

## THE BLACK MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

*The Spirit gives us courage . . . to hear the voices of people long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.*

*From A Brief Statement of Faith  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
The Book of Confessions, 10.4*

After a long silence, the voices of victims and survivors of domestic violence are calling us. They call out for hope – that the violence will end, that they will find a safe space. They call out for justice – that those who have tried to usurp God’s sovereignty will be brought to accountability. They call out for healing – that the Jesus who gave wholeness to the blind, the lame, and the outcast will transform their lives as well.\*

---

\* *Church & Society: Social Justice Actions of the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly*, July/August 2001, p. 14



# THE BLACK MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Theological Statement.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Statements of Confession, Affirmation and Commitment.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Strategy for Implementation .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Position Statement: Couples Counseling in Families With Spousal Abuse.....</b>	<b>8</b>

*Note: in the interest of readability, the batterer is referred to as “he” and the victim as “she” throughout this document. Certainly, men are sometimes victims and women perpetrators; relationship violence is inexcusable regardless of the abuser’s gender. However, data collected from human service statistics, studies, surveys, census polls, crime reports, etc., invariably show that victims of domestic violence – particularly physical abuse – are overwhelmingly female (85-95%).*



## THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

Domestic violence is a clear manifestation of human sin at work in the most intimate of human relationships. It is a gross distortion of the covenant of love between married or unmarried partners, or the violation of a relationship of love, trust, and care between parents and children. Abusers use several forms of domestic violence against family members, including a pattern of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological attacks or neglect; isolation; and economic coercion. At the core of any expression of domestic violence is the perpetrator's distorted use of power and control over other family members. Each type of abuse can occur between spouses and partners, against children, against siblings, and against elder members of a family.

Domestic violence has reached epidemic proportions in this country and is found in all aspects of society: in all religious groups, classes, and races; in all types of families and communities; in rural and urban settings. Abusers or perpetrators are likewise found in every realm of society, regardless of educational training or occupational skill, income level or gender. It is a reflection of the pervasiveness of sin at work in every aspect of our culture and behind the thresholds of many American families.

God created us male and female, saying, "let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness . . ." *Gen. 1:26*. It is worth noting that God's speaks in the plural, evoking an understanding of God's identity as being in relationship with God's total self. If both male and female are created in the image of God, then both are sacred manifestations of God's being. Neither gender has been granted sole interpretive authority of the will or Word of God about intimate relationships. Human beings are created to be in partnership with God and with each other, and our concept of partnership is illustrated in the covenantal relationships that God established with many biblical couples, including Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Joseph and Mary. Human partnership is most fully developed in the context of covenant when both parties bind themselves to each other through self-giving love and mutual forbearance.

In addressing the community of Corinth in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul defines the role that self-giving love is to play in human relationships. As such, this passage applies not only to relationships within communities of faith, it also communicates a very tangible ethic for the intimacy of family relationships. "Love is patient, love is kind, it is never envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." This passage identifies the high level of commitment and devotion involved in covenantal love. When used as a guide for one's own actions within family relationships, this passage sets a standard of behavior and accountability reflective of the love of Jesus Christ.

However, the Church and individual Christians have used this passage to manipulate victims of domestic violence. In such cases, the covenant of marriage and the well-being of an individual are pitted against each other. Too often the victim's safety is relegated to a degree of importance secondary to the preservation of the covenant and its outward appearance within the larger community. Too often the suffering of Christ is upheld as a model of endurance for the abused spouse. Such an interpretation of Christ's sacrificial love distorts what he accomplished through his crucifixion and resurrection by suggesting that enduring the abuse is somehow redemptive to the victim, the perpetrator or the relationship. This interpretation is a gross distortion of the meaning of the cross of Christ for humanity.

In actuality, both the covenant of marriage and the victim have been repeatedly violated by the abuser. A choice to preserve the covenant at the expense of the victim fails to honor the sanctity of human life in males and females, parents and children. Abuse in any form – physical, emotional, sexual, economic, or neglect – is a violation of God's will for humanity and for the abused individual who was created in God's image.

Therefore, Christ's Church must respond to abuse as a matter of justice and righteousness. The church has been called by Christ to serve as his body, to care for those who are marginalized and oppressed, to bring about hope and healing to broken lives and broken relationships, and to speak boldly against the injustice of domestic violence while working to heal its effects. The church is also called to minister to all individuals whose lives are broken by sin, including the perpetrators of injustice, by calling them to repentance and guiding them to work toward the restoration of their victims.

This raises the complex role of forgiveness between perpetrator and victim and between the perpetrator and the community of faith. Forgiveness cannot be ignored. It is essential in bringing about the wholeness of all of the parties involved. However, neither the victim nor the community of faith can easily forgive the perpetrator until the abuser recognizes and accepts total responsibility for the effects of the abuse on the victim and the entire family.

Abuse in each of its forms severely damages level of trust between the perpetrator and other family members. When abuse is physical, it damages the body of another, in some cases crippling the victim for life or in extreme cases resulting in the death of the victim. When abuse is sexual, it distorts the victim's sense of self and perception of sexuality as a sacred gift of God. When abuse is emotional, it damages or destroys an individual's self-esteem and potentially scars the psyche of the victim for life. When abuse is economic, it creates a distorted dependency of the victim on the perpetrator as the sole source of well-being. In all cases, abuse is driven by the need of the perpetrator to exert power and control over the life of another human being, which then distorts the identity of the other and violates the important dimension of mutuality that makes for healthy human relationships. Domestic violence in all its forms instills fear as the predominant emotional dynamic in the relationship.

