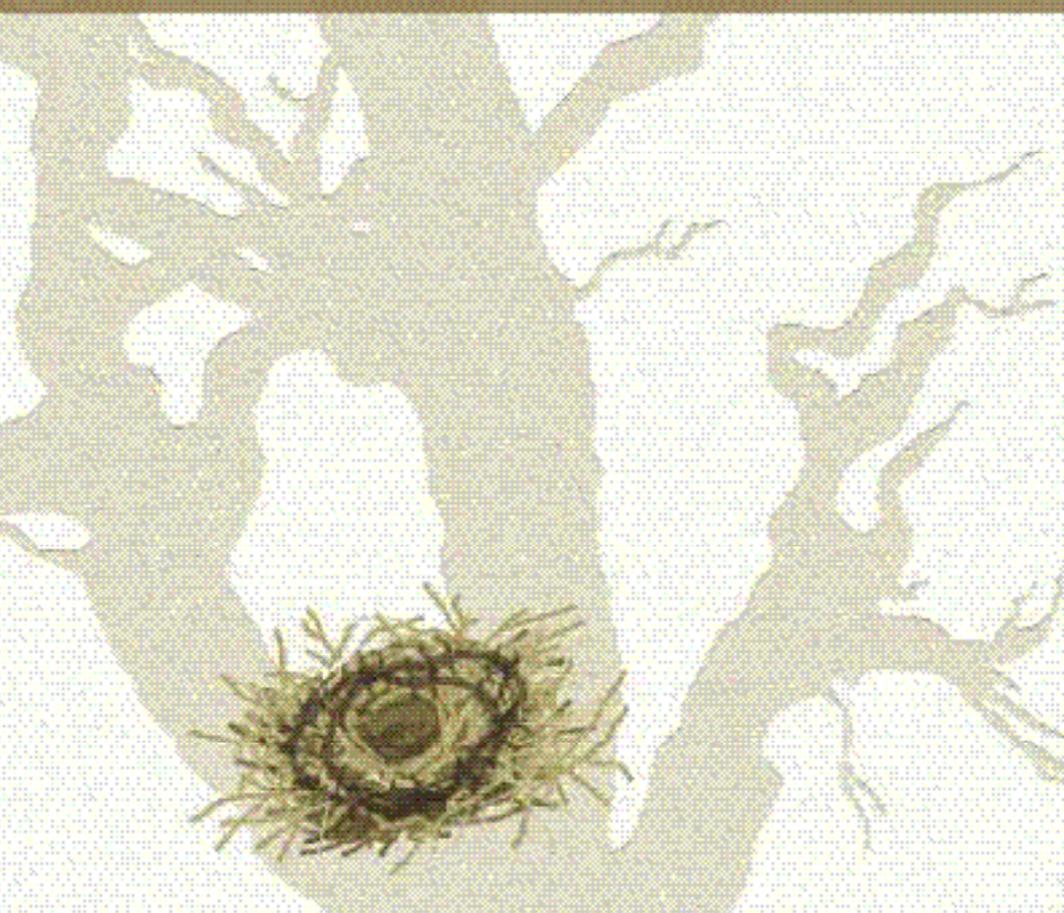


# Abuse: Response and prevention

Our churches and homes shouldn't be places that hurt



A guide for church leaders



Copyright: 2008, reprinted 2014

**Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)**

Permission to copy excerpts of this booklet for educational purposes only.

Not for resale.

Printed in Canada on recycled paper using vegetable based inks.

Cover design and compilation of booklet:

Dana Hepting, MCC Canada Communications Department

Jennifer Duby, Fiveight Design Inc.

All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Used by permission.



