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agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí

MÁNNYSTRE O  
Poustie, Resydënter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar

RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AND ABUSE  
GUIDELINES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL STEERING GROUP  
ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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**Note about terminology:** throughout this document references are made to *domestic violence*;

*domestic violence and abuse*; and

*domestic abuse*

these terms are deliberately used inter-changeably to highlight the fact that the problem is not restricted to physical violence but involves also psychological, verbal, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. See section 2 for more details.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This guide for clergy and religious leaders (hereafter referred to as leaders of Faith communities) has been developed by a small working group on behalf of the Information Sub-Group of the Regional Steering Group on Domestic Violence in line with the Strategy and Action Plan “*Tackling Violence at Home*”<sup>1</sup> published in October 2005. The membership of the working group is set out in Annex 1.
- 1.2 Domestic violence and abuse is a serious problem in Northern Ireland. It occurs right across our society and it has devastating consequences for the victims and their families. During 2005-2006 the Police Service recorded over 23,000 domestic violence incidents and the 24-hour Domestic Violence Helpline handled more than 20,000 calls, yet we know from research that there are many thousands of silent victims who neither report the abuse nor seek help. It is very likely that every faith community has members of its congregation who have been affected by, or are at risk from domestic violence, or who are perpetrators of domestic violence.
- 1.3 This Guide provides leaders of Faith communities with information to respond effectively to members of their congregations who may be victims or perpetrators. It does not purport to be all-inclusive. Rather, it is intended as an overview of important issues to assist in the formation of appropriate responses and to provide information on the services available to protect and support victims.

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Northern Ireland Office ‘Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland’. Ref 102/05

- 1.4 It is hoped that the Guide will help leaders of Faith communities to break the silence around domestic violence. It should also help them to raise awareness about the issue and to create a caring atmosphere in which victims of abuse can begin to feel understood and supported and encouraged to seek help. Society and individuals have traditionally found all sorts of ways of denying or excusing the problem. *Annex 2 sets out some examples of the myths and excuses about domestic violence that need to be challenged.*
- 1.5 The main body of the Guide sets out an introduction to the problem and a definition. It describes the role of Faith leaders and how they should respond when domestic violence and abuse is disclosed. However, for ease of reference, much of the detailed guidance on different aspects of abuse is contained in Annexes 2 to 13. While the bulk of the guidance covers victims generally (irrespective of their age, gender etc.) some of the text addresses the particular experiences of women to reflect the fact that it is mainly women who are the victims.

## 2. WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

### Definition

The definition of domestic violence and abuse as set out in the Government's Strategy "Tackling Violence at Home" is: **"threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation."**

- 2.1 Domestic violence and abuse is a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by abuse of power and control by one person over another within an intimate relationship or a family. It is usually persistent and can escalate in severity over time. It can include abuse by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship.
- 2.2 The problem knows no boundaries as regards age, gender, race, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or geography. In the majority of cases the violence and abuse is perpetrated by men against women. However there are also male victims of female abuse and there are victims within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.
- 2.3 While the abuse is most frequently portrayed as physical violence, it can take many other forms including emotional, sexual, financial and psychological abuse, for example: undermining of self-confidence; threats to others including children; controlling behaviour such as isolation from friends and family; control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation or the telephone; the destruction of property; and stalking.
- 2.4 Living with domestic violence for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects are linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness.
- 2.5 Domestic violence includes the abuse of older people. While the profile of child abuse has been raised in recent years, many people continue to be less aware of the problem of elder abuse.
- 2.6 It is acknowledged that domestic violence can also manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members through the perpetuation of unlawful activities, such as forced marriage, so called 'honour crimes' and female genital mutilation. Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of violence.

### 3. HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MANIFEST ITSELF?

- 3.1 Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse. It is vitally important to remember that an abusive relationship thrives on shame and secrecy. All of these forms of abuse can lead to severe long-term damaging consequences. Domestic violence at its most extreme can result in murder. *Stories from survivors included at Annex 11 illustrate some of the forms of domestic violence and abuse.*
- 3.2 It is impossible to produce an exhaustive list of abuses, as each victim's situation is personal, but the following is a list of examples:

#### Types of abuse

Physical abuse	Emotional abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hitting</li><li>• Nipping</li><li>• Ear pulling</li><li>• Slapping</li><li>• Punching</li><li>• Dragging by hair</li><li>• Throttling</li><li>• Stabbing</li><li>• Throwing objects</li><li>• Burning</li><li>• Force-feeding</li><li>• Beating with objects</li><li>• Imprisoning</li><li>• Urinating on</li><li>• Starving</li><li>• Attempting murder</li><li>• Murder</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ignoring</li><li>• Name calling</li><li>• Isolating</li><li>• Locking up</li><li>• Criticising</li><li>• Withholding love or support</li><li>• Threatening</li><li>• Threatening of suicide</li><li>• Bullying</li><li>• Keeping the person in a constant state of uncertainty</li><li>• Moving the goal posts</li></ul>

Sexual abuse	Financial Abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempted rape</li> <li>• Sex with force/rape</li> <li>• Use of objects</li> <li>• Forced into group sex</li> <li>• Denied sex</li> <li>• Forced to watch pornography</li> <li>• Forced to take part in depraved acts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling behaviour through money</li> <li>• Withholding money</li> <li>• Misspending money</li> <li>• Forced to be responsible for all money</li> <li>• Forced into debt</li> <li>• Controlling money to an abnormal degree</li> <li>• Restricting access to money for necessities and treats etc</li> <li>• Having to explain all expenditure</li> </ul>

Other abusive/controlling behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denying access to ante-natal care</li> <li>• Using pregnancy to increase violence</li> <li>• Using children to control and blackmail</li> <li>• Using children in threatening/frightening way</li> <li>• Threatening to harm children</li> <li>• Threatening to take children away</li> <li>• Not allowing to parent</li> <li>• Undermining parenting skills and turning children against the other parent</li> <li>• Telling someone that God hates them</li> <li>• Using faith as a weapon to control and terrorise them for the abuser's pleasure or gain</li> <li>• Using religious teaching to justify abuse or to compel forgiveness</li> </ul>

3.3 All cases of domestic violence need to be taken seriously as they have far reaching effects on the victims and their children. *A checklist for situations of severe or lethal risk from perpetrators can be found at Annex 12.*

## 4. THE EXTENT AND IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 4.1 Domestic violence accounts for one in five cases of violent crime in Northern Ireland. On average every year 5 people are killed as a result of domestic violence and about 700 families have to be re-housed. The police attend an average of 60 domestic-related incidents per day, but it is known that there is still a large amount of under-reporting of this type of crime.
- 4.2 The 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline (0800 917 1414), which is open to anyone affected by domestic violence, handles about 20,000 calls each year. A substantial number of first time callers contact the Helpline during media campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the problem. This would indicate that there are still many thousands of victims experiencing domestic violence who have not yet reached out for help.
- 4.3 Children are the silent victims of domestic violence. They may witness it or be subject to it but often their voices are not heard. Local research<sup>2</sup> indicates that at least 11,000 children here are living in violent homes.
- 4.4 The consequences of ignoring the problem of domestic violence are far reaching: murder; attempted murder; serious physical injury and illness; mental ill-health and breakdown; disability; alcohol and substance abuse; child abuse; rape and sexual abuse; anxiety; depression and failure to thrive can all be the consequences of violence in the home.
- 4.5 It is estimated that the direct cost of services to deal with domestic violence (such as police, civil and criminal court cases, health and social services and housing) amounts to about £90 million every year in Northern Ireland. The loss of economic output due to absence from work of victims is estimated at a further £90 million every year. An estimate of the “intangible costs” of pain and suffering of victims could amount to some £500 million each year in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>2</sup>Children in Northern Ireland – Domestic Violence and Professional Awareness (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002) page 7

## 5. RESPONDING TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 5.1 Faith Leaders have two primary roles in responding to domestic violence - **prevention** and **protection**. The remainder of this section sets out advice on these topics and *Annex 3 provides a Toolkit which may be useful for Faith leaders in preparing for and responding to disclosures of abuse.*

### Prevention – a voice for change

- 5.2 Faith leaders are in a key position to influence societal attitudes about the unacceptability of domestic violence and abuse. Members of Faith communities must be made aware of the inappropriateness of physical and emotional abuse and the misuse of power and control in the demoralisation and degradation of victims. There is no place for such behaviour anywhere, especially in a Faith community. Faith leaders have an opportunity to address the main issues, in a spiritual context during services, by highlighting the devastating impact that abuse has on family values, the victim and all family members, especially children. When talking about domestic violence Faith leaders should aim to:

- inform people about the reality of domestic violence and its effects on family life;
- give the congregation the clear message that domestic violence is immoral and can **never** be tolerated - it is a crime and an abuse of human rights;
- encourage people to reflect on the effect of their own behaviour on their partners and other family members;
- reassure victims that protection and support is available;
- increase awareness of domestic violence among their communities and inform leaders to recognise victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse in their congregations;
- inform their communities about the appropriate responses to domestic violence;
- communicate to their communities the risks, difficulties and barriers that victims face in leaving an abusive relationship;
- communicate to leaders the importance of advising victims of the relevant agencies and professionals that can provide protection and support (*see Annex 13 for a list of support agencies*).

