

Domestic violence and the church

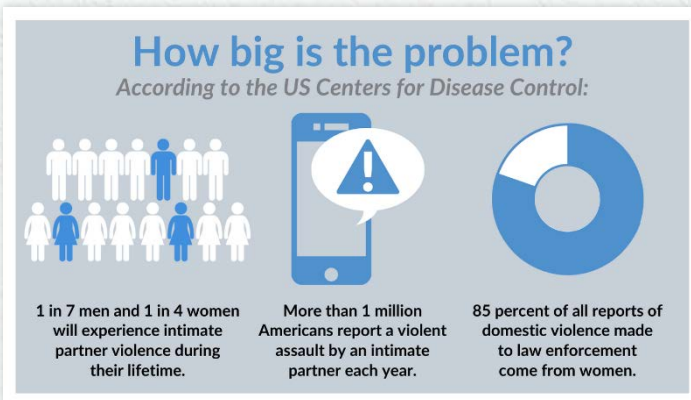
64% of pastors agree that domestic violence occurs in the lives of people in their congregations.

What is domestic violence?

Also known as intimate partner violence, domestic abuse or relationship abuse, domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Abuse takes on many forms and may include any combination of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial, spiritual abuse and/or control. In some cases, the abuse never includes physical violence, but the effect on victims can be every bit as severe.

Who is affected?

Domestic violence is a problem in every community and social group. It does not discriminate by geography, ethnicity, income level, religion, gender or educational attainment.



How does it impact the church?

Domestic violence should be a concern for every religious leader. Domestic violence victims are more likely to disclose the abuse to someone in their faith community than they are to seek help from law enforcement.

- 84% of pastors have counseled 6 or more victims of domestic abuse
- 30% of domestic violence victims are affiliated with a church
- 81% of pastors say they would take action to reduce domestic violence if they had more training

Why should churches take action?

Pastors have a spiritual mandate to ensure the safety of their congregation. By acknowledging the reality of domestic violence, they are communicating that victims are seen and that their church is a safe place.

Churches can lead the way through prevention of abuse by sharing what healthy relationships are in marriage preparation courses and youth groups.

A healthy, God-centered family is the foundational building block and the most important institution in society. The church works to shepherd family units to better reflect the love and compassion of Christ. It also plays a vital role in providing a safe home and a loving family for men, women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

What can churches do?

Pastors and church leaders are positioned to provide real help to victims and to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. There are numerous tools and resources you can use to equip yourself, your staff, your volunteers and your congregation. You can take a stand and make a difference by:

- Becoming educated about the realities of all forms of domestic violence
- Providing ongoing training for staff and volunteers
- Believing and supporting church members who say they are victims
- Creating a culture where victims feel safe disclosing
- Don't offer couple's counseling when abuse is suspected or confirmed; counsel individually
- Empowering your small group leaders, youth leaders and children's ministry teammates to respond
- Making resources available to your congregation
- Publically supporting efforts to bring an end to domestic violence
- Partnering with your local domestic violence agency

To learn more about preventing domestic violence in your church, or if someone needs assistance, call the Sheltering Wings 24/7 helpline at (317) 745-1496.



Healthy Me. Stronger Us.
shelteringwings.org

Faith leaders can protect victims

Creating a culture of safety and support through awareness and prevention efforts speaks volumes to victims and survivors of abuse – and warns abusers.

How churches can help

An important role of a pastor – a shepherd – is to protect people from the wolves prowling both within and around the flock. When speaking to church leaders in Ephesus, Paul said:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (Acts 20:27-28, NIV)

Among other things, church leaders can:

- Address the topic in everyday conversations, meetings and sermons.
- Support all victims of all forms of abuse.
- Partner with Sheltering Wings and other local agencies for resources and help.
- Place resource cards and brochures in restrooms.
- Invite Sheltering Wings to train staff and leaders.
- Offer support groups for survivors.
- Prevent abuse by addressing healthy teen relationships, offering premarital counseling and providing marriage enrichment opportunities.
- Involve your church in community awareness and prevention initiatives at deeper levels.

Create policies and procedures

While your church is primarily a place of worship, it is also a workplace. Consider creating a policy to protect employees from domestic violence (as well as other abuses). Creating these kinds of policies will provide support to victims and prevent others from being taken advantage of. Policies may include:

- A statement that your church will believe and support employees (and members) who disclose that they are victims
- A procedure detailing how supervisors or human resources will handle reports of violence
- A tactic for prohibiting unauthorized visitors
- A description of employee rights and protections
- A strategy for helping an employee who is a victim develop a safety plan while at work

Honor and protect confidentiality

Church leaders have a moral and legal obligation to maintain confidentiality. This applies to domestic violence disclosures. A dilemma may arise when a victim's physical safety is in danger. Preventing further harm is the only justification for breaking confidentiality.

Understand mandatory reporting

While there is no mandatory reporting for domestic violence in Indiana, church leaders are mandated to report child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Services and endangered-adult abuse to Adult Protective Services.


