



THE SHEPHERD'S CHURCH

Domestic Abuse Policy

Domestic abuse is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser's victim(s) through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse usually occurs in a pattern that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated by accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual and/or psychological means.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification—to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term “domestic violence,” is pervasive in our culture. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse is underreported, so those statistics are conservative. Domestic abuse is just as likely to exist in The Shepherd's Church as it is in the culture outside the church, and we have victims of abuse present in the church, so we must be on alert.

Domestic violence in any form—physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or spiritual—is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being and is therefore an assault upon God Himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh

covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the victim. Domestic abuse severely damages the relationship and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages flourishing, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear. Given this acknowledgment, The Shepherd's Church affirms the following:

- Domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living. (Mark 7:20-23, Eph 5:28-30, 1 Pet 3:7-9)
- All abuse is spiritually damaging for both the victim and the abuser and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family, and close friendships.
- Domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
- Domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage/relationship problem, the victim's problem, or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem. (James 4:1-3, Eph 5:11-14)
- Statistically, domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men against the very people whom God has given them to protect and shepherd—women and children. (Eph 5:15-6:4)
- We will listen to, believe, support, and care for those affected by domestic abuse. (Judges 2:18, Ps 9:9, 18:16-19, 103:6, 146)
- We will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling, and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage/relationship in which the abuse occurs.
- We do not have the legal authority or the ability to investigate charges of abuse but will consult with competent professional counselors, legal counsel and, if necessary, law enforcement, to determine the best course of action regarding both the abused person(s) and the perpetrator of the abuse.
- We will stand with victims in seeking legal remedies should that be their decision.

- We will discipline members who are abusers, including by removing them from the church if they are unrepentant. (Matt 18:15-17, Rom 16:17, Titus 3:10-11)
- We will work with local domestic violence support agencies, will learn from them, and will support them in appropriate ways.
- We will teach that domestic abuse is a sin. (Mark 7:20-23, Rom 1:29-31, Eph 5:25-33)
- We will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity, and worth. (Gen 1:26-27, 9:6, Matt 19:3-6, Gal 3:28)
- We will train all pastors/elders, staff, deacons, and lay leaders in domestic abuse awareness.
- We will seek to utilize trained professionals to encourage best practices and keep church members and leadership trained on and informed about the implementation of this domestic abuse policy.

Responding to Domestic Abuse

In cases of domestic abuse, we will seek first to care for and protect the victim(s). We will discipline the perpetrator and, if appropriate and desirable to the victim(s), seek to reconcile the marriage/relationship. We also will notify law enforcement when necessary for the protection of the victim(s) and when required by law, as in the case of domestic violence involving a minor, elderly persons, or disabled persons.

Domestic Abuse Protocol

Victim Care

- Safety of the victim(s) is paramount.
- Listen to and believe the victim(s).
- Recognize the signs and ask questions.
- Escalate to appropriate personnel.
- Reporting to law enforcement is required by law if abuse involves children under 18, elderly persons, or disabled persons. Otherwise, consider the victims' wishes regarding reporting.
- Assure the victim(s) it's not their fault.
- Assist practically as desired by the victim(s).
- Professional counseling as desired by the victim(s).
- Counseling should be individualized, aimed at trauma/abuse recovery (not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation).

