



OTTER VALE MISSION COMMUNITY PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

INITIAL DISCLOSURE BY A VICTIM

If a victim discloses abuse, the following factors are important:

Most victims/survivors want to be asked. If you are able to broach the subject, your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help; e.g. 'How are things at home?' and if it becomes appropriate, 'Is anyone hurting you?'

Do try wherever possible to talk in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again. Do try to make it clear that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, depending on the nature of what is disclosed. Whilst you might respect an individual's right to confidentiality this cannot be guaranteed i.e. when someone is being hurt, a criminal offence has been committed, someone is in danger, or when children are involved.

Do take plenty of time to listen and believe what they say. If they sense disbelief they may be discouraged from speaking again anywhere.

Your response to the disclosure

- Do be sensitive to people's backgrounds and cultures and check your own and their understanding of how the cultural issues affect them. Ask them about what support is available to them from friends and family.
- Do affirm the strength and courage it takes to have survived the abuse and even more to talk about it.
- Do encourage them to seek professional help from a local domestic abuse service who will be able to offer practical safety planning advice, even if they do not want to leave their home. In addition give information about national specialist helplines and websites, as required.
- Do express concern for their safety and immediate welfare. Do they have somewhere to stay?
- Do ask about the children and their safety and welfare. You may need to persuade them to report any concerns to children's social care. You have no option but to do so if you have received information that a child is at risk.
- Do encourage them to focus on their own needs, something they may not have been able to do since the abuse began but which is critical in helping them to change their situation
- Do reassure them that, whatever the circumstances, abuse is not justified and not their fault.
- Do ask them what they want from you and the parish. Offer help which is in response to their needs and preferences and which lets them keep in control, and which you feel is genuinely possible in your setting.

Record keeping and follow up

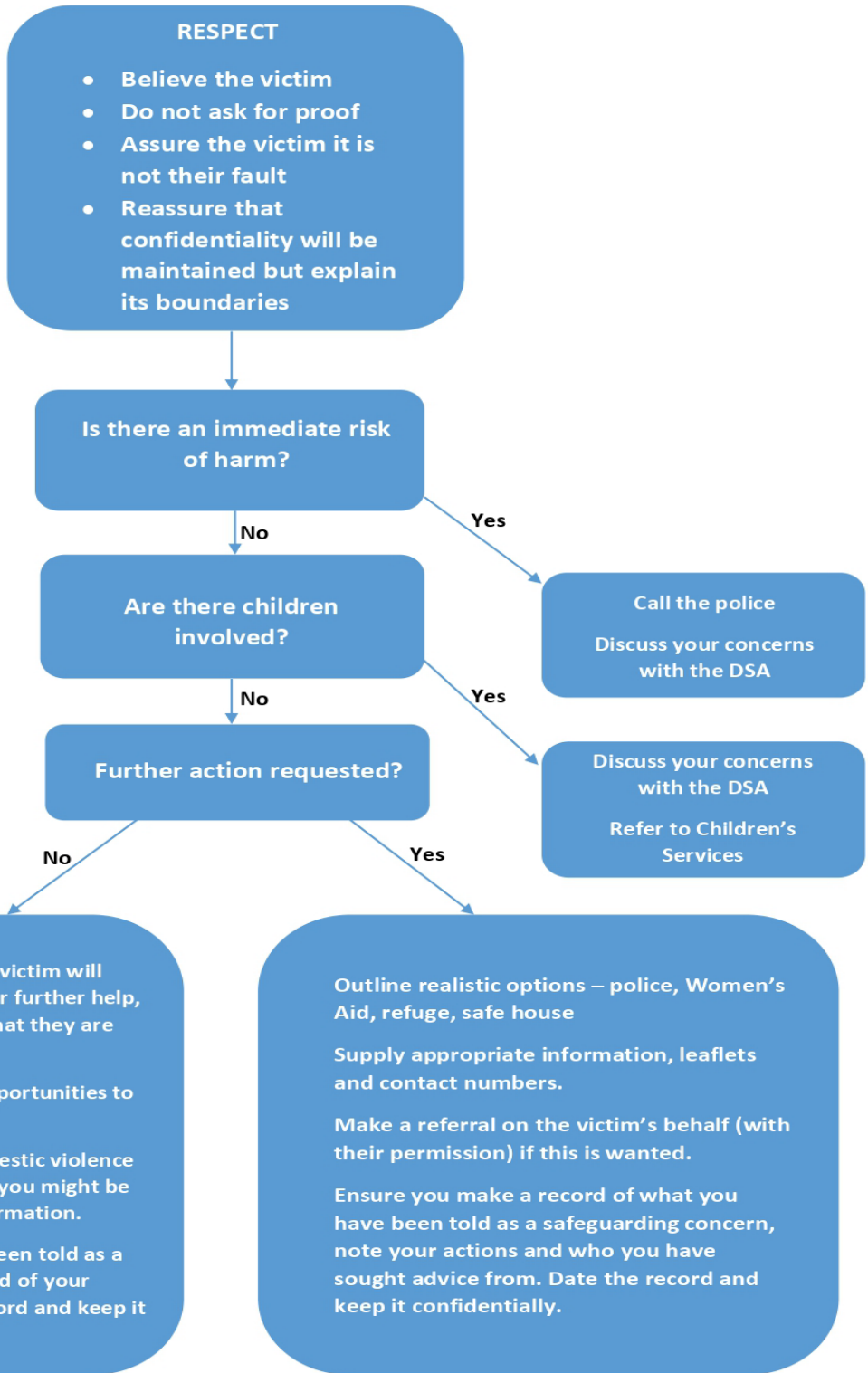
- Do check if it is all right to contact them at home before doing so. Ask them what their preferred means of contact is and confirm that this is safe.

