuals which includes the safety of their children, safety through tech devices, physical packing lists, and emotional safety planning. It is important to note that reconciliation is possible. A separation to work toward reconciliation may be needed when one partner is using violence. The abusive partner must take responsibility for the harm they have caused and make changes within themselves.

## THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Adults as well as children are affected by domestic violence. In 2010, 1 in 15 children in the United States were exposed to intimate partner violence for a total of more than 5 million children.<sup>3</sup> Children who are impacted by domestic violence may have a variety of responses to what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling. It is important to note that each child will have their own way of coping with the violence and behaviors associated with the exposure.

Children may develop resiliency through positive interaction and relationships with their non-abusive parent, other trustworthy adults, and peers. Children may also use behaviors and tactics they see at home in their own friendships and relationships, therefore becoming an abuser themselves. As a faith leader, you may have the opportunity to help children learn alternatives to violence, reinforce that their abused parent deserves respect, and reassure the children that the violence is not their fault. This task force can offer specialized training through our community child advocacy centers.

**Child abuse is when an underage victim (below the age of 16) is victimized by an adult. This adult could be a parent, teacher, mentor, religious leader, babysitter, coach, or any other adult that has power over a child. Children cannot consent to any form of sexual activity. This means that all types of sexual activity involving a minor are sexual abuse regardless of any claims or statements made by a perpetrator.**

Child sexual abuse does not have to include physical forms of contact (touching, kissing, etc.) between the child and perpetrator. RAINN includes, "exhibitionism, fondling, intercourse, masturbation in the presence of a minor, obscene interactions, child pornography, sex trafficking, or any other sexual conduct that is harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare." Sexual abuse against children often goes unreported, therefore it is critical that faith leaders know the appropriate steps to take if they suspect a child is being harmed.

# SIGNS OF ABUSE IN CHILDREN

According to RAINN, here are some signs you may recognize in a child who is experiencing abuse.

- **Behavioral signs**

- Changes in hygiene, such as refusing to bathe or bathing excessively
- Develops phobias
- Exhibits signs of depression or PTSD
- Expresses suicidal thought, especially in adolescents
- Has trouble in school or other settings
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviors
- Nightmares or bed-wetting
- Overly protective and concerned siblings
- Returns to regressive behaviors, such as thumb sucking
- Runs away from home or school
- Self-harms
- Shrinks away or seems threatened by physical contact

- **Physical signs**

- Bleeding, bruises, or swelling in genital area
- Bloody, torn, or stained underclothes
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Pain, itching, or burning in genital area

- **Verbal cues**

- Using words or phrases that are “too adult” for their age
- Unexplained silence
- Suddenly less talkative

## HOW TO RESPOND TO VICTIMS IN CRISIS

A thorough understanding of domestic and sexual abuse is essential when offering help to a victim. Often, victims are viewed to be responding in an irrational manner to what others may view as a standard or rational situation. Surviving trauma impacts the way information and memories are stored. For instance, when a victim seems unclear on the timeline of events or forgetful, this is likely due to the trauma they have experienced. They should not be discounted or not taken seriously because of it. Victims of domestic and sexual abuse often use survival and coping skills that are very rational to them in the face of the irrational, dangerous situations they face in their daily lives.

The victim is taking a courageous step in coming to you for help, and that courage must be met with equal compassion and understanding. If you are working with the victim on an ongoing basis, you may need to limit your interactions with the abuser to insure the victim's safety and trust. If the victim is female and expresses discomfort in speaking with a male clergy person, make every effort to refer her to a woman clergy person. If one is not available, ask how you can provide her services in a way that would make her more comfortable. If you are a female working with a male victim who prefers to speak to a male clergy, make every effort to accommodate his request.

### When responding to victims in crisis, it is important to:

1) **Protect confidentiality.** The victim needs to know that information shared with you will be protected by you and only released to others when they have given you written permission to do so. Let the victim know the limitations to confidentiality, and your need to report any disclosure of child abuse/neglect. Do not confront the abuser with allegations or ask for the abuser's side, and do not share information with others who might bring information back to the abuser. Victim safety depends on this.

2) **Believe the victim.** This is a crucial component to being trauma-informed. The victim's ability to trust you will grow in response to you expressing belief in all that the victim tells you. Remember that the victim is also likely to minimize, deny and blame him/herself for the violence done towards them. Expressing doubt when a victim discloses will likely result in them not coming back to the faith community for help and not reaching out to other resources equipped to help them in this serious crisis.

3) **Listen with an open mind.** Empty your mind of biases and prejudices; put aside your perceptions of this person and the family. Focus your complete attention on all that the victim has to say; listen without judgment. Reiterate what the victim has said so they know you have heard and understood.

4) **Ask direct and clarifying questions.** Your ability to address this sensitive subject with candor will give the victim assurance that it is OK to talk about it. Do not use vague terms like "violence" and "threats." Help the victim name the abuse they are experiencing. Use specific terms, such as "hitting," "name-calling," "isolation," etc.

5) **Be cautious in expressing emotion.** It is good to be empathetic when listening to a victim recount their experiences. However, be careful not to react with disgust, anger, doubt, or shock. Extreme reactions can trigger the victim or make the victim reluctant to continue to share their experience. Keep your emotions in check.

6) **Address moral and religious concerns.** A victim's faith can be a powerful resource for survival or a roadblock to safety, depending on the victim's view and experiences. This is an opportunity to emphasize the love, safety and support found in faith traditions and communities.

7) **Give referrals, especially to local agencies.** Offer to let the victim call the local crisis center to learn all of the options available to address the abuse and to create a safety plan. It is important the victim sees that the faith community supports accessing outside resources to address the victim's needs more completely.

8) **Express concern for the victim's and children's safety.** Ask questions to better assess safety needs and help develop a safety plan. Encourage the victim to put away financial resources for an emergency if possible. If the abuser remains in the faith community, plan ways to allow the victim to maintain fellowship while preserving safety. If the victim requests it, help the victim find a safe place to go.

9) **Tell the victim they are not alone.** Stress that domestic and sexual violence can happen to anyone. One in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will be physically and/or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Local agencies provide support and information for all victims of domestic and sexual violence.

10) **Respect and support the victim's choices.** Understand that the victim is the most knowledgeable about the relationship and is capable of making the right decisions at the right time to protect themselves and the family, even if that means staying with the abuser. Do not have expectations or pressure the victim to take action one way or another. Instead, outline the options, and let the victim decide. Continue to support after the decision has been made, even if you do not agree with it. Isolation is a key way abusers control their partner, so continued support can help the victim feel more comfortable to attempt changes in the relationship, even if it doesn't happen soon after the abuse is disclosed.

11) **Acknowledge the victim's courage and that they are not responsible for the abuse.** The best way to keep communication open is to let the victim know that faith tradition does not condone the abuser's behavior, the victim did nothing to deserve the abuse, and that the victim is doing the right thing by finding safety. Acknowledge the courage it takes to come forward. Assure the victim that you will honor the disclosure and the faith community will do what they can to provide support.

12) **Set boundaries, and know your limits.** If something is beyond your expertise, make appropriate referrals and seek help from your local crisis center, community colleagues and other resources.



13) **Do not physically touch a victim without permission.** Many victims experience severe physical or sexual trauma and can be triggered by touch. Ask permission to hug, hold a victim's hand, etc. Never become emotionally or sexually involved with a victim.

14) **DO NOT IGNORE THE ABUSE.** Doing nothing sends a message to both the victim and the abuser that the abuse is condoned by those who know about it. When someone says, "We don't want to get involved," what the victim likely hears is, "You're not important enough for me to become involved" or "I don't believe you." Ignoring abuse, like not believing a victim who discloses, can determine whether he or she feels comfortable enough to seek help from the faith community or other resources.

**\*\* More information can be found in The Introductory Guide to Caring Well and the Darkness To Light flyer in this resource binder.**

## **FORGIVENESS**

Forgiveness is a core value of many religions, but context is important. **When it comes to abusive situations, safety is the most immediate, urgent matter. That means that the priority should be to first remove the opportunity for further damage.** Then the sin that created the damage can be fully addressed.

While forgiveness may have value in bringing healing to some victims of domestic and sexual violence, too often, spiritual leaders advocate for the victim to forgive the abuser. This lays the burden on the victim's shoulders to fix a relationship that they are powerless to fix. The victim may already be facing internal and external pressures to forgive the abuser and reconcile. "Forgive and forget" is a message victims hear repeatedly, but rarely is forgiveness that simple. Forgiveness may be a long process for some victims, and may not be possible for all.

It is important to be clear about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not about pretending the violence never took place. Forgiveness is not excusing the abuser. It is not condoning abusive behavior, and it does not give up on justice. Forgiveness can come only after significant work by the abuser and their demonstration of true change. Forgiveness is also different from reconciliation, which is a process where two people seek to restore a safe, compassionate, fair, and kind relationship.

## **ADDRESSING DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A FAITH COMMUNITY**

Faith communities have a key role to play in addressing domestic and sexual violence. Awareness of the frequency of domestic and sexual violence interactions and the level of training and resourcing with which church leadership is equipped in a congregation is paramount to properly and safely addressing domestic and sexual violence as a faith community. The Rave Project, an online faith-based resource advocating against abuse as it occurs in faith communities, researched and presented the following statistics, giving a clearer view of domestic violence in faith communities from religious leaders.

