

# Kitsap County Domestic Violence Task Force Faith Community Workgroup Presentation Outline

## Goals of Speakers to Kitsap County Religious Groups or Faith Communities:

- Break the silence which has surrounded the issues of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, and teen dating violence
- Convey basic information about these issues
- Place issues in a religious/faith context
- Connect people to county and state resources
- Convey a sense of the KCDVTF and its mission (coordinated community response)

## The Response We Want from Religious Groups or Faith Communities:

- Safety for abused, battered women and children (and men)
- Accountability for abusive partner/person
- Restoration of individuals and, if possible, relationships – or – mourning the loss of the relationships

## **I. Introduction**

- Welcome: introduce self, KCDVTF/mission, reason for talking with group
- Discuss difficulty of subject material: (example) *“Domestic violence is a difficult subject to talk about because it makes people uneasy and uncomfortable (commend them for being here). We would just as soon talk about almost anything else. We may be afraid to talk about domestic violence for fear of raising an issue that our church/religious group/faith community doesn’t want to hear. In addition, we may fear that if we acknowledge domestic violence is effecting people in our church/organization, we’ll get involved in situations beyond our capabilities. However, as a person of faith, I believe that the act of talking about domestic violence is necessary to break the silence that has traditionally surrounded this issue in our faith communities. I believe that the act of walking with the families in our own faith communities who are affected by domestic violence is an act of compassion and justice, protecting the vulnerable among us and giving them hope. Both acts (speaking and walking) help to establish a climate of safety for those hurt by abuse, while supporting abusers to change their behavior.”*

- Opening prayer or litany: (example)

*God, our creator, redeemer, sustainer,  
God whose spirit is among us;  
We come to you to find peace –  
For ourselves, for our congregation, for our community  
For our weary, aching, fragmented world.  
Bless us, we pray, with your presence.*

## II. What is Domestic Violence?

- Present this working definition, explaining that we all may have a different definition of domestic violence based on what we've heard or seen on TV, on our own personal experience with family violence, or what we've read in the newspaper, books, etc.
- Working Definition: Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behavior and assaults that restricts the activity and independence of an intimate partner, adolescent, or child in the family. Domestic violence consists of verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Over time, without appropriate intervention, the abusive behavior can escalate in both frequency and severity.
- Talk about spiritual abuse if the audience seems receptive to this topic. *Spiritual abuse is the misuse of real and perceived spiritual authority and/or power, using that position for self-satisfaction or to get his own way regardless of the other person's wishes. Examples: a) spouse/partner demands unquestioning or blind obedience and submission at all times, b) spouse/partner denies, minimizes or ridicules your spiritual beliefs, c) spouse/partner refuses to allow you access to worship communities or faith-based groups.*
- (If there is time) Ask for input from the group, put responses on overhead or whiteboard, and then present DV definition above.
- (If there is time) Refer to handout "Definitions of Domestic Violence" (legal and behavioral) and have someone in the audience reach each one aloud. Ask audience to identify what is the difference between the two definitions. Note that a person will be held accountable by law enforcement and the court system for *only domestic violence that has escalated to a physical or sexual assault, the threat or fear of such assaults, and stalking.*
- (If there is time) "Walk" the audience through the hand-out "Abuse Continuum"

## III. What are the Dynamics of Domestic Violence?

- Refer to the overheads or hand-outs of the "Equality Wheel" and "Power and Control Wheel".
- Refer to the overhead and/or hand-out of the Equality Wheel. Explain it. This is an example explanation: *This wheel represents aspects of a healthy relationship. We as people of faith or people of good conscience understand that this is the type of relationship our faith traditions and teachings call us to have and nurture with our intimate partner. Equality is at the center or hub of the wheel because it is the guiding value and motive of people in a healthy relationship. In place of aspects of controlling behavior, there are varieties of ways of expressing honesty, mutuality, and respect. Needs are expressed fully by both partners – in fact, probably more fully than in an abusive relationship. There is no assumption that people in a relationship*

*based on equality will agree all the time; however, the whole relationship is surrounded by a commitment to nonviolence (physical, sexual, and emotional) when dealing with difficult issues.*

