



# **SAFE AT HOME**

## **RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC ABUSE Policy**

**October 2018**

# SAFE AT HOME

## Table of Contents

Foreword .....	1
Introduction .....	1
<b>Part I Policy</b>	
A. Aims of the Policy.....	2
B. Policy Statement .....	2
1. Statement of Belief .....	2
2. Why Have a Policy?.....	2
3. The Scope of the Policy and Procedures.....	4
C. The Nature and Impact of Domestic Abuse.....	4
1. Who are the Victims? .....	4
D. Areas of Responsibility in the Local Church.....	8
E. Training for Church Leaders .....	8
F. Collaboration with Outside Agencies.....	8

## FOREWORD

Promoting the well-being of those created in the image of God is integral to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a church body we care for and strengthen each other physically and emotionally as well as spiritually. *Safe at Home* calls for us to do no more than purposefully reflect our God-given commission in the principles of how we behave towards one another.

These policies and the procedures are provided to guide and support you in fulfilling our shared responsibility to create a safe environment for all family members within in our homes. They will also provide the guidance necessary to hold those who perpetrate abuse responsible for their actions. Combatting domestic abuse is everybody's responsibility. It requires collaborative work not only in the various levels of church organisation but also with those agencies within our communities who possess the specialised skills and resources to assist those in need.

The real activity to safeguard survivors of abuse comes through our purposeful attitudes and actions in our daily Christian walk. I sincerely trust that we will work together under God's guidance in keeping our church family safe at home.

**Ian Sweeney [Electronic signature to be inserted]**

BUC President

## INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places great importance upon family life. In line with our world church position statement<sup>1</sup> we affirm the dignity and worth of each human being and decry all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence. The church recognises the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We therefore believe that Seventh-day Adventists must respond to abuse and family violence within both the church and the community. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate and potentially extend such behaviour.

We have chosen the word 'abuse' to reflect a greater understanding of the nature of relationships characterised by coercive control in which physical violence is one facet of abuse. An overemphasis on specific acts of violence has historically led to a failure to appreciate the pervasive extent of domestic abuse. This has resulted in inadequate responses to a scourge that affects a disturbing number of our church community. We are challenged to maintain zero tolerance of abuse in all its forms. All are damaging and an evil in God's sight. The terms 'victims' and 'survivor' will be used interchangeably depending on the context. Survivor will be the preferred description conveying the truth that those who experience abuse can rise above their adversity.

*Safe at Home* sets out the Church's guidelines relating to changing the culture in which abuse thrives and taking practical steps to address it when it occurs. It also provides the procedures to be followed to reduce, to the minimum, the risk of abuse to children and adults within our households. It is our prayer that these resources will empower you to minister effectively to those affected by domestic abuse. Our role is to exemplify the ministry of Jesus who declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18). God is on the side of the oppressed and we should be too, to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; for the rights of all who are destitute" (Proverbs 31:8).

---

<sup>1</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists position statement on abuse and family violence (1995)

### A. AIMS OF THIS POLICY

This document sets out the British Union Conference's (BUC) Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedures providing guidance on how local churches will implement its the policy. It supports the Church's commitment to address and respond effectively to domestic abuse both within its own community and wider society. The aims of the policy are:

- To raise awareness about domestic abuse in local church communities.
- To increase awareness of and access to support services for victims of domestic abuse and where appropriate for perpetrators.
- To offer suitable training from appropriate specialist within the church and outside agencies for key staff and church leaders and to encourage church members to undertake basic training.
- To encourage churches to become places of safety.
- To encourage collaborative working among the various levels of church administration.

### B. POLICY STATEMENT

#### 1. Statement of Beliefs

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places great importance upon family life and affirms the dignity and worth of each human being. It decries all forms of abuse, including domestic violence. Such behaviour is intimidating, hostile and/or offensive and undermines our biblical and moral values and destroys the trust between people in our community.

The BUC subscribes to the following statement issued by the General Conference on Family Violence:

"The Bible clearly indicates that the distinguishing mark of Christian believers is the quality of their human relationships in the church and in the family. It is in the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or tear one another down. There is no room among Christ's followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power or authority. Motivated by their love for Christ, His disciples are called to show respect and concern for the welfare of others, to accept males and females as equals, and to acknowledge that every person has a right to respect and dignity. Failure to relate to others in this way violates their personhood and devalues human beings created and redeemed by God."

The church believes that such abusive behaviour is incompatible with Christianity and any profession of commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Therefore, it is inconceivable that individuals who, despite guidance and support, continue to choose to practise such behaviour, should be allowed to continue to represent the church in any capacity.

