Rabbinic Response

Develop Protocols
Have an action plan in place to follow if a victim of abuse asks for help or if you learn that a synagogue member is being abusive. Prioritize the safety of victim(s) and the accountability of the abuser. Be ready to make referrals to area service providers.

Create a Safe Haven
Make your synagogue a safe place where victims of abuse can ask for help. Let your community know that you are prepared to provide support. Keep an updated list of referral resources for women, men, and children.

Teach Through Family Events
You may have more contact with families during events such as weddings, brit milah, baby namings/simchat habat, bar and bat mitzvah, and funerals. Observe the dynamics within families and share resources as needed. Be alert that pregnancy and the arrival of a child may escalate abusive behavior.

Educate Our Children
Make sure all teachers and youth group leaders receive training about how to recognize abuse and whom to approach with concerns. Include age-appropriate prevention programming about teen dating violence and family violence for children and youth.

Educate Your Congregation
Sponsor education programs on domestic violence. Invite staff from local domestic violence agencies as Shabbat speakers. Print articles that include lists of community resources in the synagogue bulletin. Post bathroom flyers with resource numbers. Include abuse in pre-marital counseling.

Get Training
Participate in workshops designed for clergy to learn safe and effective ways to address domestic violence in your congregation. Network with other rabbis for support. Contact Safe Havens for education and technical assistance.

Use Your Prophetic Voice
Give sermons on domestic violence to build awareness, teach that family violence is not acceptable in the Jewish community, and emphasize that help is available. Incorporate special prayers on domestic violence, e.g., during the “Al Chet” prayer on Yom Kippur.

Work as a Team
Domestic violence is a complex problem that requires a team approach. Clearly define your role as a rabbi, and be ready to refer by building relationships with domestic violence advocates, police, and staff at state-certified batterer intervention programs.