- Explain the “Power and Control Wheel”. This is an example explanation: *The same people who designed the “Equality Wheel” have also created a “Power and Control Wheel” (created by Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota). Power and control are at the center or hub of the wheel because these are the underlying motive for the various kinds of abusive behaviors or tactics that are used by an abuser to restrict the activity or independence of another individual. The most typical types of controlling behaviors and tactics are described in the eight segments of the circle (read aloud the eight spokes). An abusive person may use only some of these behaviors or tactics to control another individual – those behaviors or tactics used do typically comprise a pattern. Physical and sexual violence, or the threat of either, are shown on the outer rim. That assaultive behavior helps the abuser to establish and then periodically maintain the control which is continually being reinforced by the other behaviors. (Note that most of these behaviors/tactics shown in the eight segments of the circle are not necessarily punishable by law – only physical or sexual assaults are punishable by law.)*
- (If there is time) Refer to the overhead or hand-out of the “Cycle of Violence”.
- Explain the “Cycle of Violence”: (example) *Often, these controlling, coercive techniques are part of a larger pattern, identified by Dr. Lenore Walker as the “Cycle of Violence”. Many abused women have reported a cyclical pattern as follows. First, a tension building phase in which she is “walking on eggshells”, trying a variety of strategies to appease the abuser and avoid or defer a violent incident. The tension-building phase, lasting several days, weeks or months, is characterized by verbal and emotional abuse directed by him toward her. Second, an acute phase in which the tension level reaches its peak, and the abuser inflicts serious harm. The duration of the violent outburst can vary from minutes to hours or more. Finally, a calm phase, in which there is a respite from the abuse and violence. The abuser exhibits kindness and contrite, loving behavior. He may promise to change and get help or try to convince her that she needs him. However, because of the context of manipulation, coercion, threats, and past history of abuse, it is a very unreliable respite phase. This cycle, if drawn as a diagram, might look something like the following figure – a spiral – because abuse almost always escalates if there is no intervention. With each escalating cycle, the abuse becomes more severe, and the respite period diminishes or disappears altogether.*

#### **IV. How Widespread is the Problem of Domestic Violence?**

- Domestic violence affects persons of all ages, educational backgrounds, income levels, religions, sexual orientations, and cultures.

- The majority of victims (95%) are women, but men can be victims of domestic violence, too. Simply being female is the single greatest factor that increases one's risk of being abused or battered. Aside from this, there is no clear method or list of characteristics that will determine whether someone will be victimized by an abusive, violent person.
- Although we recognize that both abusers and battered persons may be either male or female, for clarity of this presentation, we will refer to abused, battered persons as "she" and abusers or perpetrators as "he".
- *Kitsap County*: 700 convictions in 1999 for assault, malicious mischief, harassment, or violation of no-contact orders. This statistics only represents convictions, not arrests. (Marcy Kittleston, KC Probation, provided this data and will be checking on whether there is a statistic for DV arrests.)
- Offer statistics on violence between intimate partners, child abuse, and/or teen dating violence (see groups below) – this will be dependent upon the issue you have been asked to address by the hosting group. .
- When concluding this section, be sure to note: ***given this data, statistically, every church, synagogue, temple, mosque, or faith-based community in the United States probably has members who are living with domestic violence.***

Statistics on violence between intimate partners: domestic violence occurs in marriages, resulting in approximately 1.6 million wives being assaulted by their husbands per year. In the United States, according to the FBI, a woman is beaten by an intimate partner every 15 seconds. Injuries suffered due to domestic violence are the leading reason why women go to the emergency room – more than auto accidents, muggings, rapes combined. (Stark, E. and Fliterart, A. "Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of Battered Women," Health and Medicine. Summer/Fall (1982) 29-32) We also know those assaults not only cause injury, but can be deadly. 30% of women murdered in the US are murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends. (Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, August 1995)

Statistics on child abuse: Children are also negatively impacted by exposure to violence between parents – behaviorally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. Child witnesses of domestic violence show more aggressive and antisocial behavior as well as fearful and inhibited behaviors. Over 3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year. (Carlson, B.E. 1984. The Battered Women's Syndrome) Not only are the children at risk of exposure, but they are often abused as well if domestic violence is occurring in the home. Research has indicted that, of the men who batter their intimate partner, 70% of those men also batter their children. (Bowker, Arbetell, and Mcferon. 1989) These children face dual threats to their safety and well-being – the threat of witnessing traumatic events and the threat of physical violence.

Statistics on teen dating violence: In addition, we now know that teens are experiencing violence in their own dating relationships. Dating violence affects an estimated one of 8 high school students and one in 5 college students. Estimates from national studies of teen dating violence indicate that 28% of teen relationships involve violence. More than half (54%) of women who report being raped at some time in their lives say they were raped before the age of 18, and most of them knew their assailant. Abuse in teen relationships comes in many forms –verbally, emotionally, physically, sexually – and, in some cases, it is fatal. The abuse suffered by teenage victims is not unlike the abuse suffered by adult victims of domestic violence.

