

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Educate your congregation, friends, family by sharing this resource.

About General Board of Church and Society



The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is the social justice agency of The United Methodist Church. GBCS has headquarters on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City.

The message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ binds us together as a people and sends us forth to bring healing in the midst of strife, justice in the midst of brokenness, and love in the midst of hate.

Our purpose is to relate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the church and society to bring human life, resources and world relationships into conformity with the will of God.

Educate. Empower. Engage.

Part of the Christian faith is to live out social holiness. For more information on Domestic Violence or other social justice concerns, visit www.umc-gbcs.org or contact:

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Sources & Credits

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "When I Call For Help" presentation. Excerpted from "When Home is Where the Hurt Is," Christopher News Notes, no. 326.

² Centers of Disease Control and Prevention

³ Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief

⁴ In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary General, 2006

⁵ UNIFEM

⁶ World Bank

* Images courtesy of Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

* Power Wheel courtesy of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project www.duluth-model.org

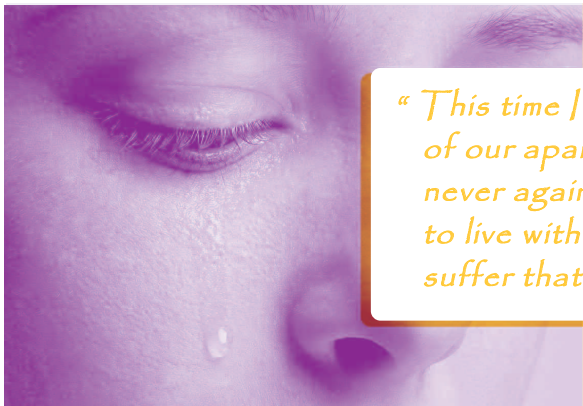
Domestic Violence

A Community Affair



*Do no harm. Do good.
Stay in love with God.
John Wesley*





“ This time I walked down the hallway of our apartment building vowing never again to be silent, never again to live with that kind of violence and suffer that kind of pain.”

In the beginning, I was young; he was handsome. He told me I was beautiful, and smart and made me feel that I was worthy of love. And so we were married, walking together joyfully down the church aisle — our union blessed by God.

Then came the angry words, the verbal tearing apart. Now I felt ugly, unintelligent and unworthy of all love — from man or God.

Next came the beatings: unrelenting violence, unceasing pain. I kept thinking I should leave, but this is my husband. We promised ourselves to each other forever.

He told me I deserved it, Maybe I did. If I could only be better; he would stop. I felt so alone, that God did not hear me as I lay in bed each night and cried out silently.

Finally came the release and the realization that it wasn't me. It was him. I am worthy of love. One spring morning my heart was filled with hope and only the fear of starting over on my own. This time I walked down the hallway of our apartment building vowing never again to be silent, never again to live with that kind of violence and suffer that kind of pain.¹

In the United States

One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.²

An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate-partner each year.^{ibid}

85% of domestic violence victims are women.³

Globally

At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime — with the abuser usually someone known to her.⁴

For women aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability.⁵

In a 1994 study based on World Bank data about ten selected risk factors facing women in this age group, rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria.⁶

Domestic Abuse is about Power

Essentially, domestic abuse comprises repeated acts of violence by a family member against another member or members of the family.

Committed by an individual, domestic abuse is rooted in distorted, damaging social conditions that define power relations while ignoring human relations.

Domestic abuse affects everyone, obliterating all boundaries of age, sex, geography, culture and economic status.

Domestic abuse is not a private family matter; it is a community affair whose commission and healing is the responsibility of everyone.

Domestic Abuse Can be Seen and Unseen

Physical battering is the most overt form of domestic abuse, often visible in burns, bruises and other injuries.

Psychological and emotional abuse, including harassment, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, name calling, threats and insults are not as obvious to identify. They are equally, if not more damaging because of their invisibility.

And sexual abuse, especially of children, may leave the deepest scars.

Even when they don't involve physical violence, all forms of abuse damage the soul and integrity of the victim.

Abuse occurs in communities of every racial composition and every economic status, in rural areas and cities, in families adhering to every religion and to no religion, and happens to both women and men.