## Protection – insight and understanding

- 5.3 It is important that Faith leaders are well briefed on the physical and emotional implications of domestic violence and on how to respond. They must have the personal skills to encourage disclosure and be able to refer to specialist agencies that can offer protection. An acknowledgement of their lack of specialist skills or lack of time available to address the problem and provide adequate support to victims may prompt Faith leaders to identify, within their communities, an appropriate person/s to take the lead on the issue.
- 5.4 Faith communities should consider training on domestic violence to enable all relevant staff to have a better understanding of the issues involved and how to respond to victims. Faith leaders can discuss arrangements for training through their Local Domestic Violence Partnership (*see Annex 13 for contact details*). Faith communities should also consider introducing a workplace policy to support their own staff/workers who may themselves be subject to domestic violence. Guidelines for Employers on Developing a Workplace Policy are available from the Domestic Violence Unit, DHSSPS.
- 5.5 Abuse is difficult to detect for any professional before disclosure, except when manifest by obvious physical symptoms. The following is just one example of the symptoms of a possible abusive/ controlling relationship:

### Example

A woman may be particularly quiet while her partner controls the conversation including answering questions addressed to her. He may appear to be very attentive while she presents as subdued; she may be of an anxious disposition and may appear to have frequent spells of ill-health; she may be isolated from family and friends and have no social life other than in the company of her partner. While there may be a valid reason for the woman's behaviour, the Faith leader should be concerned and may decide to make a home visit when her partner is at work. However, caution and skill need to be exercised so as not to exacerbate the situation and subject the victim to more abuse. She may be so fearful and conditioned into a sense of worthlessness that she may reveal details of the visit on questioning by her partner.

Faith leaders, during their pastoral role, may become aware that a member of the community is distressed or unhappy. **In no circumstance, however, should the concern be raised in the partner's presence.**

## Management of the Disclosure of Domestic Violence

5.6 Guidelines for action are based on three main principles:

- Protection of the victim and children
- Stopping the perpetrator's violence
- Reconciliation or separation.

5.7 *Protection of the victim and children*

Great sensitivity is required from the outset as disclosure of abuse is distressing and it requires considerable courage from the victim to place trust in the Faith leader. Adherence to religious beliefs, societal attitude, personal and family expectations as well as emotional commitment may have prevented disclosure until now. The abuse may have been going on for a number of years and the victim may be traumatised and think that she/he is responsible. It is essential that Faith leader believes the victim and offers emotional and practical support.

5.8 Immediate protection may be needed for the victim and children. This may necessitate the Faith leader making contact with the police, the duty social worker or a refuge, or trusted family/friends and maybe arranging the transport to the safe place. This is **not** a time to offer reconciliation advice. When safety is established follow-up contact may be made if the victim agrees. The victim may not wish a permanent separation but may hope to work on the relationship with a view to reconciliation. This cannot be done without a complete end to the perpetrator's abusive behaviour.

5.9 Once it has been established that the situation is not placing children or young people at risk of harm, in which case you should follow the guidelines in paragraph 5.8 above, it is important to recognise that each individual may consider differing options. Many victims want the safety and protection of a refuge and there are a number of refuges available for female victims and their children. Details of these facilities and other support services can be obtained via the 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline (0800 917 1414) or from local Women's Aid groups. Some women may not wish to go to a refuge or hostel even when their safety is threatened. Some will have the financial resources to go elsewhere or will have friends who can provide alternative accommodation. Some women may not wish to leave their home or remove children from familiar surroundings. Their wishes have to be respected at such a vulnerable time. The Faith leader should ensure that the victim's choice is respected but should still remain as a source of support. It is equally important that the Faith leader does not assume that each contact from a victim is an emergency. *Annex 13 provides details of the support services available to female and male victims and to victims in same-sex relationships.*

- 5.10 Through sensitive questioning and active listening, the Faith leader should establish exactly what help is required. Action taken will depend on the victim's expressed wish, the extent and nature of abuse and the degree of imminent threat. *The disclosure flowchart included at Annex 4 may be helpful for this process.*
- 5.11 A victim may choose a Faith leader to talk through the effects of an abusive relationship and may also seek spiritual counselling on the continued commitment to marital vows. It is very important that the Faith leader does **not** advise the victim to remain in an abusive relationship solely for the sake of the marriage. Also at no time should the Faith leader, through personal spiritual conviction, attempt to discuss the issue with the perpetrator, in an effort to facilitate reconciliation, unless requested to do so by the victim and even then caution must be exercised.
- 5.12 The victim may not wish to leave home but may need emotional support from a trusted confidante through difficult times and the Faith leader must respect this while being vigilant to the victim's safety. The abuse may be attributed to many factors and the victim may be sympathetic to some of these factors such as the partner's financial/employment issues or health condition. The victim may be advised to seek counselling from a health professional while the Faith leader continues to be supportive. The victim should be alerted to all the support agencies available should a place of safety be needed in an emergency.
- 5.13 Whether the victim wishes to return to the violent or abusive situation or leave, the Faith leader should help in considering a crisis safety plan. *A copy of a crisis safety plan is included at Annex 5.*
- 5.14 Women from minority ethnic communities may have extra constraining factors to overcome due to their race or cultural practices. *Information on the experiences of women in black and minority ethnic communities is included at Annex 6.*
- 5.15 At all times the victim must feel that she/he is believed and is not being judged or criticised. Domestic violence and abuse is never justified and is wrong regardless of the circumstances.

## 6. STOPPING THE PERPETRATOR'S VIOLENCE

- 6.1 It may be essential to seek help immediately from the police who may either restrain or arrest the perpetrator depending on their assessment. Or protection may need to be enforced through civil law procedures which allow a victim to apply to court for protective orders. A Non-Molestation Order may assist in the prevention of further abuse while an Occupation Order, under which the court can order the abusive partner to leave, can enable the victim and children to return safely to the family home. Returning home can be very important in reducing the trauma for children, providing it is a safe environment. Some security and sense of calm may be restored through return to their home, school and friends. *Further information on the civil and criminal law and how victims can obtain emergency protective orders is included at Annex 7.*
- 6.2 During a period of separation, future reconciliation may be discussed but only if both parties consent to consider it. This should involve the perpetrator's acknowledgement of the unacceptable behaviour and a commitment to seeking help through a treatment programme.
- 6.3 A Faith leader may wish to offer support to the perpetrator at this stage but, before reconciliation, needs to be assured that a treatment programme has been adhered to and has been effective. *Annex 8 sets out some guidelines for talking to perpetrators and some practical advice for perpetrators who want to end their abusive behaviors.* It is essential when talking to the perpetrator that the victim is offered, at the same time, support from an appropriate agency.

**At no time should the victim be encouraged to consider reconciliation if the victim has any concerns about personal safety and that of the children.**

## 7. RECONCILIATION OR SEPARATION

### 7.1 *Reconciliation*

Reconciliation should be contemplated only when safety is established and there is confirmed recognition, by the perpetrator, of the unacceptability of abuse. All forms of abuse, including verbal and emotional abuse must have stopped. Above all reconciliation needs time. Trust can only be established through time, with evidence of change in the perpetrator's behaviour. The Faith leader can be supportive through this period by listening and showing understanding while ensuring objectivity. The safety of the victim and children however is paramount.

7.2 The Faith leader should inform the couple of any specialist counselling services and/or marital guidance services available to them and provide a point of contact while leaving each one to decide independently whether or not to avail of the resource.

7.3 The Faith leader may decide to dissuade reconciliation in the interests of the welfare of the children. If the children have experienced or witnessed abuse, or at least the tension of an abusive relationship, then a return to the same unresolved issues might add to their instability. It could also subject them to further abuse while maintaining them with an abusive parental role model.

