

# Raising Awareness and Responding Well to Domestic Abuse

## INTRODUCTION

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### Course Aims and Outcomes

#### 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.

#### **When you've finished this course, you will be able to:**

- Identify 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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### Course Overview

First, this course describes a particular understanding of power-abuse, and then connects this to the context of close family relationships. We will pay attention to two areas: the types of domestic abuse, and the ways domestic abuse affects those involved.

Second, we explore issues arising from domestic abuse in the context of the church and the Christian faith.

Third, we focus on pastoral and community settings, and describe the signs of domestic abuse which can be found there.

Finally, in the light of all this, we describe our own safeguarding responsibilities, and how to support survivors.

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### Advance warning and guidance

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.

# PART 1: WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

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## 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.

For further statistical information, please refer to The British Crime Survey, the NSPCC or Stonewall’s Gay & Bisexual Men’s / Women’s Health Survey (2013 and 2007 respectively).

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## Coercion and Control

Both **coercion** and **control** are key terms in the definition of domestic abuse. These factors are central to known patterns of domestic abuse; often subtle and hard to detect. In recognition of this, and to enhance the protection of potential victims of domestic abuse, in 2015 the government created a new offence called ‘Coercive or Controlling Behaviour’.

**Controlling behaviour is defined as** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their daily life;

**Coercive behaviour is defined as** an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation, or other abuse, that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”

Serious Crime Act 2015

Coercive control may involve:

- *Taking control over someone's everyday life, for example where they go, what they wear, etc.*
- *Monitoring or controlling someone's emails, text messages, or social media accounts*
- *Threats to kill or harm*
- *Harassment and stalking.*

The video on the next slide illustrates a number of examples of coercion and control within the context of domestic abuse.

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## 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.

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## ‘Toxic Masculinity’

These days, people often use the term ‘toxic masculinity’ to describe exaggerated masculine traits that many cultures have widely accepted or glorified.

This harmful concept of masculinity also places significant importance on ‘manliness’ based on:

- strength
- lack of emotion
- self-sufficiency
- dominance
- sexual virility

According to traditional ‘toxic masculine’ values, a man who does not display enough of these traits may fall short of being a ‘real man.’ This perception is often reflected in aspects of popular culture such as music, film, and sport, which in turn can serve to support and reinforce these ideals.

Over-emphasising these traits may lead to harmful imbalances in a person who is trying to live up to these expectations. Some examples include:

- aggression
- sexual aggression or control
- showing no emotion or suppressing emotions
- hyper-competitiveness
- needing to dominate or control others
- a tendency towards or glorification of violence
- isolation
- low empathy
- entitlement
- chauvinism and sexism

We can see the relevance of ‘toxic masculinity’ to domestic abuse as these beliefs, when acted upon, can lead to offences that the law defines as ‘domestic abuse’ and/or ‘coercion and control’, as mentioned earlier in this course.

The video on the the next slide illustrates this further.

Based on <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/toxic-masculinity> (Medical News Today, Accessed August 2021)

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## Hidden in plain sight

[ Video slide ]

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## Review questions (1)

# **PART 2 : THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

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## Abuse and the misuse of power

Abuse is basically the misuse of power by an abuser. This brings harm to those who are unable to protect themselves in the relationship. This power over others may be rooted in physical strength, but it may also arise from social factors such as age, gender, position, social security or wealth.

Social norms and beliefs can reinforce or legitimise the use of power that one individual or group exercises towards, or over, another. Beliefs about other groups and their role or place in society can become 'false narratives' or 'basic assumptions' that govern our behaviour towards them - consciously or unconsciously. For example, assumptions about male/female gender roles have a major impact on whether organisations recognise the legitimacy of leadership exercised by women. In the home environment, similar assumptions can impact domestic roles and expectations.

The resistance or perceived failure to live up to or comply with these expectations can be met with force (emotional, psychological, or physical): individuals can be subjected to harsh, abusive or manipulative treatment in order to gain compliance. This compliance always serves to reinforce the position of the abuser.

As we have seen, these dynamics are common in society, and often take the form of extreme acts of violence and cruelty. Sadly, these dynamics are often deeply engrained in family life, and the lives of communities, including the church.