Each of these distortions has such an impact on human beings that apologies fall far short of the restoring the well-being of the victim and the relationship. Neither should the victim ever be counseled to forgive the perpetrator without the perpetrator's full participation in rectifying the consequences of the abuse for all parties involved. This may involve paying medical bills, counseling for the victim and other family members, counseling for the perpetrator, and other corrective measures.

## STATEMENTS OF CONFESSION, AFFIRMATION AND COMMITMENT

### WE ACKNOWLEDGE:

- That all forms of domestic violence are violations of God's will for victims, for perpetrators, for churches and wider communities, for humankind.
- That domestic violence is epidemic within our society; that it crosses all educational, economic, racial, ethnic, social and religious boundaries;
- That Christ calls BMPC to respond to abuse as a matter of justice and righteousness.

As a people who believe that God intends for all to live with integrity of body and spirit in freedom, in relationship, and in joy, **WE CONFESS:**

- We have not always heeded the victims' cries for help.
- We have too often offered abusers cheap grace.
- We have not challenged a society that legitimates and promotes abuse through the portrayals of women, children and men as objects in entertainment and advertisements.
- We have allowed, in our theology, representations of women as the cause of sin, deserving of her demise, secondary in nature, needing to be controlled.
- We have misused the Holy Scriptures.
- We have misused the biblical teachings of the relationship of wives to husbands, children to parents.

We have within our faith tradition many beliefs that can help us understand our responsibilities to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. **WE AFFIRM:**

- God's sovereignty empowers us to take up God's passion for peace and justice.
- Human beings are created in the image of God, an image restored to wholeness in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who freely offers abundant life to all.
- Human beings are created to live in right relationships with one another that include peace, love, respect, mutuality, dignity and joy.
- Love of neighbor requires us to do all that is within our power to provide sanctuary and promote healing.
- We have been created by God to have integrity of body and spirit. Whether it be physical, sexual, emotional-psychological, or verbal, domestic violence inflicts harm and suffering on God's good creation of the whole person.
- We have been created to be free people with the capacity to consent to relationships and to participate with others in decisions affecting our lives. Through intimidation and silencing, abuse diminishes the power of victims to choose for themselves.
- We have been created in covenantal relationship with God and people. Domestic violence and abuse destroy covenants in which people have promised to treat each other with respect and dignity.
- We have been created to rejoice. Domestic violence works to destroy the capacity for rejoicing.

In obedience to Christ's call for BMPC to respond to abuse as a matter of justice and righteousness, we will hear the voices of victims and survivors and respond to their calls with the following goals: first, to work to protect the victims from further abuse; second, to stop the abuser's violence and hold the abuser accountable; and third, to restore the family relationship if possible or mourn the loss of relationship.

In our ministry to victims and survivors, **WE THEREFORE COMMIT:**

- To help provide physical and emotional safety;
- To respect the autonomy of able adult victims by acknowledging their right to control their own lives and make their own decisions; by offering information and resources, then supporting their decisions even if we disagree.
- To honor confidentiality.
- To listen to victims and survivors as they break the silence, cry out, tell their stories, and deal with the memories.
- To believe and validate the victims'/survivors' experiences.
- To acknowledge the injustice and let victims and survivors know that the violence perpetrated against them is not their fault.
- To offer a community of friendship and support to victims as they plan for future safety.
- To remember and communicate that God offers grace and hope for healing.

For the abuser, we will be a vehicle of God's love, justice and grace. In ministering to perpetrators,

**WE THEREFORE COMMIT:**

- To firmly state that violent words and behavior are unacceptable and must stop.
- To reject the abuser's rationalizations and victim blaming, and to encourage the abuser to accept full responsibility for abusive behavior.
- To insist that concrete action accompany contrition, such as honoring a victim's request to separate and be free of harassment, attending a treatment group, and providing all possible restitution for damages to person, psyche and property.
- To offer hope for forgiveness and a call to discipleship.
- To remember and communicate that God offers grace for forgiveness and hope for change.

In order to prepare our church leadership and congregation to respond to domestic violence both within our society and within our congregation, **WE COMMIT:**

- To provide adequate training for pastors, church officers, caregivers and volunteers to recognize and respond appropriately to domestic violence.
- To educate children, youth and adult members about the availability of local domestic violence resources, and to communicate that specific trained church personnel are available to discuss past, existing or potential domestic violence.
- To regularly preach about domestic violence through the ministry of the pulpit.
- To address domestic violence often and regularly through liturgy, prayers, stories, testimonies, minutes for mission, information printed in newsletters and the guide to worship; thematic workshops, Bible studies, and Sunday School presentations.



## STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

### WHO NEEDS WHAT INFORMATION?

#### **Ministers, Session Members and Advocates:**

- Overview of the written materials including the theological background statement, the policy statement, the couples counseling position statement, this document, a synopsis of state and local laws, and educational materials.
- An educational presentation by Betsy Warren (a professional resource in the field of domestic violence) and Kevin Frederick, providing training for the leadership of advocates within the church and an opportunity to view the video *Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence*.