### 7.4 *Separation*

Separation may be the best possible solution. The scars of years of abuse and subjection to demoralising treatment may be too painful and severe for the restoration of trust and confidence. The perpetrator may not be able to recognise the abusive behaviour or effect real change. The decision to separate may cause distress to everyone and may place the Faith leader in a difficult situation if it appears he/she is condoning action against the sanctity of marriage, especially if their Faith does not accept divorce. The same dilemma may present for the couple or one of them. The Faith leader has an important role in supporting the victim and understanding the distress caused by the loss of a commitment. However, violence against a partner and children, which may result in death or serious injury, is an act against God.

7.5 **A victim is most vulnerable at the time of decision or threat to separate.** It is vital that everyone dealing with domestic violence, including Faith leaders and the victim, are aware that separation or even a discussion leading to separation is an extremely dangerous time for the victim. It is a time of great fear and anxiety for all in a violent situation. Statistically a victim is most at risk of being killed or seriously injured at the time of decision or threat to separate or directly after separation.

Anticipated separation can cause the perpetrator to escalate the violence to life-threatening levels. Perpetrators may claim ownership/protection of the victim; may be unable to relinquish the power/control they believe they have over the victim; may refuse to accept that the victim has the right to separate; and may argue on the basis of religious beliefs. Safety of the victim and children must be paramount and should never be compromised. Lack of vigilance may have devastating results. Domestic Violence can result in murder. *A checklist for situations of severe or lethal risk from perpetrators can be found at Annex 12.*

**No society, especially a Faith community, can tolerate domestic violence or abuse. Faith leaders have an important role in both prevention and protection. They have a responsibility to understand the pain caused and to acquire or avail of the skills and knowledge of the protection and support available from the various agencies. *Good Practice Guidelines for Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse are included at Annex 9.***

## 8. CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 8.1 Children who live with domestic violence and abuse know it is happening. Children may feel embarrassed with or isolated from other family members. Children may be more aware than parents think. They may be listening in the next room or lying awake in bed, or they may just pick up on the atmosphere.
- 8.2 Children can be affected in many different ways by living with domestic violence. There is no set pattern of signs or symptoms. Every child is different and it would be wrong to sweep each child's experience and reactions into a single defining set of outcomes. Those children with access to learning around building resilience, developing coping mechanisms and being supported by the non-abusive parent will have significantly increased life chances. Some children come through living in a violent home relatively unscathed, if they have good ways of coping, or people to turn to for support. Others recover well once they feel safe.<sup>3</sup> However, children are likely to be affected by the fear, disruption and distress in their lives. Children show distress in their own ways, depending on their age and developmental stage. They may have physical, emotional, learning, behavioural or developmental problems, and their educational performance and achievement may also be affected.
- 8.3 Dealing with disclosure is never easy. Faith leaders should take seriously what children are saying, and try to find ways to get appropriate help – immediately if the danger appears to be current. It is important for Faith leaders to:
- Realise that they cannot respond to child abuse in isolation. There is a statutory duty to contact social services or the police if it is known that a child is being abused;
  - Recognise that violence in the home is one of the most common reasons for problems in a child's life;
  - Give the child the opportunity to talk in a secure environment;
  - Believe what the child says and know what help is available;
  - Enforce that the child is an innocent blameless victim;
  - Take practical steps to get advice and support to ensure that their own position is protected.
- 8.4 It is also important to acknowledge that some children may not be aware of the violence and abuse experienced by a parent and siblings. This may be related to their age and the nature of the abuse. They may be utterly confused as to why they have had to leave their familiar environment and why they cannot see the offending parent. Considerable skill and sensitivity is required when caring for these children. *Good Practice Guidelines for Working with Children and Young People Who May Have Experienced Violence in the Home are included at Annex 10.*

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe *et al.*, 1986; Mullender *et al.*, 2002

**MEMBERSHIP OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES WORKING GROUP**

Kevin Shiels, Domestic Violence Unit, Chair

Marie Austin, Domestic Violence Unit

Reverend Gordon Graham, Church of Ireland

Joan Turner , Church of Ireland

Catherine Fleming, Catholic Church, Down & Connor Diocese

Máire Andrews, Men to Men

Annie Campbell, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

**Note** : Other Faith Communities were invited to nominate representatives to the Working Group. Some responded indicating that they were content to be consulted on the guidance in draft form.

**THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF THE MYTHS, EXCUSES AND DENIALS AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAT NEED TO BE CHALLENGED.**

**Denying that the problem exists**

***“We don’t have that sort of thing in our community”***

Domestic violence affects people from every kind of background, faith, culture and social class. Every town and village across Northern Ireland will have victims of domestic violence and abuse, with perpetrators often respectable pillars of the community. Our stereotypes are incorrect.

Victims of abuse within a same-sex relationship are likely to face denial at two levels. They may experience a negative response to their partnership, not least within a Faith community, which will make it especially difficult for them to disclose abuse with the expectation of a sympathetic reception.

**Blaming the victim**

***“Why did they pick their partner in the first place? This is their decision, we don’t have to deal with it”***

There are countless identical accounts given by survivors, saying, “I don’t understand what happened – it was an ideal relationship, then I became pregnant and it was like my partner became a different person overnight – from generous and caring to obsessive, controlling, abusive and violent. I thought I was going mad – that no-one would ever believe me because they were still loving and ‘normal’ in public, and sometimes there are good weeks at home, then it’s back to a living hell again for no reason”.

Abusers often repeat their behaviour from one relationship to another. It is not the fault of their partners, and neither is it yet normally possible for their partners or any outsiders or friends to spot them in advance. There is usually no sinister expression, no general nasty nature and their public lives can be exemplary. They are often described as charmers. They are brilliant at hiding this alter ego and often shower prospective partners with affection.

***“Surely she must have done something to cause it”***

Victims of abuse have invariably done nothing at all. No one deserves abuse. No one deserves a black eye or a broken rib because they didn’t get the dinner on the table in time. An abusive individual will usually try to pick apart every single action of their partner as a way of controlling them, no matter what they do or don’t do.

***“Oh come on, it wasn't that serious. I've been in arguments and I didn't fall apart did I? You need some perspective!”***

One of the great challenges for those in positive, mutually respectful relationships is to try to understand the dynamics of one that is negative, and abusive. It is sometimes tempting to minimise the victim's experiences. It is vital to note that an abusive relationship is not about an ordinary, everyday argument in which both people have a bit of a yell and then make up. It is very different, it is based on control of the victim and often involves repeated abusive behaviour. We must guard against deciding which abusive behaviour is worth bothering about, and which is not. We must offer help and support to all who ask for and need it.

***“Why don't they just leave? Or report it to the police? If they choose to stay, it's not our problem, is it? They went back again, so it's their choice”***

This is a response we must challenge as a Faith community. What other crime in the world *requires* the victim to be the one to leave home? It's not a normal response to people disclosing burglary or arson or vandalism or harassment from strangers, but it is often our standard response to those who experience the crime of violence in the home.

Leaving is far from an easy solution to a very, very complex problem. Those who leave home often have to leave behind all they have - friends, family, neighbours, schools, clothes, photos, gardens, pets - everything they've worked their whole life to achieve, and rebuild a life when they are already exhausted, depressed, anxious, demoralised and often injured. It is no small matter to walk out, let alone when children are involved too. In addition, leaving does not always end the abuse. It may end the relationship but may increase the abuse. In many cases for women, the most dangerous time is immediately after separation, when the violent partner is angry at losing 'control of his family'. This can be especially true in some small communities or in some minority ethnic groups where it may be seen as dishonourable to leave the family for any reason.

As a Faith community, we need to focus on what is possible and *safe* for that person and their children, not on our own expectations for the couple or individual. We must not assume that God will heal the relationship in the way we want it to be healed.

***“You're just exhausted and not thinking straight, you just need a rest or a break and you'll see things differently then”.***

Many victims of domestic violence become depressed, anxious or suffer from other mental health issues because of abusive behaviour towards them. It does not mean they are not telling the truth: indeed, it may well be further evidence of the truth of the abusive behaviour.

***“If you can’t cope with being part of the same Faith community as your partner, maybe you should leave until you feel strong enough to come back”***

If people are still together in an abusive relationship, there are real issues about how to handle the situation within the Faith community and in support groups. Victims should not be expected to leave a source of support. It might take some careful thought and planning, but people should not be expected to change support groups or Faith community services unless it is for the safety of others.

