
Domestic Violence & Religion

Religious teachings can serve as either a roadblock or a resource in addressing domestic violence. Religious teachings or scripture are sometimes misinterpreted, distorted, and misused to suggest that domestic violence is acceptable or even God's will.

Christian women often feel compelled to stay in abusive relationships by scripture mandating them to "submit to their husbands" or "turn the other cheek".

Jewish women may feel pressure to not bring shame to their community by revealing the abuse in their marriage, or they may feel that it is their responsibility to maintain *shalom bayit*, or peace in the home.

Muslim women may question the nature of God and may question the relationship of God to them if they are in an abusive relationship.

Abused women often feel abandoned by God.

Rather than offering resources and alternatives to battered women, clergy have often advised women to return to violent homes and be "better wives".

An informed, compassionate clergy person can contribute to the healing process of a victim of domestic violence. More clergy are getting the education and training needed to support victims in staying safe.

Responding to Domestic Violence: Guidelines for Pastors and Rabbis

Remember the Goals:

1. SAFETY for the woman and children
2. ACCOUNTABILITY for the abuser
3. RESTORATION of individuals and, if possible, relationships

OR

4. MOURNING the loss of the relationships

DO's and DON'Ts with a battered woman

- DO believe her. Her description of the violence is only the tip of the iceberg.
- DO reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, it is not God's will for her.
- DO give her referral information; primary resources are battered women's services or shelters and National Hotline. **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or **1-800-787-3224 (V/TTY)**
- DO support and respect her choices. Even if she chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive.
- DO encourage her to think about a safety plan: set aside some money; copies of important papers for her and children; a change of clothes hidden or in care of a friend if she decides to go to a shelter. Plan how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent. Plan what to do about the children if they are at school; if they are asleep, etc. (This is both practical and helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Safety planning is a process that is ongoing.)
- DO protect her confidentiality. DO NOT give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. Do NOT discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser.

- DO help her with any religious concerns. If she is Christian, give her a copy of Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse.
- DO emphasize that the marriage covenant is broken by the violence from her partner.
- DO assure her of God's love and presence, of your commitment to walk with her through this valley of the shadow of death.
- DO help her see that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.
- If she decides to separate and divorce, DO support her and help her to mourn the loss to herself and her children.
- DO pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.
- DON'T minimize the danger to her. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for your safety . . ."
- DON'T tell her what to do. Give information and support.
- DON'T react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you. But don't react passively either. Let her know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and not deserved by her.
- DON'T blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, try to reframe: "I don't care if you did have supper late or forget to water the lawn, that is no reason for him to be violent with you. This is his problem."
- DON'T recommend couples counseling or approach her husband and ask for "his side of the story." These actions will endanger her.
- DON'T recommend "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop." None of these will address the goals listed above.
- DON'T send her home with a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church, or be a better Christian wife.
- DON'T encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
- DO NOT encourage her dependence on you OR become emotionally OR sexually involved with her.
- DON'T do nothing.
- DO consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response.

Adapted from materials produced by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

For more information about how religious communities can respond to domestic violence and for educational materials, contact the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence at www.cpsdv.org. For books about religion and domestic violence look at the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence Reading Suggestions page.

**If you need assistance or if you have questions, call the 24-hour crisis line
425-746-1940 or 1-800-827-8840
(V/TTY available 8am-5pm)**

For more information or help, please call:
MASTERPEACE Center for Counseling and Development
308 S Maumee St, Tecumseh, MI 49286 • 517-423-6889 • www.mpccd.com