



# **A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**Safeguarding Program**  
Catholic Archdiocese of Perth



**The Safeguarding Program**

Protecting Children and Adults in the Catholic Church





As Catholic men, who are a brotherhood of men united together as a Knights of the Southern Cross, we fully and publicly reject forms of domestic violence committed by men. We want all men to take full responsibility for the quality of their relationship with women and children. Responsibility means men live by the Golden Rule, "Treat women and children the way you yourself want to be treated." Responsibility means relating respectfully and communicating clearly. All men in Australia need to be gentle-men.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth recognises that whilst both men and women can be and are victims of Family and Domestic Violence the vast majority of victims are women and children.

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### **Acknowledgement**

A Catholic Response to Domestic Violence,  
Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay

## **A PRAYER TO END FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Loving God,

We thank you for inviting us to end domestic violence  
in our community.

We ask for your wisdom, courage, and guidance.

We pray for a society where all people are safe in their homes and close relationships,  
where each person is respected, in their equality and dignity.

We pray for all those affected by violence,  
that they may find safety and healing.

We pray that all women, men and children will find a place and life free from violence,  
and children will be cared for in nurturing, protective and supportive ways.

We pray for young men and women, that they may find models of respectful  
relationships and reject the violent and demeaning images of manhood and  
womanhood current in our society.

We ask for the courage to confront the causes of domestic violence,  
including the prevalence of violence in our society, any abuses of power,  
and the unequal positioning of women in the community.

We pray for right and just relations between all people, so that together  
we may transform and overcome violence in all its forms.

We long for the time you have promised, when violence is banished,  
women and men are open to being loved and loving others, children are protected,  
and the work and wealth of our world is justly shared.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

***Adapted from Catholic Social Services Victoria Domestic Violence Parish Kit  
and the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay***

**Source:**

A Catholic Response to Domestic Violence Booklet,  
Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay 2021

## **FAST FACTS ON FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA**

Domestic and family violence is at crisis level in Australia.

On average, each week in Australia a woman dies as a result of family violence.

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One in four children experience the fear and distress of witnessing their mother being abused.

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Overwhelmingly, the victims of domestic and family violence are women and children.

## **DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Family and domestic violence is the intentional and systematic use of violence and abuse to control, coerce or create fear.

The term family and domestic violence most commonly refers to violence and abuse against an intimate partner (including ex-partners) but can also occur between siblings, from adolescents to parents, or from family carers to a relative. It can include the abuse of children and young people, older people, people with a disability, and other family members.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally prefer to use the term *family violence*. This concept describes a matrix of harmful, violent and aggressive behaviour. However, the use of the term family violence should not obscure the fact that Aboriginal women and children bear the brunt of family violence.

Family and domestic violence may include:

- emotional/psychological
- physical assault
- sexual
- social isolation
- financial abuse
- spiritual abuse.

## FORMS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE

Emotional violence is behaviour that does not accord equal importance and respect to another person's feelings, opinions and experiences. Even though emotional abuse can have a profound and long-term impact on the victim, it is often the most difficult form of violence to identify. Many emotionally abusive behaviours are not crimes, and victims therefore can find it challenging to obtain protection.

#### EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE ARE:

- deliberately undermining the victim's confidence;
- acts that humiliate or degrade;
- threats to harm themselves, the victim or another family member;
- threats to report the victim to authorities such as Centrelink, Immigration or Child Protection;
- verbal putdowns;
- questioning the victim in a hostile way;
- ridiculing and shaming aspects of a victim's being such as their body, beliefs, skills, friends, occupation or cultural background; and
- handling guns or other weapons in front of the victim.

## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence is any actual or threatened attack on another person's physical safety and bodily integrity. In addition to threatened or actual harm to people, it includes harming or threatening to harm pets or possessions. Acts can be physically abusive even if they do not result in physical injury.

## EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE ARE:

- smashing property, destroying possessions and throwing things;
- using intimidating body language such as angry looks, threatening gestures and raised voice; harassing the victim by making persistent phone calls, sending text messages or emails;
- following the victim, or loitering near a home or workplace;
- recklessly driving a vehicle with a victim and/or child in the car; and
- pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, choking, hair-pulling, punching or using weapons; and murder.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is any actual or threatened sexual contact without consent, such as unwanted touching, rape, exposure of genitals or making someone view pornography against their will. Women with disabilities are believed to experience higher levels of sexual violence – such as unwanted touching by a carer (Salthouse & Frohmader 2004). While some forms of sexual violence are criminal acts; for example, sexual assault and rape, many other forms – such as using degrading language – are not.

## EXAMPLES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE:

- rape, including being forced to perform unwanted sexual acts, or to have sex with others;
- pressuring someone to agree to sex;
- unwanted touching of sexual or private parts;
- causing injury to the victim's sexual organs;
- disclosing intimate knowledge, including threatening to share private photographs or information about sexual orientation to generate fear; and
- expecting a victim to have sex as a form of reconciliation after using violence against them (because in these circumstances they are unable to withhold consent for fear of further violence).

## SOCIAL VIOLENCE

Social violence is behaviour that limits, controls or interferes with the victim's social activities or relationships with others, such as controlling their movements and denying their access to family and friends.

### EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL VIOLENCE ARE:

- excessive questioning;
- monitoring movements, internet use and social communications;
- being aggressive towards those who are viewed as competition and acts of jealousy; isolating the victim from their social networks and supports, either by preventing them from having contact with their family or friends or by verbally or physically abusing them in public or in front of others;
- preventing the victim from having contact with people who speak their language and/or share their culture; and
- spreading lies about the victim through their support networks in order to discredit them.

## FINANCIAL VIOLENCE

Financial violence includes not giving the victim access to their share of the family's resources, expecting them to manage the household on an impossibly low amount of money and/or criticising and blaming them when unable to, monitoring their spending, and incurring debts in their name.

### EXAMPLES OF FINANCIAL VIOLENCE ARE:

- denying the victim access to money, including their own;
- demanding that the family live on inadequate resources;
- incurring debts in the victim's name;
- making significant financial decisions without consulting the victim;
- selling the victim's possessions; and
- stealing money.

## SPIRITUAL VIOLENCE

Spiritual violence is any behaviour that denigrates the victim's religious or spiritual beliefs, or prevents them from attending religious gatherings or practising their faith. It also includes harming or threatening to harm others or children in religious or occult rituals, or forcing them to participate in religious activities against their will.

## EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL VIOLENCE ARE

- ridiculing or putting down the victim's beliefs and culture;
- preventing the victim from belonging to or taking part in a group or ceremony that is important to their spiritual beliefs, or practising their religion; and
- manipulating **religious teachings** or **cultural traditions** to excuse the violence.

## OTHER CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Some men control women in ways that do not fit the above descriptions or are not - on the surface - violent, but still deny a woman's right to autonomy and equality.

Examples of other controlling behaviours include:

dictating what the victim does, who she sees and talks to, or where she goes;

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preventing the victim from going to work;

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not allowing the victim to express her own feelings or thoughts;

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loitering around places the victim is known to frequent, watching her, following her, making persistent telephone calls and sending mail, including unwanted love letters, cards and gifts;

forcing the victim to go without food or water;

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depriving the victim of sleep; and

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refusing to give the victim any privacy.

### Source

Department of Communities Fact Sheet 1:  
Forms of family and domestic violence  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet1Formsoffamilyanddomesticviolence.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet1Formsoffamilyanddomesticviolence.pdf)

## PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS

Perpetrators of family and domestic violence can vary in age and be from any socio-economic demographic, cultural background, ethnicity or religion.

They can occupy any profession or live in any geographic region. Perpetrators can be any gender; however, the vast majority are male (Bagshaw & Chung 2000). Risk assessment and risk management must be underpinned by an understanding of common perpetrator behaviours.

### TACTICS

To effectively respond to family and domestic violence, it is important to understand the methods or tactics used by perpetrators, including those adopted to hurt and/or frighten victims (coercion) and those designed to isolate and/or regulate them (control).

Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are very much in control of these behaviours and ultimately the only ones who have the capacity to change the situation ('No to Violence' 2005). Perpetrators can be good at hiding the violence, publicly presenting as kind, loving, charming and likeable, but behave in cruel, violent, undermining and manipulative ways in private. Some of the common tactics used by perpetrators to coerce and control victims are shown below.

### METHODS/TACTICS EXAMPLES

#### INTIMIDATION AND THREATS

- Causing fear through threats
- Glares
- Destroying property
- Hurting pets

#### USING THE CHILDREN

- Telling the victim she is a bad mother
- Using access to harass or assault her
- Threatening to take the children away
- Coercing the victim to get pregnant

#### UNDERMINING CONFIDENCE

- Damaging self-esteem through humiliation, ridicule, and shaming
- Intentional behaviours that make the victim doubt herself.
- Threatening to harm the children or engaging in risky behaviour with them
- Making the child watch or participate in the abuse.

#### Adapted from

Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence, Department for Child Protection, Government of Western Australia, 2013. Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework – Second edition

## **ISOLATION**

- Preventing the victim from working
- Cutting her off from her friends or family
- Physically preventing her from leaving the house.

## **MINIMISATION AND DENIAL**

- Saying it was 'only' a slap or that the victim is overreacting
- Blaming alcohol/ stress/unemployment
- Mitigating behaviour by downplaying the damage and injury
- Providing inconsistent accounts
- Using loss of control as an excuse.

## **VICTIM BLAMING**

- Telling the victim that she asked for it or she provoked him
- Avoiding or attempting to divide responsibility for violence
- Accusing the victim of a different form of violence; for example, emotional abuse; and focusing attention on her inability to cope and neglect of her children
- When women have reverted to substance abuse or have developed anxiety-based disorders as a result of this violence.

## **RECASTING THE BEHAVIOUR AS NON-VIOLENT OR ACCEPTABLE**

- Excusing behaviour as self-defence, rough play or an accident
- By using language like 'incident' or 'fight' to make the violence appear mutual.

## USE OF MALE PRIVILEGE

- Expecting sex on demand
- Demanding that the victim does all the cooking and housework
- Controlling all the money
- Making all the 'big decisions'
- Excusing excessive jealousy and violence.

## SEXUAL ABUSE

- Sexually assaulting or raping the victim
- Keeping the victim pregnant
- Blackmailing the victim with intimate knowledge or photographs.