# Contents

<b>I Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II Defining abuse</b>	<b>8</b>
• Physical abuse	
• Emotional abuse	
• Sexual abuse/harassment	
• Spiritual abuse	
<b>III Biblical and theological reflections on abuse</b>	<b>10</b>
• Salvation from oppression and violence	
• Biblical texts used to justify abuse	
• A peace theology response to abuse	
<b>IV Responding to a disclosure of abuse</b>	<b>15</b>
• Responding to victims of abuse	
• Responding to the alleged offender	
<b>V Safety and support issues</b>	<b>17</b>
• Adult victims	
• Child victims	
• Response to offenders	
• Support for caregivers	
<b>VI Legal issues</b>	<b>22</b>
• Abuse against children and teens	
• Abuse against elders other vulnerable people	
• Abuse against adults	
• Abuse by a church leader	
<b>VII How the church can be proactive in abuse prevention</b>	<b>25</b>
• Address through Christian education	
• Adopt policies and procedures to prevent sexual harassment and abuse	
• Address in worship services	
• Pay attention to theology and how we speak of God	
• Interpret the Bible carefully	
• Model mutuality and respect in all relationships	

<b>VIII Checklist for preventing and responding to abuse</b>	<b>28</b>
• Skills and knowledge for church leaders	
• Tasks for congregations	
<b>IX Resources available from Mennonite Central Committee</b>	<b>30</b>
• Website	
• Brochures	
• Booklets	
• Other resources	
• MCC programs that address abuse issues	
<b>X Additional resources</b>	<b>32</b>
• Child abuse	
• Sexual abuse	
• Family violence	
• Prevention	
• Spiritual abuse	
• Working with those who behave abusively	
<b>XI Contributors</b>	<b>35</b>

# I Introduction

At an annual conference for pastors and elders, one of the topics for discussion was how their denomination should respond to sexual abuse in the church. The general sense in the room initially was that abuse was not a significant issue in their churches.

However, over the course of the conference, approximately fifteen per cent of the men present shared their experiences of having been sexually abused, a number of them within the context of the church's ministry. Additional stories began to surface of others who had left the church because their experiences of abuse by church members had never been believed. Suddenly the material before them was no longer irrelevant.

Pastors and other church leaders are being confronted with the reality of people in pain from traumatic childhood experiences or because of current situations of abuse. Abuse occurs in many forms and to people at all stages of life. Those with the least power in society, such as children, women and the elderly are most likely to be victims.

This booklet is a general guide designed to provide tools to help care for victims, survivors and perpetrators of abuse. May the God of peace give wisdom and courage.

## **II Defining abuse**

Abuse is one person or group of persons using coercive or manipulative actions to control others. Abuse is about misuse of power. The goal of abusive behaviour is to gain or exercise control over those perceived as weaker.

Abuse is more common when there are pre-existing power differences which can be exploited, such as in the following relationships: male/female, parent/child, teacher/student, pastor/parishioner, older relative/younger relative, caregiver/elderly person.

There are many forms of abuse with significant overlap between the categories mentioned below. The list is not comprehensive, but intended to give some sense of the ways that people who are abusive attempt to control others.

### **Physical abuse**

- Pushing, shoving, shaking
- Slapping, hitting, beating
- Biting, spitting, scratching
- Kicking, choking, pulling hair
- Urinating or defecating on a person or their property
- Locking someone out of the house
- Reckless driving
- Threatening with a weapon
- Threatening to harm or kill
- Abandoning someone in a dangerous place
- Throwing objects

\* Sometimes victims of abuse use protection strategies such as shoving in self-defence.

## **Emotional abuse**

- Ignoring or neglecting the feelings of others
- Criticizing or embarrassing others in public
- Constant criticism
- Controlling and refusing to share financial resources with other household members
- Using threats to force compliance, for example threats to commit suicide or leave the relationship
- Manipulating and/or lying
- Hurting or scaring pets
- Breaking, taking or giving away someone's valued things
- Isolating someone
- Giving the "silent treatment"

## **Sexual abuse/harassment**

- Telling insulting gender-related jokes
- Treating someone as a sex object
- Touching someone inappropriately
- Coercing someone into performing any sexual act, such as intercourse or oral sex, with statements like, "If you loved me you would do this"
- Using physical force to gain sexual intimacy
- Rape/sexual assault
- Having an affair
- Calling someone sexually-derogatory names
- Using pornography
- Coercing someone to view pornography
- Inappropriate/unwanted communication (phone calls, letters, emails)

## **Spiritual abuse**

- Using Scripture or other religious material to control someone's behaviour, thoughts or feelings
- Using a position of church leadership to control or manipulate someone
- Using religious education to have power over others
- Ridiculing another's beliefs

## **III Biblical and theological reflections on abuse**

### **Salvation from oppression and violence**

In Luke 4:18, Jesus declared his mission, passed on to us: to bring release to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom to those who are oppressed. In the context of abuse, this means bringing freedom to those held captive in the cycle of violence and abuse, giving sight to those blind to the destructiveness of their behaviour and ending oppression within our families, relationships and communities. Jesus showed special concern and regard for children and declared dreadful consequences for those who harm them (Matthew 18: 1-7).

