

## **Presentation Notes: *Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse***

### **Aims:**

To develop a greater understanding of what Domestic Abuse is, who it affects, as well as its impact on individuals, children, the wider family, and the community.

### **Outcomes:**

A the end of this morning you will be able to understand a little more about the different types of domestic abuse, and how wide-spread it is

Recognise the signs of domestic abuse

Explore some of the myths, barriers, stereotypes, and impacts of domestic abuse; in particular how these relate to Christian faith and Church communities

Evaluate the needs of domestic abuse survivors in order to support them effectively, while at the same time understanding the boundaries and limitations of your own role.

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While you're taking this course, you might feel upset or distressed - or you may find that you are personally affected by the issues raised. If this happens, remember you can take a break by clicking on the coffee cup icon (top right of the screen). You can then return when you feel ready. You can also seek support from someone you trust, if you need to.

If at any time during this course you have concerns about someone you know, please contact your local cathedral/church's designated Safeguarding Officer, Adviser, Coordinator or other Designated Person. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, dial 999 and ask for the Police. If there are children involved, this must be treated as a child safeguarding response. If you are concerned about someone who works with children or vulnerable adults, then the LADO (adult safeguarding POT lead) must be consulted.

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## **PART 1: What is Domestic Abuse**

Domestic Abuse The UK government defines domestic abuse as: “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse” Within this definition, ‘family members’ are defined as: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether or not directly related, in-laws or step-family.

So, in addition to common assumptions (both about the context and the perpetrator) this also includes:

- Any type of romantic/sexual/marital relationship where one party is abused by the other, whether it be within the same household or not
- Any situation where a child over the age of 16 is subjecting any other family member over the age of 16 (including a parent or guardian) to abuse
- Any situation that includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriage.

We know that domestic abuse is widespread in society. It is not limited to a particular section of the population, nor determined by gender, ethnicity or religion. We also know that victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be those who have relatively less power in a given situation, and that social norms play a significant part in legitimising and sustaining the actions of perpetrators.

Statistically speaking when most people hear the term ‘domestic abuse’ they usually think of women who are suffering physical abuse from their husbands or partners. As we’ve said already, domestic abuse is broader than this, both in terms of the forms that abuse takes, and the range of people who are affected.

Statistically speaking, the vast majority of domestic abuse occurs within heterosexual relationships – women are more likely to be survivors than men, but men are victims too. Domestic violence and abuse also occur within LGBTQ+ relationships.

It is estimated that around one in three women will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. (Crime Survey, England and Wales 2019). 2 women are killed every week by current or former partners and 30 men are murdered every year. (Office for National Statistics, 2019) Domestic abuse also occurs within family relationships and can sometimes even be directed from children and young people towards their parents, carers and guardians.

## **PART 2: Raising our Awareness**

One of the difficulties with domestic abuse is that it is often hidden; it can become so much part of 'normal' life that the abused person doesn't know they are being abused. This means that it can take some time to build trust with others before the abuse is disclosed. The best way we can personally prepare ourselves to engage with these issues in community and/or pastoral setting is by first gaining as much awareness as possible about the verbal and non-verbal signs of abuse.

The first thing to understand is that domestic abuse often follows a pattern.

1. Tension builds. The abuser uses different tactics to keep the survivor on edge and wondering what is wrong; making them feel fearful and concerned. The survivor feels a deep need to placate the abuser.
2. An abuse incident occurs.
3. A reconciliation phase. At this stage the abuser says sorry, deflects responsibility or denies anything happened. They may also deny the severity of the incident and promise that it won't happen again.
4. A period of calm follows, where the incident is "forgotten" and no abuse takes place. Sometimes the abuser may do things like buy gifts to regain status and power. And then the cycle repeats itself.

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### **Pause and Reflect**

Take the opportunity to have a break and digest the content of the course so far.

What has been the most significant aspect of what you have heard so far?

How have the issues raised challenged your faith?

Have they highlighted anything in particular in your own community?

Is there any action you need to take?

### **PART 3: Domestic abuse in the Christian church Survivors in church communities**

Given the prevalence of domestic abuse in society, it is perhaps unsurprising that these issues affect people within the Christian church.

Take a moment to think about these testimonies, given by church members in one research project.

*“The abuse went on for six years before I realised that what I was experiencing wasn't just a bad marriage. Everyone says marriage is difficult so at first I thought it was that – our adjustment to married life. There was pressure to make marriage work and to sacrifice yourself. After all the church says !till death us do part”.*

*“I bent over backwards to make it work. From the outside most people thought we were the perfect happy couple. But I was walking on eggshells in my own home, never knowing what mood he would be in when he came home. It was such a lonely time. I didn't think anyone would believe me if I told them what it was really like at home. I was desperate for some hope.”*

#### **Christian beliefs and culture**

It is important to acknowledge the role of Christian beliefs and their impact on the disclosure and handling of abuse in Church settings. It is important to emphasise at the outset that faith and scripture cannot, under any circumstances, be used to justify, excuse or deflect responsibility for abuse.

