

Anglican Diocese of Armidale

A short guide to ‘Responding to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Good Practice Guidelines’

Aim

This 'short guide' is precisely that – a short guide to the Diocesan document 'Responding to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Good Practice Guidelines'. We recognize that domestic abuse is a complex and multi-faceted issue, and so the Policy and Guidelines, and associated appendices, is, by necessity, a long document. But sometimes we need to just get a snapshot, or an overview, of the key issues and what we should be doing. This guide seeks to do that. For further detail or a more considered discussion around the issues raised, reference should be made to the Policy and Guidelines document itself (and to the Diocesan Code of Conduct '*Faithfulness in Service*').

On Terminology

This guide and the related core documents use the expression **domestic abuse** rather than domestic violence, because domestic abuse can involve other forms of abuse other than violence.

We have also chosen to refer to 'victims' of domestic abuse, especially in the immediate context of responding to concerns, and the ongoing impact of pain and trauma. But we acknowledge that 'survivor' is also common terminology, preferred by many, since those experiencing domestic abuse show great resilience even just to stay alive in seeking to protect themselves and their loved ones. Therefore, where appropriate to the context, we will sometimes also refer to survivors.

An overview of the *Policy* (NB: Numerical references below are to sections of the Policy)

- a) 1.1 Domestic abuse, sadly, is found even within Christian relationships. All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong. Perpetrators must be called to stop, and to repent.
Domestic abuse involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship.
Whilst domestic abuse is predominantly between an adult and a current/former spouse/partner, it can occur in other relationships as well (eg between siblings, towards older people, between other people sharing a home, etc).
Domestic abuse will impact negatively on any children in the family and so should be seen as a parenting choice by the perpetrator. Responding to any abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.
We recognize that sometimes spouses/partners can be both victims of abuse and perpetrate abuse.
- b) 1.2 We are committed to safe places. Such places recognize the equality of all people; promote a culture of healthy relationships; are places where all people feel welcomed, respected and safe; offer protection for those experiencing domestic abuse; refuse to condone any form of abuse and enable concerns to be raised and responded to.
- c) 1.3 *Faithfulness in Service* is our Diocesan Code of Conduct, which has several sections relating to abuse, especially section 6.
- d) 1.4 Domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response. This may require the involvement of statutory authorities and specialist agencies, particularly as clergy (and lay ministers) are unlikely to have professional expertise in this area. It may also require regular training (by appropriately qualified professionals or programs).
- e) 1.5 We respect people who come to us for help, whether they are victims or perpetrators. We need to ensure a safe distance is kept between the two parties. We refuse to condone any form of abuse.
- f) 1.6 God's word expresses an abhorrence of abuse, and we must uphold and clearly teach this – that domestic abuse is always wrong and is not condoned anywhere in Scripture; and that victims are encouraged to seek safety (which may involve separation and/or divorce).

- g) 1.7 safety and informed help is the priority for those who have experienced domestic abuse. Disclosures of abuse must be taken seriously (including by working with outside authorities) and confidentiality maintained (as far as is appropriate/necessary). We must be aware that perpetrators may seek to deliberately undermine a victim by making their own allegations. Clergy may need to carefully challenge inappropriate behaviour, (but only after receiving professional advice, and only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk.)
- h) 1.8 We will offer informed and appropriate pastoral support to those in our care, guided always by the victim. Reconciliation may happen – but only after genuine repentance and reformation of the perpetrator.
- i) 1.9 we need to remember that our understanding of, and response to, domestic abuse is shaped by Scripture.
- j) 1.10 In our churches we need to ensure that victims are safe (as the priority), supported and empowered, and can find healing; and that perpetrators are held to account, and urged to come to repentance, reformation and healing. The Good Practice Guidelines and Appendices provide much more information and advice about this. The Policy document provides a **Domestic Abuse Response Flow Chart** which is reproduced below, as is the list of a number of key telephone numbers and websites, and an app for smart phones and tablets.
- k) 1.11 To help with prevention and care:
- Parish Councils should adopt and publish a local domestic abuse policy (see Appendix 7 of the Guidelines document for a recommended parish policy);
 - Churches should consider displaying their domestic abuse policy statement, together with information about how to access advice and support from the Police, domestic violence helplines and diocesan services;
 - Churches should consider appointing a specified domestic abuse contact person;
 - Parish Councils might consider how they can provide financial or pastoral support for victims;
 - Clergy and lay leaders (and others within the congregation) should be trained;
 - Clergy should address the issue of domestic abuse in appropriate contexts and with appropriate Scriptural teaching

1.13 Domestic Abuse Flowchart

At any time in this process you can seek advice from a domestic violence professional. Within 48 hours of a disclosure you should debrief with such a professional.

