



Domestic  
Abuse

# Domestic abuse: it's here, hidden among us

Domestic violence or relationship abuse refers to a pattern of behavior, not a one-time event, not anger out of control. **It is intentional behavior used to establish control** through coercion, fear, intimidation, isolation, or other methods. It often (not always) includes the use of, or the threat of, physical or sexual violence. The danger is very real. The severity of violence in a relationship tends to escalate, leading to hundreds of deaths each year.

Not all the wounds caused by domestic abuse are visible. **Hidden impacts are serious** and can last a lifetime. The impacts are: psychological (depression, anxiety), physical (sleep disorders, gastrointestinal problems), social (poor self-esteem, inability to trust) and spiritual (inability to experience God's love). The sense of self that has been lost must be carefully and slowly rebuilt in a new context of caring acceptance.

Domestic **abuse is devastating to children** who witness it. Studies show that the effects of witnessing abuse are similar to the effects of experiencing it firsthand. Trauma triggers the release of chemicals in the brain, which over time affect normal development. Also, abusive behavior is learned behavior; abuse can be repeated in the next generation.

The body of Christ, the Church, has parts that are not functioning as they were designed because they are hurt by domestic abuse. It affects all of us. **What can the church do?**

## **Recognize abuse dynamics**

- Don't be fooled by those who abuse, who also tend to minimize and deny the truth
- It's dangerous to treat this as a mutual conflict situation – NO couples counseling! Specialized help is needed for both parties

## **Be a safe place, a sanctuary free from abuse**

- Safety is the top priority
- Speak out about it – Abuse is NOT OK, but it is OK to talk about it

## **Listen, Listen, Listen!!!**

- A listening ear is a valuable gift that cannot be over-estimated
- We all have two ears, even when we don't have answers

## **Point to resources and be willing to learn**

- Most churches don't have all the needed resources – know where to get help
- Provide "walk-alongside" support over time

For more information visit the Safe Church website [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)

