

# How to help someone who is being abused

## Do's and Don'ts for Clergy and Faith Leaders

(so you can be a help, and not a hindrance)

### Do

- **Listen non-judgmentally.** Let her know that you do not condemn her (the abuser already does that), and that you are there to help.
- **Tell her “I am concerned for your safety.”** Help her think through ways to stay safe.
- **Be supportive.** Believe what she tells you. False allegations about abuse are extremely rare. Support her decision—even if you disagree with it. She knows the realities of the situation much better than you do.
- **Let her know that the abuse is not her fault.** The abuser will either blame her or will make excuses to rationalize his behavior. Don't buy into it. There is NO excuse for abuse, regardless of the circumstances.
- **Refer her to community organizations** that have the necessary expertise and resources to help her.

*“The truth is the reality of the person’s experience of being exploited, victimized, and terrorized. That reality needs affirmation and validation from someone else—friend, counselor, police officer, pastor/priest/rabbi, the community...Justice-making is to hear and believe, and to do so in the context of some part of the wider community. Justice-making begins with truth-telling. A context must be prepared into which the truth is told by a victim. Her story has then broken the silence of her suffering: someone had heard and believed her experience.”*

--Rev. M. Fortune, 1987. “Justice –making in the aftermath of woman battering.”

In D. J. Sonkin (Ed.), *Domestic Violence on Trial: Psychological and Legal Dimensions of Family Violence.*

### Don't

- **Just pray with her and tell her to go back to the situation.** This is dangerous and foolish.
- **Blame her for making poor choices or insinuate that God is “testing” her.** Abuse is NOT God's way of purifying her through suffering; it is the choice of one person to oppress another.
- **Encourage her to believe that if he “just gets saved,” that the abuse will stop.** Saved or unsaved, and abuser is still an abuser. God CAN help him to stop being abusive, but it is not an overnight process; it takes a great deal of hard work.
- **Threaten, cajole or coerce her into taking action she is not yet ready for.** If she is not yet ready to leave, let her know that you will be there to support her anyway.
- **Offer unsolicited advice (“you should \_\_\_\_”).** Help her to think through her options instead.

*Offer support, not judgment.*