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## 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

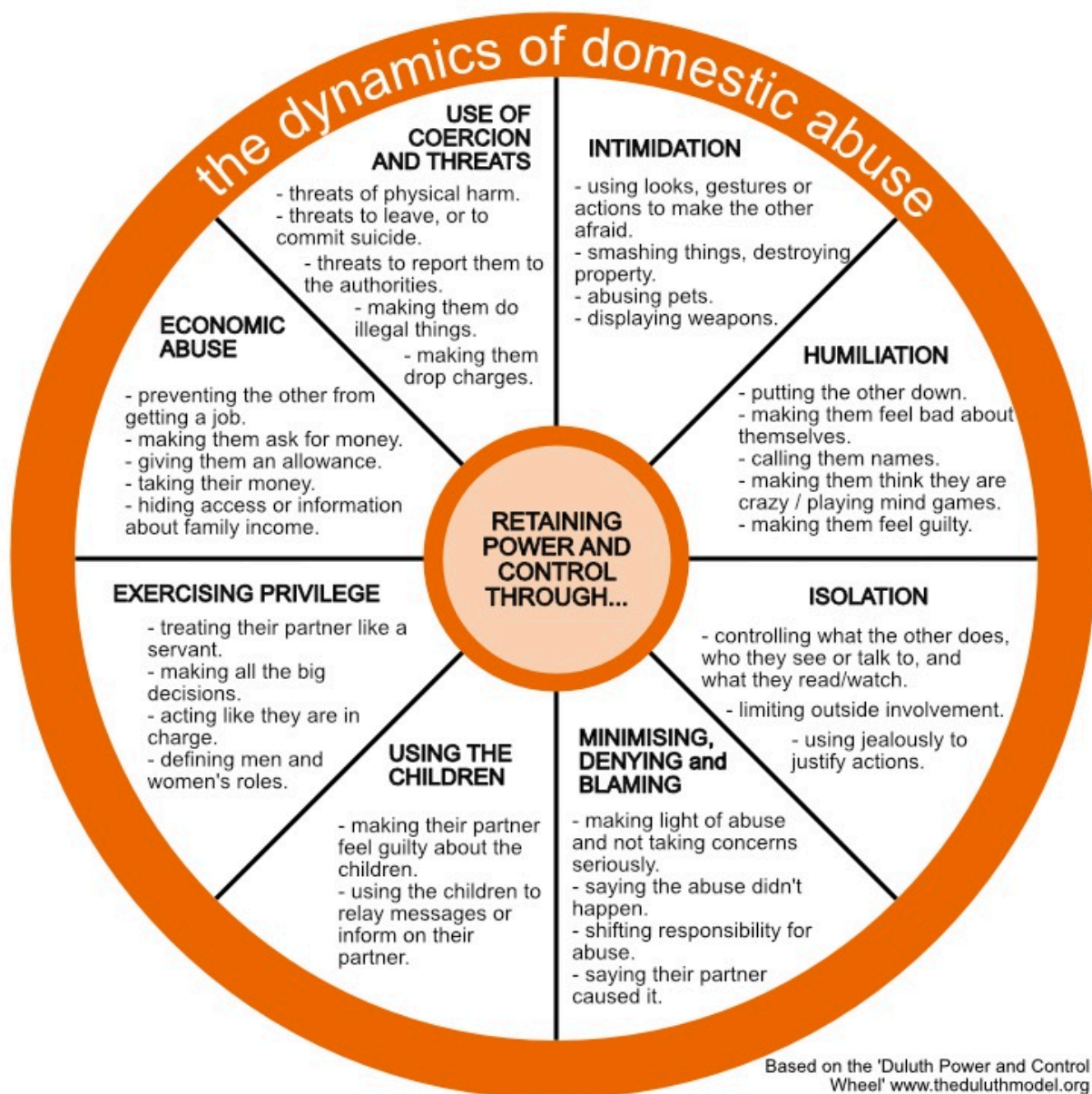
The first thing to understand is that domestic abuse often follows a pattern.

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.

## Signs that someone may be abusing their partner

The Power and Control Wheel is a tool that helps explain the different ways an abusive partner can use power and control to manipulate a relationship. We can use it to help a victim recognise the warning signs in their own relationship.



It is important to say that people who choose to abuse will change their tactics if one tactic is not working. The perpetrator will cause the victim to feel that they are unable to meet the needs of the perpetrator. In consequence, the survivor's energy, commitment, time and focus are constantly on



the abuser, leaving no space to think or plan, especially about what is going on, the abuse they are suffering, or thinking about leaving.

Take a few moments to read and digest this before moving on to the next page.

