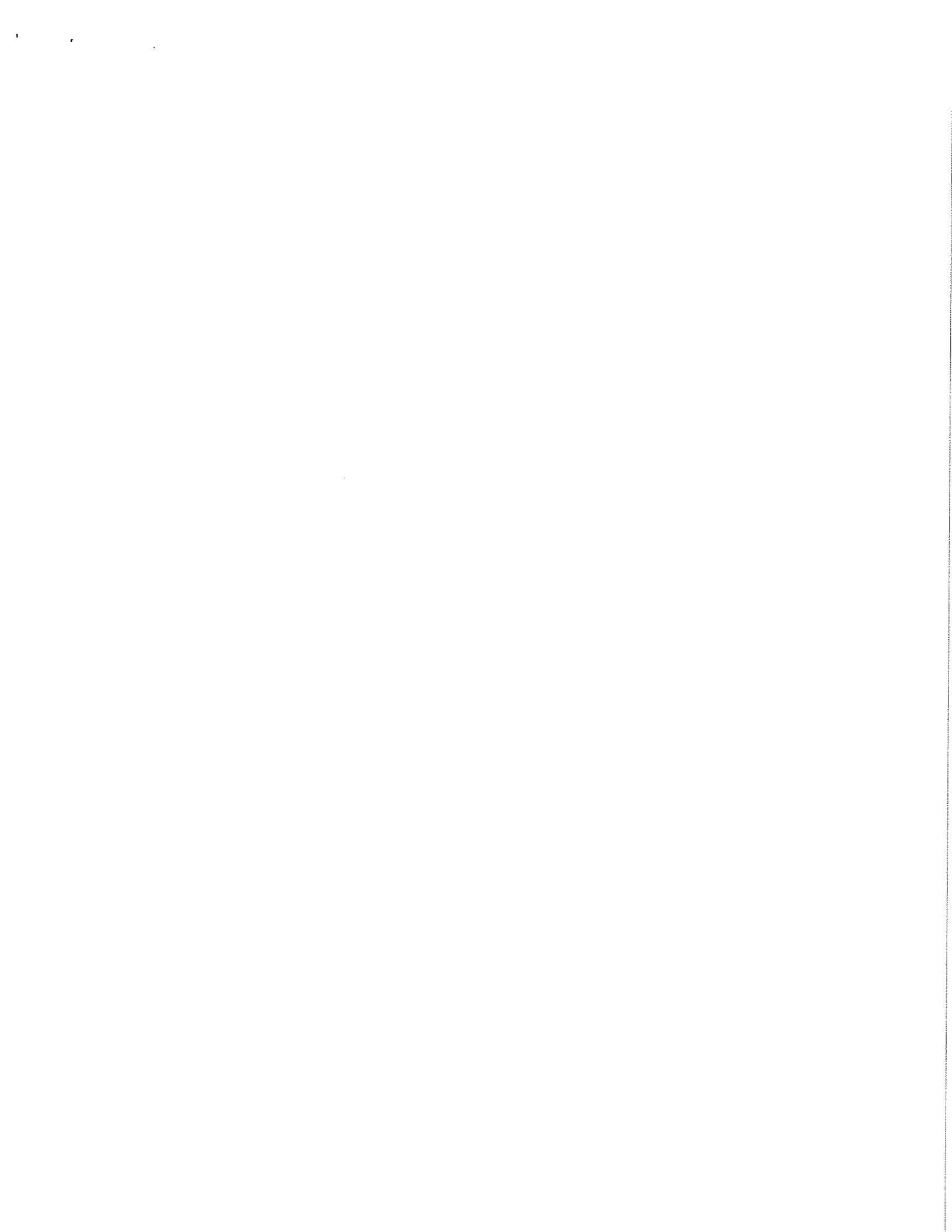


The Faith Community  
& Domestic Violence

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## What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is abusive and harmful behavior between spouses, domestic partners or those in dating relationships. It occurs in urban as well as rural communities. Domestic violence does not discriminate. It affects people of every race, religion, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic status. Couples who are married, living together or have an existing or previous intimate relationship can be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

### There Are Three Basic Types Of Domestic Violence: Physical, Sexual And Emotional

- **Physical abuse** includes shoving, restraining, hitting or kicking. Physical abuse can occur frequently or infrequently, but it tends to escalate in frequency and severity over time.
- **Sexual abuse** is any unwanted or forced sexual behavior by an intimate partner. In Texas, husbands who coerce their wives into having sex are breaking the law.
- **Emotional abuse** includes isolation from family and friends, forced financial dependence, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and control over where and when the partner can go and what he/she can do.

