



## ACTIVITY

# 1

## Building a Definition of Domestic Violence



### ACTIVITY:

Talking about domestic violence and building a working definition.

### BACKGROUND:

Most faith leaders have not had opportunities to discuss domestic violence and are not familiar with a definition. Additional familiarity with the topic and ability to talk about it helps to build a congregational culture that encourages disclosure.

### GOALS:

1. To demonstrate the complexities of situations involving domestic violence.
2. To help each participant express his/her individual views.
3. To “break the ice” and help faith leaders talk about domestic violence more comfortably.
4. To allow faith leaders to hear the opinions of their peers and to reflect on their own opinions in light of the group discussion.
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. Articulate and discuss personal viewpoints.
3. Talk about domestic violence with improved ease and comfort.
4. Express a range of opinions about the diverse scenarios.
5. Reference a definition of domestic violence that is consistent with that of service providers.
6. Anticipate the challenges and ambiguities associated with an initial disclosure.
7. Increase their ability to recognize a disclosure.

**ESTIMATED TIME:** 60 minutes

Each scenario takes 20 to 25 minutes. There are 4 scenarios. The number of scenarios you use will depend on how much time you have for this exercise.

**MATERIALS:**

Sample Scenarios (see below)

Signs (Abusive, Not Abusive, Very Abusive)

Flip chart and markers



## Facilitator Talking Points

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- ◇ *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: NOT ABUSIVE, SOMEWHAT ABUSIVE, and VERY ABUSIVE.*
- ◇ *If there are more than 20 participants or if the space is limited, you could ask half of the group to participate actively. The rest of the group could observe and comment on similarities, differences, and/or other observations.*
- ◇ *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 solicits various viewpoints about domestic violence.**
- ❖ **For the purposes of this exercise, there is no right or wrong answer.**
- ❖ **After I read various scenarios, you [the participants] will be asked to express and explain your opinions.**
- ❖ **You may change your mind, but you may be asked to explain to the group what it was that made you change your mind.**

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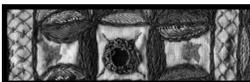
- ◇ *Read a sample scenario. One by one, read the alternative endings.*
- ◇ *Ask participants to indicate how abusive she/he thinks the ending is by standing near the appropriate sign.*
- ◇ *Participants will often ask for more information regarding the scenario. Do not give any further details. Encourage 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 (e.g. not abusive to very abusive), engage them in discussion.*
- ◇ *Ask someone from each group to explain what led them to their decision. For example, did he/she decide it was not abusive because "at least he did not hit her"?*
- ◇ *Solicit 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 another 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 his/her 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.
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- ◇ 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 lead to 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 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 somewhat abusive to raise their hands. Discuss.
  - ❖ Ask those who think this ending to the scenario is very abusive to raise their hands. Discuss.
- ✦ Ask participants who changed their mind during the discussion to explain how and why they changed their minds.



## Scenarios

### Scenario 1

Maria and John have been married for a year. 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 three alternative endings?

1. She takes the bottle of wine that John brought home to celebrate her birthday and throws it against the wall.
2. Same scenario, except this time there is no bottle of wine. 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, 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

Jason and Lisa have gone out for their third date. On the way home, Lisa tells Jason about a work party she has been invited to. He becomes jealous and angry.

How would you characterize Jason's responses in these three alternative endings?

1. He yells at Lisa and tells her she is not going to the party unless he comes with her.
2. Same scenario, but this time he doesn't yell at her. Instead, he pulls over and forces her to get out of the car in an isolated area. She has no cell phone.
3. He doesn't yell at her. He doesn't pull over and force her out of the car. Instead, he accuses her of looking at other guys during their date and warns her that if she does it again, he will have to do something about it.

### Scenario 3

Eric and Jill 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, Jill tells him that she has decided to take on extra shifts at her job so that she has extra money to pay bills. Eric stops talking to her and seems upset.

How would you characterize Eric's responses in each of these three alternative endings?

1. He tells her that he doesn't want her to work extra shifts because it would cut into their time together. He also tells her that if she really cared about him, she would have discussed the idea with him first.
2. Or, Eric accuses her of secretly seeing someone from work. He tells her that he wants her to quit working now and that he will give her money.
3. Or, Eric slams the phone against the wall and starts yelling that he can't believe that she made this decision without asking for his opinion. He tells her that she can either give her job up or give him up. He tells her to think about it and hangs up.

### Scenario 4

Mark and Tammy have been dating for 5 months. Tammy really likes Mark. She hopes that the relationship will get more serious, and maybe even lead to marriage. Mark has met someone else and wants to end the relationship. He invites Tammy to dinner, telling her that he has something important to discuss with her. They meet after work at the restaurant where they had their first date. He tells her he wants to end the relationship. Tammy starts crying so loudly that everyone is staring at them. Mark is embarrassed and upset because many people in the restaurant know him and Tammy.

How abusive are each of these alternative endings?

1. Tammy continues to cry loudly, and refuses to listen to another word Mark says.
2. Mark walks out and leaves Tammy there alone.
3. Mark yells at Tammy and tells her she is making a fool of herself and making him look bad.
4. Tammy tells Mark that he'll be sorry for breaking up with her. Then she storms out.
5. Mark escorts Tammy outside to her car. Then he goes back to the restaurant bar, where he is meeting the other woman he is interested in.

(Note: this scenario is tricky and raises questions about who is the abuser, or whether the relationship is abusive in the first place.)



◇ *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.*

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- ✦ Some main points to include 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, spiritual, verbal, etc.
    - ❖ The perpetrator uses abuse to control and manipulate the victim.
    - ❖ Often, several forms of abuse are present at the same time.
    - ❖ Without expert intervention, domestic violence usually gets worse over time.
    - ❖ Domestic violence affects both men and women of all ages and in all social classes, professions, faith communities, races, and so on. Domestic violence affects people in both heterosexual and homosexual 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.



- ◇ *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.*
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