#### 2. Why Have a Policy?

Domestic abuse is a tragic reality in both society in general and within the Church. The Church seeks to create an environment where all can feel safe from abuse. The purpose of these guidelines is to change attitudes and practices that allow abuse to thrive. It also seeks to provide clear practical guidance and procedures for addressing disclosures of domestic abuse. All church members have a responsibility to act in a manner that minimises risk and maximises support for survivors of abuse.

While the preservation of marriage and family remain the ideal goal, the primary purpose of intervention where abuse is taking place, is the safety of the victims. A failure to appreciate the inherent evil of domestic abuse results in churches becoming complicit with perpetrators by actively encouraging survivors to remain in abusive

environments, taking ineffective action, or turning a blind eye where abuse occurs. This policy calls on all churches to adopt the following Charter as its code of practice in dealing with domestic abuse. The Charter summarises the Church's determination to end abuse in Adventist homes, and from those who used to be in an intimate relationship with those who are vulnerable. It encourages churches to become places of safety where domestic abuse is taken seriously, survivors are believed, and respected and alleged or known perpetrators are held accountable.

The Charter should be displayed in prominent places in each church so that all who enter will know where the church stands. These guidelines advocates that every church adopts a code of practice consistent with the following Safe at Home Charter:

---

## The Safe at Home Charter

### Seventh-day Adventist Church:

---

- 1  
holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent/incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living;
- 2  
holds that all abuse is spiritually damaging for both the person being abused and the person who is abusing
- 3  
accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society;
- 4  
undertakes to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse;
- 5  
urges abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church and, as necessary, professional and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship
- 6  
will work with the support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways, and will publicise their work;
- 7  
will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin and will take appropriate measures to hold abusers accountable;
- 8  
believes in a God of love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness;
- 9  
will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image;
- 10  
will seek to appoint advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and keep the Church informed about the implementation and development it's policies on domestic violence.

(adapted from a Charter developed by Churches Together in Gloucestershire).  
The Charter can be used to develop an action plan for the church in straightforward stages

---

Developing policy is not just about having a policy statement but is also about gaining a working knowledge of the effects of domestic abuse on all involved and using pastoral and practical strategies to assist people who are in abusive relationships. A policy helps people think through the issues. Policy documents give a structure to the work of prevention and support and are a useful reference for monitoring.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to offer a safe place for all people in its community life, where boundaries that safeguard acceptable behaviour are known and respected, and where inappropriate practices or harmful behaviours and attitudes are openly addressed.

### 3. The Scope of the Policy and Guidelines

These guidelines specifically apply to relationships within local churches and among members, officers and volunteers. Disclosures regarding paid employees of the church should be made to the employing organization directly in writing. Further advice on how to complain about an employee can be received by contacting the Executive Secretary of your conference/mission/union/organization. The Executive Secretary/President will then arrange for all such disclosures to be investigated and resolved in accordance with both the Church's beliefs and current employment law.

## C. THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

The UK Home Office defines domestic abuse as:

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- physical
- psychological
- emotional
- sexual
- financial
- property
- spiritual

Domestic abuse occurs in relationships where one individual holds power over another and uses that power to harm. It consists of the violation of another person's human rights. Essentially, domestic abuse is terrorism. Webster's Dictionary defines terrorism as 'the calculated use of violence (or threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals . . . through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear.' Trauma specialist Dr Judith Herman has identified major commonalities between the experience of survivors of domestic violence and prisoners of war. She compares, 'the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes' (Dr Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p3).

### 1. Who are the Victims?

Domestic abuse occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography. In the UK, women are more likely than men to be survivors of domestic violence. While estimates on the prevalence of female on male incidences of domestic abuse vary from organisation to organisation, The Crime Survey for England and Wales March 2017 reported that for every three survivors of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male. One in four women and one in six to seven men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime. On average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> Accurate figures will always be impossible to ascertain because domestic abuse is vastly underreported. For men, such reluctance to report is compounded by the stigma and shame attached to perceptions of weakness from society in general.

---

<sup>2</sup><https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse#domestic-violence-and-abuse-new-definition>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>

Research indicates that men are more than two times less likely to report incidences of abuse, although men are reporting domestic abuse in increasing numbers. The paucity of funding and provisions to address male survivors of abuse is indicative of a lack of political will to recognize the problem.

There is a general assumption within the Church that male survivors of abuse among Christians are few and far between. However, the most extensive research on domestic abuse within the Adventist church shows a different picture. Research conducted by Dr René Drumm among 100 Adventist churches in the United States indicated that women in the Church are just as likely to be abused by their husbands as women in the general population. Even more surprising was the finding that men are more likely to be abused by their wives than those in the general population.<sup>4</sup> As previously noted, large disparities between male and female incidences occur when homicides, sexual assaults, severity of injury and frequency of attacks are factored in.<sup>5</sup> While male on female abuse will remain the primary focus of programming and provision, the suffering of male survivors must also be recognized and addressed. The Seventh-day Adventist Church views all forms of abuse as antithetical to Christian values.