The Hebrew Scriptures also repeatedly emphasize God's concern for all people, especially those who are most vulnerable: widows, orphans, children, strangers and the poor. Passages such as Psalms 40, 55 and 57, and Isaiah 43:1-7, provide comfort to those victimized by violence, as they speak of God's presence in the midst of pain, and God's desire to rescue us from harm.

The early church continued these concerns. They clearly expressed a desire for people to live in justice and harmony, and gave careful instruction on how to live together peaceably. See especially Galatians 5:22-26, Ephesians 4:1-6, 6:4, Philippians 2:3-11 and Colossians 3:12-17.

### **Biblical texts used to justify abuse**

#### **Physical punishment**

Proverbs 13:24 states, "Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them." The rod in this passage was not a stick for spanking or striking a child. It was the shepherd's staff, used to guide sheep away from danger, such as cliffs or sharp rocks. The shepherd gently placed the rod on the side of the sheep to steer it away from danger. This verse was never intended as an excuse for parents to beat their children. Beating a child is a criminal offence.

#### **Divorce**

Malachi 2:13-16 mentions that God "hates divorce." Yet the focus of this passage is on husbands who mistreat their wives and are unfaithful to them. The prophet goes on to chastise men for not keeping covenant with their wives, causing divorce and covering themselves with violence. This passage emphasizes God's displeasure with unfaithfulness and violence.

## Turning the other cheek

Matthew 5:39 has also been used to condone acceptance of abuse: “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...” Theologians such as Walter Wink argue that the intention of this saying was not to let others hurt us again and again. In that culture, the left hand was considered unclean and improper to use. The only way the right cheek could be hit by the right hand of another was with the back of the hand. Everyone listening to Jesus knew that people would only backhand those with less power than themselves. For example, masters would backhand slaves, Romans would backhand Jews, husbands would backhand wives and parents would backhand children.

The purpose of hitting this way was not to injure, but to humiliate the other. Backhanding was intended to communicate, “You stay in your place, which is beneath me.” Now, if someone turned their left cheek to the person who had just backhanded them, they could only be hit with the open hand, with a gesture used only between equals. Therefore, “turning the other cheek” allowed the person being hit to declare their equality with the person hitting them.<sup>1</sup>

*(Note: In our time, violence of any form is unacceptable.)*

Similarly, Jesus’ instruction not to “...resist an evildoer” (Matthew 5:39) has been used to exhort people to be passive in the face of violence and oppression. Wink argues that the Greek word for resist was understood to mean violent resistance, and a more correct translation would be, “Do not resist an evildoer with violence.”<sup>2</sup>

## Bearing the cross

Another difficult passage has been Jesus’ call to his followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross” (Mark 8:34-37). Over the centuries, people in powerful positions have used these words to urge those in oppressive situations to bear their cross of suffering meekly just as Jesus did. What is often forgotten is that Jesus was crucified not due to his meekness but rather because of his active resistance to oppression and his strong work for justice and peace. He touched those who were considered unclean, healed them and ate with them. In this way Jesus undermined the rules and customs which kept people

---

1 Wink, Walter. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003) 14-15.

2 Wink, Walter.. *The Powers that Be* (New York: Galilee Trade, 1999) 99-101.

in bondage. His teachings also threatened the ruling authorities and their control over the people. Jesus' invitation to "take up the cross" is not a call for us to be passive, but to work courageously for justice and peace as he did.

### **Repentance and forgiveness**

There is often strong pressure put on the victim of abuse to quickly forgive and be reconciled to the offender. Texts such as Colossians 3:13 and Matthew 6:15 are used to urge the offended person to forgive. However, quick forgiveness without true repentance on the part of the offender is not a healing experience for either the victim or the perpetrator of abuse, and can in fact endanger the life of the victim.