#### **Congregational Members:**

- Two worship services addressing domestic violence and the response of the faith community.
- Bulletin inserts summarizing the church policy and procedural guidelines for cases of domestic violence within the church family.
- After sessional approval, a mailing to all members stating the position of the church, with open letters speaking directly to victims, perpetrators and children.
- Annual observation of Domestic Violence Awareness Month each October in worship and throughout the life of the congregation.
- Inclusion of victims of domestic violence in the pastoral prayers on a regular and ongoing basis.
- In-depth training for ministers, educators and specific members as advocates for victims, perpetrators, and other family members where domestic violence has occurred.
- The education of all church members about available resources, options, and the legal implications of various courses of action.

#### **Victims, Perpetrators and Family Members:**

- A list of local referrals and resources.
- Information about possible options for victims.
- Easily accessible copies of the book *Keeping the Faith*. This small book corrects the misuse of scriptural text and theological doctrine commonly twisted to portray God's "approval" of family violence.
- The commitment of the church to ensuring that there are no insurmountable barriers between those affected and available resources. For example, trained advocates will provide childcare, transportation, and information about financial resources.
- First-step assistance provided by trained and informed programmatic staff.
- The opportunity for connection with a trained confidential advocate who can help victims, perpetrators, and family members think through the physical, emotional and legal issues and the available courses of action.

**BLACK MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH WILL:**

- Educate the congregation about the nature and complexity of family violence, and about the church's policies and responses when domestic violence occurs or is suspected.
- Stand as a witness to and defender of the Christian ideal of marriage.
- Address the issue of family violence holistically. The church will train individuals who can serve as advocates for the victim, children, the perpetrator, and other family members.
- Understand the limitations of the legal system to resolve domestic violence. The church advocates for more effective intervention than the civil authorities can provide including restorative justice for the victim and children.
- Provide this document to other Presbyterian churches, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina and General Assembly Offices that address domestic violence.
- The session will consider, after the first year of implementation, adding an outreach ministry to families in Black Mountain who are facing domestic violence.

## POSITION STATEMENT: COUPLES COUNSELING IN FAMILIES WITH SPOUSAL ABUSE

**NOTE:** This statement draws heavily from *Confronting the Batterer*, by Phyllis B. Frank, M.A. and Beverly D. Houghton, Ph.D., for the Volunteer Counseling Service of Rockland Co., Inc. The original document is at [www.cpsdv.org/Articles/Couples%20Counseling.PDF](http://www.cpsdv.org/Articles/Couples%20Counseling.PDF).

***Couples counseling is not a viable therapeutic tool for violent family relationships.*** Black Mountain Presbyterian Church defines a violent family relationship as one in which physical or sexual assaults occur, threats of violence occur, and/or one partner lives in an environment of fear caused by the other partner.

Couples counseling can be very helpful in resolving some marital problems. However, ***abuse is not a marital problem. Physical violence, sexual violence and threats of violence are crimes.*** Abuse is a behavior that is solely the responsibility of the abuser, and that person alone is capable of changing it. This is true regardless of any “provocation” alleged by the abuser: the behavior of one family member cannot compel another family member to be physically, emotionally or sexually violent.

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church understands that attempting couples counseling with those in an abusive relationship is inappropriate and can even be dangerous. Even though a victim in a violent relationship may request couples counseling for “her” or “their” problem, and even if both parties want to maintain the relationship, counseling them together could:

1. Endanger the victim, who may face greater violence for revealing information during counseling that her partner does not want her to disclose;
2. Imply that abuse is acceptable to God, and that the onus is on the victim to forgive, submit, or somehow “behave;”
3. Imply that the minister or counselor condones violence or considers it unimportant;
4. Lend credence to the common misconception that victims are responsible for the violence inflicted upon them;
5. Encourage further denial and minimization of the abuse as the counseling focuses on the couple’s interaction.

BMPC also understands that couples counseling cannot be effective unless there is a balance of power between the partners. An emotionally and/or physically violent relationship is based upon a power *imbalance*: the abuser has control over his victim. **Equality and honesty, both critical to effective couples counseling, are impossible if one person fears retaliation for revealing the truth about the relationship.**

Because of the power imbalance, the inequality, the control, and the fear, **Black Mountain Presbyterian Church will not practice and will actively discourage couples counseling in abusive relationships.** We affirm the following:

1. Ministers and/or church counselors will not assume that a balance of power exists in a couple requesting counseling, or that each partner is able to talk honestly and openly in each other’s presence. Both parties will be interviewed separately and asked directly about the existence of violence, coercion, psychological abuse, and control within the relationship.
2. The victim’s safety will be the primary concern at all times, superseding all other considerations.

3. BMPC will encourage each partner to receive separate individual intervention. Only when the abuser has demonstrated a verifiable history of and commitment to non-violence and equal power, and when the victim indicates that she feels safe, unthreatened, and willing to pursue the relationship – only then will BMPC consider providing couples counseling.
4. Any overt or covert message from a minister or other church counselor that the victim should change her behavior in order to stop her partner's violence is totally unacceptable.
5. Couples counseling should never be considered an alternative to legal remedies for violent behavior.
6. The abuser is solely responsible for his choice of violence as a means of control over his victim. Any counseling he receives should focus on his acceptance of accountability for the violence, and on developing alternative, non-abusive and non-controlling behaviors.
7. Counseling for the victim should help refocus her attention on her own needs for safety, support, and self-esteem; her worthiness of respect as a child of God; and her absolute right to a peaceful environment.

