



**ACTIVITY:**

Making faith communities safer for victims and survivors to speak about their experiences, and preparing clergy and lay leaders to hear those experiences.

**BACKGROUND:**

As stated earlier (see Activity 2 Background), many faith leaders will be learning about trauma and domestic and sexual violence for the first time. Activities 2 and 8 are intended to allow faith leaders to use their personal experiences of trauma as a bridge to understand the experiences of survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

This activity assumes that participants have engaged in Activity 2, Learning More about Trauma.

The first part of Activity 8 discusses how to make it easier for victims to reach out to someone in their congregation for help. After that, participants will have the opportunity to build on their own experiences of trauma to strengthen their responses to victims and survivors. This exercise will provide the opportunity for participants to name and discuss responses to trauma that they have experienced that are helpful or hurtful. This will provide a framework for exploring safe and effective responses to survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

Clergy and lay leaders may be the first person to hear the experiences of a victim or survivor, making them first responders. We encourage faith leaders to think of themselves as first responders so that they take their role seriously, understand the need for training and partnership, and recognize that anyone in the congregation could be approached by a victim or survivor.

## Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

### GOALS:

1. To consider ways to make it easier for victims and survivors to approach faith community members about their experiences.
2. To use participants' life experiences of helpful and unhelpful responses to personal trauma to strengthen their responses to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

### OBJECTIVES:

After this activity, participants should be able to:

1. Create safe space in their congregations for survivors of abuse.
2. Differentiate between helpful and hurtful responses to trauma.
3. Think of themselves as first responders.

**ESTIMATED TIME:** 30 minutes

### MATERIALS:

Flip chart and markers

List (developed as part of Activity 2) of emotional, physical, and spiritual effects of trauma

Tape

Safe Havens' toolkit: Pieces of a Bigger Picture. Provide copies of the faith-based resources in the toolkit for every participant. (Safe Havens can mail printed copies of the toolkit to you.

Call us at 617-951-3980/3981 or email [info@interfaithpartners.org](mailto:info@interfaithpartners.org). Also, all the resources in the toolkit can be downloaded in color or black and white from the Safe Havens website at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org).) There is a place on the toolkit resources for you to use a sticker to add your local contact information!

## Facilitator Talking Points

### Creating Safe Space

- ❖ Victims of sexual and domestic violence repeatedly say that the violence affects them spiritually as well as physically and emotionally. They want to turn to their faith communities for justice, hope, and healing.
- ❖ Often, victims also say that healing has a spiritual component. We heal more quickly and experience fewer long-term affects if we can talk about the trauma we have experienced and receive support, affirmation, and referrals to community services.
- ❖ Unfortunately, as you saw in the Ugly Language Activity, the trauma of sexual and domestic violence can be difficult to talk about, especially in a religious setting.
- ❖ Victims have many other reasons (fear, shame, guilt, stigma, commitment, emotional attachment, financial dependence, etc.) for not talking about sexual or domestic violence as well.
- ❖ As a result, sexual and domestic violence are seriously underreported crimes. We cannot support victims of abuse if we don't know they are victims. We cannot stop crimes unless we can talk about them and hold perpetrators accountable.
- ❖ We want to close this gap and make it as easy and safe as possible for victims to reach out, talk about their experiences, and get help. So, we need to actively create safe space. What are some things you can do in your faith community right now to make it easier for folks to talk about sexual and domestic violence?

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◇ *Open the floor for discussion amongst the group or allow table discussions with time to report back.*

◇ *Make a list on newsprint of concrete suggestions, such as:*

◇ *Learn more.*

◇ *Put up posters about domestic and sexual violence.*

◇ *Talk/preach about it.*

◇ *Include survivors in prayers.*

◇ *Invite local advocates to come talk to congregation about it.*

◇ *Put out resources and agency brochures from local domestic and/or sexual violence service provider(s).*

◇ *Create and train a congregational response team and advertise contact protocol.*

◇ *Hold a community vigil to support survivors.*

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- ✧ *Take up a collection for local service providers.*
- ✧ *Develop a congregational protocol around confidentiality and publicize it.*
- ✧ *Put the hotline number in the footer of your service leaflet or newsletter.*
- ✧ *Put resources about faith and abuse in your congregation's library.*

