

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Introduction | Domestic abuse is more prevalent in our culture now than in previous generations. Abuse now includes mental, emotional and spiritual abuse, in addition to physical and sexual abuse. We realize that there are cases of domestic abuse in the church body; the church is not immune to domestic violence. When a situation of domestic abuse arises at Grace, the Elder Team desires to address it and shepherd well those involved. This paper describes when and how that shepherding process will happen.

Three Keys to Understanding Domestic Abuse | First, not all domestic abuse cases are equal. Henderson states that “if we have seen one abuse case, we have seen one abuse case.” If you have seen one, you have *not* seen them all. The abuser could be the man only, the woman only, or both together. Henderson gives us examples of these different abuse experiences:

Henderson has sat with couples where the man was the abuser. In some of these cases, the husband worked himself into violent fits without provocation. In his mind there was provocation, but a coherent, sensible, and honest look at the facts revealed little cause for any anger at all—the meal wasn’t hot enough, there were toys on the floor, there was too much noise, there was a broken dish, etc.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

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“A godless pattern of abusive behavior of a person involving physical, psychological and/or emotional means to exert and obtain power and control over another person for the achievement of selfish ends.”

Henderson has also counseled couples where the woman was the abuser. In some of these cases, the wife was like a volcano ready to erupt without warning if her husband had the wrong tone in his voice, a gift was *too* cheap, he forgot to pick up a few groceries, etc. Pressures with the children and with life as a whole seemed to add heat until she boiled over into threats of leaving the family, suicide, or displaying violent outbursts at her husband—clawing his face, kicking his midsection, pulling his hair, and trying to choke him.

Other times, both the man and the woman were abusers. These couples seemed to be the perfect storm of jockeying, competing, button pushing, manipulating, demeaning, accusing, and cruel behavior that escalated into a tragic and eventual outburst of physical aggression and violence.

The second key to understanding domestic abuse is to distinguish between two types of marital sinfulness: normative sinfulness and abusive sinfulness. Every marriage involves sinfulness. Every marriage will include moments of rudeness, selfishness, pride, false accusation, and conflict. We could call this normative sinfulness,

not because we condone these sins, but because they fall within the range of normal marriage issues when two sinners say, “I do.” These sins must be faced honestly and repented of soberly so that a rhythm of reconciliation can take place by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This rhythm and these patterns are to be expected; they are not abusive.

However, the dynamics change decidedly in situations of abusive sinfulness. When there is continual destructive abuse, you should never ask the abused what they did to bring the abuse on. This is akin to police on a 911 call coming into a crime scene where the wife has been shot and asking her what she did to bring on the bullets. Instead, the goal is to care for her and make sure she is safe and the shooter is arrested.

The third key to understanding domestic abuse, there are different spectrums and varieties of domestic abuse. The statistics tell a scary story. According to a national survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one in three (35.6%) women and one in four men (28.5%) have “experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.” That same survey found one in four women (24.3%) and one in seven men (13.8%) have been “hit with a fist or something hard, beaten, slammed against something” at some point in their lifetime” by an intimate partner. If these are only numbers for physical and sexual abuse, imagine how much bigger the problem is if you add in mental and emotional abuse. We must be careful not to say insensitive, misguided things like, “If it doesn’t leave a physical mark, then it is not abuse.”

Evaluation Tools | We have included a few charts below that help to outline the different types of abuse and the variations of severity within each abuse type. These are the same charts that are used in domestic abuse evaluation for counseling purposes.