### **Excusing the conduct of the perpetrator**

***“But I know the partner . . . he’s a good person . . . he’s had a really bad childhood . . . he’s just a bit down, that’s all . . . he didn’t mean it . . . it’s just he had a bit to drink . . . it was just a row that went a bit far . . . he said she was nagging him and you know what a nagging wife can be like, eh?”***

There are no excuses for abusive behaviour. Domestic violence is **always** wrong, whatever the circumstances. There is a temptation to try to avoid hearing things that are uncomfortable or that do not fit with our own experience. Abusers can be charming and persuasive and can find plausible excuses if accused of abusive behaviour. It is acceptable for the person who is listening to be unsure of the truth. However, those who disclose must still be heard with respect. We must not automatically seek to disbelieve the victim or automatically look to excuse the perpetrator.

### **Excusing our own behaviour**

***“It’s not my problem. I’m too busy. I’m not an expert. It’s not our job to cope with this. I might make it worse”***

The whole process of denial, minimising, excusing and blaming the victim is common throughout society. It is immensely damaging for victims, and does nothing to help or change the perpetrator, who needs specialist intervention through a domestic violence perpetrator project.

We are called as a Faith community to respond appropriately to abusive behaviour, no matter how hard it is for us, and we must learn to watch out for and challenge excuses and denial. It is never wrong to listen with respect and caring, and to put a survivor or perpetrator in touch with the right services to help them.

***“Surely it couldn’t have happened to him? What sort of a wimp is he?”***

Although all victims of domestic abuse face challenges of disclosure and being believed, the complicating issue of embarrassment may also preclude a male partner from disclosing abuse to anyone. Whilst disclosure is never easy for

any victim, men generally find it harder to talk about such issues, and society generally expects men to be 'tough enough to withstand anything'. They may find their emotions all the more difficult to come to terms with because society assumes all men are always tough and don't need to cry.

The threat of losing all or most contact with children can be a major hold on a male victim, keeping him tied to an abusive partner. A male victim may often attract additional blame for failing to hold the marriage together as the head of the household.

The Faith community must be sensitive to the needs of men subjected to abuse and foster a culture in which they are given permission to share their pain with acceptance and no fear of ridicule or judgement.

### **Racial and cultural myths**

#### ***“Women from minority ethnic groups have a higher tolerance level of domestic violence”***

Domestic violence occurs in all religions, cultures and communities, but the pressures to remain silent may be more intense in some communities than others. Many minority ethnic women have to contend with tight-knit family and community structures, powerful notions of 'honour' and 'shame', and racism and discrimination in the wider society, all of which compel them to stay longer in an abusive relationship. Language barriers and a lack of awareness of the help that exists may also prevent victims from minority ethnic groups seeking support.

#### ***“Arranged marriage is the cause of domestic violence”***

The high incidence of domestic violence in our wider society challenges the assumption that domestic violence is more prevalent in minority communities where arranged marriage is practised. Domestic violence is not caused by arranged marriages: it is essentially about the maintenance of patriarchal power and privilege, which may present in different cultural forms in different communities.

## A TOOLKIT FOR FAITH LEADERS

<b>Prepare</b>	A response strategy	Develop, with colleagues a strategy for domestic violence. Consider creating a forum with a designated person to deal with domestic violence issues.
	Address internal issues.	Support faith leaders in addressing allegations of abuse to ensure that leaders are regarded as an appropriate source for victims of domestic violence and their children. Introduce a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence for staff within your own organisation.
<b>Inform</b>	Speak out	Faith leaders can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.
	Communicate	Display posters and leaflets which include the number of the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline and other support organisations.
	Inform	Routinely include information in sermons, bulletins, notice boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Sponsor educational seminars on domestic violence for your congregation and invite specialist organisations to speak at the seminars.
	Invite	Ensure that you are accessible to victims if they wish to talk.
<b>Respond</b>	Offer a safe place	Encourage victims of domestic violence to come for help. Hospitality and a warm welcome help to create safety.
	Be positive	A positive first response is essential to ensure that victims seek further help and support.
	Be pro-active	If you suspect someone is a victim of domestic violence enquire about their well-being and make sure they are safe. Help the victim plan for safety if appropriate. Do not attempt couples counselling

<b>Deliver</b>	Lead by example	Nominate a representative to join your Local Domestic Violence Partnership (see contacts list at Annex 13)
	Provide space	Offer meeting space for educational seminars or support groups including child contact for separated parents to visit children.
	Provide resources	Include local domestic violence services in donations and community service projects.
	Provide support	Adopt a refuge or resource centre for which your congregation or community provides material support, or help provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives.
	On-going education.	Keep up to date with developments in domestic violence.
	Support professional training.	Encourage and support training and education for <u>all</u> staff to increase awareness about domestic violence and abuse.

### Pastoral care directed towards healing

1. The Victim's needs include:
  - feeling empowered and whole again
  - recovering the capacity to trust
  - feeling safe in going back into the relationship, if that is their choice
  - considering the possibility that there is no future in going back into relationship and to move on with self-respect and with support from the faith community.
  
2. The Perpetrator needs to:
  - acknowledge and repent of his/her role in the violence or abuse
  - undertake reparation for harm caused
  - seek and be committed to a programme specifically for perpetrators
  - remain connected to spiritual and community resources and reinforcements which would minimise a return to violence.
  
3. Be careful about advising:
  - revenge or punishment (except those imposed by courts)
  - forgetting what has been done
  - playing down or excusing the harm done
  - premature reconciliation.

4. Steps towards true healing:

- **Telling the Story** The victim needs a safe place to tell his/her story. This helps alleviate the loneliness of suffering. Faith communities can create safe places where stories and pain can be shared but, at times, referral to specialised agencies or individual counsellors are more effective.
- **Challenging the Perpetrator** This is often an uncomfortable role for the Faith leader. Patience and maintaining the community tie may often take priority. Confrontation could lead to renewed recriminations and violence in the home. Positive encouragement to reflect on the harm done to the larger family unit is often an important lever to change of behaviour.
- **Changing Behaviour** Desire to change needs to originate with the perpetrator. Faith leaders comfortable with encouraging personal or small group prayer should work on an individualised basis to seek divine intervention and support. Once the perpetrator has made full acknowledgement of wrong-doing, the community and its leaders must then welcome him/her back into full acceptance.
- **Restitution** This is sometimes, but not always, an important step towards healing. It can symbolise for the victim the perpetrator's sincere desire to make matters whole. It could include payments for damage done to the home, for medical costs, or alternative temporary accommodation. But, especially in families where resources are limited and property is essentially held in common, imposing such penalties could renew bitterness.
- **Forgiveness** Most faith traditions have an understanding of the redemptive nature of forgiveness as expressed in the Christian Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us". In domestic violence and abuse matters there is a danger that premature and superficial forgiveness can leave the wounds unhealed. Here the Faith leader or counsellor must be patient. Most traditions honour healing as a grace, in the sense that it is not just the product of good intentions and willingness alone. The skills of patience and discernment need to be brought to bear. Forgiveness does not enter into the legal relationship of the parties, or even into the balance of whether the relationship can be made to work again. Law and social worker practice has moved decidedly against the certainty that all breakdowns can or should be restored.

If families are to remain the bedrock of our communities, Faith leaders must work with all the other relevant agencies and play their part in providing safety, dignity and prayerful encouragement and support.

The issues surrounding domestic violence, no matter how sensitive or difficult, need to be shared with the whole of the Faith community and should be addressed in sermons and homilies. The Scriptures of many Faiths are rich in providing the supportive texts. For example:

### **For Jews, the Torah**

“I take pleasure in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God and of mortals: agreement among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbours, and a wife and husband who live in harmony.” *Ecclesiasticus 25.1*

“What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law, all the rest is commentary.” *The Talmud, Shabbat, 31a.*

### **For Christians, the New Testament**

“Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.” *John 13.34*

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church.” *Ephesians 5.25*

### **For Muslims, the Koran**

“Be kind to one another as God has been kind to you.” *Sura 28.77*

“None of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” *Sunnah*

Similar sentiments can also be found in the scriptures and teaching of other Faiths.

