



**The Coalition Against Domestic & Community Violence  
of Greater Chattanooga, Inc.**

**The Chattanooga Family Justice Alliance**

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*Perpetrators of abuse often quote Ephesians 5:21-22, 25 to support their need to keep their victims submissive to their will. The passage from Ephesians actually reveals a different intent. Ephesians 5:21-22, 25 (NRSV) says, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives accommodate to your husbands, as to the Lord. Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.” These examples clearly indicate that both husbands and wives are to be mutually subject to one another. “Accommodate” implies sensitivity, flexibility and responsiveness – not blind obedience.*

*Often a religious woman who is a victim of domestic violence takes the blame upon herself perhaps believing it is God’s will that she suffer. However, an image of God as stern or harsh runs counter to the kind, merciful and loving God found in the Bible.*

**How can a woman’s religious belief serve as a resource in dealing with domestic violence?**

*A woman’s faith and religious beliefs can be used as a resource to assure her that the abuse is not her fault, that she is not alone, and that God will be with her on her journey to find safety and healing.*

**How can our congregation be a safe place to disclose that one is a victim of domestic violence?**

- *Information about domestic violence can be made available in a safe location, i.e. in the restrooms.*
- *Sermons can include condemning abuse in the home and in intimate relationships.*
- *Sermons can complain that there is nothing in Christian teaching which can be rightly used to justify abuse.*
- *Victims and survivors of domestic violence can be included in congregational prayers.*
- *Abuse can be discussed in pre-marital counseling.*
- *Dating violence can be discussed in youth groups; and curricula addressing healthy teen relationships can be included in programming.*
- *The congregation can develop a policy statement on domestic violence that includes safety mechanisms for women choosing to leave their abusive partners.*

**What can our congregation do to support women who disclose abuse?**

- *Listen to the women and believe them.*
- *Tell them that the abuse is not their fault, and it is not God’s will for them.*
- *Tell them they are not alone and that help is available.*
- *Let them know that without intervention, abuse often escalates in frequency and severity over time.*
- *Seek expert assistance from battered women’s programs in our community.*

- *Refer them only to specialized domestic violence counseling programs, not to couples counseling.*
- *Apply the following goals for intervention:*
  - *Safety for the victim and her children. Help her find a shelter, a safe home or resources to offer protection to her and her children.*
  - *Refer only to specialized domestic violence counseling programs, not to couples counseling programs.*
  - *Hold the abuser accountable. Support the abuser in seeking specialized batterer's counseling to help change his behavior.*
  - *Restore relationship, if possible, after the first two steps of the above have taken place. If reconciliation is not possible, help mourn the loss of the relationship.*

**If both the victim and the abuser are members of the congregation, how can we be supportive and helpful to all members of the family?**

*Safety for the victim and her children has to be addressed first. After that has been ensured, ongoing support can best be accomplished by helping the victim find appropriate community resources and providing the support of her faith community as she starts the journey of healing and decision-making for the future.*

*The most helpful support that the congregation can offer to the abuser is to hold him accountable, to support him in taking responsibility for his behavior and recognizing that he has a problem, and to stand by him as he seeks treatment from a specialized batterer's counseling program.*

**Now that we have had the experience of talking about domestic violence in our congregation, where should we go from here?**

*The following is a list of steps congregations can take to get more involved in this issue:*

- *Form a committee to address domestic violence issues.*
- *Encourage clergy to speak out from the pulpit against domestic violence.*
- *Invite staff from local domestic violence programs to make educational presentations.*
- *Designate a day or month for educating and activating the congregation.*
- *Offer pre-marriage counseling dealing with equality, conflict, violence and control.*
- *Use available curricula for youth which encourage the values of gender equality and nonviolent conflict resolution.*
- *Offer meeting space in the church to the local domestic violence program.*
- *Contribute financial support to local domestic violence programs.*
- *Serve as a volunteer at local domestic violence programs.*
- *Gather a list of resources on this issue from your denomination.*
- *Prepare future educational presentations using the resources listed below:*
  - *The Domestic Violence Awareness Brochure, "What Every Congregation Needs to Know about Domestic Violence," available in English, Chinese, Laotian, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese.*