## Domestic Violence in Texas

In the state of Texas, “domestic violence” is synonymous with “family violence.” The Texas Family Code defines family violence as: “an act by a member of a family or household against another member of the family or household that is intended to result in physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault, or that is a threat that reasonably places the member in fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault, but does not include defensive measures to protect oneself.” Studies indicate that more than 85 percent of domestic violence victims are women.

Families that experience abuse – especially women who have been abused – have special needs. They need to know that help – accurate information, resources and trustworthy people to confide in – is available to them 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Children need help dealing with their fears and confusion as well.

This information will help you address the needs of people affected by domestic violence as well as shape your community’s response.

## Signs That Someone May Be A Victim Of Abuse:

- Does the victim have visible injuries, such as black eyes, bruises or broken bones? Does the victim tend to miss work or services because of frequent “accidents?”
- Does the victim’s partner exert an unusual amount of control over their activities? Do you notice the partner controlling family finances, the way the victim acts or dresses or the victim’s contact with friends or family members?
- Does the partner ridicule the victim publicly? Do members of your faith community ignore this behavior, even though they sense the volatile nature of the comments?
- Have you noticed changes in the victim’s or the children’s behavior? Do they appear frightened, exhausted or on edge? Do the children seem to be easily upset? Are they experiencing sudden problems in school or other activities?

# When Religion is Used to Justify Abuse

Religious teachings can be misinterpreted, taken out of context or used as a tool by some batterers to further their control.

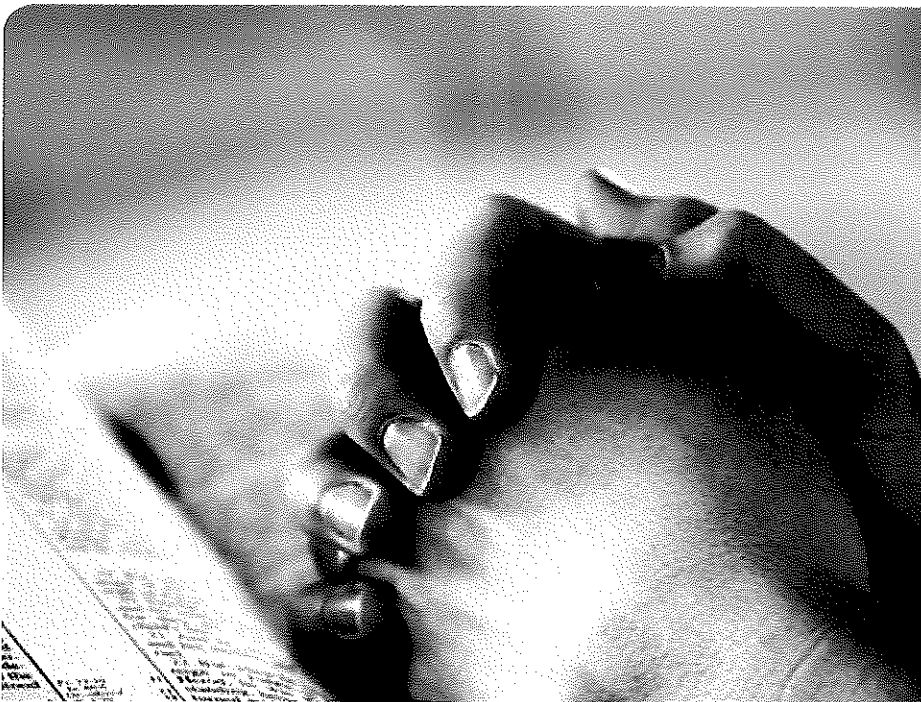
Victims who have been abused may struggle to understand the abuse in light of their religious beliefs. Christian victims may believe that they deserve the punishment because of original sin or that suffering may be a way to salvation. Jewish victims may fear they are not maintaining “shalom bayit,” or peace in the home. As a faith leader, it is vital that you recognize and acknowledge the challenge of a victim’s inner conflict. Address their guilt, empathize with them, but be clear that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the abuser.