BMPC recognizes that, **if an abusive partner is truly motivated and committed to change, then with God's help he may be able to end his violence and his need for control.** If this happens and the relationship is still unbroken, then couples counseling may be a viable modality – but only for nonviolent couples when both partners have separately requested it. Conditions that will precede couples counseling include:

1. The abuser participates in an ongoing batterer's program to maintain his behavioral change and to demonstrate his commitment to long-term recovery;
2. The abuser acknowledges full responsibility for his violence, and recognizes his ability to control his behavior;
3. A significant period of time passes (approximately one year from onset of treatment) during which there is no further abuse;
4. The victim confirms, in a separate session, her partner's ongoing nonviolence and her willingness to participate in couples counseling.

An abuser and his victim have two entirely different problems. The abuser's problem is his controlling and violent behavior. The victim's problem is that she is coupled with an abuser. Black Mountain Presbyterian Church understands that these two distinct issues are safely dealt with only in separate counseling, after the victim's safety has been assured. Couples counseling will not be offered until and unless the four conditions outlined above have been met.\*

---

\* Source materials: *Confronting the Batterer*, by Phyllis B. Frank, M.A. and Beverly D. Houghton, Ph.D., for the Volunteer Counseling Service of Rockland Co., Inc.; and the Couples Counseling Position Statement of Helpmate, Inc., of Buncombe County, NC.

# THE BLACK MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

## APPENDIX

An Open Letter to an Adult Victim of Domestic Violence .....	ii
An Open Letter to a Child Victim of Family Violence.....	iii
An Open Letter to an Abuser .....	iv
A Summary of the North Carolina Laws About Reporting Family Violence .....	v
Types and Manifestations of Abuse .....	vi
A Description of The Power and Control Wheel .....	vii
The Power and Control Wheel .....	viii
A Description of The Cycle of Violence.....	ix
The Cycle of Violence.....	x
Common Myths and Why They Are Wrong.....	xi
Domestic Violence is a Serious, Widespread Social Problem: The Facts.....	xii

*Note: in the interest of readability, the batterer is referred to as “he” and the victim as “she” throughout this document. Certainly, men are sometimes victims and women perpetrators; relationship violence is inexcusable regardless of the abuser’s gender. However, data collected from human service statistics, studies, surveys, census polls, crime reports, etc., invariably show that victims of domestic violence – particularly physical abuse – are overwhelmingly female (85-95%).*



## AN OPEN LETTER TO AN ADULT VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Dear Victim,

We are writing out of your church's deep concern for you and your family because of the emotional, physical, and/or sexual violence you are suffering at the hands of your loved one. We want to say three things to you.

First: **YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME.** There is conflict and disagreement in every relationship. No one is perfect. We all have bad moods. We argue, make mistakes, and get on each other's nerves. When you behave in these ways your partner has choices – he can ignore your behavior, or go for a walk, or talk with you about the problem. But your partner lashes out with words or fists. That is *his* choice, *his* responsibility. ***You do not deserve to be hurt!***

Nevertheless, you may blame yourself. Your partner probably tells you it is your fault. Others may talk as if it is your fault, saying “Why don't you just leave?” or “Why don't you call the police?” You may feel guilty when you think about leaving him, and guilty because you *haven't* left him. Maybe you think you are a difficult person to live with. Perhaps you are! But that doesn't give *anyone* the right to abuse you or to blame you for being abused.

Secondly, your church affirms that **domestic violence is completely outside of Christ's will and is in no way supported by scripture.** It is a breach of the marriage covenant. It is not a fit of temper, an “anger problem,” or a “lovers' quarrel.” Substance abuse may exacerbate the violence, but does not cause or excuse it. Domestic violence is caused solely by the abuser's desire to have power and control over another family member. Dominance and control are manifestations of human sin that damage and destroy human relationships. Manipulation, domination, control, and violence are all tools of hatred and destruction, *not* Christ-like love.

Finally, **family violence in any form – emotional, psychological, sexual, or physical – destroys the well being of each family member.** All forms of family violence are serious and require immediate intervention. Our church is eager to help you and your loved ones. We have information and resources to share, as well as trained advocates who will listen, believe you, maintain confidentiality, explore options with you, support your decisions, and walk with you every step of the way.

**We will not tell you what you “should” do.** We will not blame you, nor will we tolerate victim-blaming by others. We will not tell you either to stay with or to leave your partner. Unless your children are endangered, we will not report the situation to authorities without your consent. What we *will* do is insist upon your safety and your children's safety. We will help you find resources like childcare, transportation, and financial assistance, removing barriers between you and the help you seek. We will not confront your partner without your permission. If and when we do confront him, we will hold him entirely responsible for his actions and call him to true repentance.

You and your family are in the prayers of your pastors, and we pray that God will be present with each of you as you work through these difficult issues.

Your loving brothers and sisters in Christ,

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church





## AN OPEN LETTER TO A CHILD VICTIM OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Dear Child,

Your pastors have learned that some very hurtful things have been happening in your family. Whether you are the direct victim of the abuse or someone else in your family is, we know that the situation is very frightening and confusing for you. Other children in our church have had similar family problems – ***you are not the only one!*** We want to tell you and all the other children what your church family believes about abuse and what we want you to know. We hope it will help.