A person discloses domestic abuse:

RESPECT & LISTEN

- Listen with acceptance
- Don't ask for proof
- Assure the victim it's not their fault
- Be honest about your ability to help
- Reassure normal confidentiality will be maintained, but explain its limits

Is there an immediate risk of harm?

Yes

SAFETY FIRST

- Discuss with the victim, but call the Police 000
- Seek advice from the NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463

No

Are there children involved?

Yes

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

- Call the Child Protection Helpline 132 111
- Remember that witnessing domestic abuse harms children & may be reportable

No

Is the victim or accused in a ministry family?

Yes

KEEP PROFESSIONAL DIRECTOR INFORMED

- Call Kooyoora – 1800 135 246

No

Has further help been requested?

Yes

ACTION

- Advise that any intervention needs care and can heighten risk.
- Be guided by what the victim wants
- Outline realistic options: Police, AVDOs, DV services, safety planning, GP, counsellor, refuge; explore other supports like friends, Supply appropriate information, phone numbers, websites, Daisy app (be careful of storage).
- Encourage the victim to consult a service or make a referral on their behalf.
- Don't contact the perpetrator without proper advice
- Record what was disclosed and your safety concerns, note your actions, and from whom you received advice. Date the record and keep it confidential.

No

NO FORMAL ACTION

- Your time was well spent. A victim knows they have been believed, is not in the wrong, and can return to you for further help.
- You can't make a victim of domestic abuse take any action. The most you may be able to do is listen and provide information (note earlier obligations regarding immediate danger or if children are involved).
- You may be able to offer other chances to meet and talk.
- You may be able to suggest referring more generally to a GP, psychologist or counsellor.
- You could supply appropriate information, phone numbers such as 1800 RESPECT, websites, Daisy app (be careful of storage).
- Record what was disclosed and your safety concerns, note your actions and/or advice. Date the record and keep it confidential.

1.14 Domestic Abuse – key telephone numbers and websites for help

AGENCY	CONTACT DETAILS
<p>1800 Respect national helpline 24-hour national number for sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling and advice.</p>	<p>1800 737 732 1800respect.org.au</p>
<p>Anglicare Advice to clergy and lay ministers in the Anglican Diocese of Armidale especially for domestic abuse in a church-related setting.</p>	<p>6701 8200 (business hours)</p>
<p>Daisy App The Daisy App connects people who may experience violence or abuse to support services in their local area. It was developed by 1800RESPECT and is free to use and download. It includes some safety features to help protect the privacy of people using it.</p>	<p>Free to download from iPhone App Store & Android Google Play</p>
<p>Child Protection Helpline Contact this helpline if you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.</p>	<p>132 111 reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg</p>
<p>Lifeline 24-hour telephone crisis line.</p>	<p>131 114 www.lifeline.org.au/get-help</p>
<p>NSW Domestic Violence Line 24-hour number for comprehensive information and referrals to nearby support services, for all categories of domestic violence.</p>	<p>1800 65 64 63 domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help</p>
<p>NSW Rape Crisis Centre Counselling service for anyone in NSW – men and women – who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault.</p>	<p>1800 424 017 www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</p>
<p>Law Access NSW Free government telephone service that provides legal information, referral and advice for people who have a legal problem in NSW.</p>	<p>1300 888 529 lawaccess.nsw.gov.au</p>
<p>Legal Aid NSW Legal Aid's Domestic Violence Unit provides legal advice, referral and representation, as well as social support, to eligible persons,</p>	<p>02 9219 5000 legalaid.nsw.gov.au</p>
<p>No To Violence: Men's Referral Service Telephone counselling, information and referral service for men using violence in families, male victims, and for their friends or relatives.</p>	<p>1300 766 491 ntv.org.au</p>
<p>Professional Standards Unit Advice about abuse involving clergy or church workers in the Anglican Diocese of Armidale.</p>	<p>Kooyoora – 1800 135 246</p>

An overview of the *Guidelines* (NB: Numerical references below are to sections of the *Guidelines*)