## POST-SEPARATION ABUSE

- Threatening to hurt or kill adult or child victims
- Crying and emotional blackmail
- Stalking the victim
- Threatening to kill himself
- Threatening to make reports to Centrelink, Immigration and Child Protection if the victim ends the relationship or reports the abuse.

### Source

Department of Communities Family and Domestic Violence Fact Sheet 3 : Perpetrator Characteristics  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet3Perpetratorcharacteristics.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet3Perpetratorcharacteristics.pdf)

### References

Bagshaw D & Chung D 2000, Women, Men and Domestic Violence, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. No to Violence 2005, Men's Behaviour Change group work: A Manual for quality practice, No to Violence, Melbourne. Department for Child Protection 2013, Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

## CHOICE AND INTENT

Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are responsible for, and make decisions about, their use of violence. This is demonstrated by the fact that perpetrators are rarely indiscriminately violent. Many perpetrators are not violent in their workplaces, social networks or communities but choose when, where and how they use violence.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- the perpetrator might suddenly change his behaviour from violent to pleasant in the middle of an abusive episode if someone comes to the door or the phone rings, but then resume it again afterwards;
- the perpetrator threatens future violence if the victim does not do what he wants her to;
- the perpetrator makes purposeful decisions about the type, amount of, and where to inflict the abuse; for example, only injuring the victim in areas of her body that can be covered by clothing; and
- the perpetrator is selective about when and where he will be abusive. For example, a perpetrator will choose whether to wait and attack the victim privately at home, or to humiliate her in front of friends or family.



Understanding and identifying that perpetrators use deliberate and planned violence is paramount when attempting to engage them and hold them accountable.

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### PERPETRATORS AS FATHERS

Parenting by men who perpetrate family and domestic violence is associated with particular characteristics. They are likely to use controlling behaviours and physical discipline, to display more anger with their children, and to have unrealistic expectations and poor developmental understandings of appropriate child behaviour at different ages and stages. Many of these parenting characteristics are underpinned by a sense of entitlement.

The role of father can be central to these men's identity and a significant motivator for change; however, the identity of fatherhood among men who perpetrate violence should not be idealised.

Entitlement thinking prevails in their attitudes and they often see their child as their investment or possession, or as someone who should love them unconditionally. It is uncommon for men who use violence to recognise that their violence toward their (ex) partner is also abuse of their child; this, in turn, prevents them from seeing or understanding its impact on the child. While a perpetrator of violence might express love for his child, it is important not to mistake this for empathy for his child's needs and experiences.

Just as these men prioritise their own needs when relating to their (ex) partners, they have similar ways of relating to their children. They can feel justified in neglecting basic care and using violence against their children when they fail to comply with their expectations. Disregard for children's needs often continues after separation, when fathers who have perpetrated violence often privilege their 'right' for contact over the traumatic harm that this might cause the child. In this way, as in many others, these fathers put their own needs and wants ahead of those of the child.

## **A NOTE ABOUT PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY**

Engagement with perpetrators should include reinforcing that he is solely responsible for his choice to use violence, informing him about the consequences and impacts of his actions, challenging him to accept responsibility, and assisting him to seek help to change his behaviour.

Making the necessary referrals and working in an integrated way with other services to hold the perpetrator accountable can assist with supplementing risk assessment and obtaining information relevant to risk management and victim safety.

### **Source**

Department of Communities Family and domestic violence Fact Sheet 3  
Perpetrator characteristics [www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet3Perpetratorcharacteristics.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet3Perpetratorcharacteristics.pdf)

### **References**

Bagshaw D & Chung D 2000, Women, Men and Domestic Violence, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. No to Violence 2005, Men's Behaviour Change group work: A Manual for quality practice, No to Violence, Melbourne. Department for Child Protection 2013, Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Have you ever wondered “Why does she stay / why does she keep going back” or have you considered “What stops her leaving?”

The Cycle of Violence below helps to answer some of these questions and also provides a better understanding of the possible cycle of violence some victims find themselves living in. The below cycle is not indicative of all domestic and family violence situations and, as such, is to be used as a tool and not a concrete explanation for all situations or circumstances. The theory that domestic violence occurs in a cycle was developed in 1979 by Lenore Walker as a result of a study conducted in the United States.

### WHY WOMEN STAY

Women stay with men who abuse them primarily out of fear. Some fear that they will lose their children. Many believe that they cannot support themselves, much less their children.

When the first violent act occurs, the woman is likely to be incredulous. She believes her abuser when he apologises and promises that it will not happen again. When it does—repeatedly—many women believe that if they just act differently they can stop the abuse. They may be ashamed to admit that the man they love is terrorising them. Some cannot admit or realise that they are battered women. Others have endured trauma and suffer from battered women syndrome.



**Sources:**  
Catholic Teaching, Lenore E. Walker, "The Cycle of Violence" in  
The Battered Woman (NY: Harper & Row, 1979, 2000)

**The Build-up Phase:** This phase may begin with normal relations between the people in the relationship, but evolves escalating tension marked by increased verbal, emotional or financial abuse. In non-violent relationships, these issues can normally be resolved between the people in the relationship.

