ACTIVITY: Talking about domestic violence and building a working definition.

BACKGROUND: In this exercise, you (as the facilitator) will ask the participants to think about domestic violence. Most faith leaders have not had opportunities to discuss domestic violence and are not familiar with a definition. You will read several scenarios and ask the participants to decide if the scenario is “not abusive,” “abusive,” or “somewhat abusive.” We know that abuse cannot be compared or put in a hierarchy, but for the purposes of this exercise, we hope you can suspend this understanding. This will allow participants some flexibility as they grapple with the topic. And, because there are no firm right or wrong answers, the faith-based participants will have the opportunity to wrestle with the issue and to learn how to talk about domestic violence. You will facilitate a discussion (refer to Facilitator Talking Points) and make a note of comments that can contribute to a definition of domestic violence. At the end, you will have the opportunity to “fill in” the missing pieces so that you have a complete definition of domestic violence that is based on input from the participants. The additional familiarity and ability to talk about the topic after this exercise will help faith leaders to build a congregational culture that encourages disclosure.
GOALS:
1. To demonstrate the complexities of situations involving domestic violence.
2. To “break the ice” and help faith leaders talk about domestic violence more comfortably.
3. To allow faith leaders and advocates to hear the opinions of their peers and to reflect on their own opinions in light of the group discussion.
4. To allow advocates to assess faith leaders’ understanding of domestic violence.
5. To build a definition of domestic violence based on the group’s input.
6. To model the difficulties of initial disclosures (the “tip of the iceberg” effect).

OBJECTIVES:
At the end of this activity, participants should be able to:
1. Appreciate some of the complexities of domestic violence.
2. Talk about domestic violence with increased ease and comfort.
3. Express a range of opinions about the diverse scenarios.
4. Reference a definition of domestic violence that is consistent with that of service providers.
5. Anticipate the challenges and ambiguities associated with an initial disclosure.

ESTIMATED TIME: 60 minutes
Each scenario takes 20 to 25 minutes. There are 3 scenarios. The number of scenarios you use will depend on how much time you have for this exercise and how much discussion there is around each scenario.

MATERIALS: Sample Scenarios (see below)
Signs (Abusive, Not Abusive, Somewhat Abusive)
Flip chart and markers
Facilitator Talking Points

◊ Clear away furniture or select a section of room that allows movement for participants.

◊ Around the outside walls of the room, place/mount 3 signs that read: “ABUSIVE,” “NOT ABUSIVE,” and “SOMewhat ABUSIVE,” in that order.

◊ Place a chair or two under each of the 3 signs so participants who need to can sit.

◊ If the room is small or crowded, or if participants have impaired mobility, please see below for an alternative approach to this exercise.

❖ Domestic violence is complex, and people have many different ideas about what constitutes abuse. This is an exercise that elicits various viewpoints about domestic violence.

❖ I will read various scenarios, and you [the participants] will be asked to decide if the scenario is “abusive,” “not abusive,” or “somewhat abusive,” and stand or sit by that sign. I will ask volunteers to explain why they have chosen each category. If it’s easier for you, you can also remain seated and participate from there.

❖ You may change your mind, but you may be asked to explain to the group what it was that made you change your mind.

❖ We know that you can’t “rank” abuse, and that different forms of abuse should not be compared or put in a hierarchy. But, for the purposes of this exercise, we want you to suspend that understanding; we will use “abusive,” “somewhat abusive,” and “not abusive” as the possible categories.

❖ For the purposes of this exercise, there are no right or wrong answers.

◊ Read a sample scenario and read the first ending to that scenario.

◊ Ask participants, based on the information given, to indicate how abusive they think the ending is by standing near the appropriate sign.

◊ Participants will often ask for more information regarding the scenario. Do not give any further details. Encourage them to make a decision based on the information they currently have. Point out that we often are given only a small piece of the bigger picture when we initially hear a disclosure. You could ask: “if you had more information, how might your opinion change”? Or: “what additional information would you like to have had”?

◊ After participants have indicated their opinion about the first ending to the first scenario, engage them in discussion.
Ask someone from each group to explain what led them to their decision. For example, did they decide it was “not abusive” because “at least he did not hit her?”

Elicit as many opinions as possible without getting into clarification of different forms of abuse or the dynamics of abuse.

Ask participants to forget the first ending to the scenario and consider the second (and then third) ending instead. Be very clear what part of the story still happened, and how the ending is different.

Have a discussion after you read each of the three diverse endings to each scenario. Let the discussion continue as long as time allows and participants are thoughtful and engaged.

Encourage participants to change their position if someone else makes a convincing argument. For example, if someone initially thought that a particular response was “not abusive” but changes their mind in the course of the discussion, encourage them to move to stand under that sign. Ask them to explain what caused them to change their mind.

As people talk about what elements they were responding to in making their decision, write important points on a flip chart to refer to later as you continue the discussion and build the definition of domestic violence.

Also note on the flip chart any comments that participants make that can be used to build a definition of abuse. For example, if someone says, “I can’t tell whether this is abusive unless I know what came before it and what will come after it,” that is a comment that suggests that abuse is a pattern of behavior and not a one-time incident. You can point that out as part of the definition of domestic violence.