Provide training

It is a good idea to offer mandatory training so supervisors, staff and volunteers know:

- The definition and prevalence of domestic violence
- How to spot signs that someone may be a victim
- How to assess risk and respond to help a victim

Domestic Violence Resources

Central Indiana

 Sheltering Wings emergency housing and life skills training for survivors 24/7 Helpline: (317) 745-1496 Web: shelteringwings.org	 Connect2Help information, referral and crisis services contact center 24/7 Call Center: 211 Web: connect2help.org
--	---

State of Indiana

 Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence the state coalition for domestic violence programs in Indiana Phone: (800) 332-7385 Web: icadvinc.org	 United States National Domestic Violence Hotline tools and support to empower victims and survivors Hotline: (800) 799-7233 Web: thehotline.org
---	---

Awareness of resources

Church leaders can make their churches aware of how to access shelters and social services, contact police, obtain protective orders and safety plan with victims.

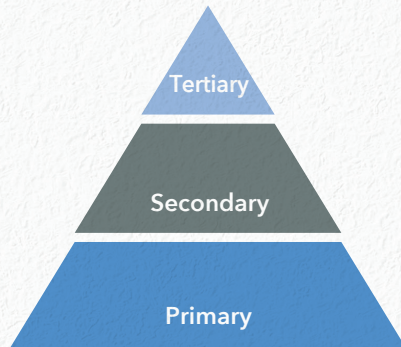
Contact us to learn more about how we can help your church protect victims, or if someone needs assistance. Call our 24/7 helpline at (317) 745-1496.



Healthy Me. Stronger Us.
shelteringwings.org

Primary Prevention for Churches

What is primary prevention?



Any Action, strategy or policy that works to stop domestic violence from occurring in the first place. Primary prevention seeks to reduce the overall likelihood that anyone will become a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence by creating conditions that make violence less likely to occur.

Potential prevention levels

Primary prevention should holistically address factors at all levels of society.



- **Individual:** Personal empowerment
- **Relationship:** Healthy relationships
- **Community:** Equitable and supportive environments
- **Societal:** Engaging and mobilizing people for action

Prevention strategies

The following are actionable steps you can take to prevent domestic violence:

- Teach safe and healthy relationships
- Engage influential peers and adults
- Disrupt pathways that lead to violence
- Create protective environments
- Strengthen economic support for families
- Support survivors to reduce harm

The spectrum of prevention

This outlines seven strategies promoted by the CDC that take into account multiple determinants of domestic violence. Church leaders should take into account all seven when possible

- **Influencing policy and legislation:** Reflect community efforts in advocacy for broad anti-violence goals.
- **Mobilizing neighborhoods and communities:** Entire communities focusing on prevention will maximize efforts to inhibit violence.
- **Changing organizational practices:** Make your church safe for everyone by implementing organizational policies that demonstrate “no tolerance” for harassment or violence.
- **Fostering coalitions and networks:** Ensure every community sector is represented and involved in prevention.
- **Educating providers:** Reach a critical group who has daily contact with people at high risk.
- **Promoting community education:** Build an influential mass of people who will become involved in prevention.
- **Strengthening individual knowledge/skills:** Individuals can take action when they know how to recognize and prevent DV.

Bystander intervention for violent behavior

Empower others to take action in primary prevention by knowing red flags and signs of abuse and speaking up:

- Demonstrating jealousy
- Diminishing their partner
- Blaming others/making excuses for their behavior
- Controlling partner’s time and activities
- Adhering to rigid gender roles and viewing partner as inferior

To learn more about preventing domestic violence in your church, or if someone needs assistance, call the **Sheltering Wings 24/7 helpline at (317) 745-1496**.

SHELTERING WINGS

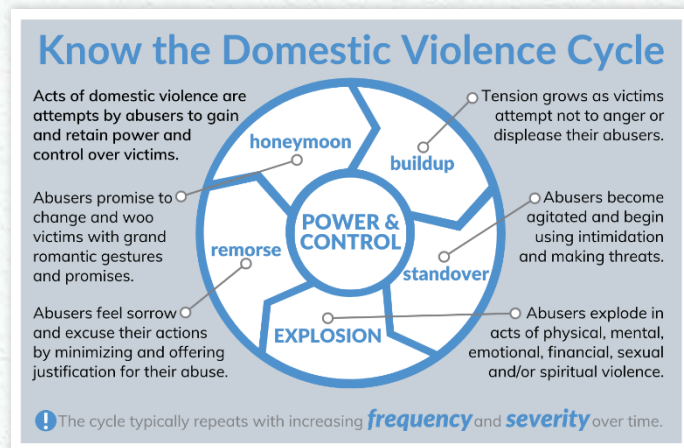


Healthy Me. Stronger Us.
shelteringwings.org

Recognizing signs of domestic violence in your church

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Abuse may include any combination of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual and financial abuse and/or control. In some cases, the abuse never includes physical violence, but the effect on victims can be as severe.



How do you spot a victim?