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## Domestic Abuse and Children

According to the government definition, children cannot be direct victims of domestic abuse. Nevertheless, they can suffer deep and long-lasting impacts from an environment in which they **witness** domestic abuse. These experiences are considered to fall within statutory categories of '**child abuse**' and would be treated as such. Research suggests that around 1 in 5 children has experienced abuse in this way.

The physical, psychological, and emotional effects on children as a result of exposure to domestic abuse can be severe and long-lasting. Some children may become withdrawn and find it difficult to communicate. Others may act out the aggression they have witnessed, or they may blame themselves for the abuse. Children who live with abuse experience high levels of stress.

For some children and families, home may not be the safe place it should be. Staying there can be extremely challenging. Some may already be experiencing domestic abuse or be worried that an adult's behaviour is changing or escalating.

Children pick up signs and can feel tension at a young age; and they can learn coping behaviours. They often do not have the maturity to deal with what is going on around them or how to process it. This can result in children developing behavioural problems during childhood, making it difficult to form positive relationships into adulthood. The video on the next page illustrates this further.

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences

[ Adverse Childhood Experiences **video or alternative**]

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## Review Questions (2)

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### Pause and Reflect (1)

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

What has been the most significant aspect of the course 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: SO CALLED 'HONOUR BASED' ABUSE**

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### So called "Honour" abuse

Family violence against women and girls is part of domestic abuse. It includes:

- forced marriage
- female genital mutilation (FGM)
- so-called "honour-based abuse"

The perpetrators, and sometimes even the victims, may not recognise that these acts are crimes or accept that they are, but UK law is very clear: **ALL** of these are criminal acts.

Honour-based abuse is a form of domestic abuse carried out in order to protect the so-called "honour" of a family or community. The code of "honour" to which it refers is set by the male members of the family, and women who break the rules of the code are punished for bringing shame upon the family. Honour crimes are most prevalent within diaspora communities from South Asia, the Middle East, and North and East Africa.

Women can be subjected to honour-based punishments for trying to:

- Divorce or separate
- Start a new relationship
- Talk to or interact freely with men
- Have relationships or marry outside a particular religion
- Have sex before marriage
- Marry a person of their own choice
- Attend college or university

Men can also be victims of so called "honour" crimes: it is less frequent, but it happens.

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### Forced Marriage

Forced marriage is where someone is forced to marry against their will, usually by parents, family, or religious leaders.

Victims can be subject to threats, physical or sexual violence, or emotional or psychological blackmail, if they resist.

Forced marriage is not a problem specific to one country or culture. The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) has handled cases relating to over 100 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

Most forced marriages involving British girls and women take place abroad.

The video on the next page shows how this issue may present itself.

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## Right to Choose

**[Right to Choose video]**

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## Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is where the female genitals are deliberately cut for non-medical reasons. Some of the reasons given by perpetrators are: cleanliness, religious requirements, ensuring chastity, protecting family honour, and better marriage prospects.

It is often carried out in secret in non-sterile conditions. It can have serious health effects, and even lead to death.

FGM is abuse. When carried out on girls, it is child abuse. It has been illegal in the UK since 1985 and convicted offenders face up to 14 years in prison.

FGM offers no health benefits. It is recognised internationally as a human right violation.

FGM is mainly practised in at least 29 countries in the western, eastern and north-eastern regions of Africa, in some countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as among migrants from these areas in Europe, including in the UK. <https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Forward-FAQ-August-2019-New-Branding-WEB.pdf>

The video on the next page gives powerful testimony from a victim of FGM.

**[ Testimony video ]**

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## Recognising the signs of honour based abuse

Both men and women are at risk. There are warning signs of honour abuse, including:

- Excessive parental restriction and control of movements, history of siblings leaving education to marry early, restrictions on friends, disapproval for adopting 'western' clothing and make-up.
- Poor attendance at work, drop in performance, failure to turn up for business trips, parental control of income and limited career choices, accompanied to and from work.
- Lengthy, extended or repeated absence from school/college, truancy, decline in academic performance, low motivation, anxiety around holiday time, being accompanied to and from school/college.
- Evidence of family disputes/conflict, domestic violence/abuse or running away from home, frequent injuries which are explained as accidental.
- Evidence of self-harm, treatment for depression, attempted suicide, social isolation, eating disorders, or substance abuse.

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## Review Questions (3)

TBC

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## Pause and Reflect (again)

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

What has been the most significant aspect of the course 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 4: Domestic abuse in the Christian church

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### 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.”*

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### 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.