### **Buddhism**

“Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” *Udana Varqa, 5:18*

### **Hinduism**

“This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt. Do nothing to thy neighbour which thou wouldst not have him do to thee after.” *The Mahabharata*

### **Zoroastrianism**

“That nature only is good when it shall not do onto others whatever is not good for its own self.” *Dadistan-i Dinik, 94:5*

### **Taoism**

“The good man “ought to pity the malignant tendencies of others; to regard their gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way.” *The Thai-Shang*

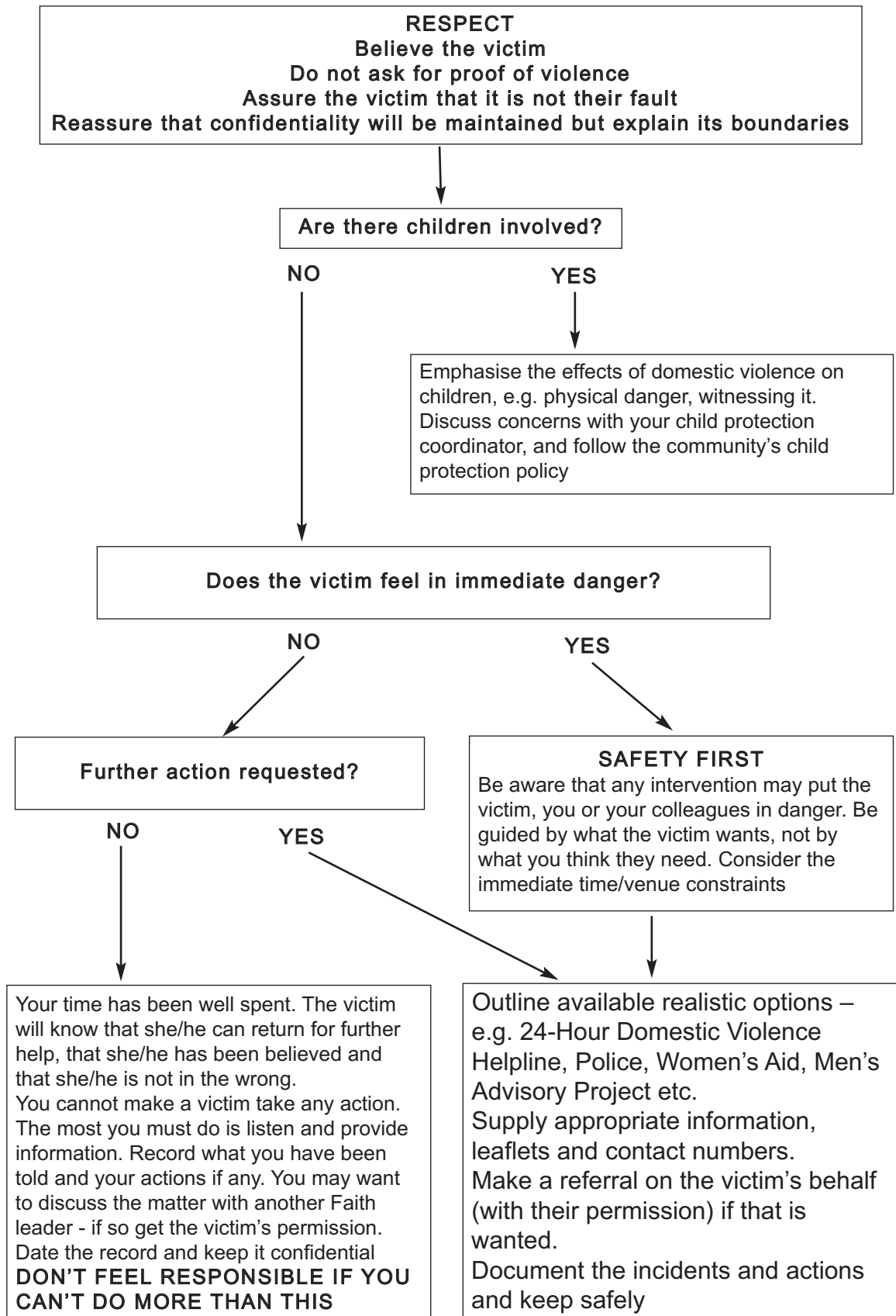
### **Confucianism**

“Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you.” *Analects, XV, 23*

### **Bahá'í Faith**

“He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfil.” *Gleanings*

DISCLOSURE FLOW CHART



## CRISIS SAFETY PLAN FOR VICTIMS

**If a victim is returning to a violent situation help her/him to think through an emergency strategy:**

- Know where the nearest telephone is located.
- Know how to access interpreting services, if required.
- Know where refuge/safe accommodation can be sought.
- Make a list of important and emergency numbers - store in a safe place.
- Save money for bus or taxi fare.
- Have an extra set of keys to home and car.
- Pack an emergency bag – take enough clothes, include school uniforms and children’s favourite possessions.
- Consider when it is best to leave. It is important to try to leave with all the children.
- Keep important documents together, e.g. medical cards, certificates, bank books, legal orders etc.
- Keep a note of the family’s essential medicines and have an immediate supply available.

**If the victim is leaving a violent situation help them to think through a leaving strategy:**

- If possible, leave when the abuser is not around.
- Take all children.
- Take personal belongings, bank and legal documentation.
- Take clothing for several days.
- Take some of each child’s favourite possessions.
- Bring essential family medicines.

## EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The experience of people who work with minority women shows that in South Asian communities, where family and community structures remain strong and where marriage is the only legitimate site of female existence, women are likely to tolerate violence and abuse for longer periods than either their white or black African or Caribbean counterparts. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are more likely than black African or Caribbean women to be married. Family structures are changing in the various Asian communities, but many remain tight-knit and this can serve as an additional barrier to reporting violence. Black African and Caribbean women, on the other hand, are more likely to head single households, but less likely to report domestic violence to agencies such as the police due to experiences and perceptions of institutional racism.

Culturally specific forms of violence and abuse such as forced marriage, honour crimes, honour killings, female genital mutilation, child and women abuse related to 'possession by evil spirits' or dowry problems must be addressed within the framework of domestic violence, since the need to protect remains the main imperative, irrespective of the cultural context in which domestic violence occurs. Such forms of abuse are common across the various Faith communities and are often justified by religious and cultural beliefs as a way of maintaining patriarchal power and control. Often the violence is perpetrated by members of the extended family, with the collusion of others in the community.

It is crucial that we understand concepts of shame and honour in South Asian and many other minority communities as obstacles to women's attempts to escape violence and abuse. Pressures to conform to traditional roles and to maintain the honour of family and community usually rest on women and their behaviour. They are expected to remain silent in the face of abuse in order to preserve their family honour. Reporting violence can impair the marriage prospects of their children and their siblings and affect their status in the community. They may be cut off from their close and extended family, the base of their social and emotional life. Behaviour which is perceived to deviate from cultural norms is often punished in a variety of ways ranging from ostracism to 'honour killings'. The pressure to maintain family or community honour can be so intense that many women contemplate, attempt or commit suicide rather than report violence or seek outside help. Research shows that rates of suicide and self-harm are up to three times higher for South Asian women than for women in the wider society.

Whilst many of the common myths and assumptions about domestic violence and women in the wider society are also applicable to minority women, such women have extra constraining factors to overcome due to their race and

gender. These act as barriers within and outside the community. Within the community, the following act as obstacles:

- patriarchal structures and sexual discrimination;
- tight-knit families and communities where the religious and community leadership is conservative, women have limited public visibility and the incidence of sexual discrimination is high;
- notions of honour and shame which are strongly held features of family and community existence;
- lack of alternative safe havens, where women are not judged or condemned for leaving violent relationships;
- lack of recognition of the fundamental rights of women and children to life, liberty and freedom from being subject to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment.

Outside the communities, the following act as obstacles:

- racial discrimination;
- racial violence;
- inability to access services and support due to language difficulties and isolation;
- lack of specialist facilities for minority women;
- the dominance of the 'multicultural approach' which can amount to non-intervention on grounds of respect for cultural sensitivity;
- insecure immigration and asylum status.

In addition, concerns have been raised about the use of mediation and reconciliation by service providers in resolving family disputes, particularly with women and young persons from cultural backgrounds where mediation with the aim of reconciliation is already practised. Mediation can have a role to play where marital tensions exist, but only in contexts where the partners or family members occupy a more equal playing field and where there is no risk of violence or abuse. In the vast majority of cases, women from minority communities have usually undergone several (almost always failed) attempts at reconciliation following informal methods of resolution involving family or community elders. The reasons for the high rates of failure are to do with the fact that the family structures and community dynamics in many minority communities are built on unequal power relations between men and women legitimised by cultural or religious practice. In community-based mediation processes, women are rarely heard and even where they are, they are blamed and made to feel guilty for the disintegration of their marriage or family. In such circumstances, women have little or no right to assert their own wishes and desires.

In many cases, women are lulled into a false sense of security by community elders or family members promising to protect and intervene if future problems

occur, only to be subject to even greater controls and restrictions and/or punished through violence and other means. In more extreme cases, following mediation, women have been maimed, abducted or killed for having brought dishonour to their families and communities.

