Communities and Justice

# Information for religious and community leaders responding to domestic and family violence

Are you a religious or community leader responding to domestic and family violence within your community?

We have developed guidelines to help you assist someone seeking help about domestic and family violence.

NSW GOVERNMENT

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## These guidelines provide information on the following:


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**To learn more about specific topics related to domestic and family violence, please visit these webpages:**

- About domestic and family violence

www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/about-domestic-and-family-violence/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.html

- Police, legal help and the law

www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/police--legal-help-and-the-law.html

- Mandatory reporting

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters/how-to

- How to stay safe

www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/how-to-stay-safe.html

Have feedback about this content?

Share your comments or concerns:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZJ8QK8L

# Responding to people who experience domestic and family violence

As a community or religious leader, you may be approached by someone experiencing domestic and family violence. This conversation guide is an example of how to safely respond to someone seeking help. Domestic and family violence is not always easy to recognize, and people may not directly tell you that they are experiencing domestic and family violence. To learn more about recognising domestic and family violence: www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/about-domestic-and-family-violence/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.html

Responding to domestic and family violence can be difficult. When in doubt, follow these steps:

1. Listen with an open mind
2. Validate their concerns
3. Offer support options and referrals

The conversation guide, on the following pages shows how to use these steps in a conversation with the person seeking help.

**If you are ever unsure about something, please call the NSW Domestic Violence Line on 1800 656 463 for confidential advice.**

## Before you continue, please remember:

If you witness a violent incident or you believe a person is in immediate danger you must contact the police on 000.

Something is considered immediate danger if:

- It's occurring now
- There's an immediate fear of it about to happen
- It's life threatening.

## If children are involved:

It is mandatory for religious leaders to report child abuse to the child protection helpline if they suspect, witness or are informed of child abuse. If you would like to learn more about reporting child abuse: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters/about

# Conversation guide

## 1. Listen with an open mind

**Them:** Do you have a few minutes to speak about something?

**You:** Yes of course. Are you alright?

**Them:** I'm not sure if I am alright actually. I have been having some issues with my partner.

**You:** I am sorry to hear that, do you feel comfortable telling me a bit more?

**Them:** It's really hard to talk about. They've been shouting at me every time I come home from work or when I'm back from visiting my mother. My mother had a fall recently and I need to visit her house more often than usual. My partner calls me all the time when I'm there. Recently they have been hiding the car keys from me so I can't leave the house, and yesterday they shoved me when I arrived home.

### Do

- Make sure you understand the situation thoroughly
- Take their concerns seriously
- Make sure that your conversation cannot be heard by other people.

### Avoid

- Making quick judgements
- Asking for proof of the violence
- Asking them to be patient with their abuser.

## 2. Validate their concerns

**You:** I'm glad you have shared this with me. Please know that you're not alone, and the way your partner is behaving is unacceptable.

**Them:** It's so scary to finally share this with someone. Please promise me you won't tell them about any of this. I am afraid of how they might react.

**You:** Of course, I will not share this with anyone, unless you or your children are in immediate danger. Then I am required to contact help.

### Do

- Keep their information private. If someone asks you to keep a secret, it might be because they're scared that the violence might get worse or that other people will judge them. However, if they are in immediate danger you are required to contact the police on 000, and if children are involved you must also report child abuse to the child protection helpline on 13 2111.

### Avoid

- Suggesting that they should leave their abusive situation. It's unsafe for victim-survivors to leave without the appropriate support and assistance. They are most at risk of severe violence and death when they try to leave or just after they leave the relationship.

## 3. Offer support options

**Them:** Thank you so much. I'm not sure what to do now.

**You:** To be honest, from what I've heard I'm concerned. I think that we should seek professional advice, but only if you feel comfortable. There is a service called the New South Wales Domestic Violence Line and they can help us figure out what to do. We can call them anytime.

**Them:** Oh, I am not sure about that yet, can I think about it?

**You:** Of course. If you decide you want advice from a professional, we can make the call together. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

**Them:** I think I am okay for now. It is nice to be listened to.

**You:** Do you feel safe to go home now?

**Them:** I do, but I'll let you know if I don't anymore.

**You:** You can speak to me anytime.

### Do

- Let them know they can come back if they decline help
- Ask what's the best and safest way of contacting them
- Assure them that help for domestic and family violence is free, as it is common for some people to worry about costs
- Consider that everyone's needs are different, and some approaches may not work for everybody
- Empower them to make decisions for themselves.