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**The Stand-over Phase:** This phase can be extremely frightening for people affected by domestic and family violence. The behaviour of the person who uses violence in relationships escalates to the point that a release of tension is inevitable. The person affected may feel that they are “walking on eggshells” and fear that anything they do will cause the situation to deteriorate further.

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**Explosion:** The explosion stage marks the peak of violence in the relationship. It is the height of abuse by the person who uses violence to control and have power over others. The person who commits domestic and family violence experiences a release of tension during an explosion phase, which may become addictive. They may be unable to deal with their anger any other way.

*What controlling ways interfered in the way you wanted to parent?*

*What have you done in this to parent in your preferred ways?*

*Exercise: Plotting timelines of his violence, her resistance.*

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**The Remorse Phase:** At the remorse stage, the person who uses domestic and family violence in their relationships feels ashamed of their behaviour. They retreat and become withdrawn from the relationship. She made it clear it's not okay. They try and justify their actions to themselves and to others, unaware they are addicted to the release they have just experienced.

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**The Pursuit Phase:** At this stage, the person who uses domestic and family violence in relationships promises to the other person affected never to be violent again. They may try to make up for their past behaviour during this period and say that other factors have caused them to be violent; for example, work stress, drugs, or alcohol. The violent offender may purchase gifts, and give the affected person attention. Also, the violent offender may go through a dramatic personality change. The person affected by the violence will feel hurt, but possibly relieved that the violence is over.

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**The Honeymoon Phase:** During the honeymoon phase of the cycle of violence, both people in the relationship may be in denial as to how bad the abuse and violence were. Both people do not want the relationship to end, so are happy to ignore the possibility that the violence could occur again.

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## IMPACTS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON WOMEN

Family and domestic violence has short and long-term physical, emotional, psychological, financial and other effects on women. Every woman is different and the individual and cumulative impact of each act of violence depends on many complex factors.

While each woman will experience family and domestic violence uniquely, there are many common effects of living with violence and living in fear. The obvious physical effects of family and domestic violence on women are physical injury and death. Yet there are also other effects on women's physical health – such as insomnia, chronic pain, physical exhaustion, and reproductive health problems – that are not necessarily the result of physical injuries. Women experiencing family and domestic violence have higher rates of miscarriage, most probably because pregnancy is often a time when violence begins or is exacerbated.

Women experiencing family and domestic violence are more likely to experience depression, panic attacks, phobias, anxiety and sleeping disorders. They have higher stress levels and are at greater risk of suicide attempts. They are at increased risk of misusing alcohol and other drugs, and of using minor tranquilisers and pain killers.

Women who experience family and domestic violence are often unable to act on their own choices because of physical restraint, fear and intimidation. Women who experience family and domestic violence live in persistent fear of further violation. They are frequently silenced and unable to express their point of view or experience. Women often make their partners' needs and feelings the constant focus of their attention as a survival strategy, which may result in an inability to attend to their own and their children's health and wellbeing.

Women who experience family and domestic violence often experience social isolation, including from their own extended family. Isolation can be a form of controlling behaviour or a consequence of women's stress, anxiety, shame, physical exhaustion, substance abuse, physical injuries and fear.

Seeing the effects of violence on their children can be profoundly distressing for women. They may feel they cannot or are unable to protect their children which can have serious effects on their identity and confidence as mothers. Women's capacities to parent their children can be affected by the physical, emotional and cognitive effects of their own experiences of the violence, and by men's deliberate attempts to undermine their confidence and ability as mothers.

## WOMEN'S RESISTANCE TO THE VIOLENCE

Although women experience a multitude of harmful effects from their partners' violence, they are not passive recipients of abuse and violence – they do not 'just go along with it' or 'let it happen'. Victims of family and domestic violence always try to reduce, prevent or stop the violence in some way. It is important for Church workers to uncover the many ways in which women creatively and strategically resist the violence in an effort to escape the violence, retain their dignity and make a better life for themselves and their children.

### Source

Department for Communities Family and Domestic Violence Fact Sheet 6 : Impacts of Family Violence on Women.  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet6ImpactsOfFamilyAndDomesticViolenceOnWomen.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet6ImpactsOfFamilyAndDomesticViolenceOnWomen.pdf)

### Adapted from

Men's Behaviour Change group work: A manual for quality practice, No to Violence, 2005. 2 Adapted from: Honouring resistance: How women resist abuse in intimate relationships, Weaver J, Todd N, Ogden C, & Craik L, 2007. Fact Sheet 6 – Impacts of family and domestic violence on women. Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework – Second edition. A victim's resistance to the violence may not make the violence stop.

### References

Department for Child Protection 2013, Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence, Government of Western Australia, Perth. No to Violence 2005, Men's Behaviour Change group work: A manual for quality practice, No to Violence, Melbourne. Weaver J, Todd N, Ogden C, & Craik L, 2007, Honouring resistance: How women resist abuse in intimate relationships, Alberta, Canada. World Health Organisation (WHO) 2000, Violence against Women, Geneva, Switzerland

## IMPACTS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

There are many ways that children are exposed to family and domestic violence. For this reason, when it occurs in a family with children, family and domestic violence is always child abuse.



A recent review by the Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse found that “more than two decades of international research definitively shows that infants, children and adolescents experience serious negative psychological, emotional, social and developmental impacts to their wellbeing from the traumatic ongoing experiences of domestic violence” (Sety 2011). These impacts are often cumulative – that is, they amass over time.