- Although information relating to domestic abuse may be given in confidence, it should be made clear from the outset, to the person providing the information, that in certain situations such information may be passed to a third party, (e.g. the police).
- Only share information with informed consent where appropriate and if possible, respect the wishes of those who do not give consent to share confidential information. You should note that it may still be possible to share confidential information without consent if, in your judgement, it is necessary and proportionate to do so (i.e. there is a good reason), such as where the safety of the victim or (an) other(s) may be at risk. Always keep a record of your decision and the reasons why you decided to share (or not). If in doubt contact the DSA and the Diocesan Registrar.
- Do make a brief objective note of date, facts and context of what you have been told but keep your opinions separate. This should be kept in strict confidence but could be useful in any future prosecution.
- You must share the incident with someone who is qualified within 24 hours and can support you to help you to think through the issues and action. This may be the DSA or local safeguarding officer/lead.
- Do seek advice from the DSA or local safeguarding officer/lead to review the safety and risk issues in relation to the alleged perpetrator if they are in the same Church. There may need to be a risk assessment and 'safeguarding agreement' put in place in line with House of Bishops practice guidance. This work needs to be undertaken in consultation with the DSA.
- Victim safety planning should be conducted by a professional, ideally from a domestic abuse service or a statutory agency. There may be an occasion when a victim wishes to discuss their safety with you. **It is essential that you seek advice from a DSA before entering into detailed safety planning discussions.**
- If the alleged perpetrator is a church officer you must talk to the DSA and follow the House of Bishops practice guidance on responding to serious safeguarding concerns in relation to Church Officers.
- Do not give information about the victim's whereabouts to the perpetrator or to others who might pass information on to the perpetrator. Do not discuss with the parish council/other members of a congregation who might inadvertently pass information on to the perpetrator.
- When victims are leaving a controlling perpetrator, they often have to leave with nothing and have access to very limited financial support. Consider how your church can provide practical support to survivors.

Disclosure flowchart

It is recognised that it can be difficult to make a referral, which can be with or without the permission of the victim. Local Authority Social Care Departments are aware of the issues and sensitivities in relation to domestic abuse, and will ensure that they operate with professionalism and an awareness of the situation. Nevertheless, it is important that they are aware of the information concerning domestic abuse, so that they can act on it appropriately. It is not the role of the Church, nor anyone employed within the Church, to investigate the issues and incidents – only social care and the police have these statutory powers. Please follow this process when you become aware of an incident of domestic abuse and violence.

DOMESTIC ABUSE DISCLOSURE FLOWCHART



INITIAL DISCLOSURE BY AN ALLEGED OR KNOWN PERPETRATOR

The Church has an important role in challenging inappropriate behaviour. This can, however, lead to increased risks for both the victim and the person who challenges the alleged or known perpetrator. This needs to be done in an extremely careful way, i.e. one that does not place a victim at increased risk.

Factors to consider include:

- Ensuring that the victim is at the highest priority in terms of safety and wellbeing, and that any action is victim/survivor centred.
- If the alleged perpetrator is to be met, ensuring that it is in a public place, and that there are others in the meeting.
- Maintaining an awareness of the danger that the alleged perpetrator may pose to you, and ensuring that you and others are safe.
- You must share the incident with a properly trained professional within 24hours who can support you to help you to think through the issues and actions. This may be the DSA or local safeguarding officer/lead.
- There may need to be a risk assessment and 'safeguarding agreement' put in place in line with House of Bishops practice guidance. This work needs be undertaken in consultation with the DSA.
- If the alleged perpetrator is a church officer you must talk to the DSA and follow the House of Bishops practice guidance on responding to serious safeguarding concerns in relation to Church Officers.