RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

Suggestions for setting up a domestic violence ministry/ program in your faith community:

1. **Put together working group** Once you have assembled the working group you will want to consider some of the following questions
   a. What is the experience of domestic violence/ family violence in your faith community/community now?
   b. What policies and practices are in place right now~ formally and/or informally.
   c. What happens when domestic violence is brought to the attention of your faith leader?
   d. What assistance will you provide to survivors and their children?
   e. How will you deal with abusers who are also part of the faith community?

2. **Look at denominational statements** (if applicable) **or policies**, if there are any, of your larger faith tradition
3. Locate **scripture, sacred texts** that can guide you as you move forward

4. Develop a **strategic plan**: What are willing and able to do; how, when etc.   There are four main areas to consider:

   • **Education -** It's important that key people, faith leader, Rabbis, pastors, ministers, Imams, counselors, other leaders in the faith community, e.g., those who take care children, work with the youth, men, women etc. understand the dynamics of domestic violence. Decide who will train and be trained. Training should be annual. New employees should get training.
   • **Awareness** - How will you raise awareness and let people know that your faith community considers intimate violence a critical issue that will not be swept under the rug? How will you send the message that this is not acceptable behavior with harmful consequences for the whole human person, families, and the whole community.
      o **Khutbahs, sermons, etc**. on domestic violence are important, perhaps during domestic violence month (but need not be confined to one month). There are sample sermons etc. available.

- o **Survivor testimonies**, (including adults who were exposed to intimate partner violence as children) or those by men who have transformed their lives are powerful ways to illuminate and also lessen the taboo nature of the issue.
- o Remember this is not just a women's issue. **It is a community issue** and if your faith community is going to take domestic violence seriously, the men of the community must partner with the women and work with other men to address it. We sometimes forget that many men who carry their own wounds, perhaps from seeing their father, or other men abuse their mother, do not want to participate in abusive behavior and may welcome the chance to be involved in some kind of response to domestic violence in their faith community. Men and women can work together, as well as have their times apart. Men's retreats, women's retreats, conferences etc. are excellent places to address family violence.
- o **Display information**: where can people go for help? Make sure there is information, phone numbers, lists of resources; support groups, agencies, hotlines, legal advocacy etc. Put information in the weekly bulletin, or on the website. You can share the city hot line number there and have a section that defines domestic violence etc. If you have a library
- o Make sure to include discussions about domestic violence in any premarital counseling and marriage seminars.

- • **Advocacy – Intervention**
  - o Who will be the contact person(s) who can respond quickly as needs arise? Organize a support team to whom the contact person(s) can turn for help.
  - o Consider purchasing a cell phone that can be shared among the support team members and used as a hotline number because it cannot be traced.
  - o If your faith community has a voice mail, set up a separate mailbox for crisis calls and have a member of the support team check it frequently
  - o or use to the your website to give information as mentioned above and have a link to an separate e mail address that the support team can check
  - o Have a list of resources available for survivors, faith leaders and key members of community should also have it handy. It should include agencies, counselors, support groups, batterers intervention programs, attorneys, shelters, information about courts etc.
  - o Since safety is a priority, the church should develop a safety plan. Consult with an advocate to help develop this.

- Develop a relationship with an advocate you can trust, and call on for support and advice.
- Meet with the domestic violence police officer in your local precinct.

- **Support** What kind of support will your community give to those struggling with domestic violence?
  - Practical needs; housing, food transportation clothing etc. for survivors and their children? Will you create a fund?
  - Shelter; Do members of the community have space to offer temporary shelter?
  - Court accompaniment: Would members of the support team be available to accompany the survivor to court?
  - Ongoing spiritual and emotional support: Would members of the support team check in with survivor regularly, pray with her, offer to spend time with children, listen compassionately. Accountability: Would someone to be a mentor/ sponsor/accountability partner to an abusive partner?
  - Support groups: support groups for survivors, groups for children who have been exposed to domestic violence and accountability groups for those who have abused.

Every faith community is different, has different needs, relationships to systems etc. This document is certainly not exhaustive and is simply meant to provide a kind of guide or blueprint for those who want to response to the domestic violence in their faith community.

These suggestions point to the some of the more outward and visible parts of a faith response to domestic violence. Of course, it is the inward and spiritual attitudes that are brought to the work that make all the difference.

If you have questions or would like to meet to discuss moving forward with a plan, we are happy to support you. Sally MacNichol smacnichol@connectnyc.org 212 683 0015 x 216

Research shows that seven out of ten people seek help with domestic violence issues from their place of worship first.