In Luke 17:3, Jesus teaches that repentance must precede forgiveness. Genuine repentance includes not only remorse and confession, but also taking full responsibility for one's abusive behaviour, naming the injustice, making long-term changes in beliefs and behaviour, and making restitution (such as paying for counselling) where possible. Ezekiel 18:30-32 makes it clear that repentance involves getting "a new heart."

The survivor may never trust the offender enough to renew the relationship. Forgiveness ultimately is a process by which the survivor stops letting the experience dominate her or his life. It is a process of letting go and moving on in healthy ways. If reconciliation is not possible, it may be necessary to mourn the loss of these relationships or mourn what might have been.

### **Submission and headship**

Passages such as Ephesians 5:21-33, Colossians 3:18-19 and I Peter 3:1-7 are often used to justify violence against women, as they call for a wife to submit to her husband. Yet the Greek word translated here as "submit" or "be subject to" can also be understood as "accommodation to" or "to be attached to or identify with another."<sup>3</sup> Further, if the Ephesians text is read in its entirety, nine verses focus on husbands and only three on wives. Husbands are instructed to love their wives, "... as Christ loved the church." This leaves no room for a husband's abusive behaviours towards his wife, since men have a responsibility to cherish and honour their spouses. Neither does it obligate women to stay and tolerate abuse.

---

3 Compelman-Blair, J. Martha, "New Lenses for Viewing Submission," Priscilla Papers, Summer 2007: 5.

This text also draws a parallel between the “headship” of a husband in relation to his wife and the relationship of Christ to the church. Often this concept of headship is used to argue superiority and a controlling authority over women. However the Greek word used for “head” is *kephale*, a word which is also used to describe the life source of a river.<sup>4</sup> In Scripture Christ models relationships which are life giving and empowering to the church and all those with whom he interacted. Christ loved selflessly and this is the type of love relationship this passage teaches for marriage partners.

## **A peace theology response to abuse**

Our peace theology calls us to reject violence. Yet it also asks us to acknowledge where we have power, and to use that power for the well-being of others. We must use the power we have to resist evil and violence as Jesus did. We cannot turn away from it. As the late June Callwood, a Canadian philanthropist, writer and journalist often said, “If any of you happens to see an injustice, you are no longer a spectator, you are a participant, and you have an obligation to do something.” Similarly, James 4:17 insists, “Anyone then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.”

Gayle Gerber Koontz, in an article called “Redemptive Resistance to Violation of Women: Christian Power, Justice, and Self-Giving Love” explains:

Redemptive resistance to evil seems to imply different things depending on one’s relational standing point ... For example, an abuser who professes to be a Christian must resist the habit, desire and need to control, and must let go of dominating power in relation to others, especially in relation to women.... A victim, on the other hand, usually needs to claim her power to act and to develop a sense of self and its value. In this case a theological and personal reorientation that emphasizes God’s love for women, desire for justice, care for the suffering, and empowerment of the weak and marginalized is critical.<sup>5</sup>

---

4 Ibid, 5.

5 Gerber Koontz, Gayle, “Redemptive Resistance to Violation of Women: Christian Power, Justice, and Self-Giving Love.” *Peace Theology and Violence Against Women*, Occasional Papers No 16, ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992) 39.

In addition, Christians need to be careful how we understand and depict God. Having only images of God as male, judge, king, omnipotent and sovereign is dangerous as these images can be used to justify having power over others. Abuse happens when those with more power believe they have the right to control and manipulate those who are considered weaker or less worthy. So it is important to also use images of God which are nurturing and life-giving, such as light, healer, redeemer, mother eagle, midwife, shepherd, guide, comforter, advocate, sustainer and shelter.

Ultimately, God desires that all follow the way of Christ: to show love to everyone, work for justice, care for the suffering, empower the weak and hold accountable those who hurt others. As the Scriptures urge: “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

## **IV Responding to a disclosure of abuse**

The response of the church when someone comes forward with a disclosure of abuse is critical. Below are some general guidelines for responding to disclosures of abuse.