## V. What are the Religious Aspects of the Problem?

- Introduce the video “Broken Vows”: (example) *“Broken Vows” is a two-part video program. Part I addresses the situations of women who were abused by their partners. Part II suggests ways that faith communities can respond to women and children affected by domestic violence and work together with local agencies. So, in this particular session today, we’ll see Part I and hear women’s experiences with domestic violence. The people in this video are real and their stories are real.*
- If you have time, show Part I in its entirety; otherwise, select the women’s stories which will appeal most to your particular audience: Janet (evangelical Christian); Jae (Jewish); Betty (African-American, Christian, wife of a minister); Delia (Hispanic/Latino, Christian, Catholic).
- Follow viewing of video with discussion questions (see Broken Vows study guide). For example, if Janet and Delia’s stories were shown, follow-on with questions: #1, #3, #6, #7, #9, #11, #12, and #13.
- Summarize key religious aspects of the problem:
  1. People living in or with the crisis of domestic violence are also experiencing a spiritual crisis and often look to their ministers, priests, or religious leader for guidance and assistance. In fact, research indicates that clergy – in comparison with police, psychologists, lawyers, and marriage counselors – are the institutional resource most frequently contacted by abused women. People also turn to their fellow congregational members for support and assistance. Lack of training and awareness may limit a religious leader’s or layperson’s ability to respond effectively. Whereas, compassionate response from clergy or laypersons can contribute to the healing process of domestic violence victims/survivors. Their spirituality and religious tradition can be a resource to abused persons. *Clergy and faith community members need to be ready to hear and believe the abused person.*

2. As Marie Fortune says in the video, “None of us helpers should ever put a battered woman in the position of having to choose between her safety and the support of her religious community. She needs both the safety and support of her church or synagogue, and it’s up to us to provide that.”
3. Discuss *perceived abandonment by God* and/or *actual abandonment by faith community or its clergy*. Key point: Abused women and children often feel abandoned by God and/or their faith community. However, God will not fail the vulnerable AND there are people within the Christian community that will “walk with” victim(s)/survivor(s) as they seek to be liberated from the abuse and violence they are experiencing at home.
4. Discuss *suffering*. Key point: suffering from abuse (involuntary suffering) is not redemptive, it is not in accord with God’s intentions for victim(s)/survivors, and one need not accept undeserved blaming or fault-finding.
5. Discuss *marriage covenant*. Key point: relationship covenants are strengthened by mutuality, respect, and free choice; they are destroyed by violence and abuse. Domestic violence breaks the marriage covenant between husband and wife; not the victim’s attempts to gain respite from the abuse, not the intervention, not the separation, and not the divorce. The latter are simply public acknowledgements that the covenant/trust between partners has been broken by the violence perpetuated by one intimate partner on another partner.
6. Discuss *repentance*. Key point: remorse by the perpetrator is not the same as repentance. The latter requires a tangible change in behavior over time. It requires a commitment to nonviolence. In reality, perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence too frequently deny responsibility, blaming their victims. Rarely do they seek help. *Faith communities need to be ready to “walk” this long journey of an abuser who does agree to travel the road from remorse to repentance – to support the abuser in terms of accountability and to affirm the difficulty of this journey.*
7. Discuss *separation* or *divorce*: Key point: if the abuser is not repentant, a separation may be necessary for victim/survivor’s safety and sanity AND if an abuser is not repentant and does not change behavior, that separation or divorce then becomes the public acknowledgement of a broken and, possibly, destroyed marriage covenant.
8. Discuss *forgiveness and reconciliation*. Key point: reaching these “states” of forgiveness and a reconciled relationship is a process dependent on securing safety for the victim(s)/survivor(s) AND dependent upon a survivor’s experiencing justice AND dependent upon an abuser being accountable for abusive/violence behavior, being repentant, and making tangible changes in behavior that last over time. “Forgive and forget” is a phrase that domestic violence victims/survivors often hear. However, it is difficult for

victims/survivors to forgive or forget the abuse they have endured. It is preferable that victims/survivors never forget about the abusive experience – it will protect them in the future from further abuse. However, forgiveness of the abuser can happen when the victim(s) has experienced some justice, e.g. the abuser has been held accountable for his behavior and has made restitution to the victim(s). Once justice has been achieved, then the victim(s) can perhaps “let go” of the experience’s power over them. For each victim, reaching that point of forgiveness is possible, but each person gets there in their own way and in their own time.

