

Faith Community responses to domestic and family violence during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic presents significant challenges for the faith community. In addition to the technical, logistical, support and general wellbeing challenges associated with supporting staff, volunteers and community who are working/volunteering remotely and/or living under restrictions, there are additional challenges for members of faith groups experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV).

Adverse events (bushfires, job loss, financial crisis, financial stress) can lead to an escalation of gendered violence and domestic abuse*.

Remote working, restricted living conditions and self-isolation measures will exacerbate the physical isolation of people experiencing DFV and put them in almost constant, close proximity with the person who is abusing them. Perpetrators of DFV intentionally isolate victims from others to increase their control over the victim and to minimise the victim’s resistance to the perpetrators abuse and violence.

It is highly likely abusers will exploit this period of enforced isolation to increase their use of violence during this period.

*Parkinson, Debra & Zara, C.. (2013). The hidden disaster: Domestic violence in the aftermath of natural disaster. Australian Journal of Emergency Management. 28. 28-35.



Do | Don't | Remember

With this in mind, here are some tips for faith leaders and volunteers in supporting members of faith communities during this time:

Do

- Place value on the potential of faith communities for connection, safety and support.
- Assume that a perpetrator of violence can hear, see and/or monitor all communications you have with the person.
- Ask the person what channels they prefer to be contacted through. Keep checking as this may change.
- Ask the person if there are better and worse times of day for you to contact them. Keep asking as this may change.
- Ask the person if there are any other challenges they are facing in their restricted living conditions, and if there is a way you can help them with these. Keep asking as this may change.

Don't

- Assume volunteers and faith community members are safe, or safer, at home than where they might otherwise be.
- Underestimate the possibility of spiritual abuse as a form of family violence.

Remember

Domestic and family violence services are deemed “essential services” by all levels of Australian government and continue to operate through this time. Most services have moved to significantly reduce face to face contact but have increased remote methods of working. Where it’s safe and appropriate to do so, you can continue to refer people to specialist services.

See page 2 overleaf to read about the importance of Faith Communities as responders and explore the free ready resources

Faith Community responses to domestic and family violence beyond COVID-19

“Despite the challenges experienced in faith-based responses to family violence, faith settings are an integral part of the community response to family violence. Faith leaders and organisations have direct and influential contact with many members of the...community, and their guidance and intervention are often sought when family violence is being experienced.

The trust communities have in their faith leaders enables these leaders to play an important role in educating communities about family violence, reinforcing community standards in relation to respect, dignity and non-violence, and providing practical advice and assistance to people in need.”

The Royal Commission into Family Violence
Vol 5 Faith Communities

Build your awareness

Watch the Insight Exchange video (75mins) shared with one faith community and filmed for the benefit of [any faith community](#)



<https://vimeo.com/334563956>



I will be consciously aware of the language I use when responding to (1) disclosures of violence (2) inappropriate unilateral statements (media, documents) (3) others who use inappropriate unilateral statements. "I am prepared to respond safely and help to guide our church communities to do the same!" Thankyou so much.

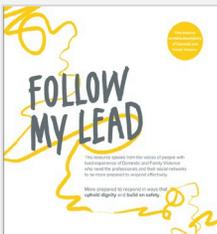
[General Manager]

The session reinforced what I started learning a few months ago. The importance of language used and how it will empower or disempower victims, the difference it may have in the court system; the need to change community notions of the language around violence. It helps embed these ideas more firmly in my thinking and vocabulary. Very inspirational, positive and encouraging.

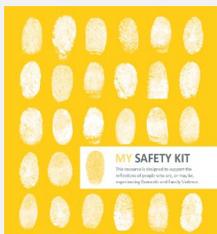
[Discipleship Ministries Team Member (Women in Ministry)]



Resources | Ready to use and share



Watch the [short Follow My Lead animation](#) (4mins) Read and share [Follow My Lead](#) An awareness raising resource for any person who may be listening to and responding to a person experiencing domestic and family violence. [Read More](#)



Watch the [short My Safety Kit animation](#) (2.5mins) Read and share [My Safety Kit](#) A reflection resource for people who are (or may be) experiencing domestic and family violence. [Read More](#)



[My Dignity - My body is mine](#) is an information and reflection resource about sexualised violence. My Dignity is for anyone who may be or has experienced sexualised violence and for anyone who may be responding. [Read More](#)

For more insights and resources like these, visit [Insight Exchange](#).