

# How Faith Communities Resist Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-Based Violence

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Sharon A. O'Brien, Ph.D., Family Violence Research Consultant, [sharonaobrien@msn.com](mailto:sharonaobrien@msn.com)

Kristen Walling, Policy Advocate at United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, [wallingk@ucc.org](mailto:wallingk@ucc.org)

We appreciated everyone attending the session at EAD and for sharing your questions and concerns. In addition to all of the resources mentioned in the responses below, there is much useful information to be found at the following sites:

National Domestic Violence Hotline

IMA World Health

Faith Trust Institute

Googling your faith and domestic violence usually provides extensive resources. For example, Catholics for Family Peace has information at [www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org](http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org).

In addition, any of the 12 Step Recovery Programs are extremely helpful to people recovering from the traumas of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuses. The meetings are free, confidential, anonymous. In addition to in person meetings, there are telephone and on-line meetings. It is a good way to start, especially the Survivors of Incest Anonymous and or the Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Families. Alcoholism can be a generational disease so even if parents did not drink, maybe grandparents or great grandparents did and passed along the effects of alcoholism.

## **1. I have gone through sexual abuse, how do I go about talking to someone?**

You can report abuse to the police or through sexual assault and domestic violence hotlines that you can call anonymously to talk with someone. You can call RAINN to connect you to your local crisis center at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or report online at [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org). You can also seek professional counseling with someone of your own faith or licensed clinical professional counselors, or pastoral counselors.

## **2. How can I help my friend who has gone through sexual abuse? She has told me her story but hasn't gotten help and won't let me get help.**

Your friend will need to make that decision. Each survivor is different. However, if s/he needs or wants to talk, always be there for him/her. Be there to be the listening ear. Allow him/her to make their decision about disclosing the abuse. Keep encouraging them to get help. Be in it for the long haul. If your friend is a child and they have disclosed the abuse to you, be a good citizen and report it. Explain to the child your reasons for wanting to report the abuse; because you care about them and others that may continue being harmed if the person is allowed to keep abusing with no consequences.

## **3. For John: You mentioned one very significant reason a child (or adult) might not disclose sexual abuse—to protect a loved one. We know there are many reasons—general or personal—people don't disclose. How does that question potentially impact a survivor? And what would you want people to be mindful of before they would pose that question to a child or adult survivor of sexual abuse?**

Survivors that won't disclose their abuse will attempt to hide their abuse at all costs. I did not disclose my abuse for over thirty years. Survivors not disclosing will normally “self-medicate” themselves with alcohol or with drugs, which will lead to suicide or attempted suicide (call for help). If you try and attempt to talk to a survivor about her or his abuse, make sure they are aware that the abuse was not their fault, there is no shame, put the blame back onto the abuser and let the survivor know that what they tell you is confidential (unless you are a mandated reporter). If possible, have the survivor speak to another survivor for guidance.

**4. To Mr. Chapman: Thank you for being here and speaking today. How do we open up a conversation with a young adult we fear is being abused?**

(See above response) and give them information where they can go for help or contact information for victim assistance.

**5. In a church setting, if an abuser is a member of the church, should the pastor confront the abuser and hold him or her accountable? Or should clergy leave that engagement to the police and/or courts? I don't pose this question to suppose clergy should skirt legal accountability...but considering the likelihood that a victim will return to her or his abuser, what can churches do to transform abuser's mentality? Is that even possible?**

Faith communities must hold perpetrators accountable for abuse. The pastor or senior leader sets the tone for how the faith community will respond. Zero tolerance should be the standard. It does not mean ostracize the perpetrator from fellowship, but minister to the needs of both he/she and the victim. Ultimately, a safe space must be created for the victim to heal and get resources. Domestic violence is a crime and should be treated as such. However, the final decision, in some states, rests with the victim's preference in pursuing legal recourse. In the case of child abuse, clergy are mandated to report abuse to legal entities.

For legal reasons, if you suspect an abuser, contact the police or CPS as soon as possible. I don't think the church or clergy can transform the mind of a pedophile or child molester.

