

HEALING THE HEALERS

10 Things the Faith Community Can Do

A PROJECT FROM

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Lilly Endowment Inc.
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10 Things a Spiritual Community can do to Address Violence in Families

Faith communities can provide a safe haven for victim/survivors in need. In addition, they can exhort society to offer compassion and comfort to those experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or child abuse. The actions identified below for faith communities can create a unified response to abuse and violence in families.

Action

Become a Safe Place

Make your church, temple, sangha, mosque, or synagogue a safe place where survivors of violence can come for help.

- » Establish a Safe Sanctuary Policy and adopt procedures to protect vulnerable members.
- » Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area.
- » Publicize the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TDD), local shelter information, and the National Child Abuse Hotline: 800-422-4453.
- » Adopt the Spiritual Community Declaration Against Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Educate the Congregation

Provide ways for members of the congregation to learn about domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse.

- » Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, in youth education, and in marriage preparation classes.
- » Create an environment of awareness.
- » Sponsor educational events in your congregation on violence in families.
- » Include healthy relationships education in your youth programs.

Prepare to Be a Resource

Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to violence in families and receive training from professionals in the field. Learn about the organizations that offer assistance to victims/survivors in your community.

- » Study sacred text that is problematic for victims and survivors, as well as that which can be a resource to the victimized and vulnerable.
- » Examine the Equality Wheel and the Power & Control Wheel.
- » Participate in Pastoral Care Training related to assisting victims/survivors of domestic violence.
- » Attend trainings and webinars sponsored by organizations that specialize in addressing domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and elder abuse.
- » Know where to refer someone for help– get to know your community resources.

Speak Out

Speak out about domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. As a spiritual leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.

- » Use the annual awareness months as an opportunity to speak to your community.
 - April – Child Abuse Awareness
 - April – Sexual Assault Awareness
 - June – Elder Abuse Awareness
 - October – Domestic Violence Awareness
- » Study liturgy offerings, sermons, meditations, and prayers written to promote the healing and safety of victims and survivors.
- » Offer an annual remembrance/healing service for all victims and survivors of violence and abuse.
- » Normalize the conversation about abuse and center abuse prevention in your conversations.

Respond

The way you respond to a victim of abuse can offer help and healing, and can save their life. A disclosure is an act of deep trust, and must be received with respect and strict confidentiality. **Safety for the victim and their family is always the #1 priority.**

- » If you suspect an adult is being abused, speak to them privately. If someone discloses their abuse to you, do not discuss it with others.
 - Let survivors know of the community resources available to assist them.
 - Work with DV advocates to help plan for safety.
 - Maintain strict confidentiality; it saves lives.
 - Do not attempt couples counseling.
 - If the suspected abuse involves a child, report to law enforcement immediately. Offer pastoral care and support. Address the spiritual questions that may be disempowering the victim/survivor.

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Partner with Existing Resources

Create and sustain partnerships with survivor-focused organizations in your community.

- » Invite advocacy organizations to attend celebrations and public events. Knowing the faith community is a partner may lead a survivor to seek help.
- » Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects.
- » Adopt a shelter that your church, temple, sangha, mosque, or synagogue supports with material and/or in-kind contributions.
- » Provide support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.

Lead by Example

Use the power of your spiritual community to support movements against violence and the oppression of the vulnerable.

- » Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.
- » Model non-violent behaviors and healthy relationships in your home, congregation, and community.
- » Publicly support awareness efforts and public policy that benefit victims/survivors.

Offer Space

Your worship or practice space can provide a calm, safe place for victims and their supporters.

- » Offer safe, welcoming, and confidential meeting space for educational seminars or weekly support groups for abuse survivors and advocates.
- » Allow advocates to meet with survivors in a meeting room if they aren't able to visit the organization's office.
- » If you run programs that support the vulnerable—food kitchens, homeless shelters, addiction recovery, or other services—include resources and information related to family violence for these folks. Food insecurity, poverty, homelessness, and addiction are rooted in trauma, especially domestic and sexual violence and child abuse.

Support Professional Training

Clergy, lay leaders, hospital chaplains, and seminary students need specialized training about sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse.

- » Encourage pastoral care training related to domestic and sexual violence for clergy and chaplains, to prepare to respond to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of victims/survivors.
- » Participate in Community Ally Training with your local domestic violence center.
- » Read and share "[A Commentary on Religion and Domestic Violence.](#)"

Address Policy Issues

Encourage efforts by religious institutions to develop and implement safe sanctuary policies.

Advocate for public policies that support the needs of victims/survivors. Support anti-violence and anti oppression initiatives.

- » If your spiritual community is part of a national or international organization, check the website for policy information & resources. Often national organizations are able to create resources and offer assistance that local congregations can use and adapt.
- » Review and update your community safety policies and procedures on an annual basis.
- » Make sure your policies address the potential of abuse by clergy or lay leaders.
- » Advocate for laws and public policies and services that provide resources for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse.



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