Research also shows that family and domestic violence affects unborn children – family violence often commences or intensifies during pregnancy and is associated with increased rates of miscarriage, low birth weight, premature birth, foetal injury and foetal death.

Family and domestic violence does not predetermine outcomes for children and young people, but it does influence them significantly – particularly when exposure to the violence occurs in a child’s early years. Infants and young children exposed to family and domestic violence are more likely to miss key

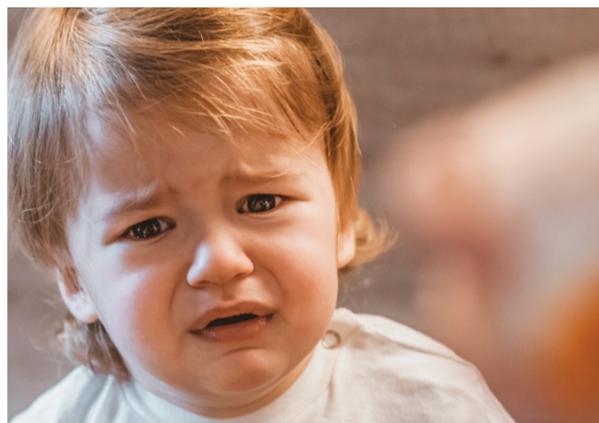
developmental experiences, which – because they are foundational – can have a cascading effect on their further developmental progress.

The effects of family and domestic violence vary from child to child. Furthermore, they are mediated or filtered by other factors, such as poverty or marginalisation on the basis of culture or race. The secondary effects of violence; for example, unstable housing, lack of access to education, and poor access to ante and post-natal care, can also significantly impact on children’s safety and wellbeing.

In addition to possible physical injury and death at the hands of male family members, children may manifest physical symptoms of stress or distress; for example, bed-wetting, stomach upsets and chronic illnesses.

The immediate emotional effects of experiencing family and domestic violence tend to differ with age.

Babies and toddlers who experience family and domestic violence often cry more than other infants and show signs of anxiety and irritability. They frequently have feeding and sleep difficulties. They are often underweight for their age and have delayed mobility.



They often react to loud noises and are very wary of new people. They might be very demanding or very passive. Pre-school children lack the cognitive maturity to understand the meaning of what they observe and the verbal skills to articulate their feelings. They exhibit their emotional distress by 'clinginess', eating and sleeping difficulties, concentration problems, inability to play constructively and physical complaints. They sometimes have symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder in adults, including re-experiencing events, fearfulness, numbing and increased arousal. Immature behaviour, insecurities and reduced ability to empathise with other people are common for this age group. Frequently, children have adjustment problems; for example, difficulty moving from kindergarten to school.

They often wonder what they can do to prevent it and might attempt to defend themselves or their mother. Pre-adolescent, school-aged children have the capacity to externalise and internalise their emotions. Externalised emotions might manifest in rebelliousness, defiant behaviour, temper tantrums, irritability, cruelty to pets, physical abuse of others, limited tolerance and poor impulse control. Internalised emotions might result in repressed anger and confusion, conflict avoidance, overly compliant behaviour, loss of interest in social activities, social competence, and withdrawal, or avoidance of peer

relations. Overall functioning, attitudes, social competence and school performance are often negatively affected, and children often have deficits in basic coping and social skills. The low self-esteem engendered by experiences of violence is exacerbated by these other effects.

Adolescents who have experienced family and domestic violence are at increased risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, delinquency, eating disorders and substance abuse. They frequently have difficulty trusting adults and often use controlling or manipulative behaviour.

Depression and suicidal ideation or behaviours are common. Adolescents are also at greater risk of homelessness and engaging in delinquent and/or violent behaviour. Children's anger at their mother tends to increase with age. Older children and adolescents commonly see their mother as causing or being complicit in the violence, or blame her for 'failing' to protect them or for not taking them away from the abusive situation.



### **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO COPE WITH THE VIOLENCE**

While the detrimental impacts for children living and experiencing family and domestic violence are well documented, not all children are adversely affected or affected in the same way.

It is important to consider how children have coped with the violence, what skills and understanding they have developed, and what resilience factors have assisted their coping. Factors contributing to a child's ability to cope with the violence include:

- the mother's responses to the violence and the supports that she receives from family, friends, community and the broader service system when seeking assistance for the violence;
- the availability and responsiveness of a support system for the child within the family structure;
- the availability and responsiveness of a support system outside the family structure;
- strong relationships with friends, peers, and community;
- involvement in extracurricular school activities or cultural activities; and
- the child's own ability and strengths to handle stressful and frightening situations.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN

When children are not safe due to family and domestic violence, this is often attributed to the mother for not leaving the relationship or not managing the perpetrator's behaviour or taking active steps to protect the child. This effectively holds the mother responsible for protecting the child from the perpetrator's use of violence. It contributes to the pervasiveness of 'mother blame' that permeates the service system.