**6. Does the statistic “1/4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime” include only physical abuse or does it also include mental abuse as well?**

The 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys refer to sexual abuse only. The boys' stats are believed to be lower than reality due to most boys not reporting their abuse.

**7. With HIPPA and Privacy acts, how can laypeople get involved in local programs?**

Contact your local Rape Crisis Center—they are always looking for more volunteers. The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) is a great resource. You can find their crisis center affiliates in your area at this site: <http://volopps.rainn.org/>. You may also want to consider advocating for better public policies in your area or nationally. Some opportunities for engaging can be found here: <http://www.rainn.org/public-policy>.

Laypersons have been instrumental in assisting grassroots organizations, faith communities, and non-profit organizations work with victims and families. You may not know all the details of a situation, but each organization will or should have guidelines as to what work you can perform in assisting a person. The

victim in most cases comes to the organizations and discloses their abuse. Persons working within these organizations should recognize HIPPA and Privacy Acts. In some instances screenings, background checks, fingerprinting, etc. may be done.

**8. Any resources: materials, contacts, or events – related to demystifying “shame” as a blockage to healing, speaking out/advocacy, and programming/organizing?**

Faith Trust Institute has a lot of resources and materials that can provide you with tools for helping to break the silence and shame of abuse, as well as RAINN [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org). Male survivors can find special resources at [www.malesurvivor.org](http://www.malesurvivor.org) or [lin6.org](http://lin6.org). Professional counseling is also recommended.

**9. Could the panel address cultural and social gender structures that we as a society can begin to change now?**

In many cultures there are established gender roles of male and female. Gender biases that prevent equal access, equal pay, and equality in general between males and females are deeply rooted structures that have begun to change. A continued push and advocacy for gender equality can keep societal norms moving towards this end.

**10. How do we, as pastors and church leaders, help our folks understand why only calling God “He” or “father” is problematic for women molested by their fathers and male figures?**

As pastors and church leaders, we must become culturally competent and sensitive to other’s beliefs about God. Gender neutral terms, e.g. Higher Power, God of your understanding, Eternal God, Ever-present God, Loving God, Almighty God, and Healer/Healing God are some familiar terms used quite often. Sometimes the mention of any spiritual or religious references can be inappropriate.

**11. How can we branch out these ideas to those that are not or do not consider themselves a part of the faith community? Such as schools or workplaces.**

You can become advocates and voices to promote awareness about domestic abuse, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence in schools and in workplaces. Ask for information and encourage businesses and communities to be involved, not just the faith community. Encourage schools and workplaces to be in touch with their local crisis center (which can be found at <http://volopps.rainn.org>) and have contact information for those sites readily available (such as in bathroom stalls or on bulletin boards). An ecological systems approach can be used to understand the overlapping systems that are involved in a family experiencing domestic violence.

**12. What can a college campus do to address domestic violence?**

College campuses have already begun addressing domestic violence. The Campus SAVE Act signifies a defining moment in our nation's handling of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking on college campuses. With the establishment of the recent White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, this issue has gained national attention signaling positive change and action to improve the lives of many thousands of students. For more information visit <http://www.thecampussaveact.com>.

**13. Have you touched the issue of human trafficking? If so, do you have any suggestions for curbing the demand?**

Human Trafficking is investigated by the FBI or ICE. Faith communities often want to get involved in curbing demand/stopping sex “perverts” from utilizing the services of commercial sex workers. The reality is that human trafficking happens across borders and within the United States, and is not only confined to sex trafficking of women and girls. All races, genders, and ages of people may fall victim to human trafficking in a variety of industries—domestic workers, farm workers, etc. The best way for faith groups to get involved is to educate themselves on the issue and then work to transform structural and systemic injustices that allow modern-day slavery to thrive. Working to reduce global economic inequality, end violence against women, and promote girls’ education are some ways to get involved. Many groups such as the ATEST Coalition, the Coalition of Imokalee Workers, and Polaris Project work on public policy advocacy on issues related to human trafficking.

**14. What makes the difference between a natural sexual desire and a sexual pervert?**

The legal standing of the act.