9. Discuss *what to expect when seeking support* from an informed faith community and its clergy as well as from a community domestic violence program or shelter
  
10. Discuss *institutional oppression*. Key point: religious institution’s decisions and actions can actually support individual batterers’ ability to use abusive tactics of power and control. For example, churches and synagogues, like society as a whole, had for many years ignored the reality of domestic violence around them. As a result, women may feel pressure to not bring shame to their faith community by revealing the abuse in their marriage. If children are involved, they may also feel fear about revealing the abuse their family’s home – fear for self and fear for their abused parent’s safety. So, in the pews of every church or synagogue each week sit both perpetrators and their victims; some may be worshipping with the very person who abuses them. In addition, misinterpretations of scripture, doctrine, teachings or traditions have been used to justify the abuse of women and children. Too often, women may feel compelled to stay in abusive relationships by scripture mandating them to “submit to their husbands”, “turn the other cheek”, or “maintain the peace” in the home. The mis-interpretation of scripture or traditions can contribute substantially to victim-blaming, self-blame, suffering, undeserved feelings of guilt or shame. Finally, some batterers use rigid sex/gender role stereotypes of husband and wife to define their spouse’s role in a marriage and use religious doctrine to justify or rationalize their domination of their wives or girlfriends.

## **VI. (If there is time) Why Do Batterers Assault Their Partners?**

- Given the alarming statistics and these women’s stories, the question should be “why do so many batterers assault their partners?”; however, many people instead ask, “why do so many battered women stay?”. The reality is that many battered women attempt to gain respite from the abuse or try to leave the relationship, but leaving does not guarantee safety. In fact, the violence often escalates after the battered woman decides to leave her partner – statistic: *The Washington state governor’s office reported that domestic violence was cited in 47 murders in 1998 in Washington state (one out of five) and, since 1990, 247 Washington state women have been killed by a current or former partner.* FEAR is the primary reason most battered women stay or

go back to abusive relationships. Be prepared to discuss that domestic violence shelters are the best resource to which you can refer women and children who are being abused because the shelters make sense in terms of safety – the time when a woman attempts to leave an abusive partner is the time when she is most at risk of being seriously injured or killed.

- An abuser will often isolate his victim and reduce her ability to leave through controlling family resources. He typically intimidates or threatens retaliation of violence toward her or family members. Due to financial, emotional, family, religious and societal pressures, a battered woman often lack the monetary resources and support systems necessary to change their situations and find respite from the violence. As a result, she feels powerless to leave and feels she has no options other than to stay with her abuser.
- Despite the risks and feelings of powerlessness, many battered women still attempt to see respite from the abuse or leave the relationship only to discover there are few resources available or they lack the funds to provide for themselves and their children with everyday necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter.

## **VII. How Do Faith Communities Respond Appropriately to Domestic Violence?**

- Due to the characteristics of domestic violence and its impact on families, it is imperative that faith communities increase their awareness of this issue, intervene when domestic violence is suspected, meet the basic needs of battered women and their children, and work toward prevention. Ask the religious community to strive for achieving these three goals: 1) safety for abused persons, 2) accountability for an abusive partner or person, 3) restoration of individuals' well-being and, if possible, relationships – or – mourning the loss of the relationships. (outline these points on an overhead, whiteboard, etc.).
- Know county resources and coordinate your efforts to with these local agencies (point out KCDVTF brochure which lists resources and highlight key county resources, e.g. YWCA A.L.I.V.E. or DV Perpetrator Treatment Programs). Domestic violence is everyone's business and everyone's responsibility.
- Note that faith communities have a special role beyond that of local domestic violence programs and agencies. We have a responsibility to help stop violence in families by making it clear that abusive behavior is not condoned by our communities. It is important to base our response on faith, establishing a climate of safety for those who are hurt by abuse, while supporting abusers to change their controlling or violent behavior. (Make available hand-out: "How Can Faith Communities Respond Appropriately to Domestic Violence")

- Review or make available hand-outs: “Responding to Domestic Violence: Guidelines for Pastors” (do’s and don’t’s with a batterer woman and an abusive partner)
- (If there is time) Introduce the video “Broken Vows”, Part II: (example) *Part II of “Broken Vows” suggests ways that faith communities can respond positively and meaningfully to women and children affected by domestic violence and can work together with local agencies help families broken by domestic violence.*
- Follow viewing of video with discussion questions (see Broken Vows study guide): #3, #4, #5, #7, #8, and #10

## **VIII. Closing**

- Thank you’s
- Closing litany or prayer (see “A Litany For Healing” or “Prayers for Healing and Justice”)