1. **GOD LOVES YOU AND WANTS YOU TO BE SAFE AND HAPPY.** Your church family loves you too – we want all children to be safe and happy.
2. **THE ABUSE IS NOT YOUR FAULT.** Only the abusive person in your family is responsible for the abuse. Nothing you do or say makes it happen, and nothing you can do or say will stop it. No matter how badly a child behaves or what mistakes he makes, no matter what a child says or how she acts, **NOBODY DESERVES TO BE ABUSED.** Not *ever*. Not for *any* reason.
3. **TALK TO AN ADULT YOU CAN TRUST ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING.** That person can help you figure out what to do and how to keep yourself safe. No matter what anyone says, **abuse is *not* a secret you should keep.**
4. **When violence happens between other family members in your home, DO NOT TRY TO STOP IT!** Go to a safe place. Once you are safe, call 911 or an adult you trust and tell what is happening.
5. **THERE ARE ADULTS YOU CAN TRUST AND TALK TO IN YOUR CHURCH FAMILY.** You can always talk to either of your pastors or Pat Tuttle or Ginny Soll – those people have all had special training about helping families with problems. But everyone in the church cares about you and wants to help you.

You and your family are in our prayers every day. Please remember these things: **God loves you and wants you to be safe; *nobody* deserves to be abused; talk to an adult you can trust.**

Your loving family in Christ,

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church



## AN OPEN LETTER TO AN ABUSER

Dear Abuser,

We are writing out of your church's deep concern about you and your family because of the emotional, physical, and/or sexual violence you inflict upon those closest to you. We are speaking on behalf of the entire session, and want to say three things to you.

First: **family violence in any form, whether it is emotional, psychological, sexual, or physical in nature, destroys the well being of each family member – including you.** All forms of family violence are serious and dangerous problems, and require immediate intervention. Our church has information that can help you and your loved ones. The church's pastors and educators have been trained to offer you constructive assistance. We urge you to consult one of them immediately.

Secondly, domestic violence is a gross distortion of authority within a family. It is not an expression of spousal or parental love; it is *not* discipline; it is *never* your victim's fault. It is instead your own terrible abuse of power. At the heart of all forms of domestic violence is the abuser's desire to manipulate or control another family member. **Dominance and control are manifestations of human sin that damage and destroy human relationships.** Christians are called by Christ to manifest Christ's self-giving love in the world, beginning within our most intimate relationships. Manipulation, domination, control, and violence are all tools of hatred and destruction, *not* Christ-like love.

Third: because the church is also called by Christ to manifest and witness to God's love, **Black Mountain Presbyterian Church is called to help break the cycle of family violence.** When we are faced with the presence of domestic violence within our congregation, therefore, we will respond by seeking safety for the victims, by holding the abuser solely accountable for the choice of violence, and by providing emotional and spiritual support to all family members – including the abuser. This does not mean that we will trust apologies or promises to solve the problem. It does not mean that we will help you "save" your marriage or relationship at all costs. Nor does it mean that there will be no consequences for your choices.

It does mean, however, that if you are truly committed to repentance, **you will find in your church the spiritual support and love to help you** take full responsibility for your past behavior, begin the hard task of changing, and provide for restorative justice for your family members.

You and your family will be in the prayers of your pastors, and we pray that God will be present with each of you as you work through these difficult issues.

Your loving brothers and sisters in Christ,

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church



## A SUMMARY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LAWS ABOUT REPORTING FAMILY VIOLENCE

### ***SPOUSAL ABUSE OR BATTERING:***

There is no mandatory reporting law for spousal abuse. *NC General Statute 90-21-20* requires only that health care providers report firearm injuries, poisonings, wounds caused by sharp pointed instrument, and other cases involving grave bodily harm or grave illness resulting from a criminal act.

### ***CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT:***

#### **Reporting suspected abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services is mandatory!**

*NC General Statute 7A-543* requires that anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect SHALL report it.

#### **What criteria must be present in order for DSS to accept a referral for evaluation?**

The only criterion necessary for reporting child abuse is the reporter's suspicion that the child is being abused. No proof is necessary; DSS will evaluate the information to determine whether to open an investigation.

#### **Whom should the reporter call?**

Buncombe County Department of Social Services (DSS)  
250-5800; or after 5:00 p.m. and on holidays or weekends dial 211

#### **What information will DSS ask the reporter for?**

- The reporter's name is confidential. The reporter is protected from civil and criminal liability for good faith reports.
- The child's name and address; the school attended (if any)
- Age or birth date
- Name of parent or guardian
- Explanation of the situation and why you feel the child needs protection
- Names of others who may help provide information about the situation (if available)

### ***ELDER ABUSE / ABUSE OF DISABLED ADULTS:***

#### **Reporting to Adult Protective Services is mandatory!**

The *NC General Statute 108-A, Article 6*, requires that anyone who has knowledge of abuse, self-neglect, caretaker neglect or exploitation of a disabled adult SHALL report it. The reporter's name is confidential. The reporter is protected from civil and criminal liability for good faith reports.