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## 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. This tension may cause them to feel unable to seek support if they are in an abusive same-sex relationship.

These factors may also lead to additional barriers to disclosure. For example, those in LGBTQ+ communities may have to "come out" in order to disclose abuse to church friends or pastoral workers, and may fear rejection.

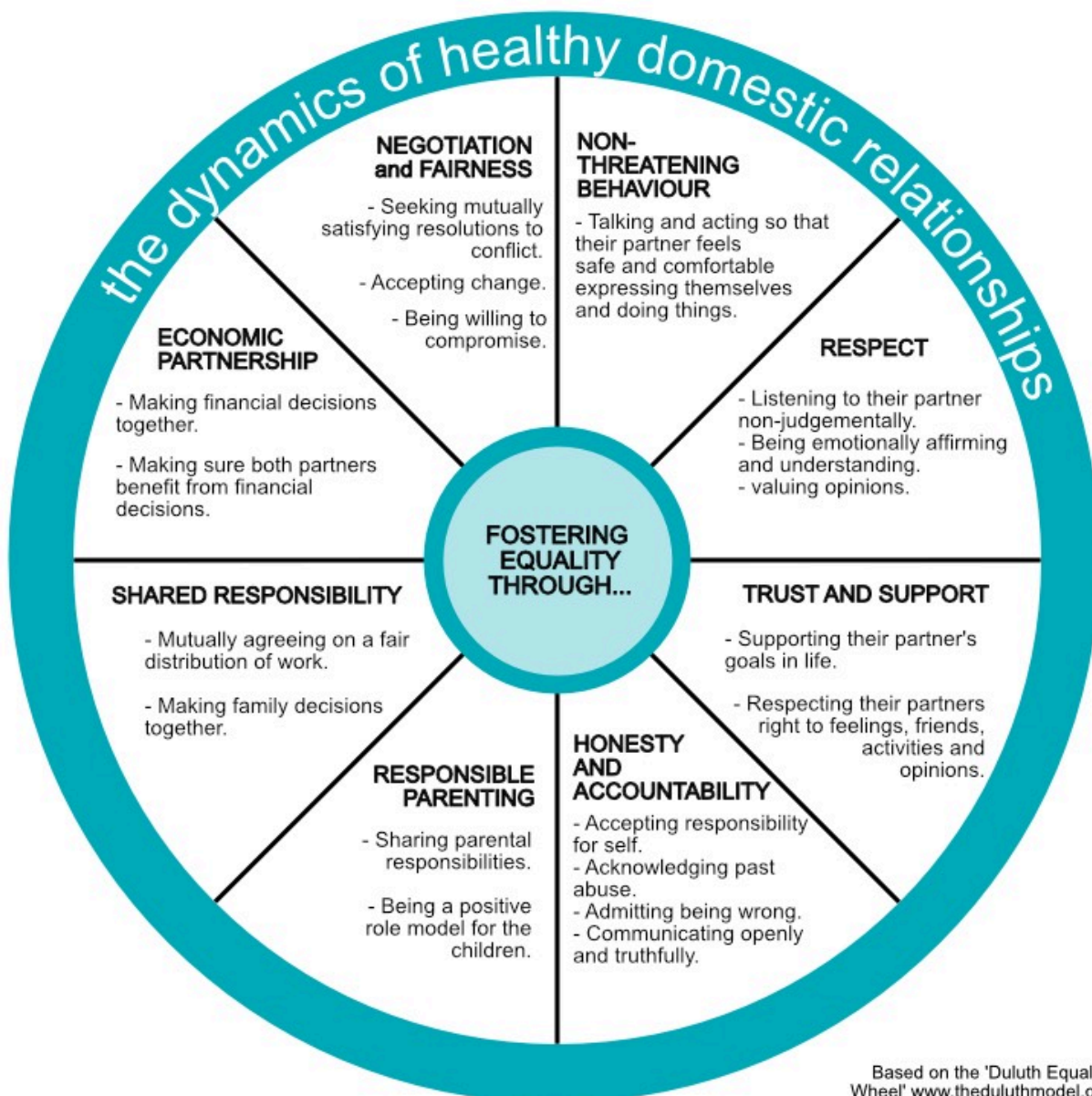
## PART 5: The role of the Christian Community

### 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.

Take a few minutes to digest this, before moving on to the next page of the course.

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## Supporting awareness and action

Here are some ideas that you might consider implementing in your own context to raise awareness of domestic abuse and engage with these issues in ministry practice.

