

## DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

### DEALING WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE AT COVENANT:

*The Session has approved the following principles and practices to be put in place through the Shepherding Ministry at Covenant*

- 1.** Abuse of any kind does violence to the Imago Dei, or Image of God, in every person.
- 2.** Abuse cannot be tolerated. In the event of this sin or any sin, we must always hold out the hope of the Gospel to all involved. While many abusers may not have genuine repentance, it is our biblical mandate to extend the gospel hope of repentance and forgiveness to all.
- 3.** Creation of a culture within CCN and the Shepherding Ministry specifically, where it is safe to raise the subject of abuse.
- 4.** Development of easily remembered guidelines for shepherds if they suspect abuse and how to respond when they come to have specific knowledge of abuse.
- 5.** Development of resources for the pastoral staff and all shepherds to use as needed.

*To implement these principles, Marilyn Mitchell, a trained counselor, has been appointed the 'Point Person' within the Shepherding Ministry to lead this effort working with Charlene Richardson, Director of the Covenant Counseling Center.*

## DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)

Domestic Abuse refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have or have had an intimate relationship in domestic settings. It can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It is most commonly seen in a dating or family relationship. The abuse can be mental, physical, economic, verbal, spiritual or sexual in nature. It includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound someone. Domestic Abuse can happen to anyone, of any race, religion, or gender as well as all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. It may also impact a child or other relative or any other household person. The incidents of abuse usually escalate in frequency and severity and can result in physical injury or death.

**THE GOAL OF THE SHEPHERD** is to be able to follow easily remembered guidelines if you suspect abuse or have specific knowledge of abuse to know how to respond. If a member of your shepherding group shares a personal matter with you that could indicate some type of abuse, assure them you care very much about what they are experiencing. **YOU ARE NOT TRAINED TO RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM.** However, as a lay shepherd or small group leader, it is part of our compassionate calling to at least walk the first steps with them toward professional assistance. We are called by God to confront oppression, provide protection and care for the vulnerable.

### **Isaiah 61:1**

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.*

### **Isaiah 1:17**

*Seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.*

### **Psalms 82:3-4**

*Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

This is the heart of shepherding!

This is why we do what we do in the Mighty Name of Jesus Christ.

With that knowledge and confidence, let's continue:

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)**

### **WHAT NOT TO DO:**

Do not panic if you feel inadequate. Help is only a phone call away!

The greatest gift you can give in this moment is your listening and empathy skills grounded in your love for Christ.

Do not judge this person, it will only add to their pain!

Do not make any decisions for the person or assume you know what is right for them.

Do not pressure them to act.

Do not ask for proof of violence.

Do not try to rescue the person or fix the problem.

Do not break confidentiality.

# DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)

## WHAT TO DO:

FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES IN YOUR CONVERSATION

**L****ISTEN AND BELIEVE** Survivors need to be heard and believed when they disclose abuse. Listen carefully to the victim's story. Listen to their hurts and concerns. Talk little and ask few questions. Abuse silences victims and renders them powerless. Listening restores dignity to the victim. Their experience may not be ordered. They may be frightened, weary and overwhelmed. You are giving them a safe place to tell a difficult story.

**You might say:** "I believe you. I am glad you told me. What happened to you is not okay."

**O****FFER EMPATHY AND COMPASSION** Respond with empathy, acknowledging the survivor's pain. Affirm them with words of encouragement. Keep your voice quiet and low. Stay present with them in the moment. Look them in the eye. Acknowledge their courage to share this painful reality. An abuse victim often experiences threats, assaults, personal shame, fear, anguish and a belief that it is their fault. If they feel uncared for or unsafe in the moment of disclosure, they might not have the courage to seek help. Look for ways to affirm them. Grieve with them and speak truth about what they describe.

**You might say:**

- "I can't imagine how much courage it took for you to share that with me. Thank you."
- "No one should have to experience what you have been through."
- Sometimes, you don't need to say anything. Just look them in the eyes and support them with your presence. They will KNOW if you believe them, and that is powerful

**V****ALIDATE AND SUPPORT** Let them know what they are doing is courageous and right. Assure them that the abuse is not their fault. They have honored you by coming to you. You are seen as safe, as a shepherd is meant to be. Let them know you want them to be safe and want to help them get the care they need. Check in with how they are feeling.

**You might say:**

- "That must have felt incredibly scary/sad/painful/etc."
- "How are you feeling right now?"
- "You are brave to come forward."
- "You are not to blame for this painful experience."

**E****MPOWER** Empower the victim. When an individual discloses abuse to you, address their SAFETY first.

**You might say:**

- "Do you feel safe at the moment?"
- "What do you need to feel safe right now?"
- "I can give you contact information of a support service you can talk to if you feel ready."
- "You are not alone. I care about you. I am here to listen and help you any way I can."
- "Can we pause and pray together?"

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)**

### **UNHELPFUL OR HURTFUL RESPONSES:**

Be careful **NOT** to:

- Judge the victim, as this adds to their pain
- Ask for details or proof
- Make decisions for the victim
- Assume you know what is right for them to do
- Criticize their choices
- Try to rescue the victim or fix the problem
- Pressure them to act
- Criticize the perpetrator rather than only the abusive behavior

**DO NOT BREAK CONFIDENTIALITY, EXCEPT** when you believe the person's safety is at immediate risk.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)

The following needs to happen before the person leaves your meeting/this conversation ends:

### 1. MAKE A SAFETY PLAN

If you are speaking by phone, ask, *"Are you in a safe place right now?"*

If the answer is **"No,"** say, *"Please hang up and dial 911 or go to a safe place and call me from there. Please call me back."*

If the answer is **"Yes,"** ask, *"Do you have a plan if you need to leave?"* Assure the victim there are people and resources in place to support and help make a plan for his/her safety.