#### **What criteria must be present in order for DSS to accept a referral for evaluation?**

1. Allegations that the adult is disabled and incapacitated by that disability.
2. That abuse, neglect or exploitation HAS ALREADY occurred.
3. The adult is in need of protection.

#### **Whom should the reporter call?**

Buncombe County Department of Social Services (DSS)  
250-5800; or after 5:00 p.m. and on holidays or weekends dial 211

#### **What information does DSS need about the victim?**

- Name and address
- Age or birth date
- Caregiver/caretaker's name (if any)
- Explanation of the situation and why you feel the person needs protection
- Mental or physical condition of the adult
- Names of others who may help provide information about the situation (if available)



## TYPES AND MANIFESTATIONS OF ABUSE

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSE?

#### ***Physical abuse:***

The use of brute force, such as hitting, biting, kicking, slapping, or burning, to damage a person's body. May include the use of a weapon.

#### ***Emotional abuse:***

Verbal assault or emotional cruelty. An attempt to control or intimidate a vulnerable person without physical contact.

#### ***Sexual abuse:***

A perpetrator's use of a victim for personal gratification. May involve the use of physical force (battery, restraint), the threat of force (such as the use of a weapon), or other forms of coercion. Incest is sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member, often involving physical or psychological coercion. Sexual abuse may also occur without physical contact, as when the abuser forces the victim to watch a sexual act.

#### ***Neglect:***

Maltreatment or negligence that harms a child's or a disabled adult's health, welfare or safety. Describes situations in which caretakers fail to look out for the victim's physical and emotional needs.

### HOW ARE THE TYPES OF ABUSE MANIFESTED IN FAMILIES?

#### ***Spousal or partner abuse:***

A pattern of coercive, sometimes violent behavior exercised by one adult over another in order to gain and maintain power and control over the victim. This pattern of behavior occurs between intimates or former intimates, and is unwanted behavior categorized as psychological, physical, or sexual in nature.

#### ***Elder / Disabled Adult Abuse:***

Involves the common forms of abuse, and can also include depriving the victim of food or clothing, withholding medications or health care, and taking financial advantage.

#### ***Dating Violence:***

Abuse that occurs in the context of a dating relationship.

#### ***Child Abuse:***

Deliberate and harmful actions by an adult, usually a parent or parent surrogate, against a child. Child abuse may include exposing a child to pornography, or the use of a child for sexual purposes. Child neglect may involve abandonment, refusal to seek treatment for illness, inadequate supervision, health hazards in the home, ignoring a child's need for contact, keeping a child home from school repeatedly without cause.\*

---

\* Definitions adapted from *Church & Society: Social Justice Actions of the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly*





## A DESCRIPTION OF THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

The Power and Control Wheel (*Appendix page v*) is a conceptual way of looking at the primary tactics and behaviors that abusers use to get and maintain control in their relationships. The prevailing belief among professionals who work in the field of domestic violence is that **the batterer's violence springs from a desire for power, rather than a short temper or uncontrolled anger**. Battering is an intentional act used to gain power and control over a partner. Physical abuse is only one part of a whole system of controlling behavior: violence is *never* an isolated behavior.

This diagram uses the wheel to explain the dynamics of an abusive relationship. At the center of an abuser's concept of intimate relationship is a driving need for power and control over the partner. Each spoke represents a tactic commonly used to gain control. Many forms of abuse are present within the relationship: emotional, financial, sexual, etc. **Physical violence is only one of many control tactics**. Typically, if physical violence is a factor in a relationship, it is initiated only *after* the batterer has used other tactics to encourage in the victim a sense of powerlessness and worthlessness.

Battering is usually linked to the batterer's perception of his role in relationship. With few exceptions, a heterosexual male batterer believes that he has certain rights or entitlements in relationships with women. He believes that he has the right to be "in charge," to make the decisions and to expect unquestioning obedience from his partner and his children. **He feels justified in establishing and maintaining control through any means**, including the use of violence.

A closer look at the tactic of *isolation*, one form of abuse described on the Power and Control Wheel, reveals the batterer's underlying belief system. *Isolation* involves any attempt to control what the partner does, who she sees and talks to, or where she goes. Specific actions might include:

- Putting down friends, making it difficult for her to spend time with certain people.
- Monitoring telephone calls, listening, commenting on every call, limiting her privacy.
- Making her dependent on him for transportation.
- Keeping her economically dependent, thereby limiting and controlling her social involvements.
- Denying "permission" to go to school, work, women's groups, bowling, "girls'-nights-out," etc.
- Strictly limiting her role to housework and childcare.

The batterer justifies these actions with the following beliefs:

- He has the right to monitor her life.
- He has the right to "let" her do something. He can give permission.
- He has the right to judge her family and friends, to deem them "unsuitable companions" or "bad influences," and to prevent her from interacting with them.
- He should be the center of her world.

Significantly, these behaviors and the beliefs that underlie them *work*. **These and the other tactics described on the Power and Control Wheel are very effective at increasing the victim's dependence on the batterer and his absolute control over her.**

## THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



## A DESCRIPTION OF THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The *Cycle of Violence* describes a typical pattern that most abusive relationships follow, at least in the earlier stages of the relationship. The cycle may vary widely for different relationships: for some couples, it may take years to move through the entire cycle once. Others suffer a dizzying repetition of the pattern many times weekly, even daily. For some victims, the violent incident may be a brutal physical attack; for others the explosion may be a terrifying verbal outburst. The “honeymoon” phase for some victims means being showered with gifts and promises, tears and remorse. Other victims may experience the honeymoon phase as a mere (and momentary) cessation of violence. In spite of the variations, however, most victims of domestic violence can recognize the cyclical pattern as it applies to their own abuse. Outlined below are some of the most typical experiences victims describe.

