

What a Congregation Can Do To Prevent and Intervene in Domestic and Other Family Violence

Increase Awareness

- Acknowledge that all forms of abuse and family violence exist in the congregation (move from denial to being proactive).
- Educate congregational leaders about the “real life” problem of family violence and understanding the larger context of family violence in the culture.
- Promote social action and outreach around family well-being.
- Establish a vision of sanctuary or the congregation as a safe place for the vulnerable; provide for safe disclosure of abuse.
- Promote family strengths (with inclusive definition of “family”).
- Create a committee on family violence to provide on-going leadership and oversight for congregational response.
- Provide resource information to clergy and other religious leaders.
- Develop a mechanism for reaching out to vulnerable and stressed families.
- Post hotline numbers in restrooms, place domestic violence brochures from local programs where literature and resources are displayed.
- Put a link to your local domestic violence and child abuse programs on your website.

Prevent Harm

- Identify and use expertise within the congregation, e.g. therapists, social workers
- Bring in outside resources (professionals, services, information, etc.)

- Develop policies for prevention and intervention, including protocols for leaders.
- Develop policies that require education on family violence for all workers in your congregation.
- Screen all staff and volunteers.
- Require fingerprinting and background checks for all staff that work with children. Repeat annually.
- Supervise all staff and volunteers, including implementing internal disciplinary procedures when necessary.

Respond to Incidents of Abuse

- Train congregants to be available to respond to others.
- Know the limitations of leaders and the congregations. Establish procedures for situations when limits are reached in time, energy, resources, etc.
- Provide safety for disclosure of abuse.
- Develop a protocol for reporting child, dependent and elder abuse. Train all members that serve in a leadership on the protocol.
- Respond appropriately to allegations (following the CA reporting laws accurately)
- Understand differences between spiritual support (such as praying) and practical support (such as developing an escape plan). Encourage both.

*2002, Rev. Kibbie S. Ruth, Kyros Ministry
2005, Edited by CA DHS*