HELPING WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

I. WHAT IS SPOUSAL ABUSE?
A. DEFINITION of abuse:
   To use wrongly or improperly; misuse
   To hurt or injure by maltreatment
   Contemptuous, coarse, insulting words
   Angry reactions – Col 3:8; Eph 4:29-31
B. STATISTICS about abuse:
   1. Number of women battered every year in U.S. = 2 – 5.3 million.
      Most abuse is never reported.
   2. A woman is battered every nine seconds
   3. Thousands of women are killed each year by husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends
   4. Abuse is leading cause of injuries to women age 15 to 44 (Surgeon General)
   5. 90-95% of victims of domestic violence are women
   6. 1 in 3 women experience a physical assault during her adulthood by a partner
C. 2012 STATISTICS about the Abusers:
   1. 95 % of domestic violence perpetrators are male.
   2. Physically violent males are also likely to be sexually violent toward partner.
   3. Chronic alcohol abuse is strongly associated with intimate partner violence.
   4. Witnessing domestic violence as a child increases drastically the risk of becoming a perpetrator of violence as an adult (10 X greater).
   5. Up to 75% of abusers who attended mandated intervention or education groups did not complete the program.
D. MYTHS ABOUT ABUSE
   1. That abuse will soon get better without help
   2. That abusers are alcoholics, addicts, down and outs, or sick
   3. That abusers are always non-believers or baby Christians
   4. That the women is masochistic or she wouldn't stay
   5. If she leaves him, she'll be safe
   6. Pressing charges will make him stop hurting her
E. How does Abuse BEGIN?
   1. Few men are abusive in the first months of the marriage
   2. It usually begins with verbal abuse, progresses to threats of physical abuse and then to a progression of physical restraints, then to physical abuse
   3. Abuse is cyclical and predictable! The Cycle of Abuse:
      Apparent peace and intimacy – honeymoon stage
      Apathy, no change, pressure grows, tensions build
      Active abuse – verbal, emotional, physical
      Apologizing for abuse, explaining, demonstrating worldly sorrow – attempting to return to the honeymoon stage by special treatment
F. What are the SIGNS of Abuse?
   1. Cuts, bruises, broken bones, or other injury to family members
   2. Injuries are repeatedly explained away as the results of falls or accidents
   3. The abused woman becomes unusually quiet / withdrawn
   4. The abusive husband belittles or bosses his wife around in public
   5. The abused wife occasionally hints about conflicts in her home
   6. The husband often ignores or abuses the children in some way
   7. The family is often isolated from social involvement with everyone else
   8. The children seem frightened in the presence of the abusive parent
   9. Suicide or homicide threat from some member of the abused family
   10. The abused wife is extreme in her attempts to avoid upsetting him
   11. She frequently wears clothing that seems inappropriate, to cover injuries
   12. The abused wife has a view of being inferior to men
   13. He is jealous or critical of her friends and limits her involvement with them
   14. The abusive spouse may have a substance abuse problem
   15. The abusive spouse responds violently when angry, so others pacify and cater
   16. Abusers go to great lengths to appear in public like “the ideal family.”

II. SO WHY DOES SHE STAY????
   A. She loves her husband and hopes for change.
   B. She has a strong commitment to her marriage.
   C. She believes it is her fault. "I didn't obey in some area."
   D. She is financially dependent on the husband.
   E. She feels her husband needs her, and is dependent on her also.
   F. She fears that she (and the children) will be in danger if she tells or leaves.
   G. She is concerned about what others may think, or how they will react.
   H. She has learned not to think about the danger or abuse (“Denial”).

III. HOW TO HELP WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
   A. GUIDE HER Through “Eight Resources For A Wife’s Protection”
      (The Excellent Wife by Martha Peace, Focus Publishing)
      1. Communicate Biblically – Pro 12:6, 16:23
      2. Overcome Evil with Good – Rom 12:21, 1Pet 3:9
      3. Make a Biblical Appeal to the Abuser – Pro 16:21, Dan 1:8
      4. Give a Biblical Reproof to the Abuser – Lk 17:3; Pro 27:5; 1Cor 8:1
      5. Respond Biblically to Foolish Demands – Pro 26:4-5, 15:28
      6. Seek Godly Counsel – Pro 24:6, Ps 1, 19:7
      7. Initiate Church Discipline – Mt 18:15-17
B. Biblically Deal with the Issues that Will HELP TO HEAL
1. Confusion - Mt 18:3-6 –
   Understanding who committed the “wrong” and dealing with own sin
2. Guilt - 1Tim1:5; 1Jn 1:8-9
   Having a clear conscience; being forgiven by God
3. Fear – 2 Tim 1:7; 1Jn 4:18
   Overcoming fear of the abuser by choosing to love - Fear self-protects; love reaches out to others
4. Anger - Eph 4:26-27; 4:31; Rom 12:17-21; Mt 5:43-44
   Learning to deal with conflict in a Biblical way, using energies to solve problems; releasing hurts to God; Follow principles taught in this blog by Ed Welch, CCEF: https://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/how-disarm-angry-person
5. Trust - Pro 3:5-6; 1Cor 10:13; Ps 71:1
   Rebuilding trust that was broken through abuse; Learning to trust God even in the toughest situations
6. Forgiveness - Eph 4:32; Mt 18:21-35
   Learning that forgiveness is a command, choosing obedience over feelings
7. Love -1 Cor 13:4-7; Rom 12:9-21; 1Jn 3:18, 4:7-11
   Choosing to meet the needs of another regardless of what that one has done
8. God’s Love - Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-7
   God loves freely and unconditionally; we model His love
9. Her own body - 1Cor 6:19, 20
   Allowing abuse to continue is poor stewardship of her body –
   She cannot willfully remain in imminent danger
   Provide a “Safe House” if Needed