Emotional Abuse use of words to assault, reorder and control emotions and affective state	Mild	Moderate	Severe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular, low-grade anger • Blaming another person for frustration and irritability • Constant criticism and questioning of how the other person feels • “Giving the cold shoulder” • Silent treatment when upset in order to arouse guilt or anxiety in another person • Subtle attempts at humiliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional explosiveness • Insults • Biting sarcasm • Threats of suicide or harm • Playing mind games • Trying to induce guilt and shame in order to manipulate • Taking advantage of emotional frailty and weakness • Attempts to instill fear in order to control the other person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats of physical harm • Vicious, demeaning words • Constant assaults upon character • Threats to harm children or friends • Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation • Attempts to instill terror for the abuser’s enjoyment • Really aggressive mocking and ridicule

<h2>Mental Abuse</h2> <p>.....</p> <p><i>use of words to assault, reorder and control thoughts and ideas</i></p>	<h3>Mild</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular and harsh criticism • Constant questioning and challenging thoughts and perspective • Giving the “cold shoulder” or silent treatment as punishment • Frequent “innocent” sarcasm about the ideas of another • Instinctive defensiveness • Habitual dishonesty to avoid accountability and blame others • Using scripture to correct and control another person for selfish ends 	<h3>Moderate</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent insults • Biting sarcasm • Threats of suicide or self harm • Playing mind games • False accusations as a means of control • Mocking • Screaming • Using tone to instill fear • Separating another person from friends • Isolating another person from contact with friends and family • Withholding help with any of the following: money, means of transportation, medical care, and other resources. 	<h3>Severe</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats of physical harm • Vicious or demeaning words • Constant assaults upon another person’s character • Threats to harm children, friends or family • Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation • Relentless attacks upon and controlling of another person’s view of reality • Perverse distortions of scripture to torment, mock, and/or subdue another person
<h2>Physical Abuse</h2> <p>.....</p> <p><i>use of posture, property and physical contact to assault, punish and control</i></p>	<h3>Mild</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bristled, threatening posture • Hostile facial expressions • Clenched fists • Slamming doors • Getting in the face of another person • Poking or flicking • Self-harm to punish and manipulate • Refusal to offer simple physical assistance • Use of law enforcement, legal counsel or churches to threaten the physical and financial livelihood of another person 	<h3>Moderate</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grabbing • Pushing • Shoving • Stalking • Slapping • Punching walls • Throwing objects around the house • Spitting • Forced drug use • Destroying the other person’s items of value • Physically isolating another person from friends and relatives • Refusal to offer vital physical assistance 	<h3>Severe</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punching • Biting • Stabbing • Shooting • Forced confinement • Torture • Hitting with objects • Physical injury to another person’s loved ones • Active involvement of law enforcement or churches to threaten or severely harm the physical and financial wellbeing of another person
<h2>Sexual Abuse</h2> <p>.....</p> <p><i>use of sexual thoughts, privileges and acts to assault, demean, manipulate and control</i></p>	<h3>Mild</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwanted sexual touch of genitals, breasts or buttocks • Pressuring for sexual acts that seem demeaning to another person • Criticizing sexual performance • Comparing to another’s sexual performance • Viewing pornography with partner before, during or after sexual intercourse • Refusing sex to punish or manipulate another person • Sexual teasing with no intent to fulfill aroused desires but rather to cause frustration 	<h3>Moderate</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coerced sex using threats or incentives, i.e. to avoid a beating or violent outburst • Forcing unwanted behaviors during sex, i.e. sodomy • Forcing unwanted locations, i.e. a public restroom • Verbal or physical punishment if another person doesn’t comply to sexual pressuring or advances 	<h3>Severe</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful injury to genitals, breasts or buttocks • Forced participation in the making of pornography, prostitution • Forced sexual involvement of additional people • Forced sexual intercourse after physical assault • Demanding that other people watch, even children

Spiritual Abuse | In addition to those listed above, spiritual abuse is doing any of these things in the name of Jesus and using the Bible to defend them. Abusive leadership uses physical, psychological, emotional (and spiritual) means to be lord over others. In contrast, servant leadership uses physical, psychological, and emotional (and spiritual) means to *serve* others.

