



Church@thepeak Policy for Addressing Domestic Abuse: Good Practice Guidelines

This policy has been prepared and approved by the Steering Group of Church@thepeak using the *Anglican Diocese of Sydney Responding to Domestic Abuse: Provisional Policy and Good Practice Guidelines* and adopting it for Church@thepeak.

For the purposes of these Guidelines, **domestic abuse** is defined as abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. It includes, but is not limited to, emotional, verbal, social, economic, psychological, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse. Such behaviour often seeks to control, humiliate, dominate or instill fear in the victim.

A more extensive definition of the various forms which abuse can take is found in Appendix 1 of the diocesan document mentioned above.

If you have any concerns or need to talk to any one please contact:

- **The Police:** dial **000**
24/7 in emergencies where safety is at risk.
- **1800 Respect national helpline:** **1800 737 732** or 1800respect.org.au
24/7 for sexual assault, & domestic violence counselling and advice.
- **Child Protection Helpline:** **132 111** or reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg
If you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.
- **Lifeline:** **131 114** or www.lifeline.org.au/get-help
24 hour telephone crisis line.
- **Professional Standards Unit:** **9265 1604** or safeministry.org.au
Advice about abuse involving Anglican clergy or church workers

The guidance below aims to assist you in responding to people who disclose domestic abuse.

2.1 HOW TO RESPOND TO VICTIMS

When you haven't personally experienced abuse, it's easy to listen with an attitude of assessing whether what is being reported is really abuse. 'Would I find that abusive? Doesn't everyone argue sometimes?' However, when a person has repeatedly been victimised and feels powerless, our response always needs to be to offer support, to listen and give those people the respect of being believed.

- Clinical psychologist and clergy wife

2.1.1 Those who respond to news of domestic abuse often feel ill-equipped. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between other types of marital dysfunction and domestic abuse, or it may be that concerns about abuse only emerge gradually. Clergy and church workers should acknowledge their professional limitations, and should consult the PSU (Professional Standards Unit), the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or experienced domestic violence services for advice

2.1.2 The safety of victims and any children is paramount. All actions should carefully consider the risk to their, and your, safety. Making telephone calls, possessing information about support services for domestic abuse, the use of texts and emails, and accessing relevant websites all create potential risks for those experiencing abuse

2.1.3 For information on domestic abuse, its prevalence and effects, and how to recognise both victims and alleged perpetrators, please see Appendix 2 of *Anglican Diocese of Sydney Responding to Domestic Abuse: Provisional Policy and Good Practice Guidelines*. This also briefly notes other particular categories of domestic abuse

2.2 INITIAL DISCLOSURE

If a victim discloses or otherwise hints at abuse, the following factors are important:

2.2.1 **Ask after them** – Most victims want you to ask how they are doing. Your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help, e.g. 'How are things at home?' and if it becomes appropriate, 'Is anyone hurting you?' or 'Do you ever feel afraid?'

2.2.2 **Take time to listen** – Take plenty of time to listen and believe what they say. If they sense disbelief they may be discouraged from speaking again

2.2.3 **Choose the place wisely** – If it is at all possible, speak with the victim in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again, keeping in mind that someone in distress may start talking anywhere. As is the case in other ministry situations

when speaking with a woman, male clergy should consider inviting her to bring a support person, or should conduct the discussion where there are others in the general vicinity.

2.2.4 **The limits of confidentiality** – Make it clear that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, depending on the nature of what is disclosed. For example, further disclosure may be needed when someone is being hurt or in serious danger, a serious criminal offence has been committed, or when children are involved

2.3 IMMEDIATE ACTION

2.3.1 **Dial 000** if you are witnessing a violent incident or if the person needs medical care

2.3.2 **Call the Police** if the victim is in immediate danger. Be aware that intervention may heighten risk, but it is important to explore how to ensure that people are safe

2.3.3 **Are children involved?** If children are involved and there is a risk of significant harm, a referral to the child protection authorities needs to be made, in addition to calling the Police, and if possible, encourage the victim to make the referral themselves, perhaps supporting them through the process

2.3.4 **Is a clergy person or church worker involved?** If the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender, the PSU will also need to be informed

2.3.5 **Is there a threat of self-harm?** Any threat to self-harm must be taken seriously as threats of self-harm made by a perpetrator of domestic abuse to their victim are usually part of their controlling and manipulative behaviour. If the victim reports this to you, and you believe there is a risk of serious harm, you should attempt, if possible, to get medical help for the alleged perpetrator

2.3.6 **Keep their confidence** – Remember that the confidentiality of the victim must be maintained

2.4 YOUR RESPONSE TO THE DISCLOSURE

2.4.1 **You are brave** – Acknowledge the victim’s strength and courage it takes to have endured abuse and now to talk about it

2.4.2 **Here are some options** – Give the victim choice in what the next steps are and the timing of those steps unless there is imminent risk of physical harm or mandatory reporting obligations

2.4.3 **Here is where to find help** – Encourage them to seek professional help from a local domestic violence service who will be able to offer practical safety planning advice, even if they do not want to leave their home. In addition, give information about specialist helplines and websites, as required. (See Flow Chart and page following the flow chart in *Church@thepeak Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse*.)