### **Responding to victims of abuse**

- Recognize the seriousness of what you are being told. Listen carefully to the victim's story and believe them.
- Be concerned about possible injuries; is medical attention needed?
- Be concerned about safety. Be sure that a safe place is available, whether in a home or a shelter. Assist the victim in contacting such a place in your community.
- Be familiar with local resources available to victims of abuse and pass that information on to the victim. Local programs may include support groups and therapy resources.
- The victim may believe that they are the cause of the abuse. Reassure them that no one deserves to be hurt.
- The victim may be very ambivalent. An abusive person can also at times be loving, and the victim may have internalized a great deal of responsibility for the abusive behaviour.
- The abuser may have greatly damaged the victim's self-esteem and confidence. Do not reinforce that low self-esteem by taking over and making decisions for the victim.
- Continue to provide pastoral care, and encourage the victim to pursue professional counselling.
- Do not recommend couples counselling, as this is not appropriate in situations of intimate partner abuse.
- **Recognize that if the abuse is not addressed, it will continue and get worse.**

## Responding to the alleged offender

- The violence must stop. This is the first priority.
- Be aware that the accused may try to minimize the behaviour or blame the victim.
- Offer hope that change is possible. Check with your local shelter, crisis hotline, mental health centre or MCC to find resources in your area.
- Hold the abusive person accountable. Promises to change are a part of the cycle of violence. For meaningful change to occur, the abuser must accept full responsibility for the violence and make long term concrete changes in beliefs and behaviours.
- Do not take the abuser's word as evidence the violence has stopped. Rather, check with the abused person. If the abuse continues, it may be necessary to take safety measures for the protection of the victim.
- Individual counselling and group therapy designed especially for those who behave abusively are essential.
- **Couples/family counselling which occurs prematurely may serve to endanger the victim further!**

*Adapted from material by Janet Reedy and Ruby Friesen Zehr (MCC Domestic Violence Task Force, 1987).*

## **V Safety and support issues**

Safety is a key issue, particularly in domestic violence situations. Adults who face harassment or abuse from those who have power over them (spouses, employers or adult children caring for aging parents) may need help to minimize further victimization and fear. Child victims must be protected from further harm.

Safety is both an emotional and physical issue. Those physically removed from an abusive situation often still face intimidation. The echo of past threats may still cause the victim to live in fear. A child who has been abused may not know whom to trust.

In a situation of abuse, the elements of fear and intimidation do not make honest confrontation possible. For example an elderly man may believe his daughter is stealing money from him. If he is dependent on her for some level of care, he will hesitate to confront her, fearing that she may stop taking him for groceries, or may refuse to give him his medication. It is essential for vulnerable people to have an advocate who can assist them in dealing with the abusive situation. For instance, if the elderly man goes to a deacon in his church, it is then the responsibility of the deacon (with the help of the church) to make sure the man's needs are being met, while dealing with the legal and moral issue of a possible theft.

Not all suggested measures listed will apply to all situations. Together with the victim, ascertain which steps will be the most helpful in increasing safety for the victim and their family.

## **Adult victims**

### **Those still in the abusive relationship**

#### **Support the victim in taking the following steps:**

- Before the next outburst, think about ways to leave before violence starts.
- Stay out of rooms with weapons.
- Make arrangements for a safe place to stay if there is a threat of violence. This location should not place others in danger. It may be a shelter, a hotel or a friend or relative's home where the perpetrator won't think to look for the victim.
- Keep a list of people to contact if a dangerous situation occurs.
- Memorize important phone numbers.
- Establish a code word or sign so that family or friends will know when to call for help.
- Prepare a bag with necessary items and leave in a safe place (i.e. friend, neighbour, work). Items include phone card, money, extra set of clothes and shoes, toys and clothes for children, medications and prescriptions, extra keys for house, car and office, phone number of emergency shelters.
- Have originals or copies of important legal papers ready. These include social security or social insurance card, medical cards, birth certificates, address book, driver's license and registration, marriage license, passports, leases, mortgage papers or deeds, copy of restraining order or peace bond, bank statements or other financial records, insurance papers, children's school and immunization records.
- Encourage the victim to have a credit card and bank account in their own name.