- Pastors believe that one in five couples in their congregation is violent.
- 9.3% of pastors have counseled five or more abused women in the last year.
- 83.2% of pastors have counseled at least one abused woman.
- 8% of pastors feel well equipped to respond to domestic violence.
- 31% of pastors report that they have preached a message on abuse.
- 40% of pastors discuss violence in premarital counseling. <sup>4</sup>

### **Faith Leaders and Spiritual Texts**

Religious texts are often used to commit spiritual abuse through excerpting, abridging, and manipulating scripture out of context to favor power toward the abuser. Faith leaders have a responsibility to educate and support accurate scriptural interpretation amongst their congregation within historical and cultural contexts.

Below, The Rave Project website defines spiritual abuse through the use of scripture. Spiritual abuse takes place when one person uses the Bible or their spiritual or religious beliefs to control, manipulate and/or justify his/her abusive behavior.

Ways to combat spiritual abuse include:

1. Have a firm understanding of what constitutes domestic violence and abuse.
2. Have an understanding of why people abuse.
3. Recognize the emotional, physical, and spiritual impact on victims and their families.
4. Be committed to collaborating with and working with service providers, mental health, police, community resources, and shelters.
5. Know how to provide spiritual and professional help, hope, and healing.
6. Be committed to breaking the silence by reporting domestic violence and by not allowing the cries of victims to be silenced and swept under the "clerical carpet."

## **COMMUNITY REFERRALS**

Local organizations and resources are available to you and the family to help address domestic and sexual violence, as well as co-occurring issues. To give the family the most complete support system possible, relationships should be developed between your faith community and local services. Local agencies may be the single most valuable resource for victims and/or their family. Local agency advocates receive extensive training on domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, teen dating violence and sexual harassment, and are a valuable 24-hour resource when you are looking for guidance. They can provide referrals to a variety of services, and are often familiar with the best programs to fit your faith community member's needs. They can also provide legal and social service advocacy, and help the victim navigate local community services.

Local agency services are free and confidential. Services for children who are exposed to domestic violence and for abusers vary across the state. Please reach out to Tri-County SPEAKS and/or My Sister's House for additional information and referrals.

## **COLLABORATING WITH LOCAL AGENCIES AND BEYOND**

To build the most effective collaborations, communication is key. Participate in faith-based initiatives, local domestic violence coordinating council, or invite your local crisis center and other community services to come speak to your group. This task force can help you discover ways that your faith community can partner with the crisis center for services.

These can include:

- Posting emergency hotline numbers and victim services program materials in prominent (but private) locations, such as bathrooms within your faith institution.
- Meeting with community programs and their staff members.
- Finding out what these programs need and challenge your congregation to help fill those needs.
- Recruiting volunteers from within your congregation for community programs.
- Writing to local, state, and federal legislators encouraging them to support local programs.
- Offering space at your meeting place for crisis centers to hold fundraisers, trainings, and support groups.





# The Introductory Guide to Caring Well

A RESOURCE TO HELP CHURCHES CARE WELL FOR  
SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND IMPLEMENT  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO PREVENT ABUSE



## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, our country has had a public reckoning with how widespread sexual abuse is throughout all areas of our society. One out of three women and one out of four men have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact at some point in their lives. But these staggering statistics only begin to tell the story. Actual incidences of sexual abuse far exceed reported incidences of sexual abuse as most survivors do not report their abuse. As was detailed in the [Caring Well Report](#) released by the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group, churches are not immune to these statistics. In fact, there are men and women sitting in your pews this week who have survived sexual abuse.

Yet, knowing where to begin to minister to survivors and to protect a congregation from abuse can feel overwhelming and confusing. What do you do when someone discloses abuse to your church leadership? How can you develop policies to better protect your most vulnerable members? How can you screen and train your staff and volunteers to improve the safety and security of your ministries?

The answers to these questions are complex. While there are principles that apply to every church, each church will have to consider their specific context to best implement effective policies and procedures. This is because every church is different: spaces are different, demographics are different, programs are different, congregational size is different. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to making a church a safer place for children.

This guide is designed to provide a starting point for church leaders who are working to implement effective policies and procedures in their congregations in order to care for survivors and help prevent future abuse. Our aim is not to provide a set of minimum standards but rather to raise questions and provide basic principles for your church to consider when setting policies for child protection. Although each congregation should work with professionals and local authorities to determine the best course of action for their unique setting, this guide is a starting point for church leaders. Whether you are reviewing existing care policies or creating them for the first time, this guide will walk you through practical steps to take as you seek to prevent abuse and care well for survivors. This guide aims to provide a foundation of topics to think through, provides sample language and policies provided by leading sexual abuse prevention advocates, and links to further resources to help you dive deeper into each area of prevention and care.

***Disclaimer:** The information contained in this document is general in nature and is not intended to provide, or be a substitute for, legal analysis, legal advice, or consultation with appropriate legal counsel. You should not act or rely on information contained in this document without seeking appropriate professional advice. By printing and/or distributing this guide, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is not providing legal advice.*

*Additionally, this document is not a comprehensive guide for how to help protect your church from abuse and how to care for survivors. It is simply a starting point. Each church should consult legal and professional advice from local professionals to determine the best course of action for your congregation. This document does not and is not intended to establish a standard of care for preventing or handling a report of sexual abuse within a church.*

*For additional questions, email [caringwell@erlc.com](mailto:caringwell@erlc.com).*

# Caring Well Team

A helpful place to begin preparing your church to care for survivors and prevent future abuse is to create a Caring Well Team.

## **WHY HAVE A CARING WELL TEAM (CWT)**

This team will coordinate your church's efforts as you implement policies and procedures to help your church be safer for survivors and to help protect against abuse. Specifically, a CWT will:

### **Encourage**

This team allows parents and survivors in your church to know you take this issue seriously and are seeking to care for and protect the congregation.

### **Deter**

Having a team who is focused on this issue puts perpetrators on notice that you take this issue seriously. This may act as a deterrent because perpetrators will go where they have the easiest access to victims.

### **Communicate**

This team will be able to focus their energies on this important issue and help your church's initial commitment become more than just good intentions. They will serve as a conduit for your church's efforts to move from ideas to implementation.

## **WHO SHOULD BE ON THE CARING WELL TEAM?**

For some churches, this team should be comprised of a small group of key leaders from your pastoral staff, student ministry, children's ministry, women's ministry, or marriage ministry. Other churches may have church members who could contribute expertise or a unique perspective. Consider your

specific church context to decide what will serve best. Because this is such a pressing issue, your most trusted leaders should be eager to support the effort.

Also, consider what individuals you have in your congregation who might bring expertise and experience to the team. If you have church members with a background in social work, law enforcement, counseling, or education—fields experienced in responding to abuse—they would make excellent team members. If you have a church member who has experienced abuse and is far enough along in their recovery for this to be a healthy experience for them, he or she would offer an immensely valuable perspective. It's also important to include both men and women.

## **WHAT WILL THEY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR?**

The CWT will be responsible for reviewing and implementing policies and procedures for abuse prevention and care for survivors. That will involve everything from learning about abuse, communicating with the leadership about next steps, attending training, reviewing current policies and recommending necessary revisions, and helping implement and maintain a screening process for volunteers.

## **HOW CAN THEY BE TRAINED FOR THEIR ROLE?**

Before your church begins to implement changes, it is important to ensure that your leaders are well trained on the issue of abuse. The [Caring Well Challenge](#) is designed to walk the team step by step through the process to help them share about abuse, care for those who have been abused, and to prepare to prevent abuse.

For example, a number of talks, panels, and keynotes from the [Caring Well Conference](#) are available online. Also, step five is to go through the [\*Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused\*](#) curriculum. This is a free, 12-video curriculum. Each video is 20 minutes and is available in English and Spanish. At the conclusion of the training you will be advised to send select videos to key lay leaders in your church to help train them as well. Churches are also encouraged to pursue additional training from state conventions, associations, and other partners.

## **WHAT IF WE ALREADY HAVE SOMETHING LIKE A CARING WELL TEAM?**

Some churches already have teams of leaders in place that function similarly to the design of a CWT. If that is your church, that's great news: you are already on track. Unless it fits your plans and priorities, there is no need to rename or modify an existing team into a CWT. Ensure they are functioning in a way that will enable your church to better prevent abuse and care for survivors.

# Screening Policy For Workers and Volunteers

It is critical that churches have a rigorous process of recruiting and screening employees and volunteers within child- and student-serving ministries for compatibility with the church's values and child protection policies. A rushed recruitment and search process for volunteers or staff to meet a staffing shortage can place children and youth in danger.

A rigorous process of recruitment and hiring allows the church to properly vet and learn whether the person is a good fit for the ministry position. The process must include time and place for evaluation and discovery of potential red flags.

With this in mind, look at the hiring and recruitment process as an opportunity for the ministry to get to know the applicant and for the applicant to get acquainted with the ministry. Good hiring and recruitment policies and practices for both employees and volunteers will lower risk and increase safety for children and youth within your church.

Once your policies and procedures are established, it is crucial that all of your ministries follow the processes put in place. If the process is not realistic, consider revising your policies. It is imperative that your policies and practices match.

