



Parish of St Mark's Darling

Policy for Responding to Domestic Abuse

All forms of domestic abuse are wrong. Perpetrators must stop.

1. The primary focus of this Policy is abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. (Abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.) Domestic abuse involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.

2. We are committed to safe places which –

- Recognise equality amongst people,
- Promote a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility in marriages, families and congregations,
- Ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse
- Strive to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse,
- Refuse to condone any form of abuse,
- Enable concerns to be raised and responded to appropriately and consistently.

3. We uphold Faithfulness in Service as our national code of conduct for clergy and church workers, specifically its affirmations that –

- Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and in the community. In essence, abuse is one person's of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one-off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour,

- It is important for clergy and church workers to be good citizens and to obey the laws of the community, except where those laws conflict with Christian convictions, (6.4) and
- You are not to abuse your spouse, children or other members of your family

4. We recognise that Domestic abuse requires a serious and realistic response –

- All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong,
- Domestic abuse can occur in all communities, including churches,
- Domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour,
- Working in partnership with vulnerable adults and children, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse,
- Clergy and lay ministers need to obtain advice from those with professional expertise when faced with situations of domestic abuse,
- Clergy should ensure the provision of training about domestic abuse by appropriately qualified professionals or programs to those in leadership positions, safe ministry roles and other pastoral roles, with periodic 'refresher' training.
- Our response should also include 'primary prevention', challenging disrespect and other attitudes or stereotypes, and other social or cultural factors which may allow individual misconduct to flourish.
- Where mistakes in caring for people in difficult situations are made, an apology should be offered and advice sought on how to address any harm caused.

5. We respect people who come to us for help by –

- Valuing, respecting and listening to victims of domestic abuse;
- Valuing, respecting and listening to alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two; and
- Refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

6. We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements by –

- Clearly teaching that domestic abuse is wrong and that the Bible should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible encourages victims to seek safety, that separation for such reason is an appropriate step to take, and that divorce may properly be a way of protecting victims in such tragic circumstances.
- Raising awareness of domestic violence agencies, support services, crisis accommodation, resources and expertise.

7. 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,
- Taking it Seriously – Ensuring that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed; also noting that a perpetrator may deliberately undermine a victim by making their own allegation first,
- Getting help from outside – Working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community,
- Keeping it confidential – Respecting the need for confidentiality within the bounds of good Safe Ministry practice, noting that reporting requirements exist where there is an immediate danger, where a child is at risk of serious harm or where the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender; where a report is required, this should first be discussed with the victim wherever possible
- Challenging with Care – Carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour, but only after receiving professional advice, and only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk.

8. We offer pastoral support to those in our care by –

- Offering informed care – Ensuring that informed and appropriate pastoral care and professional help is offered to any adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse,
- Being guided by the victim – Never pressuring any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender,
- Understanding that reconciliation comes with conditions – Understanding that any reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender,
- Coordinating the care – being familiar with appropriate pastoral care relationships for both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse, identifying and helping provide any specialist support, including separate and independent support for any children involved, and,
- Recognising cultural differences – understanding how cultural norms and values may affect victims or can contribute to abuse being perpetuated.