

Domestic Abuse: Charter for Churches

The Charter

Domestic abuse is extremely serious, and contrary to a Christian way of living. This church seeks to support those affected by domestic abuse, and their families.

This Church/Circuit:

- ⌘ holds that domestic abuse, in all its forms, is unacceptable
- ⌘ believes domestic abuse is inconsistent and incompatible with the Christian faith
- ⌘ acknowledges that domestic abuse is a serious and widespread problem that occurs in church families as well as in wider society
- ⌘ undertakes to listen to, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse
- ⌘ prioritises the safety of survivors and children affected by domestic abuse
- ⌘ works with specialist agencies, learning from and supporting them in appropriate ways, and publicising their work
- ⌘ will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is unacceptable and contrary to God's purposes and the teachings of the Bible.

Contact numbers:

National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

This is a Freephone, 24-hour service.

Domestic Abuse Policy for Churches

Aims and intentions

This policy aims to ensure that domestic abuse is acknowledged and responded to appropriately within the Methodist Church. To do this we will:

- 1 raise awareness about domestic abuse and its impact on individuals, children, the wider family and community
- 2 ensure that the safety of individuals suffering abuse or seeking help is the first priority, and be aware of the need for confidentiality (unless there are safeguarding concerns)
- 3 consider how best to provide support and information for anyone seeking help, including working with specialist agencies
- 4 encourage discussion of how our church can be a safer space for victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- 5 regularly discuss the Domestic Abuse policy, procedures, theology and principles that underpin it
- 6 adopt the Domestic Abuse Charter and display this in our churches and on social media
- 7 discuss domestic abuse with church leaders, including at the Elders and Circuit Meetings
- 8 review this policy annually and monitor it continually.

This policy was adopted by: Haven Christian Centre

on: AGM November 2022

Next review date is November 2023

Domestic Abuse Policy Statement and Definitions

Policy statement

The Methodist Church holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living. It is committed to being a safer space for all. This means ensuring that members of the Methodist Church have an awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, and know how to respond appropriately and effectively.

When victims disclose abuse, they can expect to be listened to, taken seriously, supported and referred to local professional services, as appropriate. Local churches should receive advice and support from their Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer and the District Safeguarding Officer.

This *Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedures* document includes recent legislative changes, contained in the Domestic Abuse Act, England (2021)⁴ and legislation in other jurisdictions. It also highlights useful resources available to local churches, victims and survivors.

Definitions

Victim/survivor

A person who experiences domestic abuse has historically been referred to as a 'victim' and this term is still used primarily in legal documents. Some people who have experienced abuse prefer to define themselves by the term 'survivor', since this implies that they have moved beyond the situation of abuse and are no longer defined by it. They may feel 'victim' portrays them as passive and powerless. However, others continue to choose to identify as a 'victim'. To be respectful, it is best to check which term the person prefers. In this document, we will use 'survivor', apart from when describing someone still in the situation of abuse when we will use 'victim'.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is defined in the UK Government's *Draft Statutory Guidance Frameworks* as the abusive behaviour of one person towards another, if the persons involved are 16 years of age or over and personally connected.⁶ Behaviour is considered to be abusive if it consists of any of the following:

- ⌘ Physical or sexual abuse
- ⌘ Violent or threatening behaviour
- ⌘ Controlling or coercive behaviour
- ⌘ Economic abuse
- ⌘ Psychological, emotional or other abuse.

It is important to note that domestic abuse can also occur in relationships between young people under 16 years of age, but neither this policy nor the Domestic Abuse Act address these situations, which would be dealt with according to child protection laws.

Domestic abuse includes forced marriage and honour crimes. It may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently violent. Whatever its form, domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident; rather it is usually a pattern of incidents that build up in severity and frequency over time. The abuser seeks to hold power over another person and control them.

Domestic abuse results from unequal power within relationships and the control of one individual by another. Male-on-female abuse and violence can be rooted in a sense of privilege, historically reinforced by a patriarchal culture. If we are to see an end to domestic abuse, this must be addressed, which may have implications for the theological beliefs of some individuals and for the Church's interpretation of Scripture.

Although women are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than men and are less likely to leave an abusive relationship at an earlier stage, it is important to acknowledge that men can also be domestically abused. Indeed, domestic abuse occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, wealth or geography. It is important that the specific circumstances of the victim are taken into account. Factors such as disability, ethnicity, sexuality and culture can impact on how domestic abuse is experienced and perceived. Each situation needs to be addressed with sensitivity.

Controlling or coercive behaviour

The cross-UK Government definitions of controlling or coercive behaviour are:

- ⌘ Controlling behaviour: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent, by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour

⌘ Coercive behaviour: a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.⁷
Controlling or coercive control is now a specific criminal offence under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. The perpetrator intentionally works to regulate their victim's behaviour, which can result in the victim having low self-esteem and resilience, making it difficult for them to leave the relationship. Coercive and controlling behaviour makes it easier for an abuser to hide their abuse behind closed doors. This may make it hard to identify, so clues and signs need to be recognised.

4 Domestic Abuse Act, Home Office, 2021 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted

5 *Delivery of Support to Victims of Domestic Abuse, including Children, in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services: Statutory guidance for local authorities across England – Draft for consultation*, Home Office, June 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993825/Domestic_Abuse_Act_-_draft_statutory_guidance.pdf

6 Ibid. Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies: (a) They are, or have been, married to each other; (b) They are, or have been, civil partners of each other; (c) They have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); (d) They have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); (e) They are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other; (f) They each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2)); (g) They are relatives.

7 *Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship: Statutory Guidance Framework*, Home Office, December 2015. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482528/Controlling_or_coercive_behaviour_-_statutory_guidance.pdf