

A Statement
from the
General Assembly
of the
Presbyterian Church of Australia
in
New South Wales
July 2015



DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic and Family violence is sinful

Domestic and Family violence can be defined as actions which involve violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by a partner, carer or family member to control, dominate or instil fear, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial or other types of abuse.

God is opposed to abuse and violence in marriage and in the family. He particularly warns husbands to be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect (Ephesians 5:28–30; 1 Peter 3:7). The model of love in the Bible is Jesus' suffering for others, the very opposite of abuse.

Any attempt to use the Bible's teaching as a pretext for abuse is a distortion of its message. The Bible's teaching that a wife should submit to her husband is not a basis for a husband to force submission or to seek to control his wife or to dominate her or cause her to fear. Acts of domestic violence and abuse are heinous sins.

Humans are prone to distort God's good ways into evil, and this can happen with the Bible's teaching on marriage. If this is happening in churches, ministers and elders should actively teach against it as well as doing all they can to protect victims.

Ministers, elders and church leaders involved in pastoral care should be alert for signs of domestic and family violence, and teaching in churches should address these issues.

Sessions should seek to identify to the congregation several people, including some women, whom members could approach for pastoral care and support if they are facing domestic and family violence.

How the church should respond to domestic and family violence

For Church leaders:

When a minister, elder or church leader is aware of domestic and family violence within a church family they should follow the guidelines in Section 11 & 12 of Breaking the Silence. The Conduct Protocol Unit is able to be contacted for advice and support.

When a minister, elder or church leader is aware of domestic and family violence in which no child is involved and the alleged offender is not an office bearer or leader in a Presbyterian Church then he or she should follow the general guidelines of these sections of BTS and particularly:

- ▶ seek to contact the victim as soon as possible, if he or she has not raised a concern, to clarify the situation;
- ▶ listen carefully to that person;
- ▶ ask what can be done to make them feel safe and take steps to make them safe;
- ▶ encourage the person to report their concerns to the police and support them in doing so;
- ▶ contact the police directly if someone is in danger or they have knowledge which would assist authorities to apprehend or convict a person of a serious offence, or the incident involves either physical or sexual assault;
- ▶ with the permission of the person inform elders and other appropriate leaders within the church so they are able to provide appropriate care.

If the offender is a member of the church then church discipline may be appropriate, recognising that church discipline aims for restoration and that restoration depends upon genuine repentance. Care should be taken

when an active Police investigation has commenced to ensure that any church discipline proceedings do not interfere with Police matters. The Conduct Protocol Unit can provide advice in these circumstances.

No victim of domestic and family violence should be pressured to reconcile with or restore a relationship with an offender.

For Church members:

If a member of a church is aware of domestic and family violence in a church family they should take similar steps if they are able. They may inform the minister or an elder of the church, or they may go directly to the police. Any member of the church who is concerned about a possible case of domestic and family violence is able to contact the Conduct Protocol Unit for advice and support.

A revised version of **Breaking the Silence** that includes Domestic & Family Violence will be provided to all pastoral charges in September/October 2015.

For more information contact

The Conduct Protocol Unit

Phone: (02) 96909324

In response to the report of the Committee on Gospel, Society and Culture, brought to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW in July 2015, the Assembly resolved to adopt this statement on "Domestic and Family Violence" and circulate it to all sessions (GANSW 2015 BB Min 69).

For more information about The Gospel, Society and Culture committee see www.gsandc.org.au .

For more information about The Conduct Protocol Unit of PCNSW, and Breaking the Silence, see www.breakingthesilence.org.au .