Phase 1, the “*tension-building phase*,” may begin with minor irritations and arguments that gradually escalate. “I know what’s coming,” the victim will often say. “I try desperately to defuse the tension, to avoid, or at least postpone, the explosion. I feel like I’m walking on eggshells.” Some victims describe the increasing tension as a balloon being blown up.

The balloon bursts during the second phase with an explosion of physical and/or emotional violence. This is the part of the cycle that may result in black eyes and bruises, that sends some victims to the hospital with injuries, that may even end in homicide. For the abuser, the violent explosion is the resolution to the tension that built up in him during the first phase.

Immediately following the explosive violence of phase 2 is often a moment of truth for the victim – the “*reality phase*.” At this moment, the victim may realize that the relationship is not improving. During this flash of reality she may call the police or a crisis line. She may rush from her home to a safe place.

Unfortunately, phase 3 follows right on the heels of the reality phase. Phase 3 may be the deadliest part of the cycle, because this is the stage that most contributes to the victim’s entrapment within the abusive relationship. During the “*honeymoon phase*” the abuser promises the violence will never happen again; he may cry; he may promise he’ll go to counseling or AA or church, he may buy his partner gifts and treat her to romantic dinners; he may shower her with “love” and tell her how much he needs her. He may again seem to be that wonderful, charming, playful man she first fell in love with. Because she so desperately wants and needs to believe him, and because he is so convincing and sincere, she *does* believe him: the “honeymooning” does not seem to her to be the powerful control tactic that it is. Perhaps the “honeymoon” lasts long enough for her to relax a bit, to really believe that *this* time things have changed. Maybe he actually attends a counseling session with her, or goes to church, or joins AA, just as he said he would.

And then maybe one day he comes home from work and slams the door in that particular way she knows so well, kicks out at the dog. And she gets that familiar, sinking “uh-oh” in the pit of her stomach: “I know what’s coming. How can I avoid it? I’m walking on eggshells again....”

In most abusive relationships, the couple moves through the cycle of violence again and again. Over a period of time, however, the dynamics of their particular cycle will change: the violent episodes will become more severe and happen more often, the honeymoon period will decrease. If the relationship continues long enough without some kind of significant intervention, phase 3 may disappear altogether, so that the relationship fluctuates only between periods of tension and violence.

**If, on the other hand, the victim finds information, support and understanding each time she cycles through the brief “reality phase,” then gradually this break in the cycle will strengthen and widen, and provide an escape route.**

## **THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE**

## COMMON MYTHS AND WHY THEY ARE WRONG

### ***Domestic violence only happens to poor people and people of color.***

- Domestic violence happens in all kinds of families and relationships. Persons of any class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, education level, age, and sex can be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

### ***Some people deserve to be hit.***

- No one deserves to be abused. Period. The only person responsible for the abuse is the abuser.
- Physical violence, even among family members, is ***against the law***.

### ***Alcohol, drug abuse, stress, and mental illness cause domestic violence.***

- Alcohol use, drug use, and stress do not cause domestic violence; they may go along with domestic violence, but they do not cause the violence. Abusers often use these excuses for their violence. (Michigan Judicial Institute, *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, 1998, p. 1.6 - 1.7)
- Generally, domestic violence happens when an abuser has learned and chooses to abuse. (Michigan Judicial Institute, *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, 1998, p. 1 - 5)
- Domestic violence is rarely caused by mental illness, but it is often used as an excuse for domestic violence. (Michigan Judicial Institute, *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, 1998, p. 1 - 8)

### ***Domestic violence is a personal problem between a husband and a wife.***

- Domestic violence affects everyone.
- About 1 in 3 American women has been physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives. (Commonwealth Fund, *Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: the Commonwealth Fund 1998 Survey of Women's Health*, 1999)
- In 1996, 30% of all female murder victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997)
- 40% to 60% of men who abuse women also abuse children. (American Psychological Association, *Violence and the Family*, 1996)

### ***If it were that bad, she would just leave.***

- There are many reasons why women may not leave. Not leaving does not mean that the situation is okay or that the victim wants to be abused.
- Leaving can be dangerous. The most dangerous time for a woman who is being abused is when she tries to leave. (United States Department of Justice, *National Crime Victim Survey*, 1995)
- **MANY VICTIMS DO LEAVE AND GO ON TO LEAD SUCCESSFUL LIVES FREE OF VIOLENCE.\***