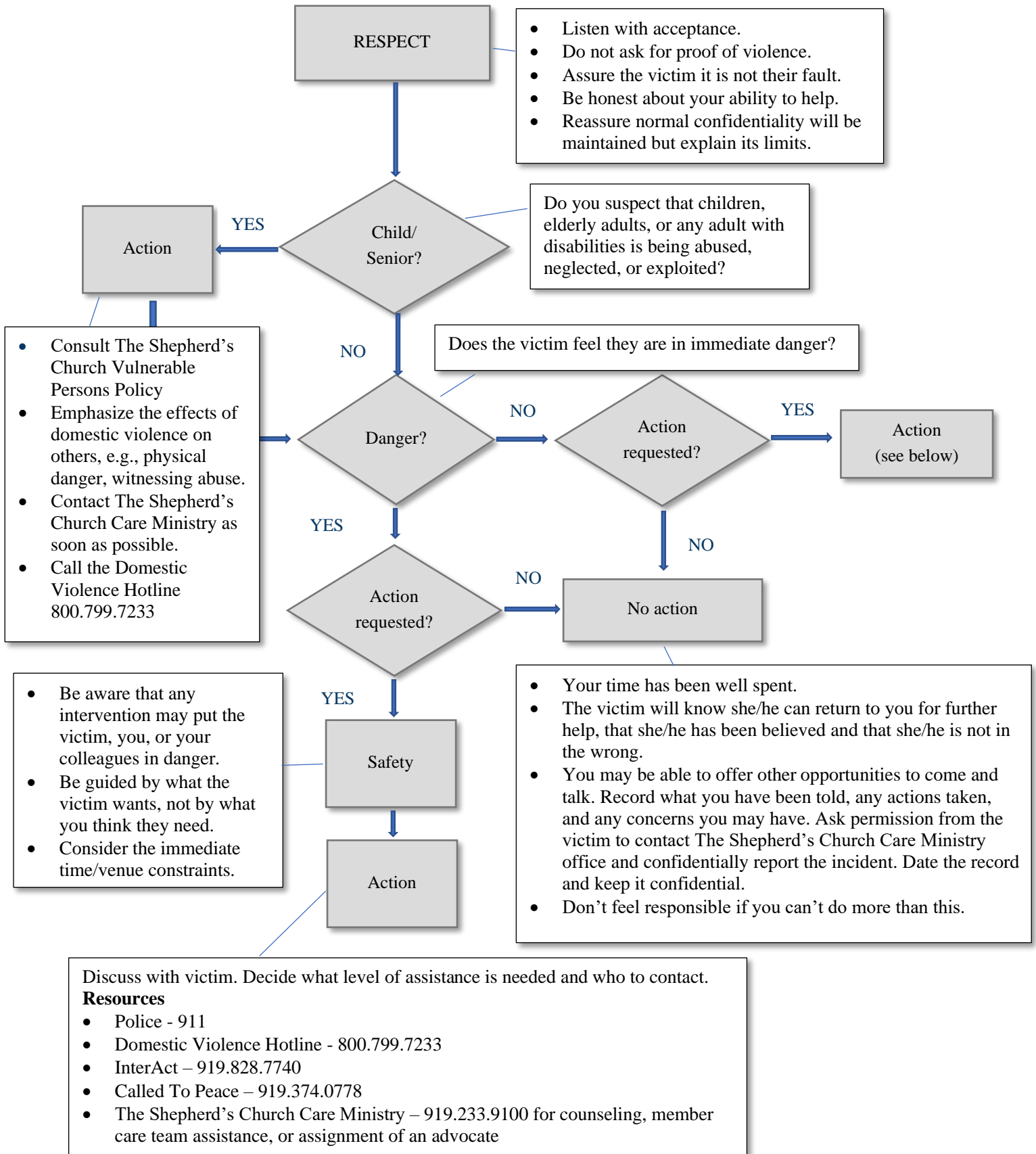
Abuser Discipline

- Confronting the abuser should only occur at the request of the victim, after safety has been established, and after consideration of whether to involve law enforcement. If law enforcement is or becomes involved, consult with and defer to law enforcement's instructions regarding confronting the abuser.
- Provide education/accountability if the abuser is open to it.
- Professional counseling should be individual counseling aimed at heart issues underlying abusive behaviors, such as power/control, entitlement, previous abuse, etc., not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation.
- Repentance is the goal. It will take time to discern, and in the short-term, worldly sorrow can sometimes appear to be godly sorrow. Over time, genuine repentance always becomes evident. We move faster with care and slower with confrontation and discipline.

Marriage/Relationship Reconciliation

- Reconciliation to God is a necessary step before the Church can support reconciliation of the marriage/relationship.
- Reconciliation of the marriage/relationship is only recommended when both parties and their counselors agree.

Incident Action Flowchart



ADDENDUM TO THE DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Vulnerable Persons Policy—Responding to Child, Disabled, and Senior Abuse

The Shepherd's Church is committed to providing a safe environment for children, the disabled, and senior adults. Any allegation or suspicion of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in compliance with North Carolina law. To this end, The Shepherd's Church has developed a separate policy, entitled "**Vulnerable Persons Policy**" to help navigate suspected abuse and neglect of children, the disabled, and seniors. Please refer to this document in any matters involving children, elderly adults, or any adult with disabilities who are being abused, neglected, or exploited.

I. The Shepherd's Church reports all suspected abuse and neglect of children.

- North Carolina law requires that **any person** who has cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected must immediately make a report to law enforcement or Child Protective Services ("CPS") (Wake County 919-212-7963).
- **All adults in the state of North Carolina are mandatory reporters.**

Adult-to-Adult Disclosures

An individual also must make a report if he or she has cause to believe that an **adult** was a victim of abuse or neglect **as a child**, and the individual determines that disclosure of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of **another child**.

Examples: *The alleged abuser is serving in a position of trust with children OR the alleged abuser is currently abusing or neglecting a child.*

The person making a report **must** identify, if known:

- The **name and address** of the child;
- The **name and address** of the person responsible for the care of the child;
- **Any other** pertinent information concerning the alleged abuse or neglect.

All suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or coworker toward a child, must be reported **to an immediate supervisor in the area or to a member of The Shepherd's Church Security Team.**

II. The Shepherd's Church reports all suspected abuse and neglect of disabled or elder adults.

- North Carolina law requires that **any person** who has cause to believe that a disabled or elder adult has been abused or neglected must report such information to the Director of the Wake County Health and Human Services Department ("WCHHS") (919-212-7264).
- **All adults in the state of North Carolina are mandatory reporters.**

An individual must make a report if he or she has cause to believe that a **disabled or elder adult** is a victim of abuse or neglect.

Example: *An elderly adult's only caretaker is not providing them with adequate food, clothing, and/or shelter, and that elderly adult is unable to obtain food, clothing, and/or shelter without assistance.*

The person making a report **must** identify, if known:

- The **name and address** of the disabled or elder adult;
- The **name and address** of the disabled or elder adult's caretaker;
- The **age** of the disabled or elder adult;
- The nature and extent of the disabled or elder adult's **injury or condition** resulting from abuse or neglect; and
- **Any other** pertinent information concerning the alleged abuse or neglect.

All suspicions of disabled or elder abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or coworker toward a disabled or elder adult, must be reported **to an immediate supervisor in the area or to a member of The Shepherd's Church Security Team.**

Because many adults are unfamiliar with North Carolina mandatory reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, The Shepherd's Church utilizes a "tandem or dual report" model for reports of suspected abuse or neglect, **where permitted.** In this process, a supervisor

of The Shepherd's Church will report the suspicion or allegation **together with** the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

This practice is not intended to inhibit any staff member or volunteer from reporting to law enforcement, CPS, or WCHHS directly. It is meant to facilitate reporting, protect the vulnerable, and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

When in doubt, report.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

This Domestic Abuse Policy does not apply to allegations of workplace (i.e., work-related) harassment involving employees of The Shepherd's Church. For more information about The Shepherd's Church's policy on workplace harassment, including procedures for reporting such allegations, please refer to the Personnel Policy Handbook.

Last revised: September 2022