### Source

Department for Communities Family and Domestic Violence Fact Sheet 7:  
Impacts of family and domestic violence on children  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet7ImpactsOffamilyanddomesticviolenceonchildren.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet7ImpactsOffamilyanddomesticviolenceonchildren.pdf)

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Victorian Department of Human Services 2013, Assessing children and young people experiencing family violence: A practice guide for family violence practitioners, Victorian Government, Melbourne. Department for Child Protection 2013, Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice - A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence, Government of Western Australia, Perth. No to Violence 2005, Men's Behaviour Change group work: A Manual for quality practice, No to Violence, Melbourne. Sety M 2011, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review, Sydney, New South Wales.

## WHY MEN ABUSE

Domestic violence is learned behaviour. Men who abuse learn to abuse through observation, experience and reinforcement. They believe they have a right to use violence and are also rewarded; that is, their behaviour gives them power and control over their partner.

Abusive men come from all economic classes, races, religions, and occupations. The batterer may be a "good provider" and a respected member of his church and community. While there is no one type, men who abuse share some common characteristics. They tend to be extremely jealous, possessive, and easily angered. A man may fly into a rage because his spouse called her mother too often or because she didn't take the car in for servicing. Many try to isolate their partners by limiting their contact with family and friends.

Typically, abusive men deny that the abuse is happening, or they minimise it. They often blame their abusive behaviour on someone or something other than themselves. They tell their partner, "**You made me do this**". Many abusive men hold a view of women as inferior. Their conversation and language reveal their attitude towards a woman's place in society. Many believe that men are meant to dominate and control women.

Alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence, but they do not cause it. An abusive man who drinks or uses drugs has two distinct problems: substance abuse and violence. Both must be treated.



## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND FALSE FORGIVENESS

When violence occurs in the home, it is important to recognise that it is a part of a cycle of abuse.

It begins with the violent incident, followed by the expression of remorse by the perpetrator. The perpetrator then makes empty promises about never harming again. Both victim and perpetrator are led to believe all is settled from here on, and there is hope for their relationship. However, the stresses of life can cause this honeymoon phase to break down. The perpetrator then returns to their old ways, demeaning and belittling their spouse. Their own issues with anger and shame begin to be displaced onto their spouse.

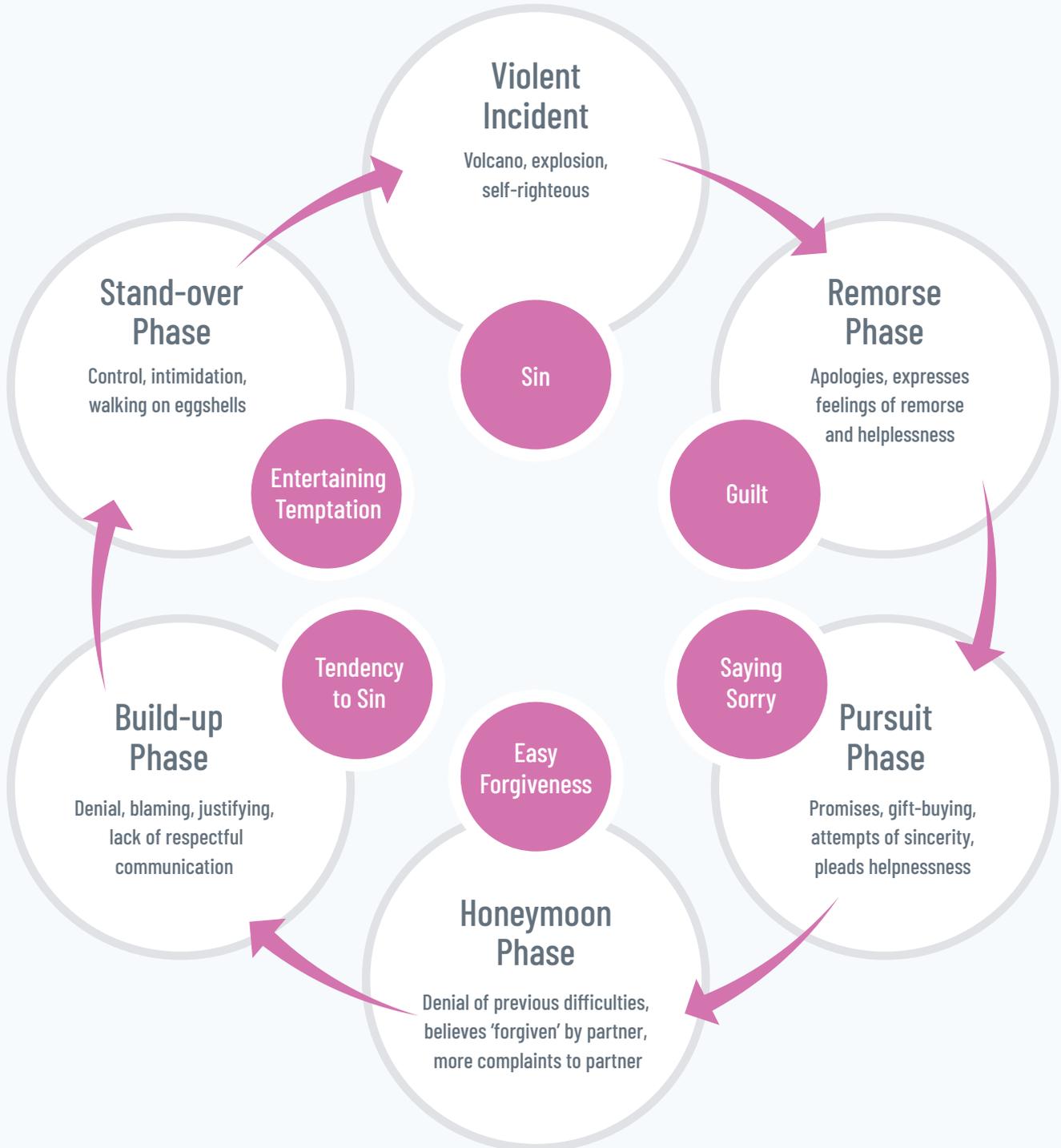
The relationship reaches a standover phase where the victim lives in such incredible fear that they sometimes incite the perpetrator to violence, just so they can stop living in this most fearful of all stages within the cycle of violence. This cycle of violence is represented in the outer circle in the diagram shown.