Some of the things churches should consider as they implement a screening process for employees and volunteers are:

- [Written application](#)
- [Background check](#)
- [Reference checks](#)
- [Interview](#)
- [Social media review](#)
- [Orientation and training](#)

## WRITTEN APPLICATION

A written application allows you to gain a lot of information in an efficient manner. The application should have all of the standard types of questions, but should also include questions to evaluate employees and volunteers from a child protection perspective. Some suggested questions your written application could include are as follows:

- Please list all experience you have working with children/youth. Include any paid positions, babysitting, volunteer positions, summer jobs, camps, or church work. Please provide start date, reason for leaving, position and responsibilities, supervisor, and contact information.
- Have you ever been suspended, asked to leave, or fired from a job? Please explain.
- Have you ever been suspended or expelled from high school or college? Please explain.
- Have you ever been convicted of a crime? Please list dates and nature of offense.
- Have you ever been accused of hurting or abusing a child?
- Have you ever been asked to step down from a position of leadership in a church? Please explain time frame and details.
- Describe an area where you need improvement or is challenging for you in working with children or youth.
- What characteristics do you possess that make you a good fit for working with children/youth?

You may also need to obtain written permission from an applicant to check all previous employment and volunteer positions related to the



applicant's work with children, including references not listed by the applicant.

## **BACKGROUND CHECK**

Background checks are necessary but are never a guarantee that a person is safe. Background checks are only effective after someone has been caught and so background checks alone can provide a false sense of security. While it is necessary to complete a background check on all staff and volunteers, it should never be your only screening mechanism, because they serve as an initial screen and deterrent.

Background checks also need to be done on a reoccurring basis. Reoccurring background checks may reveal red flags that occurred after the staff or volunteer began work at your church. Some companies that provide background checks provide ongoing checks as a part of the service.

Veteran law enforcement agent and background check expert Mike McCarty highlights the dangers that churches who rely solely on simple background checks face:

Churches and ministries are flooded with cheap background check solutions from a highly unregulated background screening industry. There is no such thing as a single, complete database of criminal records, not even the FBI. Sexual predators are highly motivated and the current church and ministry approach to background screening is no match. Protecting children and the ministry requires a complex approach that includes training, comprehensive background checks, reference checks and the development and implementation of security teams.<sup>1</sup>

When choosing a background check provider, it is important to choose an option that is comprehensive. Look for an option that includes the following:

- a Social Security number verification to validate identity, other names, and develop address history
- a multistate or national criminal database search and county criminal search
- the scope of the search should be as far back as the records allow
- real-time arrest alerts, which notify you any-time that the person is arrested in the future.

Conducting a comprehensive background check on each staff member and volunteer may require a small increase in your budget for this area, but it will be well worth the investment.

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation, is one church that has decided to make this investment. Their director of human resources, Jill Kearney, explains their decision:

Johnson Ferry takes seriously protecting our minors, elderly, employees, volunteers and the church as a whole. In an effort to do ministry with excellence, which is a core value of our church, we decided to dig deeper in our background check process, inevitably increasing costs. If this helps us to protect our minors and the elderly from abuse of any kind, we view this as being a good steward of what the Lord has blessed us with.

The church safety team should make a decision beforehand on what results are acceptable and unacceptable and adhere to the same set of policies for everyone. This avoids favoritism and improves the screening process. If something is disclosed

<sup>1</sup> Safe Hiring Solutions- Background Screening, "Leadership Team," accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.safehiringsolutions.com/leadership-team>

through the background check that causes you to be unsure how to proceed, seek legal counsel.

## REFERENCE CHECKS

Reference checks are an essential part of screening for employees and volunteers. A reference is not helpful unless you follow through and actually talk to the references. Reference checks should always occur prior to making a staff or volunteer placement decision and should be taken seriously.

View the list of employers, volunteer supervisors, and personal references as data points that should be pursued in order to verify the person is who he says he is and does not have any red flags from previous employment or ministry work. Employment references should be verified for accuracy and job performance. Other churches or ministries where the applicant has served should be contacted regarding those positions and the individual's interaction with children and youth. It can also be helpful to obtain a reference from a past church, a family member, or at least one person of the opposite sex.

Some questions that may be informative when interviewing references are as follows:

- Please verify the position, responsibilities, and start and end date of the applicant.
- What was your relationship with the applicant, and how long did you know him/her?
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with children/youth.
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with supervisors and those in authority.
- What strengths does the applicant possess in working with children/youth?
- What weaknesses or challenges did the applicant have in working with children/youth?
- Do you have any hesitancy in recommending this applicant to work with children/youth?

- Would your organization have this person back in the future?

Here is an [example of a reference request form](#) used by a Southern Baptist church.

## INTERVIEW

An interview is a time to be face-to-face with the applicant or potential volunteer. Direct questions about prior jobs and interaction with children and youth are helpful. It is also a time for you to educate the applicant about your church/ministry area and your vision and priority for child protection. Let them know that you screen, train, have clear policies in place, and report abuse.

When educating about your church, review your child protection policies during the interview and ask if the person has any questions or concerns with following the policies. The applicant's reaction may be a helpful indicator of the level of buy-in to child protection, but some predators may not give any indication at all. Efforts by the applicant to push back on the boundaries of the established policies or to seek exceptions are a red flag.

Predators look for soft targets. By communicating you have policies that you enforce and evaluate, you make yourself less inviting for predators and send a clear message about the value you place on children and your priority of keeping them safe from harm. At the same time, you are learning more about the applicant and whether he or she is a good fit from the perspective of beliefs, background, safety, experience, demeanor, and responsibility.

Prepare before the interview by having a prepared list of questions and reviewing the applicant's written application. During the interview it is helpful to have at least two trained personnel to interview the applicant. This allows for multiple things to better happen at once: asking questions, observing non-verbals,

listening to answers, recording responses, and having more than one person's assessment.

## SOCIAL MEDIA REVIEW

In an era in which most people have a social media presence, it is helpful to review an applicant's social media history for red flags or any content that could indicate improper behavior.

## ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

The final step in the hiring and recruitment process is orientation and training of your new volunteers and employees regarding your ministry area and child protection policy. While this occurs after a decision to hire or an invitation for a volunteer to serve, solid training on policy and abuse dynamics must happen early and on a regular basis throughout one's service to the ministry. Many liability carriers require training on a one- to three-year basis, but consistent training, even in shorter modules, will reinforce the church's priority of abuse prevention and child safety.

It is imperative that *all* of your staff members and volunteers be required to attend training on how to prevent and identify sexual abuse. There are many excellent ministries and local agencies that are willing to come in to train your congregation. Although in-person training is recommended, as it allows participants to personally engage and ask questions during the training, there are many excellent online training resources as well.

### Sample In-Person Training Programs

All of these programs have a fee for participation in the training.

- Darkness to Light's [Stewards of Children](#) Training
- [GRACE Safeguarding Initiative](#)
- [Ministry Safe](#)

- [Safe Hiring Solutions](#)
- [Zero Abuse Project's Keeping Faith](#): Empowering Faith Communities to Recognize and Respond to Child Abuse & Neglect

### Sample Online Training Resources

Although we recommend in-person training for every church, these resources are helpful for supplemental training or for staff and volunteers who are unable to attend an in-person training.

- Darkness to Light [Online Training Modules](#): D2L has six different online child abuse training modules. There is a fee but you can access them at any time.
- [Darkness to Light's Two Minutes for Prevention](#): 25 videos that are 2 minutes each.
- Darkness to Light produced [two documentaries](#) that provide a deeper understanding of the experience of child sexual abuse survivors in a way that is educational. They provide insight on child sexual abuse through the voices of the survivors.
- [Freedom for the Captives](#) has a free 4-hour training that any church can use (they simply have to fill out a form on the FFTC website). A viewer can take the videos at their leisure, and each video has an online test so that a church can be sure a volunteer staff member working with students have completed the video and understood the basic information.
- [GRACE's Valued Conference Videos](#). On the GRACE website, there are several videos from the Valued Conference addressing child abuse in faith communities and anyone can link to them and use them in training.
- [Ministry Safe](#) provides a five-part online Sexual Abuse Awareness training program.
- [Ten Things Every Faith Community Should Know](#): On the website of Sacred Spaces, which works to address abuse within Jewish

communities, there is a helpful video of Victor Vieth teaching at a synagogue providing basic child abuse information.

- [Four Things Parents Should Know About Protecting Children](#). Also on the Sacred Spaces website, there is a workshop by Dr.

Shira Berkovits directed at parents and giving them some basic information about keeping their children safe.

- [Safe Ministry Online Training Program](#)
- Training on church safety by [Safe Hiring Solutions](#)

# Best Practices and Protective Policies

*“Policy is not something that is created and sits on a shelf. Policy is your guide and what you live by, not what you aspire to, but what you actually do—it is who you are.”*

**-SAMANTHA KILPATRICK, attorney and former prosecutor**

Churches should develop and maintain a set of child protection policies that work together to keep children safe. Good policy in the area of child protection is meant to protect the individuals in your church, not just the church itself. In protecting individuals, you are in fact protecting the organization.

Every church’s policies will be tailored to their state laws, community resources, and size of congregation. It’s important that you develop policies that are right for your context. But it is even more important that you develop policies you can actually live by. The greatest risk you create for both children and your church is to create unrealistic policies that your church does not follow.

As God’s people, a church’s first priority should be protecting the vulnerable—people over the organization. *Care, not liability, should be our primary motivation in creating and maintaining good child protection plans.* We must change this mindset and understand that policy is a way to love and care for people well by keeping them safe from harm. Developing and operating consistently within good policy is God-honoring and a way to steward the trust that our congregation and the community puts in us to be watchful and protective of those who may not be able to protect themselves.

Formulating good policies, requiring compliance with these policies, and responding well to violations

of policy and disclosures of abuse are all ways that you protect and shepherd your congregation well.

