

Parish of Blacktown Policy for Responding to Domestic Abuse

All forms of domestic abuse are wrong and must stop.

1. The primary focus of this Policy is abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. (Abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.) **Domestic abuse** includes but is not limited to emotional, verbal, social, economic, psychological, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse. Such behaviour often seeks to control, humiliate, dominate or instil fear in the victim.

2. We are committed to safe places which –

- Recognise equality amongst people
- Promote a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility in marriages, families and congregations
- Ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse
- Strive to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse
- Refuse to condone any form of abuse
- Enable concerns to be raised and responded to clearly and consistently

3. We uphold *Faithfulness in Service* as our national code of conduct for clergy and church workers, specifically its affirmations that –

- Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and in the community. In essence, abuse is one person's misuse of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one-off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour (6.2)
- It is important for clergy and church workers to be good citizens and to obey the laws of the community, except where those laws conflict with Christian convictions (6.4)
- You are not to abuse your spouse, children or other members of your family (6.6)

4. We recognise that Domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response –

- All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong
- Domestic abuse can occur in all communities, including churches
- Domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour
- Working in partnership with vulnerable adults and children, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse
- Clergy and lay ministers need to obtain advice from those with professional expertise when faced with situations of domestic abuse
- Where mistakes in caring for people in difficult situations are made, an apology should be offered

5. We respect people who come to us for help by –

- Valuing, listening to and respecting (as people made in the image of God) both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse, while appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two and refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

6. We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements by –

- Clearly teaching that domestic abuse is wrong and that the Bible should never be used to justify
- or excuse any form of abuse
- Clearly teaching that the Bible should not be used to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse
- Raising awareness of domestic violence agencies, support services, resources and expertise

7. We ensure safety first by –

- Ensuring that those who have experienced domestic abuse can find safety and informed help as a first priority
- Taking it Seriously – Ensuring that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed
- Getting help from outside – Working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic violence, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community
- Keeping it confidential – Respecting the need for confidentiality within the bounds of good Safe Ministry practice
- Challenging with Care – Carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour, but only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk

8. We offer support to those in our care by –

- Offering informed care – Ensuring that informed and appropriate pastoral care is offered to any
- adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse
- Going at the victim's pace – Never pressuring any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender
- Understanding that reconciliation comes with conditions – Understanding that any reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender, and also upon the willing grace of the victim
- Coordinating the care – Identifying the appropriate relationships of those with pastoral care responsibilities for both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse

If you have any concerns or need to talk to any one please contact...

- The Police: **dial 000**
 - 24/7 in emergencies where safety is at risk.
- 1800 Respect national helpline: **1800 737 732** or 1800respect.org.au
 - 24/7 for sexual assault, & domestic violence counselling and advice.
- Child Protection Helpline: **132 111** or reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg
 - If you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.
- Lifeline: **131 114** or www.lifeline.org.au/get-help
 - 24 hour telephone crisis line.
- Professional Standards Unit: **9265 1604** or safeministry.org.au
 - Advice about abuse involving Anglican clergy or church workers