

North Bradley Baptist Church – Domestic Abuse Policy (2022)

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute” (Proverbs 31 v 8)

“The LORD works righteousness and justice
for all who are oppressed” (Psalm 103 v 6)

Statement of intent

Our desire is that this church, and the homes of all those who are involved with this church, are safe places.

We hold that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and is inconsistent with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.

Our intent is to promote a culture which:

- Recognises equality among people, including husbands and wives;
- Develops healthy relationships of mutual responsibility in marriages, families and our own congregation;
- Ensures that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse;
- Strives to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse;
- Refuses to condone or turn a blind eye to any form of abuse; and
- Enables concerns to be raised and responded to clearly and consistently.

As Christians, we are responsible to God for the way we treat everyone, and we seek high standards because we want to honour Him. We undertake to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse.

We undertake to clearly teach that domestic abuse is wrong, and that Scripture should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse, or to demand that a spouse tolerate or submit to abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness.

We believe the best biblical category for understanding abuse is the term “oppression”, as this provides a framework for such behaviour within Scripture and captures the domination, power imbalance and fear that it involves.

Although the trustees of North Bradley Baptist Church (NBBC) have a particular responsibility for implementing this policy, it applies to all members of the church, as a disclosure of domestic abuse could be made to any person.

Recognising domestic abuse

In the United Kingdom, the statutory definition of domestic abuse¹ includes (but is not limited to) physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour,

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>, clause 1

economic abuse², psychological or emotional abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

The Crown Prosecution Service expands on this to say: “Domestic abuse does not always have to be physical to be prosecuted – sometimes victims may not even be aware it is happening. It can include any behaviour deployed by an offender to obtain control or power over another, and we recognise that emotional abuse can be just as harmful as physical violence. Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident, and it is the cumulative and interlinked types of abuse that have a particularly damaging effect on the victim.”³

It is clear from these definitions that domestic abuse is not always easy to define and recognise. It is important to realise that domestic abuse is not a marriage problem, or an anger problem. It is never the fault of the victim. All forms of domestic abuse are wrong, and domestic abuse is a criminal offence.

Appendix 1 provides an expanded description of how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, written from the perspective of someone who is a victim.

The primary focus of this policy is abusive behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. Any abuse involving children or vulnerable adults (either directly, or because of events that they witness) should be handled according to the church’s safeguarding policy.

Responding to domestic abuse – overall framework

We recognise that domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response. We acknowledge that all forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong, and that domestic abuse can occur in all communities, including churches. If one member of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer together.

We acknowledge that working in partnership with victims, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse.

We dignify people who come to us for help by:

- Valuing, respecting and listening to victims of domestic abuse;
- Enabling and empowering victims to make their own choices regarding the situations that they face;
- Valuing, respecting and listening to alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two. In particular, “couples counselling” is a dangerous response to domestic abuse; and
- Refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

We ensure safety first by:

- Ensuring that those who have experienced domestic abuse can find safety and informed help as a first priority, and can continue to stay safe;
- Ensuring that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed;
- Working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community;

² meaning any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone’s ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services

³ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/domestic-abuse>, accessed 4th September 2022

- Respecting the need for confidentiality, noting that where children or vulnerable adults may be at risk, there will be a need to work with the appropriate statutory authorities; and
- Carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour, but only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk. Any direct intentional challenge will only be done in line with the victim's decision and consent.

The church trustees are committed to offering pastoral care (working with statutory agencies as appropriate) and support to all those who have been affected by domestic abuse who have contact with or are part of the church.

We offer pastoral support to those in our care by:

- Ensuring that appropriate trauma-informed pastoral care and professional help is offered to any adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse;
- Respecting the victim's wishes, and never pressuring any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender;
- Understanding that any reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender; and
- Identifying the appropriate relationships of those with pastoral care responsibilities with both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Responding to domestic abuse – applying best practice

Initial disclosure

In an emergency, if someone needs immediate medical assistance, this is best done by taking them to A&E or calling 999 and asking for an ambulance if they will not go. The police can also be contacted if someone is believed to be in danger.

If there is any concern that children have seen, heard or experienced the effects of abuse, this should be reported to the Safeguarding Officer immediately (within 24 hours). Children who have seen or heard the effects of abuse are regarded under the law as victims⁴.

Express concern for the victim's safety and their immediate welfare. Assist with the provision of a safe place to stay if necessary. Use the resources list in Appendix 2 to offer the victim options in obtaining professional help.

Check if it is acceptable to follow up with the victim. Establish their preferred means of contact, and ensure that this is safe, remembering that an abuser may well monitor a victim's phone and electronic communications.

Follow up

It is recommended that you make a brief objective note of dates, facts and the context of what you have been told. This should be kept in strict confidence.