### Avoid

- Confronting the person using violence or try to intervene in a violent situation, as that may cause harm to you or to the person experiencing domestic and family violence
- Offering or providing counselling to the victim-survivor and the person using violence together. This is not appropriate for domestic and family violence situations and may increase danger to victim-survivors and yourself.

It is normal to experience distress when you hear about domestic and family violence. If you need support with your own wellbeing and want to talk to a professional, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

# Responding to people who use violence



## Someone may tell you that they use violence with their family or someone close to them.

Remember that you do not have to respond to them if you do not feel comfortable. If you do not want to engage with them, you can provide them the number to the **Men's referral service on 1300 766 491**.

### If you decide to respond, please consider the following:

- It is not always clear when someone is using violence. They may ask you for relationship advice or tell you about their marital conflict, so listen carefully to any warning signs of domestic and family violence
- Make sure there are others in the meeting, or that it is in a space that you can leave easily if you feel unsafe
- Show gratitude if they are taking accountability by seeking your advice, but make it clear that using violence is never acceptable.

### Avoid:

- Justifying or trivialising any abusive behaviour
- Referring them to couples counselling or anger management classes. This is inappropriate for people who use violence with their families
- Arguing with them or shaming them, even if you feel angry with them. It may increase their use of violence and discourage them from seeking help
- Mentioning anything a victim-survivor has reported to you. This may threaten their safety.

This conversation guide shows how to approach a conversation with someone who uses violence.

**It's recommended that you:**

- Ask open-ended questions
- Encourage empathy
- Encourage taking accountability

## Conversation guide

| | |
|---|---|
| They might say: | "They made me so angry, I just snapped!" |
| **To respond with an open-ended question, you can ask:** | **"What happens when you snap?"** |
| Their response: | "I raise my voice. Sometimes I throw or break things." |
| **To encourage empathy, you can say:** | **"How do you think your other family members were feeling?"** |
| Their response: | "I'm not sure they might have been scared, but my partner always makes me lose it." |
| **To encourage accountability, you can say:** | **"Thank you for telling me. I am concerned, and I believe the way you were behaving is wrong. If you're ready, I can help you access support."** |

# Helpful contacts: crisis support helplines

## In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).

**If someone seeking your advice needs urgent help, these services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Child Protection helpline**<br>Support for children at risk of harm | 132 111 |
| **Link2Home**<br>Support for housing or shelter. | 1800 152 152 |
| **1800 Respect**<br>National counselling support for victim survivors. | 1800 737 732 |
| **NSW Domestic Violence Line**<br>State counselling and referral support service for victim survivors.<br>*Please note that you can call the DV line for general advice, but the victim survivor must be present to get a referral.* | 1800 65 64 63 |
| **Men's Referral Service.**<br>Support for men who use violence. | 1300 766 491 |
| **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)**<br>Service for people who need to use an interpreter to access support, including for domestic and family violence services. | 131 450<br>www.tisnational.gov.au |

# Helpful contacts: other support services

**Most support services are available from Monday to Friday, and operate between 9am and 5pm, but some may vary.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **LawAccess**<br>General legal help. | 1300 888 529 |
| **Women's Legal Services NSW**<br>Legal support for women. | 02 8745 6999<br>www.wlsnsw.org.au/contact-us/ |
| **Legal Aid Domestic Violence Unit**<br>Legal support for women who experience domestic and family violence. | 1800 979 529 |
| **Victim Services Access Line**<br>Long-term counselling and support for victims of violent crimes. | 1800 633 063 |
| **Centrelink Social Work Services**<br>Financial assistance. *Ask to speak to a social worker.* | 136 150 |
| **Immigration Advice and Rights Centre**<br>Support for people on a visa. | 02 8234 0700 |
| **NSW Ageing and disability abuse helpline**<br>Support for elders or people with a disability experiencing abuse. | 1800 628 221 |

# Note taking

You are not required to record information from any disclosures you receive about domestic and family violence, but taking notes can be helpful when supporting someone. If you decide to record information, remember:

- Ask permission to do so from the person seeking advice
- It must be anonymous. Do not include things like names, ages, addresses, or other information that may reveal someone's identity
- Store this information safely and privately
- In some circumstances you will be required to share information with authorities like the police.