### a) Children and Young People

Children are also profoundly affected by domestic abuse and are at serious risk in abuse situations. In addition to the risk of physical harm, witnessing domestic violence can result in long-term emotional and psychological trauma across the life-span. Research has also indicated a strong connection between domestic violence and child abuse. This highlights the importance of a **Safeguarding policy**, and of always knowing and respecting the limits on confidentiality when a child is at risk. Where domestic abuse is perpetrated in a family context, it is recommended that church leaders work in close liaison with designated safeguarding officers.

The changes to the definition of domestic abuse in 2013, to include 16 and 17-year-olds was a recognition that those in the age group 16-24 are those most at risk of domestic abuse. During the teenage years, young people are influenced by a huge array of factors, which can increase vulnerability and risk. These can include; puberty and hormonal changes, wanting increased autonomy from family, peer pressure, body image and self-esteem issues and the influence of the media.

Domestic abuse is still a 'hidden' issue in our society; and it is even more so for teenagers. This is exacerbated by the fact that adolescents can be more accepting of, and dismissive about, this form of behaviour than adults. It is important to be aware that cases involving under 18-year-olds may include features of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and street gang-related sexual and other violence.

Although some features of teenage relationship abuse are similar to adult domestic abuse, the forms and experience of this issue, as well as the challenges in seeking and providing services, make many of the issues faced by teenagers unique. There are also certain barriers relating to young people's ability to access services. Simply because of their age many young people are unable to access the same levels of support as those over 18.

Many young people will be experiencing multiple risk factors. However, as with abuse in adult relationships, teenage relationship abuse occurs across diverse groups and cultures. Teenage relationship abuse can occur in various forms, including verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial, and the experience may have both immediate and long-term effects on young people. It is sometimes the case that there are unclear parameters between survivor and perpetrator which adds to the complexity of cases.

An NSPCC report on Partner Exploitation and Violence in Teenage Intimate relationships reveals that:

- 33% of girls and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual abuse within their relationship
- 25% of girls (the same proportion as adult women) and 18% of boys reported some form of physical relationship abuse

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/effects-of-intimate-partner-violence-among-seventh-day-adventist-church-attendees>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-is-a-gendered-crime/>

- 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported some form of emotional relationship abuse
- 1. Young women who are being or have been abused are 4 to 6 times more likely than their non-abused peers to become pregnant during their teenage years.
- 2. As many as two-thirds of young women who become pregnant as adolescents were sexually and/or physically abused at some point in their lives – either as children, in their current relationships, or both.<sup>6</sup>

#### **b) Parents**

It is important to recognise that child or adolescent to parent abuse is likely to involve a *pattern of behaviour*. Abusive behaviours can encompass, but are not limited to, physical violence, humiliating language and threats, belittling a parent, damage to property and stealing from a parent and even heightened sexualised behaviours. Abuse can occur together or separately.

Domestic abuse is notoriously difficult to identify when it occurs within the family home. This can become even harder if the abuse is child or adolescent to parent abuse. Like other forms of domestic abuse, child to parent abuse is very likely to be under-reported. Many of these families may be facing multiple issues such as substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence. The lack of recognition of this issue means that many families may not recognise that they need support and may feel unable to ask for help due to feeling stigma and shame. There are also often issues of lack of awareness of existing support (notably family support groups); parents not seeing themselves as legitimate recipients of support; lack of knowledge on drugs, alcohol and their effects; an 'it'll never happen to us' mind-set; and a lack of consensus on the best course of action within couples.

It is important to recognise the effects that child or adolescent to parent abuse may have on both the parent and the young person and to establish trust and support for both. It is also important that a young person using abusive behaviour against a parent receives a safeguarding response.

Responding to disclosures of child to adult abuse:

#### **Do**

- Remember this is domestic abuse (and general domestic abuse considerations apply);
- Show understanding; consult with a Designated Safeguarding Officer, who will consider whether other referrals need to be made, for example to:
  - Public protection specialists or local policing staff: they may have existing knowledge;
  - Are other children at risk in the house? If so, you will need to make a referral to children's services.

#### **Don't**

- Assume that this is a parenting issue – the parent is the survivor in this situation;
- Joke or make light of the situation;
- Underestimate how difficult it is for the parent to report the incident and for the young person to accept responsibility;
- Wait until something more serious happens before acting.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/partner-exploitation-violence-teenage-intimate-relationships-report.pdf>

### **c) Elder Abuse**

Abuse of older people is a hidden, and often ignored, problem in society. While the profile of child abuse has been raised in recent years a number of organisations and bodies have been responsible for reminding us of the particular needs and problems that can be associated with older people.