C. Assure her that her CHURCH Will Do All It Can to PROTECT and SUPPORT her
1. Spiritually – Help her make decisions, Bible study and accountability, prayer
2. Financially – Assist when necessary - rent, food, children’s needs
3. Physically – Help her with maintenance; take her or children to the doctor, etc.
4. Emotionally – Godly women to support her as she gains independence
5. Domestically – Help with her home, repairs, babysitting, guidance
6. Socially – Provide social support through godly women reaching out to her
IV. HELP PREVENT SPOUSAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH
   A. Have a preventative ministry to the families of your church where marriages are
   strengthened, Ephesians 4 communication and conflict resolution are practiced, and
   an atmosphere of love is encouraged and modeled.
   B. Offer thorough premarital counseling for every engaged couple. Check for verbal
   abuse, uncontrolled anger, or physical abuse.
   C. Have accountability of couples in the context of small groups or mentoring couples to
   help families of abuse.
   D. Offer Safe-House protection to families that are being abused until it is safe for them
   to return home. Then, under ecclesiastical and civil authority, remove the abuser from
   the home until he has demonstrated in counseling that he has made the necessary
   steps to protect his family from his continued abuse.

Helping Victims of Domestic Violence

What should I do if I’ve been abused by someone in my family?

1. Go to the Eldership of your church, and tell them about the abuse. The abuser needs
   to be held accountable for his behavior, especially if he professes to be a believer.
   Even if he is not a believer, he needs to be presented with the Gospel, and motivated
   to stop his abusive behavior as a new creation in Christ. All abusers need help and
   accountability!

2. If the abuse has turned physical, GET OUT, call the appropriate authorities and get
   to a safe place. If possible, the elder board could also attempt to get the husband to
   commit to going to a Christian facility where he can receive help for his abusive
   behaviors. Some churches and many communities have safe houses or shelters to
   protect women from an abusive spouse. Civil authorities have procedures in place to
   help those who are being abused, and mandated counseling for the abuser. Learn
   your options now. Make a safety plan and commit to following through with it.

3. Cry out to God about your situation. Seek out a Biblical counselor, and begin to deal
   with the abuse perpetrated against you. Don’t keep silent; that will only compound
   the problem. It is NOT loving to leave someone in their sin; you can best love your
   abuser by refusing to accept their abusive behavior. Don’t excuse or justify sinful
   behavior.
What Dynamics Characterize Abuse?

1. Recognize the signs. Abuse begins first with verbal/emotional barbs, insults, controlling behavior, over-reaction to small things, yelling, screaming, punishing, manipulating, etc. In this stage, it may be possible to confront your abuser about his escalating behavior according to Mt 18:15-17. Tell him what his attitudes/words/actions are doing to you, and try to call him to repentance. If he refuses, take the situation to the elder board of your church, or to a Biblical counselor. Get help early!

2. The abuser will most often blame the situation to be totally your fault. There may be communication and conflict resolution principles that will help you in relating to the abuser, but no matter what you may have done, how you also may have made mistakes, you are NOT to blame for the abuser’s behavior. God calls us to individually obey Him (Gen 3:12-13). Do not accept the blame for his sin. God calls abuse sin!

3. Signs that you or someone you love is being abused:
   - Repeated bruises, broken bones, other injuries
   - Becoming suddenly withdrawn or unusually quiet
   - Hints of conflict at home or in private
   - The spouse ignoring or belittling his wife and or kids
   - The wife or kids seem fearful in the husband's/father's presence
   - Extreme attempts to not upset the spouse/boyfriend/father
   - Drug or alcohol problems in the home
   - The wife/kids not allowed to participate in activities outside the home
   - The woman/kids hiding cuts and bruises by wearing inappropriate clothing, such as long sleeve shirts, turtlenecks, etc. in warm weather

If you are reading this to help a friend...

As a Christian, please don’t contribute to a bigger problem rather than recognizing and trying to help solve the real problem. Submission to a husband DOES NOT include staying around to be a punching bag for an abusive husband. The woman CANNOT be told, “If you just submitted better, he wouldn’t act like this toward you....” DO NOT give an abused woman that advice.
DO NOT EXCUSE the abuser’s behavior or put the blame back on the abused. His abuse is sin and needs to be dealt with, period. Your friend needs to be pointed to a safe place, and encouraged to get away from her abuser if the abuse is physical. Even if it’s not gotten to that level yet, the leaders in church need to be approached to confront him about his verbal abuse, manipulation and control of his family. GO WITH HER to her church leaders if she needs the ride or encouragement. He needs rebuke and accountability for his abusive words and actions!

Don’t choose to be ignorant about the fact that ABUSE DOES OCCUR AMONG CHRISTIANS. This type of ignorance compounds the problem and makes abused women in the church feel they cannot come forward about the abuse for fear they won’t be believed. Abuse kept under cover helps neither the abused nor the abuser – see Prov 28:13.

Help your friend have a PLAN OF ESCAPE in case she is in physical danger now or later on. Give her phone numbers to call, a physical location to go to, and if possible, help her to get some money put aside in case she needs to flee from danger. She may need to keep a small bag with a change of clothes for her and the kids hidden but ready to go, or left at a friend’s home ready for an emergency visit. If possible, be ready to help her if she calls.

Most importantly, PRAY FOR AND WITH YOUR FRIEND. Listen empathetically, and encourage her by reminding her of her true identity in Christ. Encourage her with the Truth and comfort of God’s Word. Her world has been turned upside down and she needs a stable anchor to hold on to when her world spins out of control because of the abuse happening in her home.

Abuse hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
www.thehotline.org