## **FORM A CARING WELL TEAM (CWT) TO DEVELOP, REVIEW, AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES**

To start, no matter where you are in the process, it helps to have a CWT that oversees the policy process. This CWT should be made up of individuals who work with children and youth both inside and outside the church. It is important that the CWT understand your church’s spaces and facilities and is well acquainted with the different aspects of your church’s ministries.

No matter the size of your church, the following types of people would be a helpful resource in formulating and reviewing policy: children’s minister, student minister, director of women’s ministry, a parent, a social worker, law enforcement, attorney, counselor, medical professional, and school teacher. Form a CWT that is adequate to cover multiple areas of expertise, share the workload, and maintain confidentiality, but keep it small enough that the group can get work accomplished and make meaningful steps toward creating a robust policy of protection.

Members of your CWT should understand abuse dynamics, have a strong desire to protect children

and make your church a safe place for those that are vulnerable, and be logical and practical in the way they seek to implement their ideas.

## WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A SAFETY POLICY

When determining the specifics of policies, it is important to understand the increased responsibility when working with children. We recommend that you watch lesson 3 in the [\*Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused\*](#) curriculum, so that you can understand the different ministry responsibilities when caring for children versus adults. When working with children and youth, we recommend that at a minimum, churches meet the [national standards](#) promulgated by the Centers for Disease Control for youth-serving organizations. Advocate Victor Vieth encourages, “Indeed true Christian witness would shatter these minimal standards and also implement policies to address not only sexual abuse within the church but also sexual abuse in the home, as well as physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and witnessing violence.”<sup>2</sup>

Some important considerations for your policies include:

### **Check in/out procedure**

Implement strict check in and check out policies that ensure children are only permitted to leave the classroom with a parent or adult with permission of the parents.

### **Hall monitor**

Designate a volunteer to circulate throughout the building during services to ensure that no adults have children by themselves. This proactively shows potential predators that there is nowhere in the church where they can get a victim alone.

### **Two-deep policy / avoiding isolation**

Require at least two unrelated adults or three deep that would include one unrelated adult to be present when a child is present in all circumstances. This ensures that a child will never be left alone with anyone who is not their parent.

### **Parents Classroom Participation Policy**

In order to ensure that no adults who have not completed a rigorous background check are allowed access to children, do not allow parents to come inside the classroom when they are dropping off children.

### **Workers under 18 years of age**

When considering student to teacher ratios for children’s ministry or for the two-deep policy, do not count students under 18 as workers. While the church wants to be a place where students learn to serve, background checks cannot be conducted effectively on minors. This policy ensures that the background checks are consistent across the board. The rest of the screening process should be done for student volunteers to screen for suitability or red flags.

Some forms and training may need to be revised or adapted for workers under the age of 18. Tchividjian and Berkovits offer a sample youth worker application in their book *The Child Safeguarding Policy for Churches and Ministries* (239-242). Sexual abuse training for youth may also need to be modified especially for younger youth in order to not traumatize them. One Southern Baptist church chose to secure a local counselor/seminary professor who was credentialed in Darkness to Light training to conduct live annual training events with their youth as an alternative to their training for adults.

<sup>2</sup>Victor I. Vieth, *On This Rock: A Call to Center the Christian Response to Child Abuse on The Life and Words of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 51.

### **“Known to your church” rule**

A volunteer should be “known to your church” for a specified period of time and by a specified number of leaders in order to be eligible to volunteer. This may prove challenging for churches who rely on a large number of volunteers to keep their ministries running, but an appropriate policy is crucial in deterring predators and fully vetting those who will interact with the vulnerable among us. One veteran children’s minister at a Southern Baptist church encouraged churches to wait until a volunteer had six months of consistent attendance and engagement before allowing the potential children or student ministry volunteer to start the application process.

### **Open doors**

Have an open door policy in your church, unless a door is outfitted with a full window. Full barriers allow for private areas that could easily be utilized by perpetrators. Leaders and activities should be observable and interruptible at all times.

### **Social media and communication policy**

It is important to ensure that all communication between staff/volunteers and students is out in the open and approved by church leaders and the child’s parents. Social media, in particular, can be easily used for secret conversations, and thus clear guidelines should be established to protect children.

- Zero Abuse Project [has sample social media policies](#).
- [Safe Ministry](#) has developed [helpful suggestions to consider when developing social media guidelines](#) for your church:
  - Youth group members, their friends and parents should be directed to the Church or Youth Group’s official social media account e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat. Caution should be observed with the use of any sites that delete posts, images,

and comments. These accounts should be only used in a one directional manner, e.g., the church Snapchat account should not add, follow, or comment on any followers account. The information posted online should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement. There should be at least two designated leaders whose role it is to moderate each account for accountability.

- Leaders can use closed (not secret) Facebook groups. The information posted on these groups should be for logistics, encouragement and prayer. There should be at least two designated leaders whose role it is to moderate the group for accountability. A senior leader (e.g., Youth Minister) should be informed of all groups. Leaders should never have a group with students only of the opposite gender.

They also recommend where possible, students should be directed to a group account rather than a leader’s individual account. Where an individual’s account is used this should occur in consultation with a senior leader (e.g., Student Minister). Strict guidelines should be developed when using this type of site. These would include but are not limited to:

- Youth should initiate friendships, following or adding to their account, not leaders.
- Ensure any text posted online is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Ensure all photos and videos posted or tagged are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- All private conversations must be recorded and never deleted.
- No leader should use a social media platform for leader to youth interactions that allows anonymity, e.g., AskFM, KiK messenger etc.
- No leader should use a social media platform for leader to youth interactions that deletes



- posts, images, or comments (e.g., Snapchat).
- No leader should use video calling for leader to youth interactions.

Safe Ministry also notes that caution must be used when communicating with young people online. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.

Darkness to Light has developed talking points for [discussing internet safety with children](#).

### Transportation policy

It is important to establish realistic and consistent guidelines for transportation to and from church events to prevent one-on-one settings and opportunities for perpetrators to gain access to victims under the guise of being “helpful” and offering rides.

Here is a [sample policy from Safe Ministry](#).

### Overnight policy

Ensure that all overnight activities at the church maintain the 2-deep unrelated adult policy, avoiding any times of isolation between an adult and a child. Also, think through sleeping logistics to ensure that children are protected throughout the night. One person in each bed is best, but no adult should share a bed with a student unless it is that student’s parent. It is important to have many adult chaperones present throughout the entire event. Chaperones should be provided for each gender (i.e., male chaperones for male sleeping arrangements and female chaperones for female sleeping arrangements).







### Respect for child’s privacy

Ensure that children are guaranteed privacy when they are changing or going to the bathroom. This includes thinking through a diapering procedure.

This applies to giving them privacy from both adults and other children. Not only should privacy be maintained in the church setting but also at off-site activities like retreats and church camps.

## FURTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU DEVELOP POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Here are a collection of sample policies and resources to help you begin to think through what protections you need to implement in your congregation to prevent abuse.

1. [Safe Ministries sample policies](#)
2. [Developing Effective Policies on Child Maltreatment](#) by Victor Vieth 
3. [The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches](#) by Boz Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits  
4. [Sample policies and free awareness training](#) by Ministry Safe
5. [GRACE Safeguarding Initiative](#): If a church goes through the GRACE certification program, they will have at least one expert help them in developing their policies.
6. [Safe Hiring Solutions provides resources](#) on how to incorporate sexual abuse prevention into your general safety policies for your church
7. [CDC policy guide](#): The Centers for Disease Control has an online guide on developing policies which includes sample questions for screening, etc.
8. Darkness to Light [sample code of conduct](#).
9. Zero Abuse Project has [information for parents](#) teaching their children about how to keep themselves safe. 
10. Darkness to Light has written about [how to make camp a safer experience](#) for children. 
11. How to talk to children [about body safety](#). 



# Prepared for Disclosure

*“One of the hardest things a survivor of sexual assault ever does is say these words out loud: I have been a victim of sexual assault. People often do not share this because of shame and unwarranted guilt that plagues them. So when someone tells you this deeply personal part of their story, you must be ready to listen and care without any hint of accusation.”*

**-TRILLIA NEWBELL, sexual abuse survivor, advocate & author**

In order to be ready to respond well when a survivor of sexual violence discloses to you, as a pastor or church leader, it is imperative to understand the magnitude of such a disclosure. Lesson 5 of [\*Becoming a Church who Cares Well for the Abused\*](#) deals with this important topic.

Disclosure is not straightforward and may come in many different forms. Often survivors are only beginning to process what happened to them and will not use words like “abuse” or “assault.” They may minimize or downplay what happened to them. It is crucial to patiently listen and respond that you believe their story.

When a survivor discloses sexual abuse, whether it occurred within church walls or outside, occurred yesterday or 30 years ago, we must be prepared to meet their disclosure with compassion and action. We must recognize that our primary responsibility in caring well for survivors of abuse is to place their protection and care as paramount above all other considerations in the process. Boz Tchividjian reminds us, “Jesus was always on the side of the vulnerable and the wounded. . . . We must filter every decision with this question: How does this decision protect and care for the alleged victim?”<sup>3</sup>

To prepare well for disclosure, it is helpful to take the following steps:

1. [Develop a team of caregivers to walk alongside a survivor of abuse.](#)
2. [Develop a plan of action for reporting abuse to the appropriate authorities in compliance with state law.](#)
3. [Get to know your local agencies that work with survivors of abuse.](#)
4. Develop a survivor-care ministry.
5. Consult with local law enforcement about how to provide pastoral care for the accused perpetrator during the trial phase of proceedings.