### **In Governance**

- Appoint a Parish Safeguarding Officer.
- Develop a good working relationship with your Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor.
- Discuss Domestic Abuse and possible responses at PCC or chapter.
- The PCC or Chapter could agree a Domestic Abuse statement.
- Adopt good safeguarding procedures and ensure training is up to date.

### **In Partnerships**

- Make sure your church knows how to contact their local Domestic Abuse specialist service provider.
- Place contact information or leaflets in public places in your building.

### **In Learning and Discipleship**

- Include teaching that relates to these issues as part of your children/youth ministry programme.
- Engage critically and openly with questions of power and equality and the Christian gospel in small group adult settings.
- Ensure that the leadership team/members have completed this training in raising awareness of domestic abuse.
- Commit to financial giving or volunteering at specialist domestic abuse services.
- Make use of public prayer and teaching to acknowledge and engage with these issues.



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## *Direct intervention - helping an individual talk about domestic abuse*

If you ask someone whether they are suffering from abuse, they are more likely to admit to it than if you wait for them to say something. People are also much more likely to confide in a friend or someone close to them, than they are to the police or professional services.

Always have the conversation face-to-face. Make sure you are in a safe space, won't be interrupted or overheard, and have enough time to have the conversation.

Approach the subject with obvious kindness and concern. Let them know you are there to help and support them.

Start by asking how things are in their relationship, or mention things you have noticed in their behaviour or that of the abuser. Eg. we haven't seen much of you recently, is everything ok? I've noticed you seem a bit down, has anyone upset you?

These simple questions and your concern can be enough to give them the confidence to begin to disclose what they are experiencing at home.

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## *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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## ***Direct Intervention - helping someone leave an abusive relationship***

Escaping or leaving a domestic abusive relationship can be incredibly dangerous and professional help is almost certainly required. For example, women are at the greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation. This is because a violent partner may feel like they have lost control and may resort to more extreme measures to regain that control. The fear that women feel is very real – there is a huge rise in the likelihood of violence after separation. 41% (37 of 91) of women killed by a male partner/former partner in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2018 had separated or taken steps to separate from them. Eleven of these 37 women were killed within the first month of separation and 24 were killed within the first year (Femicide Census, 2020).

People who have escaped from abusive relationships often say how helpful it was to get practical support from people they know. It is important not to judge, or to remove/withdraw support, even if the victim appears to reject the support, and is extremely protective of the perpetrator. We need to recognise that this is a survival strategy.

### **!!DO NOT ACT ALONE!!**

Here are some ways you might help:

- Storing an emergency bag for them, containing items such as their passport, birth certificate, medication, spare keys, clothes, toys for the children
- Being with them when they call helplines or support services
- Going with them to appointments

We must remember that:

- leaving an abusive relationship raises the level of risk of reprisal to both the victim and the person helping.
- It can take many attempts to leave; and some never leave at all. People may also sometimes go back to abusers.

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## Why do we find it difficult to act?

When we do become aware of these forms of abuse, we also need to know how to act and have a clear sense of our own limitations.

The largest barrier that prevents people from acting on concerns is fear. Fear of ridicule, making false accusations, 'crying wolf' or 'making a fuss'. We may also have concerns that we may make things worse for the vulnerable individuals concerned. If there are issues of race or culture present, we may also have a fear of political incorrectness, or perhaps our own misuse of power or position in the community.

Sometimes we can simply convince ourselves to wait for more information, or consider reporting any concerns to be someone else's job.

Responding well is not an easy thing to do - there will be many reasons why people respond inadequately. Abuse thrives in secrecy. Often, we do not want to face the reality of abuse, because to do so is painful and difficult.

Safeguarding often involves dealing with uncertainty. We rarely know everything that is going on; there is often a grey area, or another explanation for something that might be worrying. When we are uncertain, and when we feel that the group to which we belong is threatened, we may find it easier to 'explain away' a concern. Facing the reality of what might be happening - abuse - is too difficult, so we 'avert our gaze' from what we ought to say, and 'look the other way'.

We are all vulnerable in these ways. Emotional blocks, the tendency to 'obliterate suspicion from our minds', and the need to protect the groups to which we belong, can cause the very best of us to respond poorly to concerns about abuse. The only way to avoid these errors is to be aware of them, which is why we have spent some time looking at them here.

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Final assessment

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END

Thanks for participating, etc.