**Mediation as an option or alternative to utilising the civil law can therefore be a highly dangerous practice.**

The ramifications of mediation and reconciliation within different cultures must therefore be better understood so that it does not add to the pressures that women are already facing to `save' their marriage. Adopting standards or approaches which deviate from what is good practice in the wider community in respect of domestic violence, will have a discriminatory and unjust impact on women from minority communities.

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) can provide support and advice for victims from minority ethnic communities. Call 028 9023 8645.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE LAW

This section provides information on how the civil and criminal law system can help victims of domestic violence and abuse.

### Criminal law

If a crime has been committed, for example an assault, the police will investigate the crime. Where they have a power of arrest, they will normally arrest the suspect. Where there is enough evidence, and if prosecution is in the public interest, the person will be prosecuted.

A Police Domestic Violence Officer may investigate all serious offences of physical violence and can help the victim contact other organisations that can provide information and practical support.

If the case goes to court, the prosecution will keep the victim informed of significant developments in the case, including when she/he may be required to attend court. Arrangements can be made to provide guidance and assistance. For example, Victim Support provides a witness service in all Crown Courts and in Belfast Magistrates' Court. In certain circumstances application may be made to the court for special measures to make giving evidence less intimidating for the victim, for example giving evidence by live television link or in private.

All prosecutions will be handled by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. This means that trained lawyers will decide when to prosecute in all cases of domestic violence. The Public Prosecution Service also offers more services to victims, including special community liaison staff who provide a telephone information line and can direct victims to the services of partner organisations such as Victim Support and the NSPCC.

If the perpetrator is an adult and sentenced to prison for 6 months or more, the victim has the right to find out when the perpetrator may be released. The Prison Victim Information Scheme can be contacted on 0845 2470002.

### Civil Law

The Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 allows a victim to apply to the court for protective civil orders. These are called non-molestation orders and occupation orders.

A **non-molestation order** prevents the victim from being molested by the perpetrator. It is served on the perpetrator who can be arrested for breaching the order.

An **occupation order** says who can live in the family home. When made alongside a non-molestation order, it offers added protection to victims of

domestic violence. If the non-molestation or occupation order has an exclusion element, the perpetrator will be prevented from living in the family home and may be kept away from other areas too. A perpetrator, who tries to interfere with the victim's occupation of the family home when both the occupation order and non-molestation order are in force, can be arrested for breaching the orders.

### **How does a victim get these orders?**

The victim must go to a solicitor. The solicitor will ask for details of what has happened. These details need to be put in a written statement that will go before the court. It is important that the victim tells the solicitor everything that has happened including any history of domestic violence and abuse – not just the details of the last incident. A copy of the statement will be served on perpetrator.

In an emergency, the victim can go to court and get short-term orders very quickly, without the perpetrator being present at court. These are called ex-parte orders. These orders normally will be served on the perpetrator as soon as possible by the police. If the order contains an exclusion element, the perpetrator will have to leave the family home.

When an ex-parte order is granted there will normally be a full hearing within five or six weeks, where both parties can put their case to the court. The court will decide if a full order is to be granted. The ex-parte order will usually be in force until this second hearing. The court will tell the perpetrator to attend this second hearing so that it can hear both parties' versions of events. If the victim, when attending court, is concerned about safety, she/he should speak to her/his solicitor, the Court Administrator or a member of the security staff.

If the victim has been granted a non-molestation order, or a non-molestation order combined with an occupation order, and the restrictions of the order are broken, the victim should telephone the police **immediately**. The police will arrest the person if the order has been breached and – if there is enough evidence – prosecute for breach of the order.

Although procedures are slightly different for 16–18 years old victims, they can still apply for protective orders. A solicitor will be able to explain these procedures.

## **GUIDELINES FOR TALKING TO PERPETRATORS**

Perpetrators approaching you may present themselves to you in a number of different ways. Offenders may:

- Be frightened of losing their family and reputation;
- Insist that a mistake has been made by the police;
- Be outraged at the way the situation has been handled by the Police/Criminal Justice System;
- Be stunned at what they have done and seem remorseful;
- Acknowledge the violence and blame other factors such as work, stress etc;
- Deny any violence in the relationship.

Some offenders may approach you as they would genuinely like to change their behaviour. There are a number of programmes available for offenders. There are programmes for male perpetrators provided by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and also by Relate. The Probation Board's Programmes are called "Men Overcoming Domestic Violence" and the "Non-Violent Relationship Programme." Both programmes are delivered in partnership with Social Services and Women's Aid. Their aim is to stop domestic violence and abuse by teaching offenders alternatives to coercive, dominating and violent behaviour.

These courses help offenders develop a loving, respectable and non-violent relationship. Other issues that may be addressed in such programmes would usually include helping perpetrators understand the impact of violence on victims and children, and learning how to deal with problems in a positive way.

For further information on programmes contact: Probation Board for Northern Ireland Headquarters, 80-90 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1LD or telephone: 02890 26 2400.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR PERPETRATORS WHO WANT TO CONTROL THEIR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

This section is taken from the Everyman Project website [www.everymanproject.co.uk](http://www.everymanproject.co.uk) . The Project's main aim is to help men to change their violent and abusive behaviour, with respect for every man, woman and child.

### *How can I stop being violent and abusive?*

Become aware of your alarm bells and use "Time out" when your alarm bells ring. Although it may seem so, people don't just suddenly snap. There is always a build-up of energy before an outbreak of violence. Become aware of your Warning Signs of the build-up towards violence.

### *What to do if your alarm bells ring:*

<b>Early Choices</b> Move out Get counselling Cease intoxicants Phone the Everyman Project Helpline (0207 263 8884) Talk to a friend Reduce stress in your life Don't get tired or hungry Avoid risky situations	<b>Late Choices</b> Take Time Out Leave the room/house Go for a walk Phone a friend Listen to music Do relaxation exercise Work at your hobby	<b>Emergency Choices</b> Sit down on your hands Keep hands in pockets Keep 6 feet away Count down from 10 Practise slow, deep breathing Concentrate on the ground
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### *Alarm bells could be:*

<b>Physical</b> Fast breathing or heartbeat Tension in neck or shoulders Clenching jaws or fists Getting hot, sweaty palms Energy rising to head Stomach churning	<b>Emotional</b> Feeling frustrated, angry, misunderstood, criticised, unappreciated, unloved, disregarded, disrespected, useless, like nobody, etc.
<b>Irrational thoughts</b> Here we go again! How dare you do/say that! You always do/say this! I'll show you! You can't do that to me!	<b>Vocal / Behavioural</b> Shouting, Swearing, Insulting Aggressive tone, Criticising, Threatening, Menacing, Standing over, Intimidating, Pointing, Raising fists.

Once you become aware of your alarm bells and the choices you make there are strategies you can use to change your behaviour:

### **TIME OUT**

If things look like they are getting out of hand, either partner has the right to call **"Time Out"**. This may involve saying the words **"Time Out"**, or raising a hand, or ringing a bell or any other sign that you have both agreed on. This immediately ends any argument, and one or both partners have to leave the room for an agreed period. (30 minutes or an hour seems about right). You just leave the room. You don't slam the door, you don't say: "Right if that's how you feel, I'm off, then!" This is not that kind of leaving. It's just giving space for things to calm down.

In this time you don't talk to each other, do not go down to the pub, and do not attack the Christmas Scotch. If you can talk to a constructive friend then do, but don't just complain about your partner! You separately think: About what is going on, about what the argument really means, about how it started, about how it can end peacefully.

Then you come back and discuss the argument - the argument, not the cause or the excuse for the argument. That would just continue the aggro. You discuss how the argument has gone, why it happened, how you felt, and you do it calmly and honestly. When that's over, you can discuss the original problem - if there is still one. You'll be amazed how often there isn't a problem left.

If you think the idea of a **"Time Out."** is a good one, discuss it now with your partner or anyone else you regularly have conflict with. Agree who can call **"Time Out"**; who leaves; and for how long.

### **THE 6 FEET RULE**

In a situation where you feel that you're going to lose control with a partner/child/friend, make the decision not to go nearer than six feet away. Don't just try not to go nearer - do it. **Control yourself!** Touching another human being is a privilege. One our society like so many others seems to have some confusion about. Some people touch a lot, some very little. From six feet away, you can't touch. Or hit. Or kick. If you were about to strike someone, you don't deserve to touch them anyway.

