



Do's and Don'ts for Supporting Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

Encouraging people to talk about gender-based violence is critical in breaking the silence and stigma that victims can often face, and removing myths that can keep people silent.

A valuable support that Mothers' Union members provides for others is giving people time and listening to them. Creating a safe and non-judgmental environment may encourage those who have experienced or are experiencing violence or abuse to speak out, including other members and friends. It is therefore important to be aware of how to respond to and support those who disclose such experiences.

The most appropriate ways to respond to disclosures of abuse may vary with culture and context. However, there are some general principles to consider:

- **Violence and abuse is ALWAYS wrong and NEVER acceptable**
- **The responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator**
- **Ultimately, only the person experiencing abuse can decide what course of action to take.**

The below "Do's and Don'ts" may provide some helpful insights...

DO'S IN RESPONDING TO VICTIMS

1. Find a safe place to talk.
2. Have someone else present – if this is acceptable to the woman.
3. Allow time for the person to talk.
4. Listen to what she has to say – and take it seriously.
5. Believe her; her description of the abuse is probably only the 'tip of the iceberg'.
6. Give priority to her immediate safety (and that of any children involved).
7. Empower her to make her own decisions.
8. Support and respect her choices. Even if she chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive. If there are children involved, however, their safety must come first and this choice is often overruled.
9. Give her information about relevant support agencies and, if appropriate, offer to contact an agency on her behalf and do so in her presence, or offer a safe and private place from which she can contact the relevant agency.
10. Use the expertise of those who are properly trained.
11. Reassure her that it is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, and it is not God's will for her.
12. Let her know that what the abuser has done is wrong and completely unacceptable.
13. Be patient with her.
14. Protect her confidentiality. Keep any information in a secure place and consider coding the information.

DON'TS IN RESPONDING TO VICTIMS

1. Don't judge her or what she tells you.
2. Refrain from making unrealistic promises.
3. Don't suggest that she should 'try again'; evidence shows that victims experience a number of violent incidents before seeking help.
4. Never minimise the severity of her experience or the danger she is in.
5. Don't react with disbelief, disgust or anger at what she tells you or react passively.
6. Don't ask her why she did not act in a certain way.
7. Never blame her for his violence.
8. Never act on the person's behalf without her consent and/or knowledge (unless children are involved).
9. Don't expect her to make decisions quickly.
10. Never make decisions for her or tell her what to do.
11. Don't recommend couple counselling/ family mediation/marriage courses/healthy relationships courses. These will not help in domestic abuse situations.
12. Don't encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
13. Don't send her home with a prayer/directive to submit to her husband/bring him to church/be a better Christian wife.
14. Refrain from contacting the person at home, unless she has agreed to this.
15. Don't approach her partner for his side of the story, as this will endanger her.
16. Don't give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser.
17. Don't discuss the situation with church leaders who might inadvertently/unintentionally pass information to the abuser.
18. Don't encourage her dependence on you or become emotionally involved with her; this can be problematic and make you seem to be the answer to her problems.

(Source: Restored, [Ending Domestic Abuse: A Pack for Churches](#), p 26)