No standard definition of elder abuse applies within the UK public sector. In 1993 Action on Elder Abuse established the following definition of elder abuse as 'A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person'. It has at its heart the 'expectation of trust' that an older person may rightly establish with another person, but which is subsequently violated.

Both older men and women can be at risk of being abused. People can be abused in different ways. These include: physical abuse; psychological abuse; financial abuse; sexual abuse; spiritual abuse; neglect; inappropriate use of medication. Elder abuse can occur anywhere: for instance, in someone's own home; a carer's home; day care; residential care; a nursing home; hospital. The perpetrator is usually well-known to the person being abused. They may be: a partner, child or relative; a friend or neighbour; a paid or volunteer care worker; a health or social worker, or other professional. Older people may also be abused by a person they care for.

There are many reasons why elder abuse occurs and these may vary with each incident. Elder abuse may range from a spontaneous act of frustration to systematic premeditated assaults on an older person. At home some of the causes would appear to include: poor-quality long-term relationships; a carer's inability to provide the level of care required; or a carer with mental or physical health problems. In other settings, abuse may be a symptom of a poorly run establishment. It is likely to occur when staff are: inadequately trained; poorly supervised; have little support from management; or work in isolation.

If you become aware or concerned about someone you know, it is important that you refer the case to your local Domestic Abuse agencies. Since domestic violence (DV) does not always meet the threshold for intervention in adult social care, DV services are always the best option in addition to whatever support services Adult Social Care can offer. Cases of alleged Elder Abuse are assessed at a local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The Domestic Violence MARAC is a meeting where agencies talk about the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. You should be aware that, despite your concern, any older person has the right to decline assistance. However, a statutory obligation exists if the person is an 'adult at risk' (see Section G, p13).

### **d) LGBT**

The official position of the Church on matters regarding LGBT does not absolve the Church of a duty of care where individuals within the Church community who either identify as LGBT or have a homosexual orientation are victims of domestic abuse. It is estimated that about 25% of LGBT people experience domestic abuse, a figure similar to women in opposite-gendered relationships. Underreporting of abuse in LGBT relationships is often compounded by the fear of sexual orientation being revealed. Perpetrators may threaten to 'out' the victim to friends, family, religious communities, co-workers, and others as a method of control. The often-secretive nature of homosexual relationships can create an environment in which abuse thrives and victims are reluctant to seek help.

LGBT victims of abuse may blame the abuse on being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, however abuse is always the fault of the abuser whatever the circumstance. In seeking to support LGBT victims of abuse, it is vital that pastoral carers do so with a non-judgemental attitude. The primary objective of support in such instances is the safety of the individual not seeking to set them straight about biblical theology and sexual orientation.

## **D. AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Local churches should be proactive in clearly identifying and communicating who bears primary responsibility for addressing issues pertaining to domestic abuse. It may be possible for this to be part of the responsibility of the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO), an Elder, or fall under the remit of someone specifically appointed to fill the role. In any event, responsibilities should be carried out in close liaison with the DSO where children are involved.

Responsibilities entail:

- a) encouraging the dissemination of and use of this policy and guidelines;
- b) developing a library of resource materials and information, using available resources such as those listed in the Resources section of these procedures (Appendices, p19);
- c) identify the best place to display relevant local phone numbers and support services;
- d) being a point of contact for ministers, lay leaders, and church members and being able to offer advice and information to them;
- e) advising and informing the district, and monitoring practice;
- f) enabling and encouraging workshops and other forms of training through networking with professionals within the church and local support services and agencies
- g) encouraging support for the annual Abuse Prevention Day

## **E. TRAINING FOR CHURCH LEADERS**

The insidious nature, far-reaching extent and the great need to provide practical remedies for victims and perpetrators of abuse necessitates that training for pastors and elders is mandated in a similar way that safeguarding training is required. Copious anecdotal evidence indicates that inadequate responses to domestic abuse on the part of church leaders not only exposes victims to greater danger but may also result in church leaders intentionally or inadvertently colluding with perpetrators.

(Training options are addressed in both the Procedures and Appendices sections of this document).

## **F. COLLABORATION WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

The goal to eradicate domestic abuse within the Church is not an undertaking the Church can accomplish in isolation. It is imperative that the Seventh-day Adventist Church at every level works in collaboration with the agencies within their communities who are specially trained and equipped to intervene in instances of domestic abuse. These agencies include, but are not limited to, the Police, Children's Services, The National Probation Service, housing authorities and health professionals. Seventh-day Adventist support and interventions should always operate alongside domestic abuse support services, like Refuge, Women's Aid and Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP), not as an alternative. All training provided to pastoral workers must include an awareness of the existence of these services and the help they can provide.