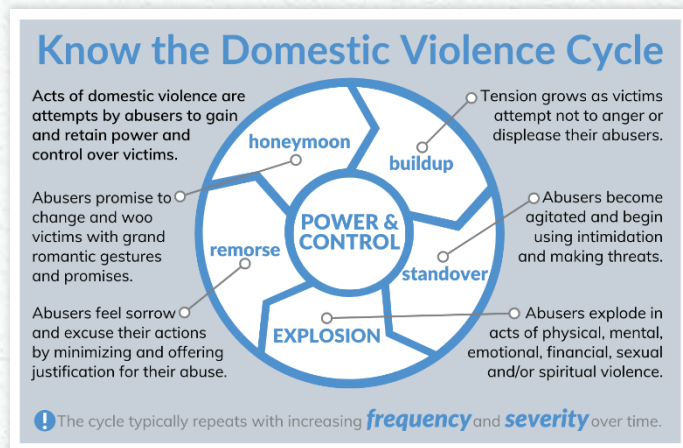


Recognizing signs of domestic violence in your church

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- Becoming quiet or withdrawn around their partner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.