

Peace and Respect in Your Marriage

Domestic Violence Awareness Module for Marriage Preparation

Notes for Facilitators

Thank you for your ministry of preparing couples for marriage. To assist you, find a brief module to raise awareness of an oft-unrecognized reality: the existence or seeds of the existence of domestic violence within Catholic marriages.

Based on decades of work with Catholic families, it is known that domestic violence is oftentimes experienced in silence, with one or both parties thinking their marriage vow prevents them from seeking safety. Some people do not know that domestic violence is against our Church teaching and that hope, help, and healing are possible. In their Pastoral Statement, *When I Call for Help*, the U.S. Bishops clarified that “no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage.”¹

When to Include this Module. We invite you to schedule 30 minutes at an appropriate time to include the material into your work with couples. We recommend that you introduce this module after you cover Respectful Communication and Skills for talking about serious issues. Print pages 3-7 for each participant. Print the questionnaire on page 8 and give one copy to each participant at the appropriate time in the lesson. Do not collect it; it is for their use. Allow time for individuals to reflect privately on their responses.

We know people have lived with abuse for years without anyone realizing it. This module may open someone’s eyes to the reality of their relationship. It may even save a life. When people know that the Church is listening, they are more likely to seek help. Marriage preparation facilitators are sometimes asked for advice in situations of domestic abuse.

If someone turns to you for help, do not try to fix the situation. It is not your role to “convince” someone to leave an abusive relationship – you must value the person’s self-determination. We must not judge. You have two roles: Listening with compassion and referring to a professional counselor.

Listening with Compassion: Demonstrate your readiness to listen by saying:

- I care about you.
- If someone is hurting you, please seek professional help.
- I want to help in whatever way you want me to.
- If you don’t want to talk about it right now, that’s ok. Help is available 24 hours a day.

What to Say. When someone tells you that they are in an abusive relationship, say:

- No one deserves to be treated this way.
- Abuse is not part of a loving and healthy relationship.

- You did not do anything to cause this abusive behavior.
- You cannot do anything to change this abusive behavior.

What Not to Say.

- Why don't you just leave?
- Why do you tolerate that behavior?
- What did you do to cause your partner to get angry?
- How could you let this happen?
- If your partner is so bad, why are you with him/her?
- Why don't you go to couples counseling?
- I would never allow that to happen to me.
- I just can't believe he/she would act like that.

Referring to a Professional Counselor

Not all mental health professionals know how to work with people in abusive relationships. Identify local mental health professionals so you have referrals ready when needed. The National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 (TTY) can provide resources, support, and referrals in your area.

This module is a collaborative effort between Catholics For Family Peace (CFFP) and the Archdiocese of Chicago's Domestic Violence Outreach Ministry. For more information or to schedule a training for clergy, parish staff, or volunteers, please contact us.



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Peace and Respect in Your Marriage: Domestic Violence Awareness Module for Marriage Preparation

Congratulations upon your decision to marry! The Catholic community wants to help you succeed in your important vocation.

The serious issue of Domestic Violence will not apply to every couple but must be addressed in marriage preparation. Simply raising the issue during marriage preparation may help an individual or a couple seek assistance.

Our office, Catholics For Family Peace, promotes safe and healthy marriages and shares information about how to address the oft-unrecognized reality of domestic abuse in Catholic marriages. In collaboration with the Archdiocese of Chicago's Domestic Violence Outreach, we have created this module for you. We define domestic abuse, share Church teaching, and identify signs of domestic violence so that you can recognize it.

For more in-depth information, please visit our websites, www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org and www.domesticviolenceoutreach.org.

Part 1: Introduction (5 min.)

Opening Prayer

Loving God, you are the author of life. You have created us in your own image; male and female you created us. You have given us hearts capable of loving as you love, and you have invited us to participate with you in the procreation of the human family. Today we ask you to inspire all couples to live their commitment to love one another. For victims of domestic violence, grant them the strength to free themselves from abuse, and grant persons using abuse the grace to recognize their abusive behavior and make changes.

Amen.

Why bring up domestic violence in marriage preparation? Because abuse is a threat in marriages. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that "About 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of intimate partner violence-related impact."²

These numbers are astounding! Because it happens in Catholic marriages, we want you to have information you can use for yourself and/or share with family and friends.

Domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence, usually creeps into a relationship slowly. Any couple will experience occasional arguments, but healthy conflict resolution will involve both parties working respectfully on a solution that is fair to both of them. Abusive relationships, on the other hand, have a well-established pattern of behavior marked by rigid control and manipulation. Often, survivors do not recognize abusive behavior developing until much later when it becomes glaringly obvious. For that reason, it is important for people to know how to recognize abuse in its early stages and for victims to seek counsel from a professional domestic violence counselor.

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behavior that seeks power and control over an intimate partner. That power and control can be physical, verbal or emotional, economic or sexual. Verbal or emotional abuse is the most common form, but it is not always recognized as abuse. When partners see their relationship developing hurtful behaviors, they need to examine what is happening. Sometimes domestic abuse begins with small measures of control and slowly escalates. The first signs of control may even seem reasonable, for example when a spouse insists: "Don't spend time with family and friends, I want you to spend all your free time with me". This may seem reasonable until one realizes it is the first step in isolating someone from family and friends.

Part 2: Church Teaching on Domestic Violence (5 min.)

The Church calls husbands and wives into a partnership of equal dignity. They are both created in the image of God. While many spouses understand this call to mutuality and equal authority in marriage, others enter marriage with destructive attitudes about how men and women should relate to one another. Some misunderstand biblical passages, such as "Wives be submissive to your husbands" (Ephesians 5: 22), to be a call for domination and submission. A full understanding includes the previous verse, "Be submissive to each other out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5: 21). More appropriate Scripture references would be "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing" (Philippians 2: 2), and "Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10). According to Catholic teaching, "Marriage must never be a struggle for control." (*Follow the Way of Love*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1994, 19).

Treating each other daily with love and dignity is critical to the nature of marriage. However, the Church realizes that loving behavior is not always practiced, and she offers two foundational pieces of information to guide couples.

The Church addresses domestic abuse in Canon Law 1153.1: "If either spouse causes grave mental or physical danger to the other spouse or to the offspring or otherwise renders common life too difficult, that spouse gives the other a legitimate cause for leaving, either by decree of the local ordinary or even on his or her own authority if there is danger in delay."

Also, the U.S. Bishops have written an informative and compassionate Pastoral Statement, *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Violence Against Women*, in which they state:

1. "Violence in any form – physical, psychological or verbal, economic or sexual – is never justified and it is a sin and often a crime. (p.1)
2. The person being assaulted needs to know that acting to end the abuse does not violate the marriage promises. (p.1)
3. The bishops condemn use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form. (p. 9)
4. Finally, we emphasize that no one is expected to stay in an abusive marriage.” (p.10).¹

To learn more about the teachings of the Church, see:

Domestic violence section of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/domestic-violence/>

Catholics For Family Peace Education and Research Initiative
<http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/>

Archdiocese of Chicago's Domestic Violence Outreach
www.domesticviolenceoutreach.org

Questionnaire and Reflection (10 min.)

The questionnaire, **Peace and Respect in Your Marriage**, is intended to help you examine your relationship. The questions are related to early warning signs of domestic violence. Abusive behaviors generally escalate over time. If you see these behaviors in your current relationship, seek individual counseling from a domestic violence counselor now.

Do not wait until after the wedding to seek counsel. While we cannot change other people, we can decide how we will be treated. Your marriage preparation facilitator has been asked to provide one printed copy for each of you. It is for your individual use. It will not be collected.

Please answer the questions honestly. They will give you an indication whether you are in a healthy relationship. This engagement period is the perfect time to ensure that you are both committed to a safe and healthy relationship.

Complete the questionnaire provided by the facilitator. Individuals work privately. When finished, spend time reflecting privately.

Private Reflection

We pray that your marriage will always be loving and respectful. We urge you to reflect individually on the following:

About Counseling:

When someone wonders if their own or spouse's behavior is abusive, they should seek individual counseling with someone trained in domestic violence. Domestic violence counseling is generally provided free of charge at domestic violence service agencies and should be sought even when the person is unsure about what is happening. If domestic abuse is suspected, do not go to a marriage counselor who is not trained in domestic violence.

Do not think you will be able to fix this problem by simply talking with your partner. If after appropriate counseling you learn the problem is not domestic violence, then, by all means, work on your relationship.

1. In your family of origin, what positive and negative relational behaviors did you witness?
2. Recall examples of unkind, disrespectful or hurtful behaviors in relationships you have observed in the media, the family, culture or in other couples.

