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## Creating a Victim-Friendly Environment

Talk about domestic violence and sexual assault from the pulpit.

Establish yourself as a safe person to talk with. Maintain regular office hours. Have an inviting, friendly office. Some victims have reported feeling comforted just by seeing a stuffed animal or teddy bear in the pastor's office.

It took a lot for the victim to walk in. Try to hear the victim out without rushing, leaping to conclusions or judging.

Domestic violence education is a must. Get training so you will know what to do or say, be able to make the right referrals and to help a victim create (and follow) a safety plan.

Establish yourself as a safe person. Maintain confidentiality to the fullest extent allowed by law. The safety of the victim and family is at stake. Be honest and up front about boundaries. **If you make a promise make sure it is a promise that you can fulfill!**

When talking with a victim allow for emotional space. The victim should decide what to do.

Know the reporting laws for your state and follow them. In most states reporting is left up to the victim. It is not mandatory and could be potentially dangerous to force a victim to report before the victim is ready. Currently, reporting is only mandatory for child abuse or elder abuse – **NOT** – domestic violence.

Get awareness materials and posters from your local domestic violence agency or shelter. Put these up in key locations throughout the church.

Put safety cards in both bathrooms. (Both women and men can be victims.) Get these from your local domestic violence agency or shelter. Replace the cards as needed.

Review your Safe Sanctuaries Policy every six months. Make any necessary changes to better protect victims.

Gatekeepers can make all the difference! Arrange for a trusted person to serve as a gatekeeper when you preach about domestic or sexual violence. Before you speak, tell the congregation if you are going to discuss material that could be potentially difficult. Give permission for anyone who becomes upset to exit the sanctuary quietly. Tell them that an intercessor will be there to help them. The gatekeeper is to check in with anyone who leaves to be sure they are ok. Train the gatekeeper ahead of time to pray with the person and help them get whatever they need – including a ride to a shelter if need be. The Gatekeeper should then follow up with you immediately after the service. Otherwise, all information should be kept fully confidential to the extent of the law.

Publish the domestic violence hotline number in the bulletin on a regular basis. Use either the national hotline of 1.800.799.SAFE or the number for your local agency.

See our information on “How Churches Can Help” or contact us for more information.