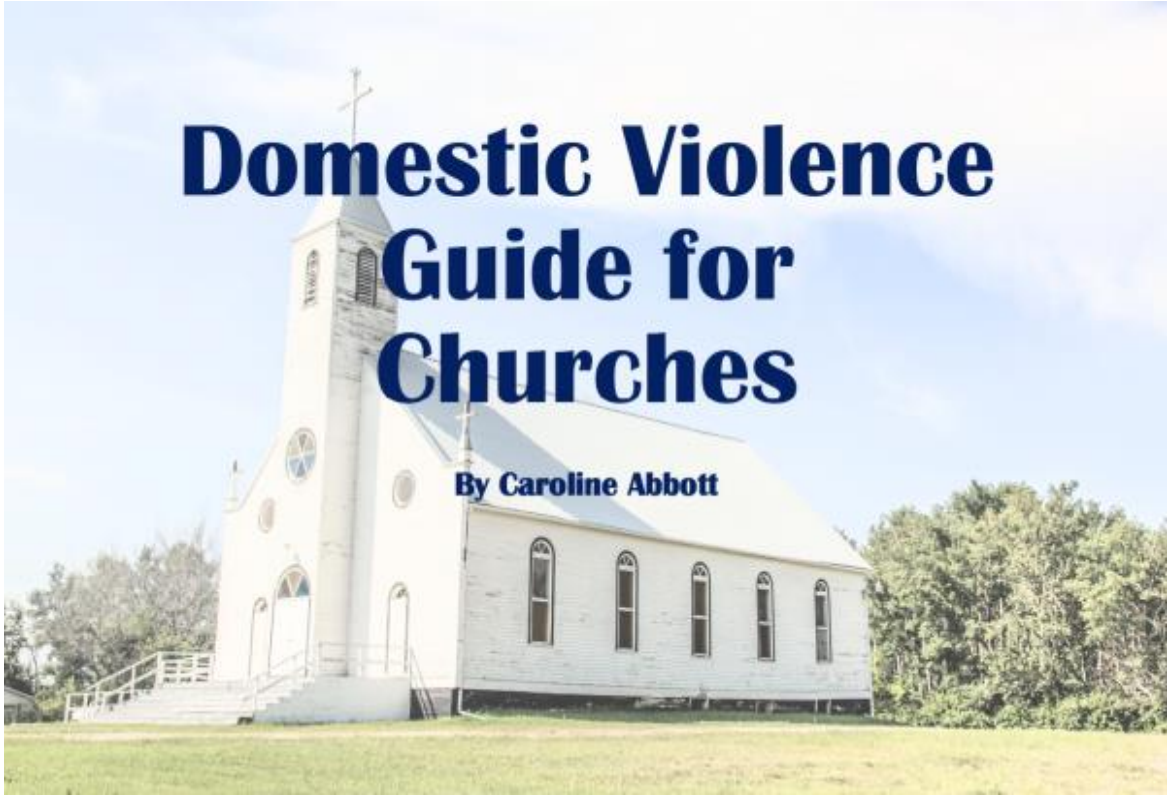


# **Domestic Violence Guide for Churches**

**By Caroline Abbott**



## Domestic Violence Guide for Churches - Preview

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## Part 1 – Understanding the Dynamics of Domestic Violence

Congratulations on being willing to learn about a subject in which few people are interested. This has traditionally not been a subject leaders in the Christian Church have wanted to address, so hooray to you for tackling it! Abusers can be male or female, and so can their victims. You might see or have to deal with either – however, most domestic violence is perpetrated by men. Often in the church you will find male abusers because they are adept in twisting God’s word about submission to keep control over their wives. For ease of writing, I will use “he” for the abuser, and “she” for the victim.

As Christians, we can agree we are all sinners. However, abuse is a category of sin that is unique. While we all have lied, and broken God’s laws during our lifetime, we are not all abusers. An abuser looks at the world very differently than do non-abusers. An abuser seeks to gain power, control and domination over others because he feels *entitled* to this power. He feels validated to use *any means necessary* to force his victim to do what he wants because he is not usually constrained by the conscience that most of us have. In his mindset, he deserves power and control because he is superior to his victims, and they exist only to serve him.

I gathered much of the information for this guide from the State of New Hampshire Governor’s Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Attorney General’s Office Faith Communities: Domestic Violence Protocol 2007.<sup>1</sup> This guide will suggest several actions you and your church can take to help abuse victims. Consider these suggestions carefully, and always remember dealing with abusers can be dangerous. If you are ever unsure how to help an abuse victim, call an expert, such as your local domestic violence crisis center, or your local police department.

Domestic violence is not a disagreement, a marital spat or an anger management problem. Sometimes when people have difficulty distinguishing the victim from the abuser, they will use the term “mutual domestic violence.” *By definition, domestic violence cannot be mutual.* However, there are many forms of violence that can be erroneously described as domestic violence, which often results in a victim being mislabeled as the abuser<sup>2</sup>:

- **Resistance Violence:** violence that is committed by a victim in reaction to the abuse that she is experiencing, and includes defending herself from an attack.
- **Pre-emptive Violence:** violence that is committed by a victim because she is anticipating an attack by the abuser or has been “walking on eggshells” for so long, she is trying to precipitate an end to the tension. The victim often knows that the longer the tension builds the more the risk of injury is increased.
- **Situational Violence:** violence that happens in reaction to the victim’s circumstances; there is no pattern, or it is out of the victim’s character to use violence.
- **Mutual Violence:** this differs from domestic violence because violence or aggression may be used but not as a means to control the other partner.

There are many incorrect beliefs (“myths”) about why an abuser will abuse. Here are a few:

1. He can’t control his behavior.
2. He doesn’t know how to handle his feelings.

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3. He was abused as a child, and this is the only way he knows how to behave.
4. He has poor communication skills.
5. He has low self-esteem.
6. He hates women.
7. He is mentally ill.
8. He doesn't understand the bible; he isn't a believer in Christ.
9. He is addicted to drugs and/or alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

The reality may surprise you. While drugs and alcohol can make his behaviors worse, they are not the cause of his abuse. Most abusers only abuse their domestics and children, and have complete control over when and why they behave abusively. They rarely lose control of themselves in other social situations, and usually look great to their bosses, friends, and pastors. They usually treat other women wonderfully. In fact, the only time they are abusive is at home. Why is that?

In his mind, an abuser abuses his victim because:

- He likes being in control
- He has convinced himself it is OK to behave this way
- He gets what he wants by this behavior.

He has a great feeling of entitlement, and feels he has a special status no one else in the family does. In his mind, he has the right to:

- Physical, emotional and sexual caretaking
- Deference (“Everyone should respect me, but I owe no one else any respect.”)
- Freedom from accountability (“No one should question my actions.”)

In contrast, his wife and children have few, if any rights.

**If you would like to purchase the entire 38-page written Guide, along with two 30-minute PowerPoint videos, go to <http://www.carolineabbott.com/domestic-violence-guide-for-churches>**

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The State of New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Attorney General's Office of Faith Communities: Domestic Violence Protocol 2007, <http://doj.nh.gov/criminal/victim-assistance/documents/faith-communities-protocol.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The State of New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Attorney General's Office of Faith Communities, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Abbott, Debbie Stafford, *A Journey through Emotional Abuse: from Bondage to Freedom* (Franklin TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2013) 26.