**How Congregations can support their local
domestic violence agencies**

**Background**

1 in 3 women, 1 in 6 men, and 1 in 2 transgender and nonbinary people will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. Though we often think about this as a women’s issue, it affects people of all genders, and it’s important to include men and nonbinary people in the conversations. It’s important to use the term survivor instead of victim or battered women. It’s much more empowering language!

Domestic violence is about power and control. While we often think about it as something physical, it can also be emotional, sexual, financial, verbal, and spiritual. You can learn more at [nnedv.org/content/forms-of-abuse/](https://nnedv.org/content/forms-of-abuse/).

**What do I do if someone tells me they are experiencing abuse?**

1. Believe them! The most powerful tool you have is to simply say, "I'm so sorry you're going through this. I believe you, and I'm here."

2. Support them. Sometimes it's hard to know the best way to help – and that's okay. First, ask what they need. Offer to call a confidential hotline together (like the National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline at 800-799-7233). An agency that serves survivors can help build a safety plan. The National Domestic Violence Hotline also has an online "[create a safety plan](https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-a-safety-plan/#tab-id-2)" tool, along with info on [ways to support survivors](https://www.thehotline.org/support-others/ways-to-support-a-domestic-violence-survivor/).

3. Trust them. Survivors know what's best. Unless they express a desire to leave, don't pressure them. Leaving is a process and it's also the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship. Support their decision, be patient, and keep checking in. Also, honor their strengths and efforts to keep themselves safe.

**What role can congregations play in supporting survivors?**

The intersection of faith and domestic violence is LIFESAVING. We can play a role in healing or harm.

Please remember this is not something happening outside of our congregations. This is already happening in your congregation right now.

If we are talking about how to support local domestic violence shelters, we need to be thinking about how we are supporting people who are here and experiencing it.

Ideas:

• Training for the congregation, pastor, or elders.

• Hang hotline numbers in all bathrooms and on bulletin boards.

• Talk about this in sermons and other group gatherings - name it publicly as a problem.

• Take part in prevention - healthy relationship classes for youth, marriage classes, divorce care. Supporting people who have gone through divorce can help take away some of the shame that often keeps survivors in abusive relationships.

**How can we as congregations support people that are being harmed?**

Imagine a bullseye where survivors at the center, then the nonprofit comes around them, and then community partners are the outside ring. Everyone is looking inward toward the survivors to ask what they need most.

Remember, survivors are the experts in their own lives, and know what is best for their own wellbeing and safety!

As you brainstorm about ways we can support your local shelter, be very open-handed with your ideas. Your local domestic violence shelter might not need the thing you are offering, and that’s okay – there are other places that might need it.

Reach out to the staff on their admin lines (not the crisis line) and ask if you can talk to them about what their needs are. Be patient, they are busy!

Remember, there is a cost to your help. For example, donating items takes staff time to accept, sort, and distribute items, space to store them, time to do a donation receipt, send a thank you, enter this information into the database, reconcile the accounting, and take your phone calls. You want to minimize their time by doing what they ask! Go above-and-beyond to make it easier on them.

One time volunteer event--donate $$ to cover the cost of their time.

**Brainstorm your resources, skills, gifts, talents?**

Being advocates

• hang hotline information in women’s/men’s/gender neutral bathrooms and your bulletin board

• October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month - can you publicly share information about DV from the pulpit or display it in a public place?

• Offer to regularly share mailers/info/fundraising pieces with your congregation

• Have information about the nonprofit to distribute at events (ex: give out a flier to everyone who makes a purchase at your rummage sale)

• Save your local domestic violence hotline in your phone

Fundraising

• Giving unrestricted funding is most helpful! You might have ideas of the best ways for nonprofits to use the money, but trust that they know best.

• Think about how to make your money go further. Can you do a special offering at church where every dollar is matched?

Connector

• Offer to be a hub person. If they have an emergent need, they can reach out to you to see who is in your network.

Amplify your impact

• If you are purchasing supplies, get them from a local business instead of Amazon. Check with the nonprofit to see if they have preferred business partners, or perhaps a survivor has a business you can support.

 Staff

• How can you help the helpers? Provide food, gifts, thank you cards, etc.

Space

• Offer your space for classes, donation drop offs, staff retreat, or support groups.

Time

• Do you have people power? Consider volunteering.

• Ask what would have the greatest impact for them.

• If you do a one-time volunteer event, include a donation as well to cover the cost of their staff time! It takes a lot of time and energy to plan for a group to come in, so honor their time with a donation.

**Discussion questions**

Share a story of a time someone really listened to you when you were hurting. What was that experience like for you?

What’s a small step you as an individual or group or congregation can take to learn how to support survivors well?

What resources, skills, gifts, or talents does your congregation have and how might you offer them to your local domestic violence agency?

**Resources:**

**Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic Violence** - Faith Resources: [interfaithagainstdv.org/faith-resources](https://interfaithagainstdv.org/faith-resources)

**Sojourners 100 Sermons on Domestic Violence** - [sojo.net/resources/100-sermons-against-domestic-and-sexual-violence](https://sojo.net/resources/100-sermons-against-domestic-and-sexual-violence)

**National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline** - 800-799-7233 (save this in your phone or address book!) - many resources for survivors and people that want to support them: [thehotline.org/get-help/](https://www.thehotline.org/get-help/)

Follow your local domestic violence organizations on social media. Like and repost what they share! Your local organization might have their own hotline number as well.