Discussion in Large-Group Setting (5 min.)

Share examples of unkind, disrespectful or hurtful behaviors in relationships you have observed in the media, the family, culture or in other couples.

Part 3: Getting Help (5 min.)

Help for People Experiencing Domestic Violence

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides crisis intervention or advice and referrals to local service providers. Call 800-799-SAFE (7233) or 800-787-3224 (TTY). Email assistance is available at ndvh@ndvh.org.

How Can We Be Marriage Helpers?

The information presented here will help you be able to offer hope and information to others in need. When someone who is experiencing domestic violence wants to talk with you, keep these points in mind: Listen to and believe their story; tell them they don't deserve abusive treatment; help them assess danger to themselves and any children, and refer them to the National Domestic Violence Hotline for local resources. Do not pressure the person to leave the relationship. Leaving without a plan for safety is very dangerous. The decision to stay or leave needs to be the survivor's decision.

In *When I Call for Help*, the U.S. Bishops urge friends and ministers to attend first to the safety of victims and their children. When a relationship ends, friends and church ministers can aid victims and family in mourning the loss and supporting the survivors. The document suggests specific steps to take when someone you know is being abused.

How else can you help?

Identify the contact information for domestic violence counseling and shelter services in your community and post it in public places: bulletin boards, restrooms, church bulletins, etc., and help these agencies with needed supplies, donations, or volunteers.

About Forgiveness

Verbal requests for forgiveness unaccompanied by changed behavior are inadequate. Victims of domestic violence should not be urged or pressured to forgive. Most victims want to forgive but forgiving is a process that requires time. Sometimes the wounds are so deep or the threat so real that reconciliation is not possible or advisable. Safety is the first concern and adequate time to heal is necessary.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me an instrument of your peace. May I speak to others with respect and love; may I work to nurture healthy relationships, my own and those of my friends and neighbors. Compassionate Lord, help me to support and console those who are hurting. Help me to understand the pain others experience when their trust is betrayed. May I be your messenger of peace and compassion in our society. Amen.

References:

1. *When I Call for Help, A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*. A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2002. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/domestic-violence/when-i-call-for-help.cfm>. Retrieved June 14, 2019.
2. *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>. Retrieved June 14, 2019.

Peace and Respect in Your Marriage

Place a check next to behaviors that apply to you and/or your partner.

Me My Partner

- ___ ___ 1. Does your partner monitor your time and make you account for every minute?
(when you run errands, visit friends, commute to work, etc.)
- ___ ___ 2. Does your partner monitor your cell phone?
- ___ ___ 3. Does your partner act suspicious or accuse you of flirting with
others or having affairs?
- ___ ___ 4. Is your partner continually rude to your family and friends?
- ___ ___ 5. Does your partner discourage you from starting or maintaining relationships
with family members or friends?
- ___ ___ 6. Is your partner often overly-critical of daily things? (your cooking, clothes or
appearance, the way you talk, etc.)
- ___ ___ 7. Does your partner's mood change radically from calm to angry, or vice versa?
- ___ ___ 8. Does your partner often say hurtful words to you (e.g., insults, constant criticism,
or belittling)?
- ___ ___ 9. Does your partner pressure you for sex or sexual acts you don't like?
- ___ ___ 10. Does your partner control finances, keeping much hidden from you?
- ___ ___ 11. Does your partner demand a strict accounting of how you spend money?
- ___ ___ 12. Does your partner threaten to report you to police, welfare, or immigration?
- ___ ___ 13. Has your partner threatened to harm you or self because of you?
- ___ ___ 14. Has your partner hit or pushed you with hands, feet or an object?
- ___ ___ 15. Has your partner injured you? (welts, bruises, cuts, lumps, etc.)
- ___ ___ 16. Has your partner thrown objects or broken things when angry?
- ___ ___ 17. Does your partner harm or threaten to harm your pet?
- ___ ___ 18. Has your partner been violent toward you during pregnancy or threatened to
harm your children or take them away?
- ___ ___ 19. Does your partner accept your ideas without denying or dismissing them?

There are different kinds of abuse. Answering "yes" to any question is a cause of concern, and you should seek individual domestic violence counseling about your relationship. Do not overlook or minimize suspected abuse in your relationship. Although these issues may be difficult to discuss, the tragic fact is that domestic violence is a common reality.