## Be objective

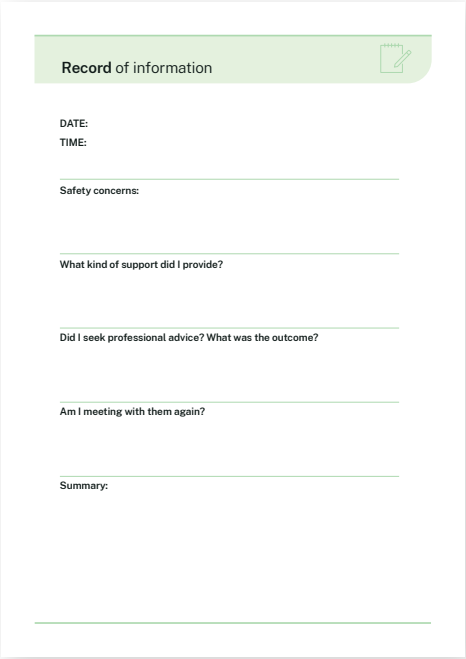
Only record the information you have been told. Make sure that you are not making assumptions or judgements on the situation, or the people involved.

**For example:**

**Do write:** 'She still lives with partner that uses violence, which may place children at risk of harm.'

**Do not write:** 'She is irresponsible and still lives with abusive husband. She clearly does not care about her children.'

## Note taking template




Scan the QR code on the back page to access the note taking template.

# Did you know?

## Some facts about domestic and family violence.

**What is the difference between normal conflict and domestic and family violence?**

Some conflict is normal in relationships, but abuse is never ok. Abuse is behaviour that causes physical, psychological, or verbal harm to people, and it is sometimes used to gain power and control over another person. To learn more about types of abuse: www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/about-domestic-and-family-violence/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.html

**Does the promotion of women's rights threaten social stability?**

Women's rights are human rights. Preventing domestic and family violence in a community will strengthen the community. Research has shown that violence against women will continue to occur in places with attitudes that see women as less than equal to men.

**Is it okay to use force with family members or people close to you?**

No type of violence is ever okay. Forcing anyone into any form of behaviour against their will is not acceptable and against the law.

**What if someone makes a false claim about domestic and family violence or sexual assault?**

False claims of domestic and family violence or sexual assault are extremely rare. Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are under-reported to the police. People are often reluctant to report it for many reasons, including fear of not being believed.

**Is domestic and family violence a result of a traumatic and violent upbringing?**

Using violence is a choice. There are many people who have experienced domestic and family violence in childhood and do not use violence when they are adults.

**Is it easy for a victim to leave or stop a violent relationship if they wanted to?**

There are many reasons why a person may be unable to leave an abusive relationship. Many victim-survivors want to leave, but they can't because:

- They are scared for their own or their children's safety
- They have no money to support themselves
- They have nowhere to go
- They think no one will believe them
- They feel ashamed
- They want to try to keep the family together.

Victim-survivors are most at risk of severe violence and death when they try to leave or just after they leave their abusive situation.

**Does domestic and family violence only happen between married couples?**

No. It can happen to family members, people that live in the same house, married and unmarried couples and ex-partners. It can happen to anyone, regardless of their cultural background, religion, gender, sexuality, or economic status.

**Can a person using violence stop a victim-survivor from seeing their child if they want to leave a relationship?**

No. Children have the right to have a relationship with both parents, even if their parents are separated. However, the time a person using violence is permitted to spend with their children can change if children are at risk of harm. Every case is different, and legal advice should be sought from a lawyer experienced in Family Law. To find out more about how domestic and family violence is considered in Family Law matters, and how arrangements for children are decided following separation: www.familyviolencelaw.gov.au/family-law/arrangements-for-children/how-does-the-court-consider-domestic-and-family-violence/

# Raising awareness in your community

As a religious or community leader, you can use your position to raise awareness about domestic and family violence. Raising awareness is an important part of preventing it from happening.

You may want to do something similar to the examples provided here or use this information to plan your own promotional activity. You could also think about how you could raise awareness about domestic and family violence in your day-to-day leadership.