- a) 2.1 Our response to any disclosure or any victim is to offer support, to listen and to give victims the respect of being believed. The safety of victims and any children is the priority. We should seek to be informed whilst acknowledging our professional limitations (and so being willing to consult others for advice where needed).
- b) 2.2 In the event of an initial disclosure of abuse (or hints of abuse) we may find it helpful to ask after them and take time to make sure we listen with acceptance. Such discussions should be in a safe, private place, with confidentiality being assured (as appropriate). No contact should be made with the alleged perpetrator at this stage (without professional advice).
- c) 2.3 In some cases immediate action may be required, necessitating a call to 000, the police, the NSW Domestic Violence Line (1800 656 463), child protection authorities (if relevant) and/or the PSD.
- d) 2.4 Our response to any disclosure will be to assure them that they have done the right thing in making the disclosure, discussing possible options and where to find help and support, doing what we can to ensure their safety (and of any children) and that their own needs are met, reassuring them it is not their fault, discussing ways the church can help and offering to talk again.
- e) 2.5 We will need to keep notes of individual pastoral activity (and be aware of privacy legislation). We will probably want to follow the victim up again - so what is the best and safest way to do that? There may be circumstances where we need to tell authorities, so we need to do so and keep a record. Within 48 hours of receiving the first disclosure we ought to share the incident with someone qualified in domestic abuse. We will need to make sure we do not give information to the perpetrator (or to someone who might give it to the perpetrator).
 If the perpetrator and the victim are in the same church, we will need to review safety issues (which may involve a risk assessment, an MOU, an ADVO, or advising the perpetrator to change congregations or churches or to withdraw from online groups or seek behaviour change therapy, etc). This may need to be done in consultation with the PSD.
 It may be appropriate to consider detailed safety planning with the victim, although normally this would be done with a professional (Appendix 7 to the *Guidelines* gives an example of a safety planning format).
 We should also consider how to practically support a victim who is leaving (or considering leaving) a situation of domestic abuse, and what agencies may be available to help.
- f) 2.6 We need to consider how we respond to perpetrators. This will involve carefully challenging the perpetrator (although this may pose risks to both the victim and the person challenging). Abuse is sin – but repentance and reformation are hard long-term works. We need to remember the victim comes first, and any proposed action involving the perpetrator should be discussed first with the victim.
 As we discuss matters with a perpetrator, they will want to persuade us of their point of view and the ‘rightness’ of their actions. We will need to meet them in a safe, public place with others at the meeting.
 We will need to check on the safety of the victim after any discussions with the perpetrator.
- g) 2.7 We need to follow the same record-keeping requirements as with victims.
 As we work with a perpetrator, it is generally inadvisable for the same person to provide support or pastoral care to both a victim and a perpetrator.
 Again, there are limits to our confidentiality, and we need to be aware of when information may need to be shared, and with whom. Records should be kept of all such decisions made. We must ensure we do not collude with, excuse or minimise their behaviour.
 Nor should we provide treatment – this is for professionals to do.
 In the event of a legal investigation, we should cooperate fully with police requests; only produce documents requested by the perpetrator if they are subpoenaed; generally not act as a character witness for the perpetrator; and consider whether there is someone else who might provide pastoral support for the perpetrator.

- h) 2.8 As we consider pastoral care for the victim we need to be available to help where we can, to be patient (and accept that the victim may have reasons for choosing to stay in the situation), to emphasise that abuse is always wrong and not the victim's fault; to reassure them of God's presence and love; to pray for them; to not rush into reconciliation or counselling/mediation.
- i) 2.9 When it comes to responding spiritually to perpetrators, we need to name the abuse as their sin (not the victim's) and be clear about this and not allow them to make excuses. We may want to remind them that abuse is a parenting choice (if there are children involved). We need to make sure we are not taken in by their narrative or any quick/easy remorse/regret. Repentance must be real, visible and enduring. We may want to pray with them and perhaps seek some pastoral care for them.
- j) 2.10 There are several Men's Behaviour Change programs which run, and these could be considered/suggested.
- k) 2.11 There are several pastoral issues which arise when there is domestic abuse within the church. The PSD may need to be consulted on how to address these. Some of these include:
 - Legal restrictions if there is an ADVO in place; or whether a risk assessment is required and an MOU put in place, etc;
 - Perpetrators moving church;
 - If clergy are involved whether as a victim or perpetrator;
 - How to care for both victim and perpetrator if they remain in the same church;
 - How to care long-term for victims, and how to care for carers
- l) 2.12 If a clergy or lay minister (or their spouse) discloses abuse they are to be treated as any other victim and offered the same support and resources. Safety for victims remains paramount, even above any fear of scandal, etc.
- m) 2.13 If a clergy or lay minister is the alleged perpetrator they are to be treated as any other perpetrator. Allegations of domestic abuse by them should be referred to the PSD. The Bishop may consider how to provide pastoral support to them. Domestic abuse may result in proceedings under our ministry standards and disciplinary ordinances and policies.
- n) 2.14 Mediation may be helpful, but it is a specialist activity which must be undertaken by trained professionals. It can be an empowering process for the victim, but safety concerns must be managed. Legal advice may also be needed.
- o) 2.15 We need to consider and work through the significant spiritual and theological issues involved in responding to perpetrators.