## CARE TEAM

It is important to identify key staff members, church leaders, and professionals to include on a care team to walk alongside a survivor who has disclosed abuse. Each scenario and survivor will be different, so the team needed may be different for each survivor as well. Pastors, elders, women’s ministry leaders, student ministry leaders, children’s ministry leaders, professional counselors, medical professionals, and attorneys are all examples of people who may need to be included on a team. The number of people on a care team will differ based on the situation, but a team of two to four individuals is typical.

<sup>3</sup> Bayle J. Tchividjian, “Responding with Excellence to an Allegation of Sexual Abuse Within the Church,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 45, no. 3 (2018): 42.

Here are three things to consider when developing care teams:

### **Consider the needs and agency of the survivor**

Each survivor has walked through a unique nightmare. Some may need immediate medical or mental health attention. Others may simply need a listening ear for the time being as they process what has happened to them. Some may need help discerning their legal options for reporting and holding their perpetrator accountable. Others may be children where swift action is required to report the abuse and protect them from a dangerous situation.

Whatever actions need to be taken, it is imperative that we hear and respect the agency of the survivor. The survivor's agency, or ability to make their own free choices, was taken during the abuse, so the survivor should be allowed to determine when and how care proceeds. One survivor explained to our advisory group that upon her disclosure of rape on her Southern Baptist higher education campus, she was assigned a female counselor and told she must attend counseling with this specific counselor. Immediately in the session, the counselor asked the survivor questions that insinuated the rape was her fault. She dutifully attended the rest of the required counseling sessions, but was heartbroken and confused. It took over a decade later before she re-entered professional counseling and began to recognize and heal from her assault. Had she been empowered to decide when and where she would seek help from the very beginning, her story may have turned out very differently.

Additionally, it is crucial that we respond very delicately if the survivor is a child. Lesson 3 of *Becoming a Church who Cares Well for the Abused* will instruct you on the different responses

required for abuse against a minor and abuse against an adult. For example, expressing anger or disbelief can lead to even more confusion and trauma, causing the child to shut down. Children need to know that we believe them and that we will do everything we can to keep them safe. Even saying things like, "Let me go investigate," can signal to a child that we don't believe them, and they are not safe. Do not ask leading questions that could retraumatize the child, but instead ask open-ended questions like, "Then what happened?" But we must be careful here, we are not trained investigators.

### **Make sure to protect the survivor's confidentiality**

Protecting the identity and story of the survivor is paramount. A survivor should be consulted about who they want to be told about their abuse. Although it is important to communicate with your congregation when abuse occurs, it is not necessary to identify the survivor or break their trust by divulging their identity. Include only those people who are necessary and have been welcomed by the survivor. Note that reporting obligations are constantly changing from state to state, even for adults. Quickly determine whether there is any reporting obligation that would necessitate a report that requires disclosure of the survivor's identity to the authorities.

### **Include men and women in the process**

It is essential that the care team be made up of men *and* women. Both genders bring a unique and invaluable perspective.

## **REPORTING**

The church should not act as an investigative body in criminal matters. When abuse is disclosed and investigation is needed, local law enforcement should be called. In the *Becoming a Church*

that *Cares Well for the Abused* curriculum, attorney Samantha Kilpatrick explains:

In my experience, churches make mistakes when they try to handle everything in-house. This is problematic because churches are not equipped in all of the proficiencies needed in an abuse situation. Church leaders are often hesitant to get the “government” involved—usually due to mistrust, coupled with a desire to handle abuse internally. Rather than mistrust, the church should view these authorities as a resource – God-ordained entities that have been put in place for the safety of those they serve and protect.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of the abuse disclosed will determine what types of reports should be made and to what entities. Each state will have different requirements about reporting sexual abuse and harassment of adults and sexual abuse of minors. Check your state’s reporting requirements through the national [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#).<sup>5</sup> In some states, members of certain professions, like counselors and teachers, are mandatory reporters of child abuse. In other states, all adults are mandatory reporters.

But as Russell Moore has said, “The Kingdom is a mandatory reporting state.” As Christ’s ambassadors, we are not to hide any evil or abuse. If you believe that child abuse has occurred, you should report it to the appropriate authorities immediately.

If you are talking with an adult who has been abused as a child, a question that needs to be raised during this initial conversation is, “Does your abuser have any access to children at this time?”

If the answer is “Yes,” then it is reasonable to assume that children are at risk and a report should be made. And as discussed above, reporting obligations are constantly changing from state to state, so be sure your church knows what your requirements are and keeps those up to date.

However, when sexual violence happens to an adult, it is up to him or her to determine if he or she would like to report it to the authorities. It is important for you to advise the adult of his or her options and encourage the reporting of the abuse. As you are advising of options and encouraging reporting, make sure the survivor knows that you or someone from your Caring Well team is available to walk beside them through the process in whatever way they choose. Many times a perpetrator will be harming or have the potential to harm others, and reporting is the best way to stop him or her from causing any more harm. Lesson 3 of the [Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused](#) curriculum is a helpful resource on the topic of reporting. It addresses pastors’ and ministry leaders’ roles and responsibilities when learning of abuse against both minors and adults, explains when reporting abuse is mandated, and how to help a survivor when the decision about pressing charges is theirs to make.

## LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

When someone in your church makes a disclosure of sexual abuse, it is imperative that you utilize local law enforcement and appropriate professionals who are trained and prepared to handle such difficult situations.

Reaching out to and developing relationships with your local police department, mental

<sup>4</sup> Hambrick, *Becoming a Church*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> “Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect,” *State Statutes Series* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, 2016), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/mandat/>

health providers, department of child services, and domestic violence advocacy groups, among others, will provide you with the relationships you will need when a disclosure is made. Understanding the resources available to you in your community before a disclosure is made will help to take the pressure off in the midst of crisis and allow you to call in experts to walk alongside the survivor and your church community, who will undoubtedly be in a state of shock and unequipped to best deal with the situation.

Your local Child Advocacy Center (CACs) will be an invaluable resource to you when child abuse is discovered. CACs are designed to protect children from having to tell their traumatic stories of abuse over and over again. When a child makes a disclosure of abuse, he or she should be taken to a CAC where a trained interviewer will ask the right questions to record the child's story without retraumatizing him or her. From there, a team that includes medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocacy, and other professionals can use the recorded interview to make decisions about how to proceed and protect the child.

### **SURVIVOR-CARE MINISTRY**

Regardless if the sexual abuse disclosed is ongoing or happened many years ago, it is crucial to create a safe environment for survivors to heal within the context of the church. For a large congregation that may mean bringing professional counselors on to your staff to help survivors and their families walk through the aftermath of abuse. For smaller congregations, that may mean partnering with local nonprofits and agencies to develop

relationships so that you can easily refer survivors to counseling as needed. Whatever the capacity of your church, make sure you have curated resources ahead of time to help your congregants deal with the long-term aftermath of sexual abuse.

### **INTERACTING WITH THE ACCUSED PERPETRATOR**

When determining a policy for how to deal with an accused perpetrator, it is crucial to remember our first priority is always to the survivor of abuse and protecting potential victims. According to the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#), false allegations of sexual violence overall fall between 2-10%. Thus, when it comes to accusations involving children, it is wise for us to receive disclosures as credible until outside professionals demonstrate otherwise. Assuming innocence can endanger children.

Churches should consider immediate action in several areas when dealing with accusations of child sexual abuse, including access to church property and events during the deliberative process. Because a church is a place that cares for children, our standard of access should be at least as strict as a school's standard would be during this period. In such a case, it may be wise to assign the accused a church leader to act as their liaison to the church. You can encourage them to listen to sermons online and send prayer requests through their liaison, but it is important to set strict and immediate boundaries to protect the survivors and the rest of the congregation.

Admittedly, deciding the exact parameters to put in place is complex. It is wise to have law enforcement and other local experts help you make these types of decisions.

# Are You Ready For a Disclosure?

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY WHEN AND HOW TO REPORT AHEAD OF TIME, SO THAT WHEN A DISCLOSURE IS MADE, YOU CAN ACT SWIFTLY. DEVELOP A PLAN THAT ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

- We know our state's reporting laws for child and adult disclosures:
  - *Who must report*
  - *What must be reported*
  - *Timeframe it must be reported*
  - *Who to report it to*
  
- We know who to contact in the following areas:
  - *Police*
  - *Social Services*
  - *Community Resources*
  - *Legal Help*
  
- Our leadership and team have a list of phone numbers to contact them.
  
- We have a plan in place to address any allegation of sexual abuse and our staff and volunteers know the plan and their responsibility to report.



## FURTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PLAN FOR DISCLOSURE



- [Safe Ministry has developed forms for reporting.](#)
- Darkness to Light's [Guide for Reporting](#)
- [Brad Hambrick video on Ministry Grid](#): Brad Hambrick, Pastor of Counseling at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, discusses how to care for the victim, victim's parents, and perpetrator, all while cooperating with legal authorities, in the initial stages of response. Brad additionally provides downloadable sample response plans, sexual abuse allegation report forms, and recommended medical and counseling resources.
- [Child Sexual Abuse Response Plan](#)- Christianity Today has provided a guide to help you develop a sexual abuse response plan.
- The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod have [many resources for caregivers](#) in speaking to a child who has been sexually abused about their faith, including tips, specific prayers, and coloring pages. Scroll down to "documents and articles" to access these materials.
- [Child Abuse & the Church](#): A special issue of *The Theological Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and Wartburg Theological Seminary* on child abuse that has many articles to help pastors begin to care well for survivors. It addresses topics like the spiritual impact of abuse, coordinating medical and pastoral care in abuse, and toxic theology. The issue is open access so anyone can use any of the articles for reading and teaching.
- Darkness to Light- [Being the Trusted Adult](#): How to react when a child discloses abuse to you.
- ["Implicit Messages & Spiritual Injury in Faith Communities"](#): GRACE provides this resource written by Laura Thein & Carrie Nettles
- [Freedom for the Captives articles](#): The Freedom for the Captives website also has a number of articles that can be downloaded under the resources section.
- [GRACE articles](#): GRACE also has articles that can be downloaded and used for training and directing.
- Author Victor Veith writes [Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators](#) in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*.
- Justin and Lindsey Holcomb write on the GRACE website about [What to Say and What Not to Say to a Victim of Sexual Assault](#).
- Diane Langberg's article, [The Spiritual Impact of Abuse](#) can be read on the GRACE website.

## ○ Discuss your policies and procedures with staff, volunteers, and congregation.

Develop a plan for how to update your church body on all that you have done to care well for your congregation in this area. It is important for everyone to know the new procedure and guidelines in place so that they can be a part of creating a safe environment. You want to do everything you can to create a safer environment for everyone where people feel heard and not minimized and are comfortable voicing their concerns. Additionally, making prevention policies clear and visible to all will act as a deterrent to any predators in your midst, letting them know that they will not have easy access to victims in your congregation.

### FURTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU EQUIP YOUR ENTIRE CONGREGATION

- [“God Made All of Me”](#) by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb wrote a book parents can use in teaching their children personal safety.  

- The Jacob Wetterling Resource Center of the Zero Abuse Project has [lots of information for parents](#) in teaching their children personal safety and otherwise keeping them safe.
- Darkness to Light has developed tips for parents to help keep their children safe from abuse in specific settings, including:
  - [Checklist for Safer Sleepovers](#)
  - [Checklist for Safer Camp Experiences](#)
  - [Tips for Hiring Caregivers](#)
- [On This Rock: A Call to Center the Christian Response to Child Abuse on the Life and Words of Jesus](#) by Victor I. Vieth: In this book, Christian theologian and internationally recognized child abuse expert Victor Vieth examines the role of Jesus’ life and teachings in reducing child abuse in the New Testament world.  
- [7 Ways to Welcome Survivors in Our Churches](#)

## ○ Ensure you have proper liability insurance, including coverage for sexual misconduct.

## ○ Have a plan and schedule to review policies and practices moving forward.

Your Caring Well Team should review your policies and the implementation of those policies on a consistent basis. As your congregation changes

over the years it may present new safety challenges and require new safeguards.



- **Complete prevention and care training with staff and volunteers and have an ongoing plan and schedule for training moving forward.**

## Conclusion

Sexual abuse has impacted many in the pews and people in the community. As J.D. Greear pointed out in the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group report at the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting, our response to sexual abuse is a gospel issue. He asked,

**First, what greater lie could we illustrate about the gospel?**

At its core, the gospel is about God's commitment to protect the vulnerable. The cross shows us that he is a safe refuge for all who run in repentance to him. What greater lie could we tell about the gospel than for us not to be doing whatever it

takes to make our churches safe places for the vulnerable?

**Second, why would the lost trust us with a message of salvation if they are not sure if they can trust us with the safety of the vulnerable?**

Why would survivors trust us to care for their souls if they are not sure if they can trust us to care for their wounds?

May churches use this guide as a starting point to take steps to make their church safe for survivors and safe from abuse.



[www.caringwell.com](http://www.caringwell.com)



# EVERY 73 SECONDS

AN AMERICAN IS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.<sup>1</sup>

1 DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY, 2018 (2019).



Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Knowledge & Services



**HOTLINE**

**(843)745-0144**

**24/7  
FREE  
CONFIDENTIAL**

**HOSPITAL**

Within 5 days, or 120 hours, of a sexual assault, you can go to MUSC Adult ED for a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE).

- Free (not filed with insurance)
- Police Report Not Required
- Accompanied by Advocate (virtual and in-person available)



## VOLUNTEER

Volunteers play a critical role in supporting survivors, educating the community on sexual violence prevention, and raising awareness of our support services.

We are accepting new volunteers and welcome all skills and talents. Contact us today to learn how you can get involved!

For more information, visit [www.tricountyspeaks.org/volunteer](http://www.tricountyspeaks.org/volunteer)

**COMMITTED TO HEALING.  
COMMITTED TO HELPING.**

**WE BELIEVE  
YOU**

**IT WASN'T  
YOUR FAULT**

**YOU ARE  
NOT ALONE**

# WHAT WE DO

## ADVOCACY & SUPPORT SERVICES

- Crisis intervention and case management
- Hospital accompaniment for SANE
- In-person, virtual, written and phone follow-up support
- Free and low-cost therapy
- Community resource referrals
- Facilitate dialogue between victims and loved ones
- Assist with completion of Victim Compensation applications
- Crisis intervention and follow-up for incarcerated survivors
- Accompany victims to court and other legal and law enforcement appointments

**\*\*Interpreter Services Available\*\***

## SUPPORT GROUPS

Our support groups offer survivors of sexual assault and their loved ones continued care and support after an assault. We also offer skill building support groups to empower resiliency after a trauma.



**24/7 Hotline**  
**843-745-0744**

## PREVENTION & EDUCATION

TCS provides prevention and education trainings, presentations, and programming for community members, businesses, colleges, and local organizations. Topics include consent, violence prevention, supporting survivors, and more!

For a list of current trainings available, visit our website at [www.tricountyspeaks.org](http://www.tricountyspeaks.org)

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Our team engages local organizations, businesses, and service providers in the Tri-County area to raise awareness of services and resources available to survivors. Outreach includes tabling, programs, and other events. Please reach out for potential partnerships!

## CONTACT US

OFFICE: 843-577-9882

198 Rutledge Ave, Suite 5  
Charleston, SC 29403

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



**MY SISTER'S HOUSE**



**LOWCOUNTRY  
LEADERS IN DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE SURVIVAL**

# ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE? MY SISTER'S HOUSE IS HERE TO HELP.

**CRISIS LINE | 843.744.3242 OR 800.273.4673**

## who we are

**My Sister's House is the Lowcountry leader in domestic violence survival, with proven programs and services developed over 40 years of serving Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester counties.**

We are a local nonprofit victim services agency affiliated with the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA).

## our mission

**To break the cycle of domestic violence by providing comprehensive support, services, and education within and beyond the walls of our shelter.**

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

*Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.*

*It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically.*

## our services



**CRISIS LINE**  
800.273.4673

Callers receive resources, referrals or complete the intake process for MSH



**THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

Individual counseling, clinical support groups in the community, and parenting support employing Triple-P Parenting



**SHELTER**

Provides safe shelter to qualified women and men, as well as their children (17 and under)



**CASE MANAGEMENT**

Supports clients during program, identify goals/objectives, assist with barriers faced, referrals and other needs



**ADVOCACY**

Assists with filing for orders of protection, accompanies clients to court and refers to legal resources as needed



**EDUCATION & TRAINING**

Increases community awareness and understanding of Intimate Partner Violence; partners with Law Enforcement and first responders to provide training and resources

**START YOUR  
SAFETY PLAN  
TODAY**





# AM I BEING ABUSED?

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM EDUCATION + SUPPORT PROVIDED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MY SISTER'S HOUSE, LOWCOUNTRY LEADERS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVAL

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ISN'T ALWAYS PHYSICAL

*Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Nearly half of all women and men*

*will experience psychological aggression from an intimate partner in their lifetime.*

INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE CAN BE ANY ONE, OR A COMBINATION, OF CONTROLLING BEHAVIORS, LIKE:



### PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Calling you names, insulting you or continually criticizing you
- Trying to isolate you from family or friends
- Monitoring where you go, who you call and who you spend time with
- Punishing you by withholding affection
- Humiliating you in any way
- Telling you that you will never find anyone better, or that you are lucky to be with a person like them

### SEXUAL

- Demanding sex when you're sick, tired or after hurting you
- Ignoring your feelings regarding sex
- Forcing or manipulating you into to having sex or performing sexual acts
- Reacting negatively with sadness, anger or resentment if you say no or don't immediately agree to something
- Making you feel like you owe them — ex. Because you're in a relationship, because you've had sex before, because they spent money on you or bought you a gift



### DIGITAL

- Controls who you are friends with or follow on social media
- Sends you negative, insulting or even threatening emails or messages online
- Puts you down in their status updates
- Steals or insists on being given your passwords
- Constantly texts you and makes you feel like you can't be separated from your phone for fear that you will be punished
- Looks through your phone frequently, checks up on your pictures, texts and outgoing calls
- Uses any kind of technology (such spyware or GPS in a car or on a phone) to monitor you



### REPRODUCTIVE

- Refusing to use birth control
- Lying about their methods of birth control
- Forcing pregnancy and not supporting your decision about when or if you want to have a child
- Forcing you to get an abortion, or preventing you from getting one
- Threatening you or acting violent if you don't comply with their wishes to either end or continue a pregnancy



### FINANCIAL

- Giving an allowance/closely watching how you spend it or demanding receipts for purchases
- Placing your paycheck in their bank account and denying you access to it
- Maxing out credit cards in your name without permission or not paying the bills on credit cards, which could ruin your credit score
- Using funds from children's savings accounts without your permission
- Living in your home, but refusing to work or contribute to the household
- Refusing to give you money to pay for necessities/shared expenses like food, clothing, transportation, or medical care and medicine



**FINANCIAL ABUSE OCCURS IN 99% OF CASES OF ABUSE AND IS OFTEN STATED AS THE MAIN REASON VICTIMS STAYED WITH OR RETURNED TO AN ABUSIVE PARTNER.**

MSH IS HERE TO PROVIDE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM SERVICES, FREE OF CHARGE



24/7 CRISIS LINE



SHELTER



COURT ADVOCACY



CASE MANAGEMENT



THERAPEUTIC SERVICES



EDUCATION & TRAINING

**WHEN YOU'RE READY FOR HELP, WE'RE HERE.**

**24/7 CRISIS + SUPPORT LINE (800) 273-4673**

or, visit [www.mysistershouse.org/safety-plan](http://www.mysistershouse.org/safety-plan) for resources





## Mission

Provide a coordinated, evidence-based response to child abuse that reduces trauma and provides treatment for the children and families in our community in a safe child-focused environment.