A safety plan is a personalized and practical plan on how to remain safe in an abusive relationship while preparing to leave when the timing is right and it is safe to do so. A good plan will contain all the vital information needed to help the victim address safety both at home and at work. It can be hard to think clearly or make logical decisions during moments of crisis. It could take months or longer for a victim to actually leave an abusive relationship. If a person is unsure about using a safety plan, having one in place will give them confidence if needed.

Trained advocates are ready and willing to problem-solve with the victim. They will provide **CONFIDENTIAL** assistance in guiding the person in developing a personalized plan.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)

### **2. SHARE RESOURCES**

Listed below are several resources to support you if your sheep or small group member is seeking safety from domestic abuse.

#### **RESOURCES LIST:**

##### **THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE**

1-800-799-7233 or text 2252 (SAFE)

[www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week

##### **THE SHELTER FOR ABUSED WOMEN AND CHILDREN NAPLES FLORIDA AREA**

CRISIS LINE 239-775-1101

SHELTER CALL OR TEXT 239-775-3862

[www.naplesshelter.org](http://www.naplesshelter.org)

Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week

##### **COVENANT COUNSELING REFERRALS**

Charlene Richardson and Rebecca Torres

[www.covenantnaples.com/care](http://www.covenantnaples.com/care)

239-591-4354

##### **FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

1-800-962-2873

[www.myfamilies.com](http://www.myfamilies.com)

##### **PURE LIFE MINISTRIES**

A faith-based ministry dealing with sexual sin and addiction

888-PURELIFE or 859-824-4444

[purelifeministries.org](http://purelifeministries.org)

##### **COVENANT CHURCH SHEPHERDING ADVOCATES**

The church members listed here are acquainted with domestic abuse. Please feel free to call any of them if you have questions or concerns in your supporting role with an abuse victim.

Debra Griswold 407-902-9023

Marilyn Mitchel 586-850-7553

Mary Pendleton 314-616-7444

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)**

### **3. SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW**

The victim might feel supported if you offered to be present with them when they make a call for help.

You could support them in what they learn during the call.

Encourage them to create a safety plan with the help of one of the professionals listed above, if needed.

Remember that it is not your place to contact anyone for them. Confidentiality and trust are vital in this matter.

It is the victim's choice to receive assistance.

**REMEMBER THE PERSON MUST MOVE FORWARD AT THEIR OWN PACE...  
NOT YOURS.**

### **4. END WELL**

With each contact continue to listen well, show empathy and compassion, believe their story, validate and support them in the journey they are taking to be safe. Reassure the person that no matter what they choose as a next step you are there for them. Let them know you will be praying for them. Always ask permission to PRAY with them and share Scripture that will support and encourage them, then make a plan to reconnect either with a phone call or in person.

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)**

### **IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CONTACT WITH THE VICTIM:**

If you have received permission from the victim, contact your team leader so they are aware of the situation.

*Please provide the following information:*

- **Name of victim**
- **Best contact information**
- **General description of the situation:**
- **What the victim would like to happen next or what goal they need help with.**

Even if permission has not been granted, please reach out to your team leader and let them know, in the most general terms possible and without naming anyone, what is happening. It is important that situations of this nature are documented and that you also receive support as you work through the situation.

Thank you for your willingness to walk alongside this wounded person. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the story you have been told and your experience with the victim, please feel free to contact one of the Covenant Counseling Domestic Abuse Advocates listed on page 106. They will be happy to process your questions and feelings about the experience without names (if permission has not been given) to protect the victim's confidentiality. This ministry is about caring for our shepherds as well as our sheep.

May God bless you as you continue to minister to your flock, especially those who are vulnerable, in the Name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SHEPHERDING ACTION PLAN (Revised)**

### **A SIMPLE REMINDER:**

**WHAT TO DO** in ministering to victims of Domestic Violence

**Listen** carefully to the victim's story.

**Offer support**, empathy, compassion and affirmation.

**Validate** their experience and BELIEVE their story.

**Empower** the person with resources that promote safety and well-being.

## ENCOURAGING VERSES FOR ABUSE SURVIVORS

God's Word is full of comfort, healing, reassurance and direction for survivors of domestic abuse. Encourage this precious person with these and other promises from Scripture.

### GOD SEES AND KNOWS YOU

#### **Psalm 10:14 (NIV)**

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

#### **Psalm 10:17-18 (ESV)**

O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

#### **Psalm 147:3 (ESV)**

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

### GOD WILL MAKE A WAY FOR YOU

#### **Psalm 9:9 (ESV)**

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

#### **Psalm 77:19 (ESV)**

Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.

#### **Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)**

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

#### **Isaiah 40:29 (ESV)**

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

#### **Hebrews 10:39 (NIV)**

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

#### **Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

## ENCOURAGING VERSES FOR ABUSE SURVIVORS

### **Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV)**

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

## **GOD HAS A FUTURE FOR YOU**

### **Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)**

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare[a] and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

### **Jeremiah 17:7 (NIV)**

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

### **Romans 15:13 (NIV)**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Philippians 1:6**

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