

Tips for Preaching About Domestic Violence

- Offer a content warning at the beginning of the sermon if you will be sharing stories or illustrations that may cause emotional distress for members of the congregation.
- Define domestic violence clearly.
- Be familiar with all kinds of domestic violence, not just physical assault. Know that verbal, emotional, sexual, financial, electronic, and spiritual abuse exist and what those look like in relationships. Keep in mind that neglect and stalking are also forms of abuse.
- Clearly state that all forms of abuse are wrong. Communicate that domestic violence is never the victim's fault. Discuss how power and control are at the root of abusive behavior and how this is never God's intended design for the family.
- Carefully use local, state, and national stories about victims of abuse and neglect as illustrations to communicate the fact that abuse is a crime. No one can justify domestic violence. Connect these to local, state, or national statistics about domestic violence.

If a Victim Comes to You Regarding Domestic Violence

- Know that victims and survivors are already in your church but won't talk about it if they do not feel safe to do so.
- Victims often will first disclose abuse to an informal support person, including clergy. Victims of abuse want their churches to be sources of help and comfort. Believe the victim. Validate the experience. Be empathetic. Know how to recognize abuse. Consider how a perpetrator may use faith/religion to further abuse and keep the victim trapped in the toxic relationship.
- Resist the notion that abuse is a private matter for the couple to solve at home. Understand that prayer and submission will not end the abuse.
- Know that couples counseling is unwise. Instead refer out for professional, trauma-informed individual counseling.
- Know about local resources for food, clothing, shelter, financial assistance, counseling, and other resources. Refer the victim to these services. Use the church's benevolent fund to assist with needs. Offer the victim continued support for the long duration of healing.

Learn more about preventing domestic violence at www.sccadvasa.org.