2.4.4 **Are you in danger?** – Express concern for their safety and immediate welfare. Do they have somewhere to stay?

2.4.5 **Are children in danger?** – Ask about the children and their safety and welfare. You may need to persuade them to report any concerns to the child protection authorities. You have no option but to do so if you have received information that a child is at serious risk of harm

2.4.6 **Do you have support?** – Be sensitive to people’s backgrounds and cultures. Ask them how cultural issues may affect them. Ask them about what support is available to them from friends and family

2.4.7 **Take care of yourself** – Encourage them to focus on their own needs, something they may not have been able to do since the abuse began but which is critical in helping them to change their situation

2.4.8 **It’s not your fault** – Reassure them that whatever the circumstances, abuse is not justified and not their fault

2.4.9 **How can our church best help you?** – Ask them what they want from you and the parish. Offer help which is in response to their needs and preferences and which lets them keep in control, as much as possible

2.5 RECORD KEEPING AND FOLLOW UP RE. VICTIMS

Please also see the guidance from *Faithfulness in Service* paragraphs 4.36 and 4.37 (noted in Appendix 4) which address the need to keep notes of individual pastoral activity, and also to be aware of relevant privacy legislation.

2.5.1 **What’s the best way to contact you?** – Check if it is all right to contact the victim at home before doing so. Establish their preferred means of contact, and make sure that this is safe

2.5.2 **Keep it confidential** – Keep information confidential and, as a general rule, only share it where appropriate and with informed consent of the victim

2.5.3 **Tell authorities when appropriate and keep a record** – In some circumstance you will be required to share information with statutory authorities, for example, where the victim or others may be at risk.

Always keep a record of your decision and the reasons why you decided to share (or not). If in doubt, contact the PSU, the Police or the child protection authorities.

2.5.4 Take notes – It is recommended that you make a brief objective note of dates, facts and context of what you have been told, but keep your opinions separate. This should be kept in strict confidence but could be useful in any future prosecution

2.5.5 First 48 hours – Within 48 hours of the disclosure you ought to share the incident with someone who is qualified in the area of domestic abuse, who can support you and help you to think through the issues. This may be a Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or via the 1800 RESPECT national domestic violence helpline

2.5.6 Review church safety – If the alleged perpetrator is in the same church as the victim, you will need to review the safety issues. There may need to be a risk assessment and memorandum of understanding (MOU) put in place. You are advised to consult with the PSU

2.5.7 Safety plan with a professional – Victim safety planning should be conducted by a professional, ideally from a domestic violence service or the Police. But there may be an occasion when a victim wishes to discuss their safety with you. You should seek advice before entering into detailed safety planning discussions with the victim. (Appendix 6 of the *Anglican Diocese of Sydney Responding to Domestic Abuse: Provisional Policy and Good Practice Guidelines* for an example of a safety planning format that normally guides such planning). Careful consideration should be given to where and how such information is provided and kept by the victim, to avoid the alleged perpetrator learning the details of the plan

2.5.8 When to go to the PSU – If the alleged perpetrator is a clergy person or church worker you must report this to the PSU

2.5.9 Extreme discretion needed – Do not give information about the victim’s whereabouts, contact details or personal circumstances to the alleged perpetrator or to others who might pass information on to the alleged perpetrator. Do not discuss with the parish council or any other members of a congregation or anyone who might inadvertently pass information on to the perpetrator

2.5.10 Offer practical help – When victims are leaving a controlling perpetrator, they often have to leave with nothing and have access to very limited financial support. Consider how your church can provide practical support for victims

2.6 RESPONDING TO ALLEGED OR KNOWN PERPETRATORS

Every church has an important role to play in challenging inappropriate behaviour among its members. This can, however, lead to increased risks for both the victim and the person who challenges an alleged or known perpetrator. This needs to be done in an extremely careful way that does not place a victim at increased risk.