## Promotion through sermons or public community announcements

### Why is this important?

Talking about domestic and family violence can be difficult as it is a sensitive topic. But these messages can make a positive impact on the community.

It may encourage other leaders and members of the community to spread awareness. It also may encourage someone to speak about their own experience in relation to domestic and family violence.

### Guidelines for promoting your message

- Make sure your message is as clear as possible
- Use phrases like 'Violence is never acceptable', or 'Victim-survivors are not responsible for any violence they experience'
- Talk about what makes a respectful, equal, and healthy relationship or family. To learn more about healthy relationships: www.1800respect.org.au/healthy-relationships
- Use sacred texts, scriptures and practices from your faith to promote equal and respectful relationships and families.

Make sure your message is as clear as possible.

## Raising awareness on social media

You can also use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to spread awareness. Here are some sample messages that you can include in your post:

- Safe families treat each other equally and with respect.
- End family violence and protect our children.
- Stopping your partner from seeing their family is abuse.
- It's not ok to put anyone down, not even as a joke.
- Violence against women and children affects everyone.
- Everyone has the right to be safe. Make your homes and communities a safe place.
- Children see, children do – make your influence positive!
- Good relationships have a foundation of trust and support for each other's differences.

You may also want to promote helpful contacts.

## When should you plan your promotional activity?

Some dates that may be appropriate for delivering your message are:

- International Women's Day, March 8th
- Harmony Day, March 21st
- World Health Day, April 7th
- Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May each year
- International Day of Families, May 15th
- Father's Day, the first Sunday in September each year
- International Day of Peace, September 21st
- Week without Violence, the third week in October each year
- White Ribbon Day, November 25th
- International Human Rights Day, December 10th
- 16 days of Activism Against Gender Violence, November 25th to December 10th

Other days that are significant in your community such as festivals and feasts may also be good opportunities to raise awareness about domestic and family violence.

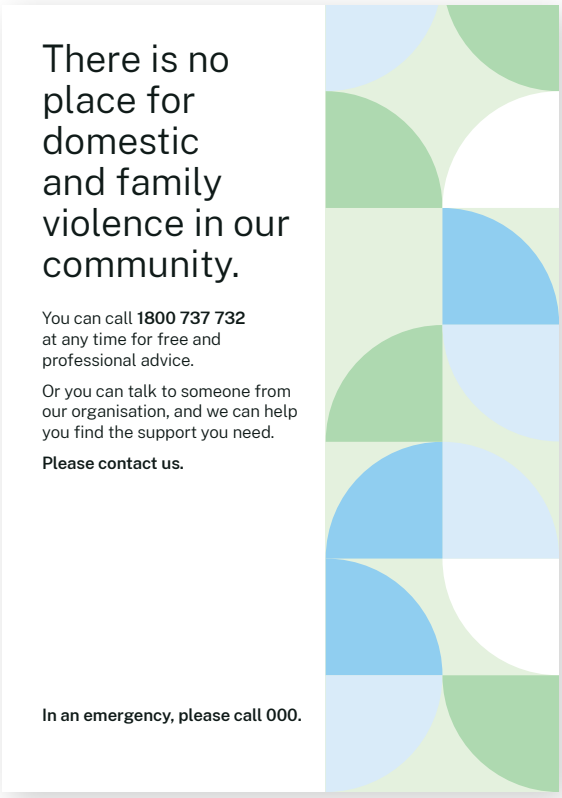
## Examples of initiatives, campaigns, and organisations that might be useful to you:

- **Australian Muslim Women's centre for Human rights**
  - Website: www.amwchr.org.au/
- **Walk Against Family violence**
  - Facebook: www.facebook.com/WAFVAU/
- **Faith Trust Institute**
  - Website: www.faithtrustinstitute.org/
- **Illawarra Committee Against Domestic Violence**
  - Website: www.icadv.org.au/
- **Our watch**
  - Website: www.ourwatch.org.au/

# Promotional poster

This poster has been designed to promote the 1800 Respect helpline. You can add your organisation's contact details within the poster. Alternatively, you can use the wording below to create your own.

## Poster template




Scan the QR code on the back page to access the poster template.

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To access these resources online, please scan this QR code.

**Contact us:**

multiculturalengagement@justice.nsw.gov.au