## Vision

Creating communities in which children and families live free from abuse and are free to reach their full potential.

## Treatment Services

**Trauma Screening:** an assessment to determine the level of trauma symptoms experienced by a child.

**Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT):** Evidence-based treatment for children who have experienced abuse/neglect or any other traumatic experience \*Clinicians have received additional training to provide TF-CBT to those who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation

**Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT):** Evidence-based treatment for late adolescents and adults who have experienced trauma and are reporting symptoms of PTSD.

**Risk Reduction through Family Therapy (RRFT):** Evidence-based treatment to help reduce trauma symptoms in adolescents and human trafficking victims who display risk behaviors

**Alternatives for Families Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT):** Evidence-based treatment for families who are struggling with anger, conflict, and aggression.

**Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT):** a short-term specialized behavior management program designed for young children (2.5-6) experiencing behavioral and/or emotional difficulties

**Problematic Sexual Behaviors-Adolescents:** treatment group for adolescents who have displayed an inappropriate or an illegal sexual behavior

**Problematic Sexual Behaviors-School-Age:** treatment group for 7 to 12 year old children who have sexual behaviors that are beyond their normal developmental level

**Creating Healthy Interactions and Respecting Personal Space (C.H.I.R.P.S):** treatment group for pre-school age children who have difficulty with personal space/boundaries and display sexual behaviors that are beyond their normal developmental level

**Be Safe:** psycho-educational group for children who are 3 to 8 years old. Children learn about general body safety and okay and not okay touches

**Clarification:** process where parents clarify their responsibility to protect their children or their responsibility in the abuse

## Prevention Training

*For Adults:*

**Recognizing, Reporting, and Responding to Child Abuse:** Recognizing signs of abuse/neglect, how to adhere to the mandated reporting laws, and respond to a child's disclosure.

**The CAC's Response to Child Abuse:** The CAC's role in the investigation, prosecution, & treatment of child abuse & neglect. Our services.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences Initiative (ACE)- SC Children's Trust:**

Understanding ACEs to prevent and address the largest public health problem, building self-healing communities.

**Stewards of Children- Darkness to Light:** Child sexual abuse prevention training for adults.

**On the Other Side of Stress:** Understanding the stress response cycle and how to return to relaxation with evidence-based coping strategies.

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) 101:** Defining, identifying, & responding to sexual exploitation of minors.

**Problematic Sexual Behaviors (PSB):** Defining Problematic Sexual Behaviors, learning about sexual development, and identifying protective/risk factors of PSBs.

*For Children:*

**Be Safe with Moss & Violet\*:** Psycho-educational group for children who are 3 to 8 years old. Children learn about general body safety, okay, and not okay touches.

**Teen Self-Care:** Finding Your Hack to Relax: Self-care and stress management coping skills specific to teens.

**Teen Safety Matters- Monique Burr Foundation\*:** Relevant safety topics for youth grades 6th to 12th.

Topic 1: Digital- Cyber Safety  
Topic 2: Physical Safety

\*Parent approval needed

## Contact:

(843) 875-1551  
303 E. RICHARDSON AVE.  
SUMMERVILLE, SC 29485  
WWW.DORCHESTERCHILDREN.ORG

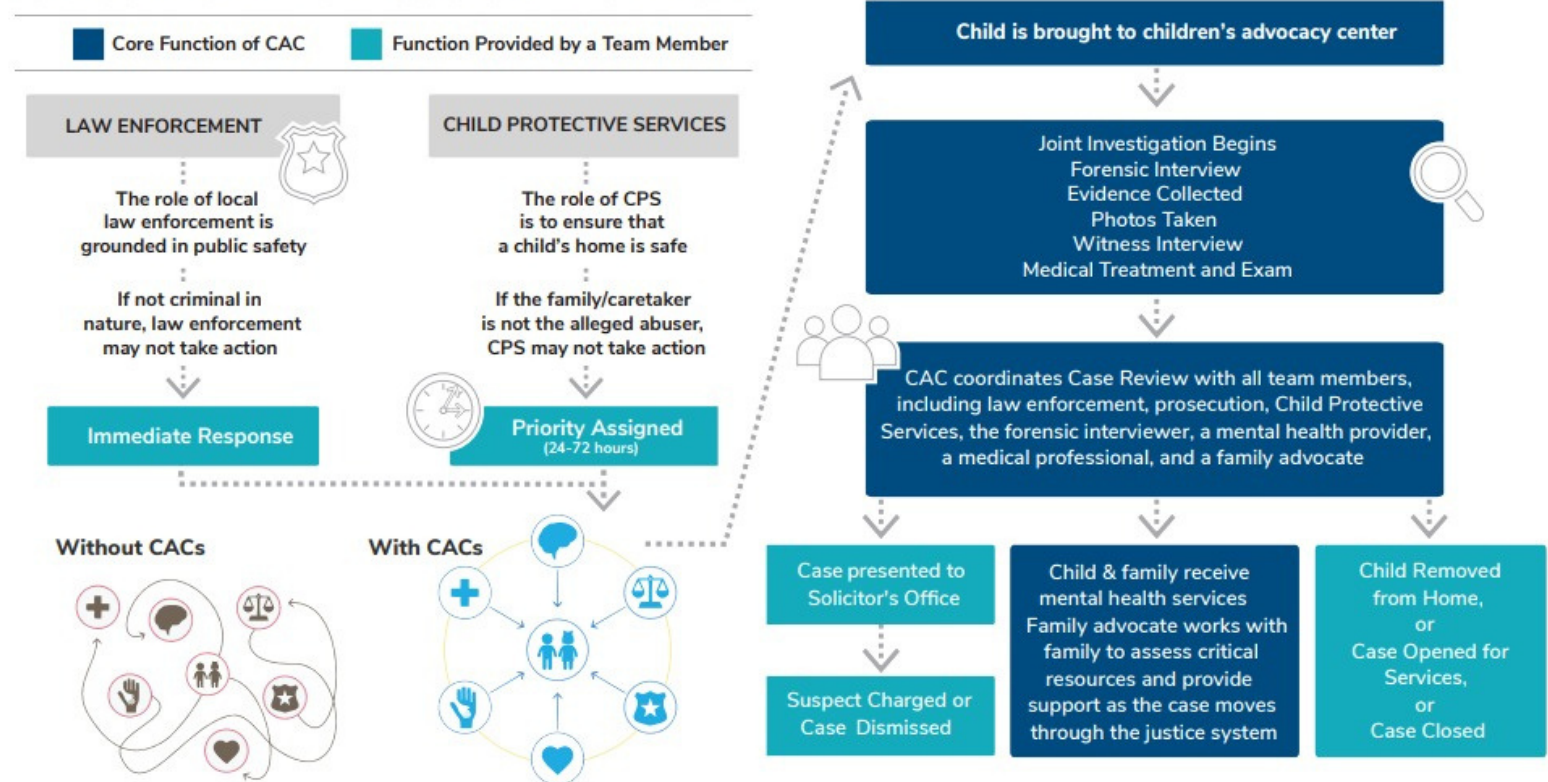
*Treatment Services*  
treatment@dorchestercac.org  
*Prevention Training*  
banderson@dorchestercac.org



# What is a Child Advocacy Center (CAC)?

The CAC model is about teamwork and about putting the needs of the child victim first. So rather than having a child taken from agency to agency throughout the law enforcement and child protection system, and having to endure multiple, repetitive interviews, the CAC brings the system to the child, and brings the agency professionals together to work in a collaborative approach to better serve the child victims. The primary goal of all CACs accredited by the National Children's Alliance (NCA) is to ensure that children disclosing abuse are not further victimized by the intervention systems designed to protect them. CACs are child-focused, facility-based programs with representatives from many disciplines working together to effectively investigate, prosecute, and treat child abuse.

## HOW DOES THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER MODEL WORK?



## A) Forensic Interviews

Interviews are conducted at the CAC by trained interviewers who follow a specific protocol for victims of child abuse.

## B) Medical Exams

Medical exams are provided at the CAC or through linkage agreements. Exams are conducted by child abuse pediatric experts.

## C) Trauma Counseling

Counseling is provided at the CAC for child victims and non-offending caregivers.

## D) Victim Advocacy

Victim Advocacy and support for the families is provided through the CAC.

## REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

### HOW DO I REPORT?

Report to the police or child protective services, or both. Generally, if the suspected offender is in the home with the child, it is better to contact child protective services.

