

Bethel Baptist Church

Security Training 06/06/2021

When Domestic Abuse Hides in the Shadows

The light you shine on it makes a difference. Domestic abuse often doesn't stay confined to the home. It can reach your pews, your school, your study groups, and your volunteer projects.

More than a safety team issue

More than 70% of U.S. workplaces don't have a formal program or policy to address workplace violence.¹ And because nearly one-third of women killed in U.S. workplaces² were at the hands of a current or former partner, it's important that your safety and security team [trains to respond to a domestic violence situation](#).

Taking that first step is good. But your whole ministry could benefit from education, too. Domestic abuse and violence victims may confide in someone other than a pastor or ministry leader. Do your employees, volunteers, and attendees know how to respond?

The risk of doing nothing

Domestic violence is difficult to discuss, and your ministry may struggle to find its voice. But the risk to the safety, physical health, and emotional well-being of your people makes taking action important.

[The Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#) and the Gun Control Act are laws that protect victims' rights and make some actions by an abuser a misdemeanor or a felony. Most states have laws that broaden federal laws and outline who is required to report domestic violence. [WomensLaw.org offers state-specific overviews of domestic violence laws](#). While this is a good place to start, a local attorney can advise your ministry on the most up-to-date laws.

Learn your responsibilities

1. **Who:** Know your state laws for who's considered a mandatory reporter. Your state may require some roles in your ministry to report incidents to local authorities. Look for nuances in how your state distinguishes who is a mandatory reporter, such as a licensed vs. unlicensed counselor or an employee vs. a volunteer. Some states allow for persons in nonoccupational roles to report.
2. **What:** Learn what types of information must be reported to authorities in your state. Some states list specific injuries.
3. **Risks:** Know the penalties for failing to follow federal or state law. Penalties can range from monetary fines to jail time. Some states do not require that the reporter disclose to the victim that a report has been made. [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) offers information to help organizations create a plan.
4. **Liability:** Learn where you are vulnerable. Your ministry could be exposed to liability issues if a mandatory reporter within your organization fails to follow the domestic violence reporting laws in your state.

Education is the key

Physical, emotional, or verbal domestic abuse can occur 24/7, 365 days a year. Do your employees and volunteers know how to react if they learn of, witness, or suspect abuse?

- Consider getting legal assistance to help create your response plan.
- Consider your own safety. Call the police if a victim of domestic violence or you are in immediate danger.
- Equip staff, including volunteers, with numbers for local and national abuse hotlines.
- Look for community groups offering support resources. Domestic violence victims seeking help with abuse face many barriers, like shame, lack of money, social pressure to keep the family together, legal advocacy needs, and other cultural taboos.³
- Train pastors and lay leaders to recognize domestic abuse. Many national and local organizations involved in domestic violence programs offer informational workshops.
- Document what you are told. Keep notes in a secure place.

Open discussion and an easily accessible high-level response plan can raise awareness to your whole ministry. Finally, discuss the best methods for communicating your organization's initiative—such as general information, hotlines, and resources—and how to keep it in the forefront of people's minds.

If you or someone you know needs help:

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

TTY: 1-800-878-3224

Live Chat: www.thehotline.org

The service is always free and available 24/7.

Related Resources

- [The Deacon's Bench Online - Hidden Dangers](#)
- Brotherhood Mutual: [Q&A: What should ministry personnel know about mandatory reporting requirements?](#)
- [RAINN](#): Educational materials, survivor help, and consulting & training

1 *National Domestic Violence Hotline*, accessed 12 March 2021. <https://www.thehotline.org/stakeholders/domestic-violence-statistics>.

2 *Statistics*, *National Domestic Violence Hotline*.

3 "What is Domestic Violence? Knowing the facts." *National Resource Center on Domestic Violence*, accessed 11 March 2021. <https://nrcdv.org/resources-media>.