

Local Resources

DV SUPPORT AND SHELTER SERVICES

Valley Human Services @BHN
Ware: 413-967-6241 or cell 413-579-2924
Advocacy, support groups, offender groups

Safe Passage
Northampton: 888-345-5282 (24/7)
Shelter, 24 hour help line, support services

Womanshelter/Companeras
Holyoke: 877-536-1628 or 967-3435 (24/7)
Shelter, 24 hour help line, support services

YWCA
Springfield: 800-796-8711 (24/7)
Worcester: 508-755-9030 (24/7)
Shelter, 24 hour help line, support services

New Hope Attleboro: 800-323-4673 (24/7)
Shelter, 24 hour help line, support services

Safe Link Hotline: 877-785-2020 (24/7)
Hotline, and shelter availability state-wide

SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT SERVICES

Center for Women and Community
Amherst: 888-337-0800 (24/7)

YWCA Springfield: 800-796-8711 (24/7)

Pathways for Change:
Worcester: 800-870-5905 (24/7)

HELP ON LINE

National Coalition Against DV: www.ncadv.org

Jane Doe Inc. (MA Coalition) www.janedoe.org

What Catholics believe about safety and domestic abuse in marriage



All Saints Catholic Church *Ware, MA*

This brochure is adapted from a paper written by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2015. For full paper see www.usccb.org. Support for the development of this brochure was provided by the Ware River Valley Domestic Violence Task Force www.waredvtaskforce.org

Excerpts from the Catholic's Bishop's Statement on Domestic Violence:

As pastors of the Catholic Church in the United States, we state as clearly and strongly as we can that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is *never* justified. Violence in any form, physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal is sinful. Often, it is a crime as well.

When violence occurs within a sacramental marriage, the abused spouse may question, "How do these violent acts relate to my promise to take my spouse for better or for worse?" The person being assaulted needs to know that acting to end the abuse does not violate the marriage promises.

Domestic violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses to control an intimate partner through fear and intimidation. Some examples of domestic abuse include battering, name-calling and insults, threats to kill or harm one's partner or children, destruction of property, marital rape, and forced abortion. Some who suffer from domestic violence are also victims of stalking, which includes following a person, making harassing phone calls, and vandalizing property.

We focus here on violence against women, since 85% of the victims of reported cases of non-lethal domestic violence are women.

Why Men Batter

Domestic violence is learned behavior. Men who batter learn to abuse through observation, experience, and reinforcement. They believe that they have a right to use violence. The batterer may be a "good provider" and a respected member of his church and community. While there is no one type, men who abuse share some common characteristics. They tend to be extremely jealous, possessive, and easily angered. A man may fly into a rage because his spouse called her mother too often or because she didn't take the car in for servicing. Many try to isolate their partners by limiting their contact with family and friends.

Typically, abusive men deny that the abuse is happening, or they minimize it. They often blame their abusive behavior on someone or something other than themselves. They tell their partner, "You made me do this."

Alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence, but they do not cause it. An abusive man who drinks or uses drugs has two distinct problems: substance abuse and violence. Both must be treated.

Why Women Stay

Women stay with men who abuse them primarily out of fear. Some fear that they will lose their children. Many believe that they cannot support themselves, much less their children.

When the first violent act occurs, the woman is likely to be incredulous. She believes her abuser when he apologizes and promises that it will not happen again. When it does—repeatedly—many women believe that if they just act differently they can stop the abuse. They may be ashamed to admit that the man they love is terrorizing them. Some cannot admit or realize that they are battered women. Others have endured trauma and suffer from battered woman syndrome.

The Church Responds to Domestic Violence

Scripture and Church Teachings:

Abused women often say, "I can't leave this relationship. The Bible says it would be wrong." Abusive men often say, "The Bible says my wife should be submissive to me." They distort the biblical text to support their right to batter.

As bishops, we condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form. A correct reading of Scripture leads people to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love.

Beginning with Genesis, Scripture teaches that women and men are created in God's image. Jesus himself always respected the human dignity of women. Pope John Paul II reminds us that "Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women."¹¹

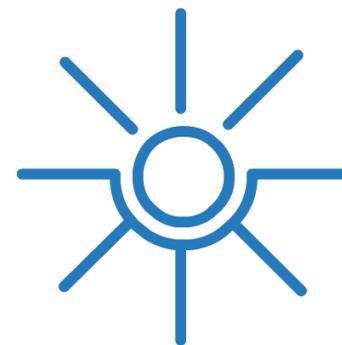
Men who abuse often use Ephesians 5:22, taken out of context, to justify their behavior, but the passage (v. 21-33) refers to the mutual submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. Husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church.

Men who batter also cite Scripture to insist that their victims forgive them (see, for example, Mt 6:9-15). A victim then feels guilty if she cannot do so. Forgiveness, however, does not mean forgetting the abuse or pretending that it did not happen. Neither is possible. Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse. Rather, forgiveness means that the victim decides to let go of the experience and move on with insight and conviction not to tolerate abuse of any kind again.

An abused woman may see her suffering as just punishment for a past deed for which she feels guilty. She may try to explain suffering by saying that it is "God's will" or "part of God's plan for my life" or "God's way of teaching me a lesson."

This image of a harsh, cruel God runs contrary to the biblical image of a kind, merciful, and loving God. Jesus went out of his way to help suffering women. Think of the woman with the hemorrhage (Mk 5:25-34) or the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11). God promises to be present to us in our suffering, even when it is unjust.

Finally, we emphasize that no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. Some abused women believe that church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Church. Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. We encourage abused persons who have divorced to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment. An annulment, which determines that the marriage bond is not valid, can frequently open the door to healing.



For Abused Women

- Begin to believe that you are not alone and that help is available for you.
- Talk in confidence to someone you trust: a relative, friend, parish priest, deacon, religious sister or brother, or lay minister.
- If you choose to stay in the situation, at least for now, set up a plan to ensure your safety. This includes hiding a car key, personal documents, and some money in a safe place and locating somewhere to go in an emergency.
- Find out about resources in your area that offer help to battered women and their children. The phone book lists numbers to call in your local area. Your diocesan Catholic Charities office or family life office can help.

For Men Who Abuse

- Admit that the abuse is your problem, not your partner's, and have the manly courage to seek help. Begin to believe that you can change your behavior if you choose to do so.
- Be willing to ask for help. Talk to someone you trust who can help you evaluate the situation.
- Keep in mind that the Church is available to help you. Part of the mission Jesus entrusted to us is to offer healing. Contact your parish.
- Find alternative ways to act when you become frustrated or angry. Talk to other men who have overcome abusive behavior. Find out what they did and how they did it.