The inner circle represents the stages of sin which correspond to the stages of the cycle of violence. This inner circle shows that domestic violence is a sin. But just because our Christian faith teaches us that to be human is to sin does not mean we can commit violence, ask for forgiveness, and then repeat the violence. That is not how true reconciliation works. We can only break this cycle of violence and abolish it forever from our relationships by undergoing the hard work of truth-telling, acknowledging, reparation, and relating anew with each other (as shown in the following diagram, A Cycle of True Reconciliation).

**Sources:**

Catholic Teaching, Lenore E. Walker, "The Cycle of Violence" in *The Battered Woman* (NY: Harper & Row, 1979, 2000)

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND FALSE FORGIVENESS



**Sources:**  
Catholic Teaching, Lenore E. Walker, "The Cycle of Violence" in The Battered Woman (NY: Harper & Row, 1979, 2000)

## WHAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Catholic Church teaches that violence against another person in any form fails to treat that person as someone worthy of love. Instead, it treats the person as an object to be used. When violence occurs within a sacramental marriage, the abused spouse may question, “How do these violent acts relate to my promise to take my spouse for better or for worse?” The person being assaulted needs to know that acting to end the abuse does not violate the marriage promises. While violence can be directed towards men, it tends to harm women and children more.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE PERMANENCE OF MARRIAGE

Some abused women believe that Catholic Church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Catholic Church.

Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. The abuser has already broken the marriage covenant through his or her abusive behaviour. Abused persons who have divorced may want to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment.

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Abusive men may take a text from the Bible and distort it to support their right to batter. They often use Ephesians 5:22 (“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord”) to justify their behaviour. This passage (v. 21-33), however, refers to the mutual submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. It means that husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church. The Catholic bishops condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behaviour in any form. Men and women are created in God’s image. They are to treat each other with dignity and respect.

## WHAT THE POPE SAYS

Pope Francis, in his 2016 exhortation, *The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*, acknowledges that domestic violence exists in families in our Church and our parishes, and declares that it is not something we can turn a blind eye to. He reiterates Canon 1153, saying that in cases where a spouse and children are experiencing violence and abuse, “separation becomes inevitable” and even “morally necessary” for their safety.

## FORGIVENESS

Men who batter also cite the Bible to insist that their victims forgive them (see, for example, Matthew 6:9-15).

A victim then feels guilty if she cannot do so. Forgiveness, however, does not mean forgetting the abuse or pretending that it didn’t happen. Neither is possible. Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse. Rather, forgiveness means that the victim decides to let go of the experience, to move on with life and not to tolerate abuse of any kind again.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers an important opportunity to address these issues. While there are limitations to dealing with issues of abuse in the confessional due to the seal of confession and the absolute confidentiality that it implies, and issues of time and place for a lengthy conversation, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important place to address domestic violence.

## CANON LAW

Canon Law provides some guidance as to what constitutes a valid marriage.

### CANON 1151

Spouses have the obligation and the right to maintain their common conjugal life, unless a lawful reason excuses them.

### CANON 1153 §1

A spouse who occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult, provides the other spouse with a lawful reason to leave, either by a decree of the local Ordinary or, if there is danger in delay, even on his or her own authority.

## COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Violence is antithetical to Christianity and the Good News it proclaims. The social doctrine of the Church teaches us that violence is not an acceptable solution to any problem, is unworthy of any human being, and *“destroys what it claims to defend”*.

### #488

Violence made its appearance in interpersonal relationships (cf. Genesis 4:1-16) and in social relationships (cf. Genesis 11:1-9). Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence, God cannot be present (cf. 1 Chronicles 22:8-9).

### #496

Violence is never a proper response. With the conviction of her faith in Christ and with the awareness of her mission, the Church proclaims “that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings”.

#### Sources:

A Catholic Response to Domestic Violence Booklet,  
Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay 2021

## CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catechism tells us man and woman are both with one and the same dignity. Therefore, one is neither superior nor inferior to the other; they are both made in the image of God. This implies that one neither has power over the other nor reason to lord over them.

### #369

Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity "in the image of God".

### #1931

Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any exception) as 'another self'; above all, bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."