### **DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUE**

Deep breathing from your diaphragm can help you remain calm. A baby instinctively knows how to breathe from its diaphragm, as it sleeps with its tummy rising and falling with each breath. You can re-learn this technique you knew as a baby: Put one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen, just above the belt line. Now take a deep breath and push it all the way down into your belly. It helps to imagine filling a canteen with water. The canteen fills from the bottom up, just like the air in your belly. As you breathe in, the hand over your abdomen will rise, while the hand on your chest hardly moves at all. Focus all your attention on your belly, and send your breath down, down, down to fill your belly. Allow your breath to slightly stretch and relax your abdomen. As you take each breath, noticing your belly rise and fall, you experience a

sense of calm. By doing this exercise, you are sending a message to your brain that all is well - just like a peacefully sleeping baby.

If you're having trouble pushing the air into your belly, it might be helpful to press down on your abdomen with both hands or place a moderately heavy telephone book on your abdomen. Both of these methods will not only increase your awareness, but will also force you to use your abdominal muscles.

- M McKay & P Rogers, The Anger Control Workbook

## **GROUNDING TECHNIQUES**

When you have become familiar with the deep breathing technique, you can add grounding to it. Grounding has several advantages:

- The ground is consistent and reliable. It is always there to support you when you feel vulnerable;
- The ground has unlimited capacity to absorb your excess emotional energy;
- Grounding shifts your attention away from your head, where you are remembering, anticipating, or creating the meanings that make you feel vulnerable;
- Grounding shifts your attention to the present, away from the past and the future where you are remembering past or anticipating future vulnerable feelings.

Three techniques you can use for grounding are:

1) feeling the contact, 2) visualising the connection, and 3) rotating the ankles.

### *Feeling the contact*

While practising deep breathing, notice the contact of your soles and heels against the floor. Focus your attention there. If you are sitting, facilitate this by keeping your feet flat on the floor. Also notice how your bottom and back are supported by your chair. If you are walking, notice the making and breaking of contact of your soles and heels against the ground as you take each step.

### *Visualising the connection*

While practising deep breathing, imagine a pipe connecting your tailbone straight down, down, down, all the way to the centre of the earth. Allow your excess energy to drain down this pipe and to be absorbed by the earth. You can make the diameter of the pipe as large as it needs to be to drain off your energy. If you are walking, allow the pipe to flex like a coiled hose so that your tailbone remains constantly connected with the centre of the earth.

### *Rotating the ankles*

Practice deep breathing. Allow one foot to make light or no contact with the floor. While keeping that leg still, rotate the toes on that foot around the ankle such that they make a complete circular motion. Repeat that motion 50 times. Make 50 circles in the same direction with the other foot. Then make 50 circles in the other direction with each foot. Doing this lying down can help you fall asleep when you are having troubling thoughts

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

- Provide a service that enables victims, children and young people to disclose domestic violence.
- Be aware of the possibility of domestic violence.
- Respond positively and supportively to victims, children and young people experiencing or fleeing domestic violence.
- Recognise and address the specific needs of victims, children and young people from groups which experience additional barriers - for example, those with a disability, or people from minority ethnic groups including the travelling community.
- Be aware that employees and co-workers may be experiencing domestic violence. Consider introducing a workplace policy – Guidelines for Employers on Developing a Workplace Policy are available from the Domestic Violence Unit DHSSPS.
- Be aware of, and learn about, local and regional services which can help victims and children experiencing domestic violence.
- Help victims gain access to appropriate services.
- Encourage victims to record the abuse as it may be of use if they seek recourse to the law in future.
- Provide evidence to support legal actions.
- Be aware of your child protection responsibilities.
- Participate in your local multi-agency domestic violence partnership.
- Review the service provided to victims and children experiencing domestic violence.
- Provide information on other sources of support/assistance, statutory and voluntary.
- Develop, implement and monitor policies and protocols.
- Your first response is crucial and should be sensitive, positive and supportive. Ask yourself “will my intervention or lack of intervention put this victim and the children in greater danger or make them safer?”
- Be aware that domestic violence may be underpinning another presenting issue.
- If you suspect domestic violence do not be afraid to ask directly but sensitively.
- Don't trivialise the abuse. Listen to what the victim is saying. Focus on the victims needs. Discuss the options with the victim.
- Give reassurance that the violence is not the victim's fault.
- Recognise that the victim may have a sense of isolation.

- Try to establish a relationship with the victim. If you feel unable to help put the victim in contact with another colleague who has specialist knowledge of domestic violence, or if this is not possible, with one of the specialist organisations listed in Annex 13.
- Contact the 24-hour Freephone Domestic Violence Helpline on 0800 917 1414 which offers information and support to anyone affected by domestic violence.

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE IN THE HOME

### Effects of domestic violence on children and young people may be that:

- their experience is different to their parents/adults
- they experience intense feelings of fear and uncertainty
- they have a conflict of loyalty between parents
- they experience a feeling of guilt
- they feel that the situation is wrong but are unable to say so, leading to confusion
- they become anxious as they witness parental vulnerability.

### Responding to a child or young person who discloses information about living with domestic violence

- **First response should always be a positive response**  
Having lived in an abusive environment, some children and young people may have been told that no one will believe them. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the child or young person's disclosure is treated seriously and not rejected.
- **Be sensitive and take the child or young person seriously**  
She or he knows what the abuser is capable of doing.
- **Create a trusting environment for young people**  
This will put them at ease to talk openly and honestly. Do not make promises that cannot be kept.
- **Reassure the young person**  
Tell them what has happened is not and never has been their fault.
- **Acknowledge that this is a difficult subject but important to discuss**  
The child and young person may have feelings of love and/or loyalty to both the perpetrator and the victim. That increases the importance of discussion rather than shutting down avenues for the child or young person to seek help.
- **Be very clear that abuse isn't always physical**  
The psychological and emotional aspects of domestic violence are as wounding as physical abuse.
- **Give the young person time to talk**  
If there is not sufficient time on this occasion, arrange another opportunity to suit both you and the young person. Be aware that it may not be easy for the child or young person to have another opportunity to discuss this. Remember that the safety of the young person is paramount.

- **Focus your attention**  
Never 'brush off' anything the young person has to say, listen to everything and respond when appropriate.
- **Support and empower**  
Try not to be judgemental about the young person, their family or anything else they are telling you about. Bear in mind that domestic violence is a hidden crime where the abuser takes great care to present an acceptable face to wider society so your impression of the family may initially seem at odds with the child or young person's disclosure.
- **Be honest about your professional role**  
Reassure them that they do not have to keep such issues to themselves; there are individuals and agencies that provide support. Remind the young person about the issue of confidentiality and its boundaries, particularly there is a child protection issue.
- **Avoid criticism of either parent**  
Remember that in many cases the young person may still love both parents.
- **Give time and attention**  
Do not rush the young person in any way.
- **Affirm feelings**  
Empathise with the young person and tell them that you believe them. Use the counselling technique of 'reflecting' back i.e. repeating the things the young person has told you to let them know that you are listening.
- **Stay calm**  
Listen to everything the young person has to say calmly and quietly, do not interrupt unless necessary.
- **Follow your organisation's good practice guidelines**  
It is essential that you know these and make every effort to follow them.
- **Keep yourself informed**  
Update yourself on a continuous basis of the availability of support services for young people in your area.
- **Provide practical assistance**  
Help identify support networks. Make available practical information and resources.

## STORIES FROM VICTIMS

The following are real-life stories of victims' experiences. Names have been changed to protect the victims' identities.

1. Sharon has been married to Ken for 4 years. He had been the perfect gentleman for the first year of their marriage, but she describes him as changing character the moment she first became pregnant. 'Things have got worse and worse, the tiniest thing will set him off. Not with other people, just with me. He starts punching and kicking things, smashing things in front of our son and me. He starts shouting and swearing and the more I try to calm it down the worse he gets. He hit me so hard last year I had a miscarriage. Things were terrible last week. We went out for a lovely meal but when we got home he just went into a violent rage. I was so worried I tried to get our son out of the house to a friend, but he realised what I was trying to do, and he started shoving me. He snatched my cup of tea off me and smashed it, and then shoved me so hard against the wall saying I wasn't leaving the house. Our son was now crying and I pleaded with him to let me go but he just pushed me back with our son in my arms and pushed us out of the house and locked the door. He shouted that he'd kill me if I came back, and I really thought he meant it. I went round to my friend's house and I just didn't know what to do, I was so scared. That evening he kept calling me, pleading with me to come home, promising he would never do it again. He was crying and said he wanted to end it all. I had nowhere else to go, and he sounded so ashamed that I ended up back at home and things were great for a few days. Now he is back to criticising everything I do and blaming me for what he did and the violence has started up again and my friend says she won't help me because I went back to him. I don't know what to do, or who to go to for help. He has changed so much from how he was at the start. I used to love him so much. Now I am so scared of him but my marriage vows are important to me.'
2. Paul had been married to Sonia for ten years. He lived with emotional abuse and violence on a daily basis for most of this time, but felt that it wasn't right to hurt a woman even in self-defence. He felt trapped and isolated, felt to blame for not being man enough to sort it out. He felt as if he had failed in his role as head of the household. 'If you tell what has been happening to anyone, I will count that as a personal betrayal and leave and you will never see the children again... You don't earn enough money to keep this family well provided for. Call yourself a man... you're nothing but a big baby... that's right cry. That's all you are good for. Go on big baby, cry like the baby you are.'

