

What Communities of Faith Can Do To Make a Difference

- ◆ **Become a safe place.** Make the church, temple, mosque, or synagogue a safe place for victims of violence against women. Display materials that include local, state, and national hotlines for these victims.
- ◆ **Educate the congregation.** Routinely include instructional information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes, and sponsor educational seminars on violence against women.
- ◆ **Speak out.** Speak out about sexual assault and domestic violence from the pulpit. A faith leader can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs, and his or her leadership is important, particularly on public policy issues such as funding and changes in criminal laws.
- ◆ **Lead by example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local sexual assault or domestic violence program or train to become a crisis volunteer.
- ◆ **Offer space.** Offer meeting space for educational seminars and weekly support groups or to serve as a supervised visitation site when parents need a safe place to visit their children.
- ◆ **Partner with existing resources.** Include local sexual assault or domestic violence programs in donations and community service projects. Adopt a shelter for which the church, temple, mosque, or synagogue provides material support or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.
- ◆ **Prepare to be a resource.** Seek out training from professionals in the fields of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking. Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to sexual assault and dating and domestic violence.
- ◆ **Intervene.** If suspicions that violence is occurring in a relationship or in a family exist, speak to each person separately. If an individual is being or has been victimized, speak to her privately. Help the victim plan for safety, and refer her to the community resources available to assist her.
- ◆ **Support professional training.** Encourage and support training and education for clergy and lay leaders, chaplains, and seminary students to increase their awareness about sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking.
- ◆ **Address internal issues.** Encourage continued efforts by religious institutions to address allegations of abuse by religious leaders to ensure that religious leaders are a safe resource for victims and their children.

Chapter 12

Engaging Religious, Spiritual, and Faith-Based Groups and Organizations

Two out of every three Americans are affiliated with a religious, spiritual, or faith-based group or organization, and approximately one out of every four Americans is an active member of such a community.¹ Based on the breadth and reach of these organizations, it is not surprising that many women and girls turn to religious leaders for guidance in dealing with violence. Some religious, spiritual, and faith-based organizations provide victims with well-informed, practical, and spiritual guidance, including referrals to other organizations.

Religious organizations are essential to the culture and sustenance of communities and are uniquely positioned to champion efforts to end violence against women. Although philosophical differences have created tension between some religious, spiritual, and faith organizations and victim advocates, common ground can be found in shared interests to end violence against women.

Faith-based groups and organizations often have strong relationships with communities of color, older women, women with disabilities, and immigrant communities. Religious organizations can reach the large numbers of people often underserved by other groups with messages of safety and support for victims and with information about offender accountability. Establishing training for and by members of religious communities and building the capacity to address the issue will strengthen the role of religious communities in ending violence against women and girls.

Outlined below are specific actions religious, spiritual, and faith-based organizations,

community-based sexual assault and domestic violence programs, secular victim services, advocacy programs, and public and private funders can take to end violence against women.

What Religious Communities Can Do

1. Commit to making the problem of violence against women and girls a critical concern.

- ◆ Emphasize the teachings, practices, and organizational structures that promote a woman's right to be free from violence, such as teachings that support equality and respect for women and girls.
- ◆ Develop theologically based materials that emphasize a woman's right to safety and support and a perpetrator's personal responsibility for ending the violence.
- ◆ Adopt policies developed by religious leaders that outline appropriate responses to victims and perpetrators of violence, and educate leaders about child abuse reporting requirements, the importance of confidentiality, misconduct by clergy or spiritual leaders, and other safety issues.
- ◆ Support local advocacy programs that provide services to victims and survivors by encouraging congregants to donate time, money, and other material resources.

2. Ensure that religious, spiritual, and faith-based communities are safe environments to allow victims of violence to discuss their experiences and seek healing.

- ◆ Encourage members and leaders of churches, synagogues, mosques, and other spiritual or

faith-based groups to seek training on victim and survivor experiences and on support that will restore and heal the victim.

- ◆ Create opportunities for survivors to discuss their experiences and needs. Form support groups in collaboration with local sexual assault and domestic violence programs for women who desire faith- or spirituality-based healing.
- ◆ Encourage members to discuss sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking within their faith communities in a manner that is sensitive to their cultures and backgrounds.
- ◆ Create or provide materials that address victims' concerns, and offer informed referrals to various advocacy organizations.
- ◆ Encourage men, particularly leaders in the community, to speak out and use their influence to communicate intolerance for violence against women and girls in all forms.
- ◆ Integrate information on sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking into existing activities.