---

\* <http://www.nccadv.org/handouts>

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A SERIOUS, WIDESPREAD SOCIAL PROBLEM: THE FACTS**

### ***Prevalence of Domestic Violence***

- Estimates range from 960,000 incidents of violence against a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend per year<sup>1</sup> to 3 million women who are physically abused by their husband or boyfriend per year.<sup>2</sup>
- Worldwide, at least 1 in every 3 women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 1/3 of American women (31%) report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives, according to a 1998 Commonwealth Fund survey.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly 25% of American women report being raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime, according to the National Violence Against Women Survey, conducted from November 1995 to May 1996.<sup>5</sup>
- 30% of Americans say they know a woman who has been physically abused by her husband or boyfriend in the past year.<sup>6</sup>
- Intimate partner violence is primarily a crime against women. In 1999, women accounted for 85% of the victims of intimate partner violence (671,110 total) and men accounted for 15% of the victims (120,100 total).<sup>7</sup>
- While women are less likely than men to be victims of violent crimes overall, women are 5 to 8 times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner.<sup>8</sup> From 1993 to 1998, victimization by an intimate accounted for 22% of the violence experienced by females. It accounted for 3% of the violent crime sustained by males.<sup>9</sup>
- Women of all races are about equally vulnerable to violence by an intimate.<sup>10</sup>
- Male violence against women does much more damage than female violence against men; women are much more likely to be injured than men.<sup>11</sup>
- The most rapid growth in domestic relations caseloads is occurring in domestic violence filings. Between 1993 and 1995, 18 of 32 states with 3-year filing figures reported an increase of 20% or more.<sup>12</sup>
- Women are 7 to 14 times more likely than men to report suffering severe physical assaults from an intimate partner.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Domestic Homicides***

- On average, more than 3 women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country every day. In 1999, 1,642 murders were attributed to intimates; 74% of the murder victims (1,218 total) were women.<sup>14</sup>
- Male murder victims are substantially less likely than female murder victims to be killed by an intimate partner. In 1999, intimate partner homicides accounted for 32% of the murders of women and approximately 4% of the murders of men.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Health Issues***

- About half of all female victims of intimate violence report an injury of some type, and about 20% of them seek medical assistance.<sup>16</sup>
- 37% of women who sought treatment in emergency rooms for violence-related injuries in 1994 were injured by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Domestic Violence and Youth***

- Approximately one in five female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.<sup>18</sup>
- Eight% of high school age girls said "yes" when asked if "a boyfriend or date has ever forced sex against your will."<sup>19</sup>
- Forty% of girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.<sup>20</sup>
- During the 1996-1997 school year, there were an estimated 4,000 incidents of rape or other types of sexual assault in public schools across the country.<sup>21</sup>

### **Domestic Violence and Children**

- In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50% of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children.<sup>22</sup>
- Slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in households with children under age 12.<sup>23</sup>

### **Rape**

- Three in four women (76%) who reported they had been raped and/or physically assaulted since age 18 said that a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, or date committed the assault.<sup>24</sup>
- One in five (21%) women reported she had been raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime.<sup>25</sup>
- Nearly one-fifth of women (18%) reported experiencing a completed or attempted rape at some time in their lives; one in 33 men (three%) reported experiencing a completed or attempted rape at some time in their lives.<sup>26</sup>

### **Stalking**

- Seventy-eight% of stalking victims are women. Women are significantly more likely than men (60% and 30%, respectively) to be stalked by intimate partners.<sup>27</sup>
- Eighty% of women who are stalked by former husbands are physically assaulted by that partner and 30% are sexually assaulted by that partner.<sup>28</sup>

---

### **References:**

- <sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends, March 1998
- <sup>2</sup>The Commonwealth Fund, Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health, May 1999
- <sup>3</sup>Heise, L., Ellsberg, M. and Gottemoeller, M. Ending Violence Against Women. Population Reports, Series L, No. 11, December 1999
- <sup>4</sup>The Commonwealth Fund, Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health, May 1999
- <sup>5</sup>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The National Institute of Justice, Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence, July 2000.
- <sup>6</sup>Lieberman Research Inc., Tracking Survey conducted for The Advertising Council and the Family Violence Prevention Fund, July – October 1996
- <sup>7</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99, October 2001.
- <sup>8</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends, March 1998
- <sup>9</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000
- <sup>10</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics, Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey, August 1995
- <sup>11</sup>Murray A. Straus and Richard J. Gelles, Physical Violence in American Families, 1990
- <sup>12</sup>Examining the Work of State Courts, 1995: A National Perspective from the Court Statistics Project. National Center for the State Courts, 1996
- <sup>13</sup>National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, November 1998
- <sup>14</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99, October 2001.
- <sup>15</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99, October 2001.
- <sup>16</sup>National Crime Victimization Survey, 1992-96; Study of Injured Victims of Violence, 1994
- <sup>17</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Violence Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments, August 1997
- <sup>18</sup>Jay G. Silverman, PhD; Anita Raj, PhD; Lorelei A. Mucci, MPH; and Jeanne E. Hathaway, MD, MPH, "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 286, No. 5, 2001
- <sup>19</sup>The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls, November 1997
- <sup>20</sup>Children Now/Kaiser Permanente poll, December 1995
- <sup>21</sup>U.S. Department of Education, Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997
- <sup>22</sup>Strauss, Murray A., Gelles Richard J., and Smith, Christine. 1990. *Physical Violence in American Families; Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- <sup>23</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends, March 1998
- <sup>24</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, November 1998
- <sup>25</sup>The Commonwealth Fund, Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health, May 1999
- <sup>26</sup>National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, November 1998
- <sup>27</sup>Center for Policy Research, Stalking in America, July 1997
- <sup>28</sup>Center for Policy Research, Stalking in America, July 1997