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The Power Wheel™

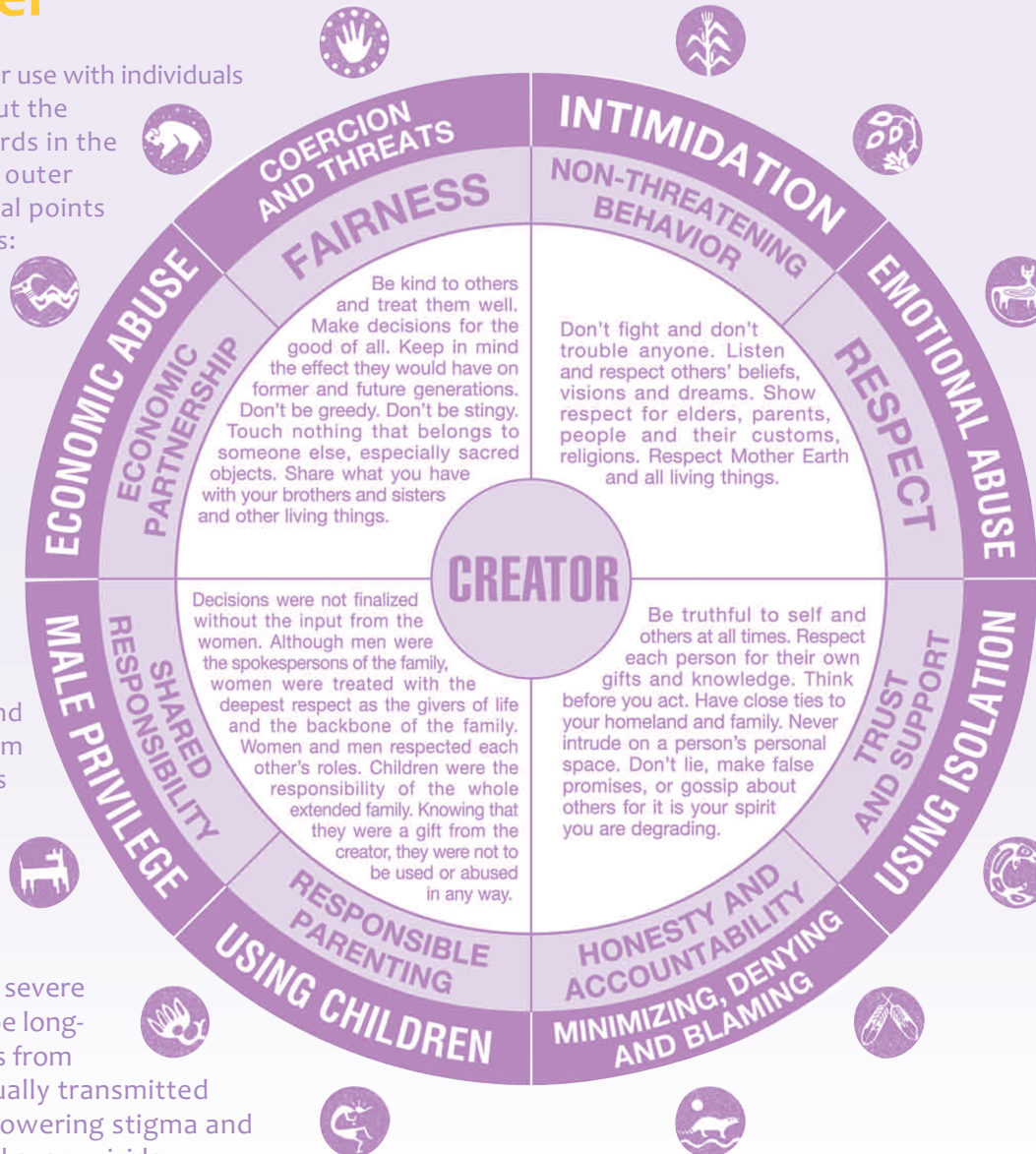
The power wheel is a teaching tool for use with individuals or small groups wanting to learn about the dynamics related to abuse. The words in the inner (positive behaviors) ring and outer (unhealthy behaviors) ring can be focal points for discussions on such questions as:

- What societal/cultural messages about men and women contribute to unhealthy behaviors related to abuse?
- How can the church be a positive force in the prevention of abuse?
- How has the church perpetuated or been silent about domestic violence?