A priority on relationships, family and marriage in church can make it difficult to tell others that things are bad at home. Individuals may feel that they are ‘letting the church down’ or ‘failing’ in some way.

There is sometimes a risk of false hope, due to a communities’ beliefs about prayer and God’s intervention. We also need to acknowledge

that Christian teaching has been used to give, or resulted in giving, permission to abuse’.

For example, perpetrators can use the “sanctity” and permanence of marriage as a lever to maintain an abusive relationship. As a consequence, survivors can feel immense guilt for breaking off the marriage and may stay longer in abusive relationships because of this.

This can be reinforced by their church’s teaching on divorce, re-marriage or forgiveness. This means that the social norms and beliefs in the Christian community may at times be complicit in allowing abuse of many kinds go unchallenged, and may normalise behaviours that should not be happening at all.

## **Gender, sexuality and the church**

In the church, as in society, there still exist barriers in organisations and institutions that need to be broken down so that people can feel supported when they are in crisis. So often it is reported that

if you are LGBTQ+ you are not welcome in the Church, regardless of whether this is true or not.

This is both an actual and perceived barrier, and can affect whether someone in an abusive relationship can access support.

Many people experience the tension between being true to their faith and being true to their sexuality or gender identity.

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## **PART 4: The role of the Christian Community Supporting healthy relationships.**

Christian families experiencing domestic abuse are as complex, if not more complex, than those outside the church community. It is still the case that the church is called to embody, and by God's grace develop, loving and just relationships.

This means living out the Gospel in word and action; a sustaining spirituality rooted in the language

and shared experience of God's love in Christ.

In practice, this should include using words to build others up, practising empathy, using power to protect the vulnerable, and creating a healthy culture where positive relationships include permission to talk about struggles, difficulties,

and to disclose experiences of abuse in the home environment. We do this in the hope that many who participate or connect with the Christian community can find safety, healing and restoration.

*We can support the ministry of the church by teaching and modelling healthy relationships.*

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## **PART 5: Direct intervention - Handling Disclosure**

The 4R's are a useful way to remember how to respond to the disclosure of abuse.

### **Recognise**

- Accept and take seriously what is being said, without displaying shock or disbelief.
- Let the person tell their story and don't push for information or ask leading questions.
- Do not interrogate them or decide if they are telling the truth.
- Be alert to signs and symptoms of abuse.

### **Respond**

- Reassure the individual that they have taken the right step in sharing this information and that they are not to blame.
- Be honest; never make promises to keep what you are being told confidential. If abuse is involved, you will need to tell someone.
- Tell them what you will do with the information they have shared, and that they will be kept informed.
- Do not introduce personal information from either your own experience or that of others.
- Do not investigate the matter any further yourself, nor approach the person about whom allegations may have been made.

### **Record**

Write down, concisely, exactly what was seen, said or heard, and make clear where you have added your own views or interpretation.

Remember that this is your information, and that you are responsible for passing it on to the person with safeguarding responsibility. Be mindful that your written comments may be needed in the event that further legal or disciplinary action is taken.

You may find it helpful to use the 4 W's, as follows:

- WHO was involved? Name the key people.
- WHAT happened? Facts not opinions.
- WHEN did it happen? Date and time.
- WHO have you referred the issue on to?

Only pass the information on verbally if it is an emergency situation. Even so, you must also find time as soon as possible to write it down and send it on to the relevant person.

## Refer

Pass the information to the Safeguarding Lead or Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor in your setting within 24 hours. If you are unsure about the person's consent and confidentiality, you can get advice from your Parish Safeguarding Officer without necessarily disclosing people's names. In case of an emergency call the Police or dial 999.

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## What is domestic abuse?

Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)

### Types of Domestic Abuse

**Psychological/emotional abuse:** Includes name-calling, threats and manipulation, blaming you for the abuse or 'gaslighting' you.

**Coercive control:** When an abuser uses a pattern of behaviour over time to exert power and control. It is a criminal offence.

**Physical abuse:** This isn't only hitting. He might restrain you or throw objects. He might pinch or shove you and claim it's a 'joke'.

**Tech abuse:** He might send abusive texts, demand access to your devices, track you with spyware, or share images of you online.

**Economic abuse:** Controlling your access to money or resources. He might take your wages, stop you working, or put you in debt without your knowledge or consent.

**Sexual abuse:** This doesn't have to be physical. He might manipulate, deceive or coerce you into doing things you don't want to do.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iwAcd2VuzU>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=198Qrbg0\\_3E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=198Qrbg0_3E)