Speaking out against domestic violence sends a message that it is unacceptable and contrary to religious teachings.

## Some Questions to Consider

Before you initiate contact with a domestic violence victim, survivor or perpetrator to provide advocacy or faith-based counseling, ask yourself these questions:

- What are my attitudes, feelings and thoughts about domestic violence?
- What qualifications do I have for helping victims, perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence?
- What are my limitations?
- What information and resources can I access to help victims, survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence in my community?



## Myths and Facts

One way to assess your attitudes toward domestic violence is to be aware of some common myths and misconceptions:

### MYTH

Domestic violence occurs when men and women assault each other. Women are just as violent as men.

### FACT

Abuse occurs in a relationship when one person coerces, intimidates or dominates another. The National Crime Victimization Survey of the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 85 percent of serious spousal assaults are perpetrated by men against women. Domestic violence can't be assessed by asking, "Who hit whom how many times?" You must ask, "Who is terrified, hurt repeatedly or afraid to speak out?"

### MYTH

Stress causes abusive behaviors.

### FACT

Most people who are living under severe stress do not abuse. Stress may be a contributing factor, but reducing stress will not necessarily reduce violence in the family. Psychological, physical and financial control of an intimate partner is a problem, not a symptom of stress.

### MYTH

Drugs and alcohol cause batterers to abuse their intimate partners.

### FACT

Domestic violence and substance abuse are two separate problems, however, they may occur simultaneously. Elimination of substance abuse doesn't necessarily eliminate physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Substance abuse is not an excuse for battering, but society often views it as a reason for the abuse.



**MYTH**

Survivors and victims of domestic violence (especially women) are masochistic; they provoke the violence.

**FACT**

Abused women are not a personality type. They don't enjoy being assaulted. Women may act in ways that their husbands or partners don't like. This should not be confused with provocation. Disagreement doesn't justify assault.

**MYTH**

Victims of domestic violence do not seek help and will not use it when offered.

**FACT**

A study of women in Texas family violence shelters found that most shelter residents had repeatedly sought various forms of help before entering the shelter. In many cases, women found that friends, family, the medical community or police often discounted their abuse, sided with their batterers or did not believe their stories.

**MYTH**

What goes on within a family is a private matter.

**FACT**

Domestic violence is a community problem. The harmful, hurtful and dangerous behavior that we have outlawed in public places should not be tolerated in our homes. Victims of domestic violence need support and assistance, and abusive people should be held accountable for violating criminal laws.

**MYTH**

Some religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam sanction violence or ill treatment of women.

**FACT**

According to scriptures in these religions, a woman should be respected and never ever abused.

## Counseling Considerations

It is important to talk to a victim of domestic violence alone. Many experts in the domestic violence field concur that counseling a couple together is not effective once domestic violence has been established. **Joint counseling often threatens the victim's safety, and the abuser's presence will hinder the victim's ability to openly discuss the abuse.**

« In my experience as a faith leader, I know all too well the dangers of couples or marriage counseling in situations of domestic violence. Earlier in my career, without the extensive education and training I later received on domestic violence awareness, I'd often talk to the victim/survivor with her alleged perpetrator present. The risks that I placed on abused women by my well-intentioned, but inappropriate, efforts were great. I now know that the women were not free to express the devastation under which they lived. »

*The Rev. Al Miles,  
Author and national trainer on  
domestic violence awareness for faith leaders*

Many victims and survivors of domestic violence are relieved when asked to tell their stories to an understanding and knowledgeable person. Encourage victims who come to you to openly discuss their situations. A domestic violence victim may express feelings of isolation, shame, confusion, guilt, fear and powerlessness.

Because violence is pervasive in our society, many victims may minimize their situation to make it bearable.

The trauma a victim experiences may make it difficult to make decisions. You can help by asking the victim to assess personal strength, resources and support systems without making decisions on the victim's behalf. By presenting information and options and allowing victims to make their own decisions, you will strengthen the victim's self-esteem. Let victims know that you support the decisions they make, whether it means leaving the abusive relationship or even returning to the abuser. Everyone's safety must be secured before work to preserve the family can begin. Victims may feel their safest option is to stay in the relationship. In this scenario, faith leaders can provide options, support and safety planning by believing that the victims are the experts in their own situations.

