DOMESTIC ABUSE

A pastoral response

For information and action by

Clergy, PCC and Church Members
WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse is a crime. It includes all violence and abuse of power within a household between: men and women, married and unmarried, parents to children, children to parents including elderly parents, and between non related parties. Suffering through violence whether physical, psychological, spiritual, financial, sexual, emotional or through neglect should not be an accepted part of Christian life.

FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE

- Domestic abuse affects 1 in 5 adults in this country. Approx 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men

- It is an escalating process and rarely occurs just once. Always becoming worse rarely getting better.

- One quarter of all assaults reported to the Police are defined as domestic abuse. You are more likely to suffer domestic abuse than suffering violence in the street.

- An average of 2 women a week are killed by their male partners or ex partners. One in 3 suicide attempts is by a victim of domestic abuse.

- If Children witness or hear violent incidents they are badly affected. It is a form of child abuse by the violent partner. 750,000 children a year witness domestic abuse.

- Domestic abuse occurs in all types of households and amongst all professions including those in positions of leadership. Rich and poor all types of people are affected.
This is a very sensitive issue and is painful for those who suffer from domestic abuse and those who try to help.

**HOWEVER, WE DO NEED TO ENGAGE WITH IT!!**

**DO’S AND DON’TS**

**DO** talk in a safe, private place.

**DO** take plenty of time to listen and do believe what you hear.

**DO** affirm the courage and strength it takes to talk about abuse.

**DO** express your concern for their safety.

**DO** reassure them that whatever the circumstances violence is not justified and is against the law.

**DO** check with specialist agencies as to what they can offer and pass on the information.

**DO** check if it is all right to make contact with them at their home.

**DO** keep information confidential (unless it is a child protection matter) and never pass on an address without consent.

**DON’T** fob them off if they ask for help. Instead try to help them, contact the right agency for them.

**DON’T** trivialise or dismiss what they tell you.

**DON’T** judge or criticise.

**DON’T** suggest that they try again.

**DON’T** ask what they did to provoke the violence. If you do, you condone it.

**DON’T** initiate any physical contact, or confront their partner. Your own safety is important too.

**DON’T** make decisions for them. Discuss the options, find out what they want to do and help them achieve it.

**DON’T** expect them to make decisions in a hurry. Leaving may be as frightening as staying.

**DON’T** offer pastoral care or counseling to both the abused and the abuser together.
THE EFFECT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic abuse devastates lives. People who suffer abuse are more likely to have health problems, abuse drugs or alcohol, or try to commit suicide because they cannot bear the pain and fear any longer.

Thousands of children live in fear in their own homes, and are often affected for the rest of their lives, when they witness, hear or experience violence. They may suffer anxiety and think that it is ‘normal’ to choose an abusive partner, or become bullies at school or use abusive behaviour at home.

HOW TO HELP VICTIMS OF ABUSE

What to look for

If you have concerns that someone you know might be a victim of domestic abuse, you may notice some of these signs.

- They may have unexplained bruises or injuries
- They may have become unusually quiet or withdrawn
- They may have frequent or puzzling absences from work or Church or other commitments
- They may wear clothes that conceal, even on very warm days.
- They may stop talking about their partner
If you could broach the subject, your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help in an abusive situation. A question like "Is anyone hurting you?" can be a good way to begin.

WHY DON’T THEY LEAVE?

Those experiencing abuse at home often find it hard to seek help or to leave. This may be because of:

- Fear of reprisals.
- Promises of better behavior
- Financial dependence
- Worry about the effect on their children
- Feelings of guilt or low self-esteem
- Fear of losing home, positions, friends and stability.
- Love of their partners
- Cultural factors for those from ethnic minorities
- Fear of being condemned by their church

IF YOU KNOW OR SUSPECT THAT CHILDREN ARE AT RISK FROM WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, YOU ARE LEGALLY BOUND TO REPORT IT TO THE POLICE OR SOCIAL SERVICES.

If YOU are suffering abuse:
DO TELL SOMEBODY YOU TRUST

Blame and denial are used by abusers to make victims feel responsible for the violence. This allows abusers to continue the violence rather than seek help.

Guidelines if you need to leave your home in an emergency:

- Have some money saved in case you need to use a taxi or bus
- If you don't have a mobile, find somewhere you can quickly and safely use the phone should you need to.
- Take important documents such as your marriage and birth certificate, any court orders, passport, benefit and bank books, and health records.
- Have a small bag already packed with an extra set of keys for the house and car should you need to leave in a hurry.
- If you choose to leave try to take your children with you.
- Take essential medicines that you and your children will need
- Leave when it is safe to do so.
- If you later discover that you have left behind something essential, you can always arrange for a police escort so that you can return for it.

For more information consult the Church Action for Domestic Abuse website

www.ccpas.co.uk