*Refer participants to the one-page handout called "What You Can Do to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Your Congregation," which is available as part of Safe Havens' Pieces of a Bigger Picture toolkit.*

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- ✦ The Pieces of a Bigger Picture toolkit also contains booklets on both sexual and domestic violence, with pointers about what to do to support a victim or survivor. You will find "red flags" that can help you know what to look for.
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◇ *Encourage participants to take time (after the training) to read these booklets and to share copies with others in the congregation.*

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- ✦ The toolkit also includes bathroom and bulletin board flyers that you can hang in bathrooms and hallways. These will be seen by people in your congregation and by people in the community who use the building. You never know who you may be able to help.
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◇ *Place the "Creating Safe Space" list where it can be seen for the rest of the training. Thank participants for their ideas and suggestions. Encourage them to put some of these ideas into action.*

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## Exploring Helpful and Not Helpful Responses

- ✦ Now we are going to build on our earlier exercise about trauma. This activity can be re-traumatizing, so please, as before, take care of yourself.
- ✦ I'm going to ask you to go back in your mind to the traumatic incident that you were thinking of when we talked about trauma in Activity 2. Remember the lists of emotional, physical, and spiritual effects of trauma?
- ✦ We are going to focus for a few minutes on how people responded to you when you were traumatized. Things that people say to you or do for you can be both helpful and not so helpful.
- ✦ Let's start with what WAS helpful.

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◇ On the left side of the top of a piece of flip chart paper, write “Helpful.”

What were some of the things that people said or did that were helpful, or that made you feel better?

Make a list. The list might will look something like:

✧ “I’m really sorry this happened.”

✧ “You didn’t deserve this.”

✧ “What can I do to help you?”

✧ Just being there.

✧ Bringing food, running errands, picking up kids, etc.

◇ It may come up naturally, but if it doesn’t, ask: “Were there any faith-based statements or actions that were particularly helpful to you?”

✧ You may discuss these BRIEFLY as you are adding them to the list. State that there may be some controversy because what’s helpful for one person may not be for someone else. Point out comments that:

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- offer genuine support,
- express solidarity,
- acknowledge that what happened was terrible, or
- acknowledge that the survivor didn’t deserve this.

◇ On the right side of the top of the same flip chart page, write, “Not Helpful.” Invite participants to name some of the things that people said that were not helpful or did not make them feel better. Make a list, which might look something like:

✧ “You shouldn’t have done ‘that.’ Then this wouldn’t have happened.”

✧ Stories from the “helper” about how their trauma is/was much worse.

✧ “I know exactly how you feel.”

✧ “Quick fixes” based on a superficial understanding of the trauma.

◇ It may come up naturally, but if it doesn’t, ask: “Were there any faith-based statements or actions that were hurtful to you?”

✧ Discuss these BRIEFLY as you are adding them to the list. State that there may be some controversy because what’s unhelpful for one person may not be for someone else. Point out comments that:

- blame or judge the trauma survivor,

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- *imply that the trauma was the survivor's fault,*
- *imply that the survivor deserved the trauma,*
- *make the "helper" the center of attention instead of the survivor,*
- *provide "quick fixes" or glib responses to a deep-seated and complicated problem, or*
- *sound fake or superficial.*

◇ *Briefly discuss the lists. What made a comment or action helpful? What made it unhelpful? Not everyone will agree.*

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- ✦ You may have come in here not too sure how to respond to a survivor of domestic or sexual violence, but collectively we've gathered a lot of good wisdom about this. You have compiled a good list of helpful responses, including responses that:
  - ❖ *don't blame you for what happened,*
  - ❖ *acknowledge that the trauma shouldn't have happened,*
  - ❖ *acknowledge that it's not your fault,*
  - ❖ *don't judge you,*
  - ❖ *don't tell you what to do,*
  - ❖ *stay focused on you, and*
  - ❖ *affirm that you have a right to be safe and whole.*
- ✦ Thank you for your hard work. Let's take a few deep breaths and appreciate the opportunity before us, the people in the room, the day, and the partnerships that we are building to make it easier for survivors of trauma.



◇ *Keep this list. Tape it to a wall where everyone can see it.*

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