Please adapt these scenarios to fit your circumstances. For example, if you are presenting in a community where alcohol is not part of the culture, perhaps you could have Maria (see Scenario 1) throw a vase instead of a bottle of wine. Also, if you live in a place where it would be life-threatening for much of the year to “storm out of the house and stay out all night,” perhaps you could have Maria (see Scenario 1) go to another part of the house and lock herself in, or go to a neighbor’s house and stay all night.
Alternative Approach to this Exercise
(If the room is small, there are many people, and/or there are mobility concerns):

❖ Read the sample scenarios. One by one, read the alternative endings.
❖ After each of the alternative endings:
  ❖ Ask those who think this ending to the scenario is not abusive to raise their hands. Discuss as described above.
  ❖ Ask those who think this ending to the scenario is abusive to raise their hands. Discuss.
  ❖ Ask those who think this ending to the scenario is somewhat abusive to raise their hands. Discuss.
❖ Ask participants who changed their mind during the discussion to explain how and why they changed their minds.

◊ After the scenarios selected for the training have been discussed, review with participants some of the important elements and/or signs of abuse that arose from the discussion. For example, a participant may have mentioned that the abusive partner is trying to control the other partner. Use this to suggest that power and control is one hallmark of domestic violence. Another participant may have said that although a scenario doesn’t include physical contact, it is emotionally damaging. Use this to discuss the various forms of abuse and how they can reinforce one another. A participant may have suggested that the abuse has been going on for a while, or that he/she would like to know more about what has been going on in the relationship before the scenario. Use this to talk about how domestic violence is a behavior that continues over time, not a one-time incident. Point out how one partner feels trapped and manipulated. Also, the discussion might afford you the opportunity to discuss the role of jealousy, stress, alcohol, or other excuses for domestic violence. As you work toward a “working definition” of abuse, try to allow the definition to arise organically from the participants’ thinking and discussion. It doesn’t have to be perfect, but make sure you touch on the major points. Where necessary, fill in any obvious missing information. Use your flip chart notes to support this discussion.
Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

❖ Make sure to include these main points in the discussion of the working definition of domestic violence:

❖ Domestic violence occurs between two people who either are now or were intimate partners. If your state restraining order statute includes other family members, housemates, and so forth, include them here as well.

❖ Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior over time.

❖ Domestic violence is NOT a two-way street. Instead, one person is the perpetrator, and the other person is the victim.

❖ Abusive behavior can take several forms: physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, verbal, spiritual, etc. Spiritual abuse is important to many survivors.

◊ Ask the group, “What comes to mind when you hear spiritual abuse?” Examples can include using scripture or religious traditions against the victim, forcing a level of observance on the victim, or preventing the victim from practicing their faith as they choose.

❖ Often, several forms of abuse are present at the same time, and compound each other.

❖ The perpetrator uses abuse to control and manipulate the victim.

❖ Without expert intervention, domestic violence usually gets more severe and frequent over time.

❖ Domestic violence affects both men and women in all social classes, professions, faith communities, races, and so on. Domestic violence affects people in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

❖ Anyone could be abusive, and any of us could become victims of abuse.

❖ “Nice” behavior (flowers, gifts, etc.) can be used to manipulate and control. This is often another aspect of the abuse.

❖ Abuse is learned, chosen behavior.

◊ There are many excuses given for abusers, such as anger issues or stress at work. But in fact, many of us are stressed at work, and many of us get angry, and we do not take it out on our partners.

◊ Research shows that removing alcohol and drugs does not stop the abuse.

◊ Close by referring to the working definition of abuse one more time and reminding them that we will be building on the great work they just did throughout the day. Thank everyone for their input and wisdom.

◊ Provide a short break or time for a stretch and then move on.
Scenarios

Scenario 1
Maria and John have been married for 6 years. They’ve had what you could call a stormy relationship. One evening John came home late from work. It was Maria’s birthday and she was upset.

How would you characterize Maria’s responses in these 3 alternative endings?

1. She takes the bottle of wine [or vase of flowers] that John brought home to celebrate her birthday and throws it against the wall. *(If you are presenting in a community where alcohol is not part of the culture, it may be more appropriate to use the example of a glass vase.)*

2. Same scenario, except this time there is no bottle of wine [or vase of flowers]. Instead, when John forgets Maria’s birthday and comes home late from work, Maria storms out of the house and stays out all night.

3. There is no bottle of wine [or vase of flowers], and Maria does not storm out of the house and stay out all night. Instead, when John comes home late on her birthday, Maria wakes John up after they have gone to bed and keeps him awake all night, telling him everything he has done to upset her since they met.

Scenario 2
Sam and Lina have been married for 20 years. One night after having dinner out, Lina tells Sam about a work party she has been invited to. He becomes jealous and angry.

How would you characterize Sam’s responses in these 3 alternative endings?

1. He yells at Lina and tells her she is not going to the party unless he comes with her.

2. He doesn’t yell at her. Instead, he accuses her of looking at other men during their dinner and warns her that if she does it again, he will have to do something about it.

3. Sam pulls over and tells Lina to get out of the car and find her own way home.
Scenario 3

Eric and Chris have been dating for 6 months. They spend time together every weekend and often get together after work during the week. One afternoon while talking to Eric on the phone, Chris mentions taking on extra shifts at work to have extra money to pay bills. Eric stops talking and seems upset.

How would you characterize Eric’s responses in each of these 3 alternative endings?

1. Eric says that taking on extra shifts at work is a bad idea because it would cut into their time together. He also says that if Chris really cared about him, this idea would have been discussed between the two of them first.

2. Eric accuses Chris of secretly seeing someone from work. He tells Chris to stop working now and he will support both of them.

3. Eric slams the phone against the wall and starts yelling that he can’t believe that this decision was made without consulting him. He tells Chris to give up the job or give him up. He shouts, “think about it!” and hangs up.

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