“Creator” refers to God, or a “higher power,” which calls each of us to live our lives with respect for ourselves and others. Physical abuse can result from these unhealthy behaviors sometimes leading to the death of a victim.

Family Violence Harms Everyone

Domestic violence survivors endure severe damage to body and soul that can be long-term, even life-long. Damage ranges from infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases, to demoralizing, disempowering stigma and isolation, fear, substance abuse, and even suicide.



It's Not My Problem

We tell ourselves:
 “What goes on in the family is a private matter. It's none of my business.” “The victim must have brought it on herself by the way she dresses or walks.”
 “Why doesn't she just leave?”

Domestic abuse harms not only those who are directly abused, but those who witness and know about it. Domestic abuse extracts a high material and spiritual cost from society.

I Must Have Deserved It

The silence also includes abuse survivors who often fail to report the crime against them. They fear for their lives, have no place to go, and believe they will lose or be unable to feed their children. Survivors internalize society's stigma, turning it into shame and self accusation, and most regrettably, acceptance: “Beating is a sign of love.” “Sex is my duty.”

Domestic violence is not about self-sacrifice, respect or love. It is about power, control and domination. It is not about building up a relationship, but rather tearing it down.

Abuse rarely stops with one person in the family. Abuse of a mother is often accompanied by abuse of her children, compounded by her inability to protect them.

Healthy families are the bedrock of a healthy society. Their spiritual or actual dismantling through abuse creates an environment in which the unacceptable is acceptable, even normal.

God's expectation of human relationships is clear throughout the Bible. Genesis states that marriage is characterized by mutual submission, self-sacrifice, respect and love.

The church does not always follow its own teachings. Silence and misinterpretation of the Bible are obstacles to healthy, loving relationships. The church defends abuse by distorting passages about mutual submission, respect and irrevocability of marriage, it betrays the true meaning of the Bible's messages. When the church denies or ignores voices of resistance in stories of survivors, it denies the voice of Christ.

What the Church Says

The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of all persons and their right to safety, nurture and care. It names domestic violence and sexual abuse as sins and pledges to work for their

eradication. The church commits itself to listen to the stories of battered spouses, rape victims, abused children, adult survivors of child sexual abuse, and all others who are violated and victimized.

The church further commits itself to provide leadership in responding with justice and compassion to the presence of domestic violence and sexual abuse among its membership and within the community at large.

2008 Book of Resolutions, "Violence Against Women and Children"

The United Methodist Social Principles

We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms — verbal, psychological, physical, sexual — is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the church to provide a safe environment, counsel and support for the victim. While we deplore the action of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God's redeeming love.

¶ 161.H (2008 Book of Discipline)

Ways You Can Take Action

The Church is a Voice for Action

The church must speak out against domestic abuse and help survivors. When it does, the church is a clear voice for action.

Steps to take can include:

- Post and widely distribute materials including contacts for domestic violence hotlines and other local and national resources.
- Incorporate the topic of family abuse in sermons, making clear the church's position. Emphasize the scope and harm not only to individuals and families, but society. Use language of responsibility and healing rather than blame and punishment. Encourage family members, neighbors and friends who suspect or know of domestic abuse to come forward.
- Provide education and training for clergy and laity on abuse prevention, detection and intervention.
- Provide counseling for survivors, their families and people at risk.
- In the United States, advocate for the ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Develop and implement clear policies to deal with sexual abuse by pastors and others who provide church leadership.
- Create and nurture men's and women's groups to raise awareness of the stresses in their own families and issues that are risk factors for abuse. Raise awareness about male abuse by women and same sex abuse by both sexes.
- Organize forums, inviting outside speakers, including survivors, abusers and representatives of local and national organizations to facilitate discussions and encourage congregants to come forth about their own risk status.
- Encourage congregant volunteers to organize and run support groups and forums.