

What is Domestic And Family Abuse?

The best way to comprehend domestic and family abuse is to understand some of the abusive behaviours that it includes.

VERBAL ABUSE- using verbal insults to belittle, humiliate, degrade, demean and/or intimidate. This may be done in private or out in public.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE- making someone feel like everything is always their fault and that they are always wrong. Subjecting a person to personal criticism and ridicule to purposely undermine their self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

SOCIAL ABUSE- isolating a person from family or friends. Preventing a person from having a job or making them move to a location where they know no one.

SPIRITUAL ABUSE- denying choice. Preventing someone from practising their beliefs. Using spiritual or religious beliefs and teachings to justify abuse. Forcing someone to do something against their beliefs. Using a position of spiritual authority to dominate or manipulate someone.

PHYSICAL ABUSE- physical harm to the body. Use of weapons. Destruction of property. Abusing pets. Depriving of sleep.

SEXUAL ABUSE- any sexual activity without consent. Persuading or forcing someone, with the misuse of Scripture, to participate in sexual activity- is not consent.

FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC ABUSE- limiting someone's access to money. Providing only an insufficient 'allowance'. Not allowing access to bank accounts. Creating debt in someone else's name. Making a person explain/justify any spending.

TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED ABUSE- using any form of technology to threaten, track, harass, stalk, monitor or control a person.

Domestic and family abuse occurs in all the many different relationship dynamics that exist in society. These include heterosexual couples, couples from within the LGBTQI+ community, amongst siblings, parent/child relationships and it can include extended family members.

Elder abuse (which is any action, or in-action, by a person in a position of trust, which causes harm to an older person) also falls within domestic and family abuse.

SEEKING SUPPORT

In the case of an emergency call 000 for police or ambulance

1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)

National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence
Counselling, Information and Support Service:

- Available 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week
- Online counselling also available at:
1800respect.org.au
- Is available to **ANYONE** impacted by domestic and family abuse or sexual assault (including family, friends, and professionals)
- Interpreters are available

Trained counsellors can:

- Talk through your situation with you
- Look at your current level of safety and the level of safety for anyone else that is in your care
- Explore your options with you
- Support you with making a safety plan if necessary
- Help you to work out what sort of support you need
- Link you with appropriate support services

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Prepared by Newcastle Anglican

A close-up photograph of a woman with a gentle smile, looking down at an open Bible she is holding. The Bible is open to a page with text, and a colorful bookmark is visible at the bottom. The background is softly blurred, focusing attention on the woman and the book.

Domestic
& Family
Abuse

What Does the Bible Really Say?

THE BIBLE TEACHES US THAT WE ARE ALL WORTHY OF RESPECT AND LOVE

The Bible tells us that we are all created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27) and are all precious to God. Therefore, the value and dignity of every individual should be upheld by all.

Jesus shows us the way we must treat others.

Throughout His life and ministry, we see Jesus treat others with love, kindness, compassion, and equality, regardless of gender, class, age, or ability. He did not condone violence or abuse. Jesus never abused His power.

Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

God wants us to have healthy relationships characterised by mutual service, respect and affirmation, partnership, honesty, accountability, trust, and fairness.

Tragically, many people do not experience loving and healthy relationships as God intended. Instead, many women, children and men are subjected to domestic and family abuse. This includes people within our faith communities.

This is not what God wants for His people. God wants each of us to flourish.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)



THE BIBLE DOES NOT JUSTIFY OR EXCUSE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY ABUSE

Too often people misuse passages of Scripture to justify their violent and abusive behaviour. To misuse the Scriptures in this way is unacceptable and is spiritual abuse.

Submission and Male Headship

Men who abuse often use Ephesians 5:22-23 completely out of context. These verses read: “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is head of the Church....”

However, if we read on and properly understand what St Paul is saying, we see that the passage refers to **mutual submission** of husband and wife in self-giving love: “Husbands should love their wives as they love their own body... as Christ loves the Church.” (Ephesians 28-29)

Violence, abuse and any coercive or threatening behaviour is contrary to God’s will, is a sin and is a criminal offence.

Whatever understanding one has of a husband and wife in our contemporary setting, there is never any justification for the use of violence and abuse. This includes minimising or denying abuse or shifting the accountability of abusive behaviours onto another. Power, control, and a sense of privilege should never exist in a mutual love relationship.

The Person Using Abuse is the One Responsible for Breaking the Covenant of Marriage

People who abuse sometimes try to manipulate their victims by suggesting that divorce or separation is, in every circumstance, sinful. This allows them to maintain a sense of control and shifts the responsibility of whether the marriage covenant is broken or not, onto their victim.

The person who is subjected to abuse may themselves also believe that if they leave, they are the ones breaking the marriage vows. However, it is important

to understand that **the person using abuse has already broken the covenant of marriage.**

Whilst we recognise the sanctity of marriage, we must not put more emphasis on this than we do on the **wellbeing and safety** of anyone who is experiencing domestic and family abuse.

Forgiveness Does Not Mean an Acceptance of Abuse or That Someone Must Stay in an Abusive Relationship

People who abuse sometimes use Bible verses about forgiveness to guilt their victims into forgiving them. This gives the person using abuse a sense of freedom from having to be held accountable for their actions. Luke 17:3-4 says that if someone sins against you, “...you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.”

Forgiving does not mean forgetting the abuse, accepting it in any way or that it is safe to stay in, or return to, a relationship. Forgiveness should never be forced or rushed. Forgiveness can be a long journey that may require support and distance from the situation.

Luke 17:3-4 is clear that holding someone to account for their actions is essential to the process of forgiveness. This may take the form of legal action and/or complaint procedures. To tell someone subjected to abuse to simply “just forgive” their abuser, implies they must suffer in silence. This does great harm.

Apologies and Remorse is Not Repentance

Luke 17:3-4 says, “if there is repentance...”. Giving an apology or being remorseful is not repentance. True repentance is when a person accepts responsibility and faces up to their abusive behaviour. It is about creating **lifelong changes in attitudes and actions that are free from the need to dominate and control.** This generally does not come without support from behavioural change groups or an accredited counsellor or therapist to change longstanding beliefs, thoughts, and ingrained patterns of behaviour.