Safety should be the priority for victims of domestic violence and their children. Victims should develop a safety plan by identifying a safe place to go in the event of an emergency. (The National Domestic Violence Hotline or your local domestic violence shelter can help). Talk to the victim about setting aside money, keys, medication, important papers, clothes and whatever else is needed in an emergency. Provide the victim with resources if the abuse occurs again. Planning a victim's safety and the safety of their children may help ease feelings of guilt and betrayal of family loyalty.



## Texas Family Violence Programs

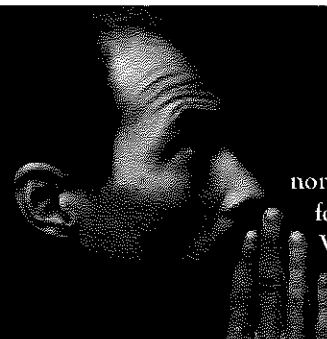
Family violence programs are excellent resources to use when helping victims develop a safety plan. These programs are also a source of information and support for you. Services provided by programs for domestic violence victims may include shelter, a crisis hotline, referral to emergency medical care, counseling services, emergency transportation, legal assistance, employment assistance and more.

A directory of Texas programs for domestic violence victims can be found at [www.tcfv.org](http://www.tcfv.org) or by calling the Texas Council on Family Violence at (800) 525-1978. There is also a TTY line at (888) 239-9035 for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind or Hard of Hearing.

## Help for Batterers

A batterer can present one face to the community and another at home. They may be outwardly charming, congenial and an active member in their religious community. However, in the privacy of their home, they could be controlling, cruel and violent. They often blame others for their violence and deny responsibility for their behavior. Working with batterers can be complex and difficult.

Faith communities can hold batterers accountable and provide intervention that does not place a victim in danger. When there is violence in a relationship, the safety of the victims and their children should be the main concern.



Some group counseling has been found to be effective with batterers through Batterer Intervention and Prevention Programs. The programs provide a framework for teaching a nonviolent lifestyle and hold batterers accountable for their behavior. The Texas Council on Family Violence can provide information and referrals.

## What Faith Communities Can Do

You can be part of a community's understanding that violence is not acceptable under any circumstances. To enhance your community's awareness of domestic violence:

- Educate yourself about the dynamics of domestic violence and the issues related to it through reading, meeting with local advocates or talking with state/national advocates from the Texas Council on Family Violence or the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
- Educate your community through sermons, speeches and prayers around the subject of domestic violence, healthy marriages and relationships.
- Encourage development of an age-appropriate curriculum on bullying prevention, healthy dating relationships and domestic abuse for children's classes and youth groups.
- Listen to survivors of domestic violence in your faith community and ask them for ideas on how your faith community can better support them.
- Invite your local family violence program staff to speak and facilitate discussions with members of your faith organization.
- Encourage your faith community to support and get involved with the local family violence program or anti-violence organization in your community.
- Display posters and phone numbers for family violence programs and hotlines on your institution's bulletin boards.
- Create a fund to help displaced domestic violence victims in your community.
- Develop a resource list for shelter, clothing, food, childcare, money and whatever else a family might need in an emergency.
- Participate in or sponsor Domestic Violence Awareness Month activities in October.
- Organize or join a task force or council within your faith community to address domestic violence.
- Help victims maintain membership within the community and provide children with scholarships so that they can continue to attend religious school classes, youth groups or summer camps.
- Train staff, especially those who work closely with children, to be aware of signs of abuse.

## Suggested Readings

*Abuse and Religion: When Praying isn't Enough.* Horton, Anne L. & Judith A. Williamson, eds. Lexington Books, 1998.

*Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse.* Eugene, Toinette M. & James Newton Poling. Abingdon Press, 1998.

*Battered But Not Broken: Help for Abused Wives and their Church Families.* Gaddis, Patricia Riddle. Judson Press: Valley Forge, PA 1996.

*Battered Wives.* Martin, Del. Volcano Press, 1981.

*Broken By You: Men's Role in Stopping Woman Abuse.* Paterson, Morton. The United Church Publishing House: Etobicoke, Ontario 1995.

*Chain, Chain, Change: For Black Women Dealing With Physical and Emotional Abuse.* White, Evelyn C. Seal Press, 1994.

*Conservando La Fe: Una Guia Para Mujeres Cristianas Victimadas Del Abuso.* Fortune, Marie M. Faith Trust Institute: Seattle, WA 2003.

*Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know.* Miles, Rev. Al. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, MN 2000.

*Ending Violence in Teen Dating Relationships: A Resource Guide for Parents and Pastor.* Miles, Reverend Al. Augsburg Books: Minneapolis, MN 2005.

*Family Violence and Religion: An Interfaith Resource Guide.* Volcano Press: Volcano, CA 1995.

*God's Reconciling Love: A Pastor's Handbook on Domestic Violence.* Murphy, Nancy A. Faith Trust Institute: Seattle, WA 2003.

*Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse.* Fortune, Marie M. HarperCollins, 1995. \*Available in Spanish and Korean

*Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada: Para la Mujer Golpeada/ For the Latina in an Abusive Relationship.* Zambrano, Myrna M. Seal Press, 1985.

*Pastoral Care of Battered Women.* Clarke, Rita Lou. Westminster John Knox, 1986.

***Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behaviors, and Violence.*** Funk, Russ. JIST Publishing, Inc. Indianapolis, IN 2006.

***Silence is Deadly: Judaism Confronts Wife Beating.*** Graetz, Naomi. Jason Aronson, Inc.: Northvale, NJ 1998.

***Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook.*** Adams, Carol J. & Marie M. Fortune. Continuum Publishing Company: New York, NY 1995.

***Violence in Families: What Every Christian Needs to Know.*** Miles, Reverend Al. Augsburg Books: Minneapolis, MN 2002.

***Violent No More: Helping Men End Domestic Abuse.*** Paymar, Michael. Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Hunter House Inc.: Alameda, CA 2000.

***When the Vow Breaks: Building a Response to Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community.*** Jewish Women International, 2005.

***When Violence Begins at Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse.*** Wilson, Karen J. Hunter House Inc.: Alameda, CA 1997.

***When Violence is No Stranger: Pastoral Counseling with Survivors of Acquaintance Rape.*** Leslie, Kristen. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN 2003.

***Woman Battering: Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series.*** Adams, Carol. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN 1994.

***Women, Abuse, and the Bible How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal.*** Kroeger, Catherine Clark & James R. Beck, eds. Baker Books, 1996.

***You Are Not Alone: Solace and Inspiration for Domestic Violence Survivors Based on Jewish Wisdom.*** Landesman, Toby. Faith Trust Institute: Seattle, WA 2004.

The Faith Community and Domestic Violence brochure was originally developed in 1996 under the direction of the Family Violence Advisory Committee, a 15-member committee appointed by the former Texas Board of Human Services. This brochure was revised in 2006 through a collaborative effort between the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, the Texas Council on Family Violence, and stakeholders statewide.



Brochure layout provided by the Texas Council on Family Violence.

## Domestic Violence Prevention/Intervention Resources

Direct services for victims, survivors and perpetrators:

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**  
800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 800-787-3224  
[www.ndvh.org](http://www.ndvh.org)

**Women's Advocacy Project**  
P.O. Box 833  
Austin, TX 78767-0833  
(512) 476-5377  
(512) 476-5773 (fax)  
[www.women-law.org](http://www.women-law.org)

**Department of Family and Protective Services**  
P.O. Box 149030  
Austin, Texas 78714-9030  
800-252-5400  
[www.txabusehotline.org/PublicMain.asp](http://www.txabusehotline.org/PublicMain.asp)

**Training and Support for Faith Communities:**  
Texas Council on Family Violence  
P.O. Box 161810  
Austin, Texas 78716  
(512) 794-1133 or TTY 888-239-9035  
[www.tcfv.org](http://www.tcfv.org)

**Faith Trust Institute**  
2400 N. 45th Street #10  
Seattle, WA 98103  
(206) 634-1903  
(206) 634-0115 (fax)  
[www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

**Family Violence Prevention Fund**  
383 Rhode Island St. Suite #304  
San Francisco, CA 94103-5133  
(415) 252-8900 or TTY 800-595-4889  
(415) 252-8991 (fax)  
[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

**National Coalition Against Domestic Violence**  
1120 Lincoln St., Suite 1603,  
Denver, CO 80203  
(303) 839-1852 or TTY (303) 839-1681  
(303) 831-9251 (fax)  
[www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)

**National Network to End Domestic Violence**  
660 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Suite 303  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 543-5566  
(202) 543-5626 (fax)  
[www.nnedv.org](http://www.nnedv.org)