Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence

After an individual has disclosed domestic violence to you, it is recommended you follow the process below.

AN INDIVIDUAL DISCLOSES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

RESPECT AND LISTEN

- Believe the survivor
- Listen, acknowledge their feelings and treat them with dignity
- Do not ask for proof of violence
- Assure the survivor it is not their fault
- Maintain confidentiality
- Provide information on resources and support services with the survivor's permission
- Be upfront about your ability to help
- Ask if you can contact someone to support them
- Give the survivor choices so they can regain a sense of control

ARE THERE CHILDREN INVOLVED?

YES → **Ensure safety of children as first priority.**

NO

DOES THE SURVIVOR FEEL IN IMMEDIATE DANGER?

YES → **SAFETY FIRST**

- Be prepared that any intervention may increase the risk of further violence to the survivor or their children.
- Be prepared that you and/or other faith members may also be in danger.
- Be guided by what the survivor wants, not by what you think they need.

NO

HAS FURTHER ACTION BEEN REQUESTED BY THE SURVIVOR?

YES → **ACTION**

- Outline realistic options available, eg police, social services and **Thuthuzela Care Centres**.
- Supply information about where the survivor can find ongoing support.
- Ask the survivor if they are ready to go to the police and report. Share the pros and cons and prepare them for what will take place. Offer to go with them as support.
- With permission from the survivor, document the incident and keep it confidential.

NO

NO ACTION

- Your time has been well spent. The survivor will know they can return to you for further help, that they have been believed, and that they are not to blame.
- You may be able to offer other opportunities to meet and talk.
- You cannot make a survivor take any action. The most you may be able to do is listen and provide information and options.
- Ask for permission to record what you have been told, using the survivor's own words where possible, note your actions if any, and write down your concerns.
- You may want to discuss your concerns with a professional. If so, maintain confidentiality (do not reveal the survivor's name or personal information in the conversation).

THUTHUZELA CARE CENTRES (TCC)

The survivor can report gender-based violence, including rape, directly to a TCC (based at community clinics or hospitals).

A TCC is a one-stop shop where staff will assist the survivor to:

- get immediate medical attention
- access trauma counselling
- open a police case (immediately or at a later stage)
- access ongoing counselling
- prepare for court (if the case goes on trial).

This was adapted from Tearfund and Restored

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WHAT NOT TO DO

When supporting a survivor, know that it is a long and difficult journey with many twists and turns. Allow professionals to do the work – just be available in a supportive way.

1. **DO NOT** try to do it all alone. You do not have the time, and it is very draining, and requires specific understanding and skill. Refer, refer, refer.

2. **DO NOT** minimise what the victim/survivor is sharing with you – it is usually the tip of the iceberg, because it is so hard to admit.

3. **DO NOT** refer couples you suspect are dealing with abuse to marriage enrichment programmes, mediation sessions or communication workshops, and DO NOT try to offer them marriage counselling yourself. These presuppose that both partners have equal power and agency, which in abusive relationships is never the case. Counselling also presumes joint responsibility, and already many victims believe it is their fault while the perpetrators mostly refuse to take responsibility.

4. **DO NOT** be taken into the abuser's claim to a religious conversion experience. It may or may not be true, but is often just an attempt to avoid the consequences of their actions, in the name of forgiveness. This means that, while forgiveness is important, this should not short circuit any consequences, such as legal proceedings, public exposure and accountability to the leaders of the church, separation or even divorce – until there is evidence of long term deep consistent change.

5. If the abuser is taken to court, **DO NOT** side with them or provide a character witness. Many perpetrators behave completely differently in public and at home, and you may just be absolving a criminal. You will also betray the confidence the victim/survivor has placed in you to help end the violence.

6. Victims of abuse may mistake your support and care for a desire for deeper intimacy, either emotionally or sexually. **DO NOT** allow the boundaries between the counselling relationship and personal intimacy become blurred. It may be safest to refer a victim of the opposite sex to your spouse or another counsellor in the church.

7. **DO NOT** use confidentiality as an excuse not to report an instance of child abuse. The law requires that any person reports such incidents, as children's safety is the first priority.

Important contacts

LifeLine Domestic violence helpline: 0800 150 150
National Shelter Movement: 0800 001 005
SA Depression and Anxiety Group: 0800 567 567
We Will Speak Out SA: coordinator@wwsosa.org

Adapted from PACSA

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