3. Develop strategies to address the needs of all women and girls exposed to violence.

- ◆ Include members of specific ethnic and cultural groups in discussions of community efforts addressing violence.
- ◆ Seek advice from various age groups within communities on ways to address violence.
- ◆ Organize youth ministry and leadership groups to educate young people about the dynamics, impact, and prevention of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking.
- ◆ Inform leaders about the particular vulnerabilities of older people and people with disabilities who may be dependent on abusive partners or caregivers.
- ◆ Seek appropriate training and legal assistance before advising immigrant victims so as to avoid potentially compromising their citizenship status.

4. Develop and refine guidelines and protocols for responding to disclosures of sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking of a member of the congregation or community.

- ◆ Encourage support for a victim's continued inclusion in the community of her choice if the perpetrator is from the same community, including respecting emotional and physical safety considerations and no-contact orders.
- ◆ Consider the emotional and physical safety of victims and any dependents affected by victimization, including elderly relatives and children.
- ◆ Encourage youth workers to receive training on child abuse reporting requirements and local child welfare practices.
- ◆ Encourage congregations, religious community centers, and other religious institutions to adopt policies for employees, members, and participants who may be victims or perpetrators of violence.
- ◆ Develop consistent policies for responding to misconduct or abuse by spiritual leaders or clergy to ensure that action is taken to protect congregants and that appropriate cases of clergy misconduct are referred to law enforcement agencies.

5. Create opportunities for youth to develop healthy and appropriate interpersonal relationships in the context of their religious, spiritual, or faith-based traditions.

- ◆ Consider conducting background checks of volunteers and staff who work with youth to try to ensure that they have not been perpetrators of physical or sexual violence.
- ◆ Invite youth to participate in the design and evaluation of programs that address their needs, such as writing and designing multimedia materials on safety and healthy relationships.
- ◆ Train youth to support victims and to constructively confront peers about violence against women and girls.

6. Institutionalize efforts to address violence against women and girls by educating, training, and supporting community leaders.

- ◆ Develop or expand core curriculums on violence against women in the basic education for religious leaders, including theory- and practice-oriented course work such as counseling or pastoral care.
- ◆ Create and support continuing education programs on violence against women.
- ◆ Develop and disseminate educational materials, regionally and nationally, about religious programming that address sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking.
- ◆ Work with religious educational institutions to teach ordained and lay leaders how to develop programs that address sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking in religious communities.
- ◆ Partner with secular advocacy and direct service programs for consultation, support, or joint programming.

7. Draw on the resources of secular victim service, advocacy, and perpetrator treatment programs to enhance community responses to violence against women and girls.

- ◆ Network with victim service and advocacy programs to locate religious and secular allies on the local, regional, state, and national levels.
- ◆ Use the resources of other religious groups and existing sexual assault and domestic violence victim advocacy organizations to develop policies, protocols, and educational materials appropriate to specific traditions.
- ◆ Learn about local secular community protocols for handling sexual assault and dating and domestic violence.
- ◆ Make appropriate and informed referrals to local secular programs that have the expertise to help victims or perpetrators, including the legal community, health care system, and child welfare system.
- ◆ Collaborate with perpetrator treatment programs to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence.

What Secular Victim Advocates Can Do

8. Develop and expand relationships with religious organizations.

- ◆ Establish referral networks with religious leaders who understand the spiritual and practical issues facing survivors and perpetrators of violence.
- ◆ Establish ongoing opportunities for collaboration, cross training, technical assistance, and joint programming with religious organizations.
- ◆ Attend conventions and conferences organized by religious, faith-based, and spiritual organizations as participants, exhibitors, and presenters to raise awareness about the issue and available community resources.
- ◆ Collaborate with religious, spiritual, and faith-based groups and organizations to develop or adapt factual, germane materials for survivors and perpetrators of violence within those groups or organizations.
- ◆ Develop alliances with formal and informal women’s groups both within and outside religious institutional boundaries, including inter-religious groups, ecumenical groups, or women-centered groups, to encourage and support their work on issues relating to violence against women.
- ◆ Develop alliances with formal and informal men’s groups both within and outside religious institutions to support their role in eliminating sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking.
- ◆ Identify ways to institutionalize religious organizations’ participation in local, regional, or statewide decisionmaking bodies, such as creating a vacancy on a board or commission for a “religious community representative” or establishing an interfaith task force as part of an existing commission.
- ◆ Work with religious organizations to secure appropriate funding for their participation in projects relating to violence against women and girls.