Factors to consider when responding to perpetrators:

2.6.1 The victim comes first – Ensure that the victim is at the highest priority in terms of safety and wellbeing, and that any action is centred on the victim. Action here includes giving the victim choice in what the next steps are and the timing of those steps unless there is imminent risk of physical harm or mandatory reporting obligations

2.6.2 **Strength in numbers** – If meeting an alleged perpetrator, ensure that it is in a public place, and that there are others in the meeting

2.6.3 **Be safe** – Maintaining an awareness of the danger that the alleged perpetrator may pose to you, and ensuring that you and others are safe

2.6.4 **First 48 hours** – **Within 48 hours of the disclosure you ought to share the incident with someone who is qualified** in the area of domestic abuse, who can support you and help you to think through the issues. This may be a Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser or via the 1800 RESPECT national domestic violence helpline

2.6.5 **Get help** – If the alleged perpetrator threatens self-harm while talking with you, then they may require urgent support. Dial 000 if you are witnessing a violent incident or if the person needs urgent medical care. Otherwise you could refer them to their GP

2.6.6 If the alleged perpetrator is in the same Church as the victim, you will need to review the safety issues. There may need to be a risk assessment and ‘memorandum of understanding’ (MOU) put in place. You are advised to consult the Safe Ministry website (safeministry.org.au/for-parishes/safe-ministry-journey/safe-ministry-map/4-0/) or contact the PSU

2.6.7 **When to contact the PSU** – If the **alleged perpetrator is a clergy person or church worker** you must report this to the PSU

2.6.8 **Extreme discretion needed** – Ensure that information concerning the victim is only given to statutory authorities and not to the alleged perpetrator. This includes keeping all contact details and personal circumstances confidential

2.6.9 **Where to get help** – Share information about helplines and accountability programs

2.7 RECORD KEEPING AND FOLLOW UP RE. PERPETRATORS

Please see the previous section on ‘record keeping and follow up’ in regards to a victim. What follows is additional guidance in relation to responding to alleged or known perpetrators.

2.7.1 **You can’t promise confidentiality** – While you might respect an individual’s right to confidentiality this cannot be guaranteed. In some circumstances you will be required to share information with statutory authorities, for example, when someone is being hurt, a serious criminal offence has been committed or a child or adult is at risk

2.7.2 **Keep a record** – Always keep a record of your decision and the reasons why you decided to share or withhold information. If in doubt, contact the PSU, the Police or the child protection authorities

2.7.3 In responding to alleged or known perpetrators:

- Do not collude with, excuse or minimise their behaviour
- Do not meet with them alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the church with several other people around
- Do not try to investigate or offer/provide treatment. Only those with professional training should discuss such issues formally with them

2.7.4 In relation to any investigations or legal proceedings for domestic violence:

- Cooperate fully with requests from the police

- In the event that the alleged perpetrator requests you to produce documents or give oral evidence in any proceedings, insist that a subpoena is issued
- A church leader should exercise extreme caution and seek advice before acting as a character witness or advocating for an alleged perpetrator
- A church leader may arrange for the alleged perpetrator to be provided with pastoral care throughout the investigation or proceedings, but should contact the PSU for further advice and not provide this care themselves

2.8 ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR CLERGY AND LICENSED LAY MINISTERS – RESPONDING TO VICTIMS

2.8.1 **Help** – Help the victim with any spiritual concerns

2.8.2 **Be patient** – Accept that victims may choose to stay in their situation for a variety of reasons, including genuine spiritual concerns regarding a desire to keep promises and for reconciliation

2.8.3 **Abuse is always wrong** – Emphasise that violence or other domestic abuse is always unacceptable in a marriage, whether Christian or otherwise

2.8.4 **Remember the Lord** – Assure them of God’s love and presence and pray with them

2.8.5 **Don’t rush to reconcile** – Do not encourage them to forgive the alleged perpetrator or take them back in the absence of persistent evidence of repentant attitudes and behaviour, especially without obtaining professional advice

2.8.6 **Do not pursue couples’ counselling/mediation with them and their partner if you are aware that there is abuse in the relationship**

2.8.7 **Seek advice** – Where couples’ counselling has been commenced for general marital difficulties and concern about abuse emerges, seek advice about whether it should be discontinued

2.9 RESPONDING TO PERPETRATORS

2.9.1 **Be clear** – Address any spiritual rationalisations they may offer or questions they may have

2.9.2 **No excuse** – Do not allow them to use theological excuses for their behaviour

2.9.3 **Name the sin** – Name the abuse as *their* sin, not the victim’s sin. Tell them that only they can stop it and that they need to seek help

2.9.4 **Do not be easily swayed** – Do not be taken in by the perpetrator’s “conversion” experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as they proceed with accountability. If it is not genuine, it is only another way to manipulate you, so as to maintain control of the process and to avoid accountability

2.9.5 **Pray** – Pray with them

2.9.6 **Remorse may be real** – Recognise that perpetrators may express real remorse for the damage that they have wrought on others in their relationships. A perpetrator may ask for forgiveness from God and seek to live a repentant life even though they may be unable to regulate their emotions and behaviour sufficiently to be reconciled in a relationship

2.9.7 Repentance must be real and visible – Ask for and look for actions of repentance, not just words of repentance. What has the perpetrator done, for how long, with what kinds of accountability, to show evidence of change?