We must be careful to not judge by appearances. It can be tempting to hear an accusation of abuse about someone and say things like, “Surely he could not be an abuser. He always seems so kind and likeable,” or “He teaches the Bible so well,” or “He is so willing to help people in need.” Abusers are not walking around “looking like an abuser” any more than Satan’s servants are going to carry pitchforks or have 666 tattooed on their foreheads. Abusers can be charming around other people—that is part of the deception. Don’t judge by appearances and discount what an abuse victim says with flippant incredulity. Think about how much the victim is risking by saying anything at all. Take it seriously. Tell the person that you believe them, that God hates abuse, and that you are committed to helping them.

What Should You Do? | How should you report abuse to the Elders if you or someone you know is being abused? What can you expect the Elders to do to shepherd the situation for the glory of God, the safety of everyone involved, and the redemption of the relationships that have been damaged by abuse? Please see the Domestic Abuse Response Process on the following page.

The Domestic Abuse Response Process

The purpose of this Domestic Abuse Response Process is to ensure that God is glorified by seeing that the victim and the abuser receive immediate Gospel-centered care to stop the abuse.

When a counselee reports abuse to a counselor...

1. *Assure the counselee* that this will be taken seriously and will be thoroughly investigated.
2. Establish a *timeline* of abuse using a Domestic Abuse Worksheet.
3. *Evaluate* the severity, trajectory and progression of the abuse using a Domestic Abuse Worksheet
4. *Ask*, “What would make you feel safe? What would you like to see happen here?”
5. *Report* the findings to one of the Biblical Counseling Elders (Jason Blackley or Dave Kirk) and wait for further instructions.

When an Elder is contacted by a counselor about a domestic abuse situation...

1. Once an Elder is contacted by counselor, he should *consult* with another Elder to process next steps.
2. Determine if this is a *mandatory reporting issue*, whether or not children are involved and being abused. If it is, the counselor is required to make two reports: an oral report within 24 hours and a written report within 48 hours of submitting the oral report. The Elder will assist the counselor in following the mandatory reporting process.
3. Work with the counselor and victim to *develop a safety plan* if needed. This may include temporary housing, financial considerations, medical care, legal plan etc.
 - a. Note: This safety plan should include a legal plan moving forward that would include opportunity for joint counseling even when a no contact order is in place as agreed upon and as it is deemed safe to proceed.
4. The Elders involved *make a plan to seek out the abuser* in order to counsel and shepherd them. If the abuser is in a community group, the Elder is to let the Community Group Leader know and an advocate should be assigned to the abuser. If they are not in a community group, then an advocate is assigned to the abuser and a growth plan is put in place for the abuser.
5. The Elders involved work with the individuals, advocates and counselor to ensure the plan of restoration is being followed. The goal is restoration and missional living.

When there is no repentance and things are taking an unbiblical direction...

1. The Elders involved *consult* with the team dedicated to the individuals in the case for prayer, evaluation and wisdom moving forward in confrontation.
2. A *formal meeting* is set with the individual where it is acknowledged that a church discipline process ^{Matthew 18} is now in place. In case the individual will not meet, a *formal letter* is sent with action steps and deadlines in place to be followed to the point where repentance is seen.
3. If there is still no repentance, then a *public statement* is made to *particular members* of Grace Community Church who are in direct contact with the situation and individual to let them know church discipline is happening and to ask for their help.
4. If there is still no response, then a *public statement* is made to the *membership* of the congregation.

Bibliography:

John Henderson, a counselor with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), has helped many churches to establish a definition of domestic abuse and to shepherd situations of domestic abuse well. This policy comes from his research. We thank him for his contribution to the body of Christ in this way. John Henderson was quoted as the basis for Jason Meyer's message.

Pastors Seldom Preach about Domestic Violence." *www.lifewayresearch.com*. n.p., 27 June 2014. Web. Meyer, Jason. "Fooled by False Leadership." Sunday Service. Bethlehem Baptism Church, Minneapolis, MN.