

WHAT A FAITH COMMUNITY CAN DO TO RESPOND TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Faith communities can provide a safe haven for those who are living with violence in their home. In addition, they inspire society to show compassion and provide comfort for those afflicted by the tragedy of domestic violence. Leaders of the faith community have identified actions to create a unified response to sexual and domestic violence.

- **Become a Safe Place.** Make your church, temple, mosque or synagogue a safe place where victims of domestic violence can come for help. Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area. Publicize the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TDD) or local shelter information.
- **Educate the Congregation.** Provide ways for members of the church to learn as much as they can about domestic and sexual violence. Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Create an environment of awareness. Sponsor educational events in your congregation on domestic and sexual violence.
- **Speak Out.** Speak out about domestic violence and sexual assault. As a faith leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs through preaching, teaching and prayer.
- **Prepare to Be a Resource.** Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to the faith & cultural issues related to violence and abuse.
- **Respond.** If you suspect someone is being abused, speak to her/him privately. Let individuals know of the community resources available to assist them, including helping them plan for safety. If someone discloses their abuse to you, do not discuss it with others. Confidentiality saves lives. Do not attempt couples counseling.
- **Get Professional Training.** Encourage and support training and education for clergy and lay leaders, hospital chaplains, and seminary students to increase awareness about sexual and domestic violence. Pastoral care training insures that a faith leader is prepared with information, referrals, spiritual guidance and marriage preparation skills.
- **Partner with Existing Resources.** Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects. Adopt a shelter for which your church, temple, mosque or synagogue provides material support, or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.

- **Offer Space.** Offer space to local client agencies as a safe meeting location for them to meet with a survivor, lead educational seminars or weekly support groups.
- **Lead by Example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.
- **Address Policy Issues.** Encourage efforts by religious institutions (your denomination) to develop and implement safe church policies as well as efforts to address allegations of abuse by clergy or lay leaders. Encourage efforts in your community to advocate for laws and or develop and implement public policies and services that provide resources for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

*Adapted in part from Toolkit to End Violence Against Women, OVW/DOJ and FaithTrust Institute.
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