3. Christine had been married to Hugh for seven years. She explains, 'The first year we were together was wonderful, but then he started to get so jealous. Like, one day I was looking into the newsagent's window at the cards and when I looked round, he was staring at me. When we got home he yelled at me for hours and hours, saying it was because I must have fancied the guy at the till. I was terrified to look at any men at all. He'd say he was sorry. After a year of this I was an emotional wreck. I even took an overdose because it was too much to cope with and I couldn't see any way out. He told me I was mad and it was all my fault. Now he's started to hit me. Last time it was in front of our five-year-old daughter. I still have a black eye, but he says it doesn't count as domestic violence as he only pushed me into the banisters and it wasn't a punch. We have weeks when things are great and it's hard to remember the bad times. I still see that lovely man he used to be when it's good, but I am so frightened when it is bad. He's a great dad - our child loves him. It's got to be my fault.'

## CHECKLIST FOR SITUATIONS OF SEVERE OR LETHAL RISK FROM PERPETRATORS

### The Victim Is Attempting To End the Relationship

There is no time of greater danger for a victim of domestic violence than when she attempts to get away from the perpetrator. Statistically a woman is more in danger of being murdered at the point of, or immediately after, leaving a relationship.

### The Victim Believes That the Perpetrator Will Do Something Dangerous

While many victims of domestic violence underestimate the danger that they are in, it is quite rare for them to overestimate. A victim's disclosure that she/he believes that the danger is great should be taken seriously.

### Weapons: Possession, Access, Past Use

Guns, knives and any other weapons need to be confiscated if at all possible, even if they have not been used against the victim in the past. If they have been used before, the danger is that much greater. Verbal reference to a weapon should be considered: in other words, if the offender has said, 'I should use my gun that will sort you out', we should consider that similar to the gun having been taken out and pointed.

### Alcohol/Substance Abuse

An alcohol/substance abusing perpetrator is more likely to commit a dangerous or lethal assault. Past history of alcohol/substance abuse should be taken into account, not just substances being used currently or very recently.

### Threats

Threats made to kill the victim or the children, or commit suicide, need to be taken seriously. Many lethal assaults are preceded by lethal threats. Perpetrators do not commonly kill themselves without first attempting to kill at least one family member.

### Sexual Violence

Perpetrators who have committed any previous sexual assaults against their victim are almost twice as likely to commit a dangerous or lethal act of violence against her as those who have not. (Studies show that somewhere between

one third and one half of victims of domestic violence have been sexually assaulted by the perpetrators at some point.)

### **Surveillance/stalking**

A significant proportion of killings and attempted killings of intimate partners are preceded by stalking, reading of mail, listening in on phone calls, or other acts of monitoring or surveillance. Turning up unexpectedly at places where the victim is, 'just by coincidence', should also be considered as an implied threat. Surveillance is sometimes carried out by friends of the perpetrators or by people that he/she has hired.

### **Escalation**

A pattern of increasing frequency, severity, or cruelty of the abusive behaviour is a clear danger sign. Each time that the perpetrator commits a more serious act without significant consequences, he/she feels encouraged to take the next step towards an eventual lethal attack.

### **Terror Tactics**

Attempts to terrorise the victim, often associated with the previous headings of surveillance and escalation, are clear warning signs. Killing pets, describing violent fantasies in gory details, cutting out newspaper articles about killings and leaving them around the house, and holding the victim out of an upper storey window, are all fairly common examples of these tactics. The perpetrator may deliberately pretend to be insane or unpredictable in order to terrorise the victim as much as possible.

### **Possessiveness**

Perpetrators who demonstrate attitudes of ownership towards their partners are especially dangerous. Extreme jealousy and efforts to isolate the victim from all outside contact are key examples of this. Very possessive perpetrators do not believe that their partners have a right to end the relationship with them, and therefore may refuse to accept the decision. Perpetrators in this category may appear to be obsessed with their partners, and sometimes get labelled as having 'fear of abandonment' by mental health professionals, but these are excuses for a very dangerous attitude of owning the victim.

### **Very Frequent or Severe Violence**

Statistically speaking, the best predictor of future violence is past violence. A perpetrator who has been violent extremely often (2-3 times per month or more), or in very severe forms (requiring hospitalisation of the victim, for example), is at high risk of committing a dangerous or lethal act in the future,

even if other items on this checklist are not pronounced.

### **Misogyny**

Evidence of hatred of women by a male perpetrator has been linked to a tendency to commit a murder or other dangerous assaults against a woman. Watch for evidence of violent or hateful statements that have been made against women as a group. (e.g. 'if I don't kill you I'll kill someone else, because someone is going to pay for what you've done').

### **Paranoia, Depression**

Certain mental health problems are linked to increased tendency to commit a lethal assault. Watch for delusional fears and for severe depression or signs of major recent losses, although the vast majority of perpetrators do not have significant mental health problems.

**Consultation with the victim and with co-workers in the domestic violence field is strongly advisable in assessing danger.**

**If you are aware of any of these behaviours or have any concerns about supporting a victim of domestic violence then call the police or contact the 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline on 0800 917 1414**

## CONTACTS AND SUPPORT AGENCIES

There are a number of organisations dealing with domestic violence and supporting victims.

**Anyone who feels in immediate danger should dial 999**

### National Domestic Violence Helplines

Northern Ireland 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline	0800 917 1414
Republic of Ireland Helpline	1800 341900
Scottish 24-hour Helpline	0800 027 1234
English 24-hour Helpline	0808 200 0247
Welsh 24-hour Helpline	0845 7023 468

<b>Police Service of Northern Ireland</b> (ask to speak to the local Domestic Violence Officer)	0845 600 8000
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### Women's Aid

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation responding to domestic violence in Northern Ireland. Its main aim is to create a safe and supportive society for women, children and young people affected by domestic violence.

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland	028 9024 9041
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### Local Women's Aid Advice Centres

Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey	028 2563 2163
Belfast and Lisburn	028 9066 6049
Causeway	028 7035 6573
Cookstown and Dungannon	028 8676 9300
Craigavon and Banbridge	028 3834 3256
Fermanagh	028 6632 8898
Foyle	028 7128 0060
Newry, Mourne, South Down and South Armagh	028 3025 0765
North Down and Ards	028 9127 3196
Omagh	028 8224 1414

### Men's Organisations

Men's Advisory Project (MAP)	028 9024 1929
Men to Men	028 9024 7027

## **Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Helplines**

Cara Friend	
Gay helpline (Monday to Wednesday)	028 9032 2023
Lesbian helpline (Thursday evenings)	028 9023 8668
Rainbow Project	028 9031 9030

## **Local Domestic Violence Partnerships**

North Down & Ards Domestic Violence Partnership	028 9042 3396
Sperrin Lakeland Domestic Violence Partnership	028 6634 4000
Southern Area Domestic Violence Partnership	028 3833 3747
North & West Belfast Domestic Violence Partnership	028 9041 7450
Colin Domestic Violence Partnership	028 9092 3444
Down Domestic Violence Partnership	028 4461 3511
Lisburn Domestic Violence Partnership	028 9267 2644
Foyle Domestic Violence Partnership	028 7126 6111
South & East Belfast Domestic Violence Partnership	028 9056 5682
Northern Domestic Violence Forum	028 9442 4673

## **Other useful numbers**

Sydenham House	028 9065 6444
Age Concern Northern Ireland	028 9032 5055
Children In Northern Ireland	028 9040 1290
Citizen's Advice Bureau	028 9023 1120
Disability Action	028 9029 7880
Help the Aged (Freephone)	0808 8087 575
Law Society (Legal and Local Solicitor Advice)	028 9023 1614
Nexus	028 9032 6803
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	028 9023 8645
Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission	028 9024 6441
NSPCC Helpline	0808 800 5000
Parents Advice Centre	028 9023 8800
Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre	028 9032 9002
Samaritans	0845 7909 090
Victim Support	028 9024 4039
Victim Support Supportline (24hr)	0845 3030 900
Accord	028 9033 9944
Relate	028 9032 3454





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