No two cases are identical but several red flags signal someone is experiencing abuse. While one behavior may or may not be a sign of abuse, it is important to look for patterns of behavior that have caused the victim to change how they normally behave. Here are some signs or patterns you may notice:

- Acting differently than normal
- Withdrawing from activities in which they were once involved
- Becoming quiet or withdrawn around their partner
- Deferring to their partner, who speaks for them
- Avoiding certain topics or social commitments to please their partner
- Going along with everything their partner says
- Mentioning or making excuses for their partner's temper, jealousy or possessive behaviors
- Having limited access to money or the bank account
- Demonstrating low self-esteem, especially if they used to be confident
- Becoming depressed, anxious or suicidal

How do you spot an abuser?

A sobering truth is that abusers may be model members of your church, never showing signs of violent behavior. Others may behave in ways that make it more obvious. Generally, abusers are prone to:

- Coming on too strong
- Wanting to be the center of attention
- Demonstrating extreme jealousy
- Diminishing their partner
- Blaming others for their behavior
- Speaking for their partner or making all the decisions for them
- Keeping their partner from family and friends
- Controlling their partner's time and activities.
- Adhering to rigid gender roles and viewing their partner as inferior

How do you hold abusers accountable?

Abusive and controlling behaviors are choices and should never be excused. However, confronting abusers may put victims in greater danger. Abusers may infer victim have disclosed the abuse. Therefore, they should disclose their own behaviors. The primary concern should be for the safety of the victim, his or her children and the congregation. When confronting an abuser:

- Focus on behaviors, not characteristics
- Speak only if the victim has given permission and is safe from the abuser
- Realize they may use excuses to justify actions (e.g., stress, anger, financial problems, jealousy)
- Consider removing the abuser from leadership roles
- Adhere to protective and no-contact orders
- Support the abuser in taking personal responsibility for their actions
- Suggest counseling for individuals, not couples

To learn more about recognizing signs of domestic violence in your church, or if someone needs assistance, we are ready to help. Call the Sheltering Wings 24/7 helpline at (317) 745-1496.

How to help someone in your church who is experiencing abuse

If you suspect that someone in your church is a victim of domestic violence, reach out to them privately to understand the situation and offer help.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Abuse may include any combination of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual and financial abuse and/or control. In some cases, the abuse never includes physical violence, but the effect on victims can be as severe.

Never ask this question

Well-meaning pastors often ask victims, **“Why don’t you just leave?”** Not only does that question place the blame on the victim, but it overlooks the fact that domestic violence is complex. Pressing charges, telling someone or seeking shelter may put a victim at significantly higher risk for increased violence, including murder. The victim may lack resources to leave safely, be worried about children or pets, be embarrassed or fear their abuser’s threats.

Ways to offer support

Before approaching the victim, consider calling Sheltering Wings for advice and assistance.

If you suspect someone is experiencing abuse, their safety and the safety of their children is the most important thing. Be discreet. Speak with the victim privately, away from their partner and children. Understand it may be difficult and frightening to talk about the abuse they are experiencing. Assure them the abuse is not their fault and no one deserves abuse. If a victim discloses abuse, you believe they are unsafe, but they are not ready to leave, help them create a safety plan for their protection in the event violence escalates.

If a victim is yet to disclose their abuse, begin a conversation by simply stating your concern and the reasons you are concerned.

If the victim needs resources or help, remain with them and place a call to the 24/7 helpline at Sheltering Wings. An advocate will answer their call.

Is the victim at risk?

Once trust has been established and abuse has been disclosed, you can ask the following questions. If a victim answers “yes” even once, he or she is at risk of experiencing escalating violence.



Is the abuser spying on or using intimidation when the victim is in public, with family, at church, traveling or at work?



Has the abuser threatened the victim or children with violence (e.g. punching, pushing, slapping, strangling, and etcetera)?



Has the abuser used or threatened to use a weapon against you? Does he or she own or have easy access to any weapons?

Encourage victims at high risk to contact us and help them create safety plans.

Create a safety plan

When victims are not able or ready to leave their abusers, it’s important to help them plan. A safety plan can decrease risk during and after a relationship has ended. It should include places to go if they leave their home and people who might help them. It must be their decision to leave and to let others know that they are in an abusive relationship or still at risk.

- Call Sheltering Wings at (317) 745-1496.
- Tell someone you trust about your situation.
- Create signals to alert a neighbor or child to call 911.
- Keep a cell phone with you at all times.
- Pack a bag with documents, extra keys, money and clothes for you and your children in case you must leave quickly. Keep it in a safe place or leave it with a trusted neighbor or friend.
- Plan to leave when your abuser isn’t at home.
- If violence escalates, avoid rooms with objects that can be used as weapons (e.g., kitchen, garage and bathroom). Move to a safer room with multiple exits.
- If you are injured, seek medical help, take pictures and document details.
- Advise school system and employer not to give out your personal information.
- Safeguard information on computers and cell phones. Change all passwords. Disable location services, that could help the abuser locate you.

To learn more about helping victims of domestic violence, or if someone needs help, we are here.

Call our 24/7 helpline at (317) 745-1496.