## WHAT CAN WE, AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, DO ABOUT DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Faith communities can play a very important role in the lives of individuals affected by family and domestic violence. It is important that Church workers:

- learn about domestic and family violence;
- communicate zero tolerance for violence of all forms;
- reflect on our own attitudes;
- promote healthy relationships;
- equip ourselves with the knowledge to assist those who ask for help, through referrals to specialist services where needed;
- do what we can in our relationships, parishes, communities and organisations to eliminate violence and its impact;
- foster in our families and communities alternatives to violence;
- not be a bystander and report violence;
- pray for peace, justice and true reconciliation;
- aim to make all Church communities places of support and healing;
- ask direct questions if you suspect abuse. Ask the woman if she is being hit or hurt at home. Carefully evaluate her response. Some women do not realise they are being abused, or they lie to protect their spouses. Be careful not to say anything that will bolster her belief that it is her fault and that she must change her behaviour; and
- have an action plan in place to follow if an abused woman calls on you for help. This includes knowing how and where to refer her for help. This will be easier if you have already established contact with local shelters and domestic violence agencies.

# We must always say 'no' to violence in the home

**POPE FRANCIS**

## **A SAFEGUARDING RESPONSE TO FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The key messages in responding to victims of domestic and family violence are **sensitivity** and **confidentiality**. We do not advise you to counsel or attempt to mediate. An appropriate response is to listen and refer the person to a professional service.

### **CLERGY AND CHURCH WORKERS**

Whilst clergy and many Church workers want to help abused women, they worry that they are not experts on domestic violence. Clergy may hesitate to preach about domestic violence because they are unsure what to do if an abused woman approaches them for help.

### **INTERVENTION BY CLERGY AND CHURCH WORKERS HAS THREE AIMS ;**

1. safety for the victim and children;
2. accountability for the abuser; and
3. restoration of the relationship (if possible), or mourning over the loss of the relationship.

### **WE ALSO ENCOURAGE CHURCH LEADERS TO SEE THEMSELVES AS "FIRST RESPONDERS" WHO**

- listen to and believe the victim's story;
- help her to assess the danger to herself and her children; and
- refer her to counselling and other specialised services.

Church workers are required to become familiar with and follow the reporting requirements in the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth and report any concerns they may have to the Safeguarding Office.

**VISIT** [safeguarding.perthcatholic.org.au](http://safeguarding.perthcatholic.org.au)

In dealing with people who abuse, clergy need to hold them accountable for their behaviour. They can support the abusive person as he seeks specialised counselling to change his abusive behaviour.



Couple counselling is not appropriate and can endanger the victim's safety.

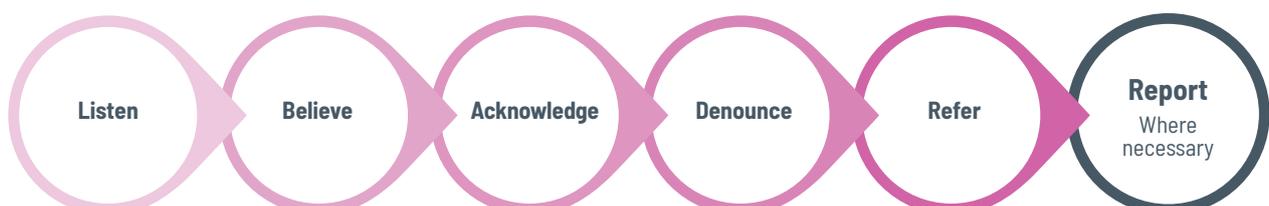
## SUGGESTED APPROACHES IN PARISHES

In order to draw attention to violence and abuse, here are some specific suggestions:

- In homilies, include a reference to domestic violence when appropriate. Just a mention of domestic violence lets abused women know that someone cares. Describe what abuse is so that women begin to recognise and name what is happening to them.
- In parish reconciliation services, identify violence as a sin.
- Include intercessions for victims of abuse, people who abuse others, and those who work with them.
- Have an action plan in place to follow if an abused woman calls on you for help. This includes knowing how and where to refer her for help. This will be easier if you have already established contact with local shelters and domestic violence agencies.
- Include a discussion of domestic violence in marriage preparation sessions. If violence has already begun in the relationship, it will only escalate after marriage.
- In baptismal preparation programs, be alert that the arrival of a child and its attendant stress may increase the risk of domestic violence.

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead – James 2:14

## RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



**FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF STATE AND NATIONAL HELPLINES, PLEASE VISIT THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELP AND ADVICE PAGE:**

**[www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)**

[/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Pages/Helpandadvice.aspx](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Pages/Helpandadvice.aspx)

or download the Family and domestic Violence Referral Guide

**[www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)**

[/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet6ImpactsOffamilyanddomesticviolenceonwomen.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet6ImpactsOffamilyanddomesticviolenceonwomen.pdf)

**[www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)**

[/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet1Formsoffamilyanddomesticviolence.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/FactSheet1Formsoffamilyanddomesticviolence.pdf)

Or refer to the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth Safeguarding Website:

**[safeguarding.perthcatholic.org.au](http://safeguarding.perthcatholic.org.au)**





**Safeguarding Office . Catholic Archdiocese of Perth**

**a.** 29 Victoria Square . Perth . WA . 6000  
**p.** 08 9221 7763 **e.** [safeguarding@perthcatholic.org.au](mailto:safeguarding@perthcatholic.org.au)