**IF THE CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL 911**

**State laws require that you have reasonable suspicion that abuse is occurring. That means you do not need proof of sexual abuse to make a good faith report to authorities.**

Reasonable suspicion means you have witnessed physical or behavioral signs of maltreatment, either in the child or parent/caregiver, or both. OR, you have received a disclosure from a child about abuse, neglect, or boundary violations toward them.



### WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO MAKE A REPORT?

#### Necessary Information

- Child's name, address and age
- Parents' name and address
- Nature of the abuse

#### Helpful Information\*

- Perpetrator's name
- Details of the abuse

\*If the child does not readily supply this information, do not continue to question or investigate. It could interfere later with the investigation.

### A child just disclosed sexual abuse to me. WHAT DO I DO NOW?

#### 1. Say, "I believe you," and "It's not your fault."

- DO** remain calm.
- DO** ask open-ended questions: "Then what happened?"
- DON'T** make promises. Say, "We're going to get the help we need."

#### 2. Conduct a "minimal fact" interview.

- DO** let them use their own words.
- DON'T** ask leading questions or probe for details.

#### 3. Report immediately.

- DO** tell law enforcement and/or child protective services.



**FALSE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTS MADE BY CHILDREN ARE RARE\***

Source: D2L.org/Statistics

#### Do not ask the child leading questions or try to draw out information.

Asking too many questions about abuse may cause distress in the child, and can interfere with prosecution of the alleged offender.

#### Some guidelines for reporting abuse:

- Do not investigate on your own - Especially do not investigate physical signs beyond those that can be seen in daily interactions.
- It is best not to contact parents about your report, especially if a parent or household member is the suspected abuser. This could put the child at further risk or lead to the destruction of evidence.
- Even though your report may not result in legal action, the investigation may cause other services to take place, like counseling or the provision of necessities for the child.

**Sometimes the investigating professionals may not be able to gather enough evidence to act on your report. Still, your report may become part of a series of reports that can lead to action later.**

## When talking with children about **SIGNS OR DISCLOSURES:**

### **When talking with children about signs or disclosures:**

- Find a private place.
- Drop to eye level, or sit next to the child.
- Remain calm; keep a pace that is patient and slow.
- Ask the child about the sign in a simple, open-ended style. "I'm worried about you. You seem really afraid and sad." Or, "Is anything bothering you?"
- Listen to the response. Repeat what the child just said with a question inflection. "Your daddy touched your privates?"
- Listen to the response. Let them use their own words and repeat their words exactly again, followed by, "Is there anything else?"
- Reassure the child that he or she has done nothing wrong.
- Tell the child, "I care about you."
- When you are completing the conversation, tell the child, "This took a lot of courage. I'm proud of you for telling me."

### **Refrain from behaviors that will frighten the child, put him or her on the defensive, or cause him or her to relive the abusive events.**

- Don't ask questions that begin with "W" like "who, where, when" or "why."
- Don't overreact or make negative statements about the abuser.
- Don't make judgments or conclusions about the child or the abuser.
- Don't interrogate, investigate, or delve deeply into the events.
- Don't ask leading questions or make suggestions about what happened. For example, ask, "How did you get hurt?" rather than asking, "Did someone do that to you?"
- Don't make promises that the information will be kept confidential.
- Don't make any broad promises about the future.

## **Make your report immediately and include:**

- Name of the alleged child victim.
- Age of the child.
- Address where the child can be located.
- Contact information for the child's parents or caregivers, if known.
- Types of suspected abuse or neglect.
- Reason for making the report, including specific signs of maltreatment and whether it is part of an ongoing pattern.
- Other children in the home, if known.
- Name of the alleged perpetrator, if known.
- The emergency nature of the report and whether the child is in imminent danger.
- Name, phone number, and address of the reporter.

When known, the following should also be shared with child protective services:

- Exact time the child disclosed abuse, if there was a disclosure.
- Whether the perpetrator is aware of the report.
- Whether the non-offending parent was notified of the report.
- Last occurrence of the offense.

### **Report immediately. But first, take a few moments to jot down some notes in two categories.**

Category 1: What is the action, or failure to act, on the part of the parent or caregivers?

Category 2: How are these actions or failures to act affecting and hurting this child?

## Local Resources for Victims of Abuse

- **Tri-County SPEAKS:** agency that serves adult victims of sexual abuse
  - [www.tricountyspeaks.org](http://www.tricountyspeaks.org)
  - 24-hour hotline: (843) 745-0144
  - Office: (843) 577-9882
- **My Sister's House:** agency that serves adult victims of domestic violence
  - [www.mysistershouse.org](http://www.mysistershouse.org)
  - 24-hour crisis line: (843) 744-3242
  - Office: (843) 747-4069
- **CHILD ABUSE SERVICES**
  - **Dept. of Social Services** 24-hour, toll-free Child Abuse Hotline
    - 1-888-CARE4US (1-888-227-3487) between the hours of 8:30 AM and 1 AM Monday–Friday. Any other time please contact the county office where the child resides. County office contact information can be found online at <https://dss.sc.gov/contact/>
  - **Dorchester Children's Advocacy Center:** (843) 875-1551
  - **Dee Norton Children's Advocacy Center:** (843) 723-3600
- **CHILD ABUSE EDUCATION**
  - **Darkness To Light:** (843) 965-5444 or [d2l.org](http://d2l.org)
- **HUMAN/SEX TRAFFICKING**
  - **The Formation Project:** (843) 375-6635
  - **Doors To Freedom:** (843) 879-3924



## Local Resource For Offenders

- **Dorchester Alcohol and Drug Commission** - Community Against Domestic Abuse
  - <https://www.dadc.org/cada-community-against-domestic-abuse/>
  - Call Dorchester Counseling Services at 843-871-4793 for further information.

## Other Community Resources

- **United Way Association of South Carolina:** [sc211.org](http://sc211.org)
  - An online database with resources for housing/utilities, tax assistance, food, clothing/household, transportation, legal/public safety, GED/education, employment, income support, mental health/substance use, healthcare, individual/family support, senior services, disability, veterans, homeless services, children/maternity services, trafficking/violence, inmate/re-entry services, government/regulation/public services, LBGTQ, runaway children/youth, suicide/crisis services, youth services and disaster services.
- **Trident United Way (Charity Tracker)**
  - An online network of agencies that share resources, requests support and can track client engagement.
  - Account must be set up by TUW
- **East Cooper Community Outreach:** (843) 849-9220 or <http://eccocharleston.org>
  - Assistance, guidance and resources (food, health clinics, clothing, etc.)

## Other Community Resources

- **180 Place:** a homeless shelter in downtown Charleston that supports men, women, children and veterans
  - Crisis line: (843) 737-8357 or visit <https://lowcountrycoc.org/gethelp>
  - If you are homeless, or at-risk of becoming homeless, and a veteran in the Lowcountry, please call (843) 212-8668
- **Hope's House** (operated by Dorchester Co. Community Outreach): a homeless shelter in Summerville for women
  - (843) 900-4315
- **Home of Hope** (operated by Dorchester Co. Community Outreach): a homeless shelter in Summerville for men
  - (843) 469-8858
- **Navigation Center:** organization that assists individuals who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless
  - <https://thenavigationcenter.org> or (855) 355-1200
- **Hope Center:** a collaborative community resource center to provide comprehensive services to those who are homeless or at-risk of experiencing homelessness
  - 843-579-6399
- **SC Legal:** a nonprofit law agency that covers all of SC
  - Online request for support at [www.sclegal.org](http://www.sclegal.org)
  - 1 (888) 346-5592

## Suggested Material for Continuing Education

- Book: **Becoming A Church That Cares Well For The Abused**
  - Can be found online at:  
[churchcares.com/assets/downloads/ChurchCares.pdf](http://churchcares.com/assets/downloads/ChurchCares.pdf)
- Book: **On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church** by Deepak Reju
- **Caring Well** online resource and training videos
  - [caringwell.com](http://caringwell.com)
- **Darkness to Light: Grooming & Red Flag Behaviors**
  - [https://www.d2l.org/child-grooming-signs-behavior-awareness/#collapse\\_2636](https://www.d2l.org/child-grooming-signs-behavior-awareness/#collapse_2636)
- **The FaithTrust Institute** is a multifaith, multicultural training and educational organization. Their website includes articles, liturgical resources, sermons, FAQs, and trainings on a wide variety of topics related to abuse.
  - [faithtrustinstitute.org](http://faithtrustinstitute.org)

For more information about our faith-based workshops, including follow-up educational modules, help confronting and responding to abuse within your faith community, or general questions, please contact:

- **Sophia Rodriguez**, Prevention & Education Coordinator at Tri-County SPEAKS  
sophia@tricountyspeaks.org  
(854) 500-1225
- **Dan Glenn**, Education & Training Specialist at My Sister's House  
dan@mysistershouse.com  
(843) 619-3719



# SOURCES

The general information in this resource binder, including definitions and examples of types of abuse, was adapted from the state of New Hampshire's "Faith Communities: Domestic Violence Protocol 2007," from the Governor's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Attorney General's Office.

1. Pictures on title page: from pexels.com

2. Page 9: definition of gaslighting

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/gaslighting/>

3. Page 23: Office of Justice Programs' National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence

<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/232272.pdf>

4. Page 28: "From Religious Leaders." The Rave Project.

<https://www.theraveproject.org/resources/from-religious-leaders/>

5. Pages 31-52: The Introductory Guide to Caring Well: an initiative of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group

<https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Introductory-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>

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**The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of DHEC or the CDC.**