9. Help secure financial support for religious, spiritual, or faith-based groups and organizations developing responses to violence against women and girls.

- ◆ Encourage federal, state, and local governments to award grants within current legal restrictions to religious, spiritual, or faith-based organizations working in tandem with secular service providers to address violence against women and girls.
- ◆ Reach out to religious, spiritual, or faith-based organizations not familiar with grant seeking to facilitate active participation in program development.

10. Direct resources to community-based sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking victim advocacy programs to help them better serve women with special religious and spiritual needs.

- ◆ Provide transportation to the victim's temple, church, or mosque, and provide religious or kosher foods, among other resources, to help her heal, recover, and obtain safety.

11. Develop and refine guidelines and protocols for dealing with victims and perpetrators who come from a religious background or present spiritual concerns.

- ◆ Enlist religious leaders to train advocates in addressing religious or spiritual questions with sensitivity and support.
- ◆ Refer victims, survivors, or perpetrators to trusted religious or spiritual resources.
- ◆ Collaborate with religious leaders and faith-based groups where appropriate.

Resources

Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence

National Clearinghouse on Religion and Abuse
936 North 34th Street, Suite 200
Seattle, WA 98103
Phone: 206-634-1903
Fax: 206-634-0115
Web site: www.cpsdv.org

The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence addresses issues related to sexual and domestic violence and child abuse from an interreligious standpoint, with emphasis on education and prevention. The center provides religious leaders and victim service professionals with information, training, and resource materials to help them address religious questions and issues that may arise in their work with women and children in crisis.

Jewish Women International

1828 L Street NW., Suite 250
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-857-1300
Fax: 202-857-1380
Web site: www.jewishwomen.org

Jewish Women International (JWI) advocates around the world to help women who are victims of violence and strengthen the lives of women, children, and families. JWI resources include a magazine (*Jewish Woman*) and other publications, public education and advocacy efforts, and the JWI Residential Treatment Center in Jerusalem.

Mending the Sacred Hoop

STOP Violence Against Indian Women Technical Assistance Project
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
Phone: 218-722-2781 or 1-888-305-1650
Fax: 218-722-5775
Web site: www.msh-ta.org

Mending the Sacred Hoop (MSH) is a Native American Women's organization that helps tribal governments and agencies improve their response to Native American victims of violence against women by crafting strategies at local levels that reflect available resources and cultural perspectives. MSH publishes a newsletter, provides assistance and advocacy, coordinates public education events and conferences, and hosts an online discussion forum.

Spiritual Dimensions in Victim Services

P.O. Box 821
Charleston, SC 29402
Phone: 843-722-0082
E-mail: SBeardPARC@aol.com

Spiritual Dimensions in Victim Services works with the religious community to prepare religious leaders and counselors to better serve victims of crime. The training provided covers responses in cases involving child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, robbery, assault, burglary, and survivors of victims of violent deaths.

National Hotlines

Victim Services Helpline (assistance and referral)

National Center for Victims of Crime
2000 M Street NW., Suite 480
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-467-8700 or 1-800-FYI-CALL
TTY: 1-800-211-7996
Fax: 202-467-8701
E-mail: gethelp@ncvc.org
Web site: www.ncvc.org/infolink/main.htm

The National Center for Victims of Crime's (NCVC's) mission is to help victims of crime and their families rebuild their lives. NCVC works with local, state, and federal agencies to enact legislation and provide resources, training, and technical assistance. The NCVC Web site provides relevant statistics, links to publications, and referrals to participating attorneys. The Infolink Helpline (1-800-FYI-CALL) refers callers to services including crisis intervention and counseling, research and publication information, assistance with the criminal justice process, and support groups.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

P.O. Box 161810
Austin, TX 78716
Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE
TTY: 1-800-787-3224
Phone: 512-453-8117
Fax: 512-453-8541
Web site: www.ndvh.org

The National Domestic Violence Hotline uses a nationwide database to provide crisis intervention, referrals, information, and support in many languages for victims of violence against women.

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network

635-B Pennsylvania Avenue SE.
Washington, DC 20003
Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE
Fax: 202-544-3556
Web site: www.rainn.org

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) offers a toll-free hotline for free, confidential counseling and support 24 hours a day for victims of rape, abuse, and incest.

Endnote

1. U.S. Census Bureau (1998). *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 118th Edition*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.