2.9.8 Support – Assure them of your support in this endeavour

2.9.9 Do not pursue couples' counselling/mediation with them and their partner if you are aware that there is abuse in the relationship

2.10 PERPETRATOR PROGRAMS

The attitudes that underpin domestic abuse often have deep roots and are difficult to change. Some success has been achieved through Men's Behaviour Change programs for alleged or known perpetrators. These programs are conducted over an extended period of time and include one-on-one support as well as a group work program.

NSW has minimum standards for accredited Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Information on who is accredited and where programs are conducted can be found at the Men's Behaviour Change Network website: <https://www.mbcn-nsw.net/>. Accredited programs in NSW are strongly underpinned by victim support.

Anglicare is accredited to run Men's Behaviour Change Programs in Nowra and Parramatta. Contact the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser for further information.

Participation in a Men's Behaviour Change Program may be mandated by a court but self-referral to community-run programs is possible. Contact the Men's Referral Service (MRS) on 1800 065 973.

There is currently not a female equivalent to accredited Men's Behaviour Change Programs. If a female perpetrator was willing to seek assistance, a referral to a specific domestic violence service would be an appropriate option.

2.11 PASTORAL ISSUES

2.11.1 Consult the PSU – There are complex issues for parishes where both parties continue to attend church. Parishes need to be aware of any legal restrictions around those accused of perpetrating abuse and ensure these are not undermined. As stated earlier (2.5.6), a risk assessment and MOU put in place may also need to be put in place. You are advised to consult with the PSU regarding any instance of a victim and an abuser (known or alleged) remaining in the same church. If a MOU cannot be agreed, the PSU can provide further advice about options

2.11.2 Is a clergy person involved? If the victim or alleged perpetrator is a member of the clergy, please talk urgently to the PSU to review the action required to ensure the victim's safety and the appropriate response

2.11.3 Division of care – Congregational leaders will need to consider how to support both parties safely, noting that a clergy person or church worker cannot support both individuals. If they need further advice in relation to providing support they should contact the PSU or the Anglicare Domestic Violence Adviser

2.11.4 **Long-term care for victims** – There may also be a need to provide long-term pastoral support for victims of domestic abuse, including support to couples when one or both parties have experienced abuse in a previous relationship

2.11.5 **Caring for carers** – Likewise those responsible for caring for victims, or for perpetrators, also need emotional and pastoral support, along with others indirectly impacted; for example, friends or family within the parish

2.11.6 **Dissatisfaction with care is possible** – There may be times that either victim or perpetrator, or both, may be dissatisfied with pastoral care provided in such difficult situations, even with significant efforts by congregational leaders to follow good practice guidelines

2.12 & 2.13 CLERGY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

For the Good Practice Guidelines for Clergy families, refer to the *Anglican Diocese of Sydney Responding to Domestic Abuse: Provisional Policy and Good Practice Guidelines*

2.14 MEDIATION

2.14.1 **Get professional help** – Mediation is a specialist ministry that needs to be undertaken by trained professionals. In order for mediation to be effective any imbalances in power in the relationship need to be addressed

2.14.2 **Safety first** – In the context of family and domestic abuse, mediation (or ‘family dispute resolution’ as it is known when parenting arrangements are being discussed) can be an empowering process for a victim. However, this can only occur if safety needs are managed and both parties are well-prepared for the mediation process

2.14.3 **Legal advice** – Where children or property matters are concerned, it is also important that both parties have received legal advice. Family Relationship Centres are a good referral option for family dispute resolution and have designated processes to ensure the safety of all concerned

Further Resources	
Safer A resource to help Churches understand, identify and respond to domestic and family violence.	http://www.saferresource.org.au/
A Just Cause Australian Churches Responding to Domestic Violence	https://ajustcause.com.au/no-place-for-violence/
Sydney Anglican Diocese Resources for Domestic Violence	https://safeministry.org.au/for-parishes/domestic-violence-resources/
Anglicare: Family Violence Adviser and Educator	Email: lynda.dunstan@anglicare.org.au Phone: (02) 9895 8144