Within 48 hours of the disclosure, but only with the victim's consent, you should share the incident with someone who is qualified in the area of domestic abuse. This may be NBBC's Women's Worker, the National Domestic Violence Helpline, or the Splitz Service.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>, clause 3

Encourage the victim to consider the need for a safety plan if they decide to remain with the abuser. Ideally this should be carried out in conjunction with NBBC's Women's Worker, the National Domestic Violence helpline, or the Splitz Service.

Do not take any information back to the abuser. Although Matthew 18 v 15 would normally encourage direct conversation with someone who has sinned, it would be dangerous to apply this to a situation of abuse.

Be very gentle with a victim and learn the story of their suffering. Name the abuse for what it is, and weep with those who weep. Bring words of comfort from a Saviour who cares.

Be aware that, for abuse victims in Christian circles, Scripture may well have been weaponised, particularly verses such as Ephesians 5 v 22 and 1 Corinthians 7 v 4.

Responding to perpetrators

Never initiate a meeting with an alleged perpetrator without the victim's consent.

In the event that a perpetrator (or alleged perpetrator) seeks a meeting, then if they are an active part of NBBC's congregation they should be referred to NBBC's elders.

If the perpetrator is a member of NBBC, or a part of the congregation, then this should be reflected in the safety planning and (where the perpetrator is a member) church discipline should be initiated.

Always be aware that perpetrators may present themselves as misunderstood victims, and that they can come across as persuasive and credible, and may well express remorse which is not, in practice, backed up by genuine repentance, accountability and change.

Do not allow perpetrators to use theological excuses for their behaviour. Be clear that the abuse is *their* sin, and not the victim's sin. Encourage them to seek help from an organisation such as Respect, and to engage in one-to-one counselling with an elder of NBBC.

Do not ask *why* a perpetrator did what they did; they will tend to point the finger of blame elsewhere. Instead, ask *what* they did, and ask questions to uncover *how* they benefited from this behaviour.

Do not allow a perpetrator to misuse Scriptures such as Matthew 6 v 14-15 or Psalm 103 v 12 to try and rush towards forgiveness; genuine repentance will recognise the deep harm done, and will not pressure for immediate reconciliation.

Appendix 1 – How to recognise domestic abuse in a relationship⁵

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you might be in an abusive relationship.

Emotional abuse

Does your partner, or former partner, ever:

- belittle you, or put you down?
- blame you for the abuse or arguments?
- deny that abuse is happening, or play it down?
- isolate you from your family and friends?
- stop you going to college or work?
- make unreasonable demands for your attention?
- accuse you of flirting or having affairs?
- tell you what to wear, who to see, where to go, and what to think?
- control your money, or not give you enough to buy food or other essential things?

Threats and intimidation

Does your partner, or former partner, ever:

- threaten to hurt or kill you?
- destroy things that belong to you?
- stand over you, invade your personal space?
- threaten to kill themselves or the children?
- read your emails, texts or letters?
- harass or follow you?

Physical abuse

The person abusing you may hurt you in a number of ways. Does your partner, or former partner, ever:

- slap, hit or punch you?
- push or shove you?
- bite or kick you?
- burn you?
- choke you or hold you down?
- throw things?

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can happen to anyone, whether they're male or female. Does your partner, or former partner, ever:

- touch you in a way you don't want to be touched?
- make unwanted sexual demands?
- hurt you during sex?
- pressure you to have unsafe sex – for example, not using a condom?

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs>

- pressure you to have sex?

Have you ever:

- felt afraid of your partner or former partner?
- changed your behaviour because you're afraid of what your partner, or former partner, might do?

If your partner, or former partner, has sex with you when you don't want to, this is rape.

Appendix 2 – Useful resources

National Domestic Violence Helpline: Tel: 0808 2000 247. Free and confidential 24hr helpline run by Women's Aid and Refuge. This helpline will also take calls from children and young people.

Splitz Support Service: Tel: 01225 775276 (Monday - Friday 8.00am - 5.00pm), Tel: 01793 610 610 (out of hours) Splitz is an independent charity established in 1989 who work free of charge with victims, children and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Respect: Tel: 0808 802 4040. Respect offers information and advice to people who behave in abusive ways, as well as those who are victims of abuse. <https://www.respect.uk.net/>

ManKind Initiative: Tel: 01823 334244. For male victims of domestic abuse.

Restored: An international Christian alliance working to end violence against women and to transform relationships. <http://www.restoredrelationships.org/>

Make a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme application. This scheme gives any member of the public the right to ask the police if their partner may pose a risk to them. It is often called 'Clare's Law' after the landmark case that led to it. This scheme also allows a member of the public to make an enquiry into the partner of a close friend or family member: <https://www.wiltshire.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/daa/domestic-abuse/alpha2/request-information-under-clares-law/>

NBBC Women's Worker: Catherine Hadow, catherine@nbbc.org.uk

NBBC Safeguarding Officer: Hana Taylor, hana@nbbc.org.uk