### **Those who have left the relationship**

#### **Support the victim in taking the following steps:**

- Remove tracking app and install an alarm app on cell phone. This may help to protect the victim whose safety is especially at risk immediately after leaving an abusive partner.
- Save and document all contacts, messages, injuries or other incidents involving the perpetrator.
- Avoid staying alone.
- Work out a safety plan with a support network.
- Vary daily routine.
- Notify work contacts and the children's school.

## **Providing support for adult victims**

- Find proactive ways for the church to be supportive, including paying for counselling, providing grocery gift certificates, meals, child care as needed, rides to appointments and other support services.
- Provide spiritual care, being careful not to oversimplify the situation or possible solutions. Prayer CAN change things, but God's people still need to act.
- Find two or three people to come alongside the victim in order to provide support.
- Do not recommend marriage counselling. Marriage counselling in abusive relationships offers a forum for abusers to abuse over and over again. Victims cannot be honest about what is happening in the relationship for fear of retaliation and may be in serious danger if they disclose the abusive behaviour. Individual specialized counselling for perpetrators of abuse and victims of abuse is the only counselling recommended in abusive relationships.
- Do not push forgiveness. Forgiveness is an individualized process and cannot be forced on anyone. If a person is pushed to forgive too soon, risks of abuse may increase as this allows the abusive person to further minimize the effects of his/her actions on the victim. Also, the healing process is in jeopardy if forgiveness is given prematurely.
- Be patient. Healing from abuse takes a long time. Anger, fear, grief, doubt and other emotions will all affect the healing process.

## **Child victims**

### **Addressing safety**

- Safety for the child is the first priority.
- If no one else is willing to report the abuse to authorities, it is the legal obligation of the church to do so.
- Work with the child safety agency in your area to find a safe home for the child to live in.
- If one parent has reported the abuse to the authorities, assist that parent in providing a safe, healthy environment for the child.

### **Providing support for child victims**

- Believe the child's story. Very seldom does a child lie concerning their experiences of abuse.
- Assure the child of your support.
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality for the child, but explain your legal obligation to report a criminal offence to the authorities.
- It is not the church's responsibility to investigate. That is under the authority of the child protection agency.
- Provide age-appropriate information about resources for healing available in the community.
- Support older children to make decisions for themselves whenever possible.

## **Response to offenders**

- It is important for the church to hold accountable those who abuse others.
- Find two or three people of the same gender to provide accountability and support.
- Make sure the offender attends counselling sessions designed for those with abusive behaviours.
- Do not allow the offender to minimize the abuse.
- State clearly that what the offender has done is a serious offence.
- Guide the offender towards confession, repentance and restitution.
- Provide spiritual care.

## Support for caregivers

Walking alongside a victim of abuse can be physically and emotionally challenging. The abusive person may issue threats and attempt to gain support from members of the congregation. This can create division and caregivers may get caught up in the conflict. It is important to draw support from outside the congregation to help mediate and to provide resources to the caregivers and the congregation.

### Caring for victims

- Share the caregiving role with at least one other person.
- Set boundaries for yourself in order to prevent burnout.
- Educate yourself on the issue of abuse.
- Keep confidences.
- Do not confront the abusive person! Keep your energies for caring for the victims.

### Caring for offenders

- Share the caregiving/accountability role with others.
- Set boundaries for yourself, in order to keep safe.
- Educate yourself on the issue of abuse.
- Never meet with the offender alone!
- Do not give personal contact information, unless you feel safe to do so.
- Do everything you can to keep yourself as well as your own family members safe.
- Keep confidences because the consequences of telling others of the situation could further jeopardize the wellbeing of the victims and their family and caregivers.

*\* You are not alone: MCC staff who work on abuse issues are available to assist you. See [abuse.mcccanada.ca](http://abuse.mcccanada.ca) for contact information. Also, check out resources in your area.*

# VI Legal issues

## Abuse against children and teens

All of us have a responsibility to protect children, teens and other vulnerable people from harm. All adults are mandated by law to report disclosures of abuse to the authorities.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) define child abuse as any form of physical, psychological, social, emotional or sexual maltreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self-esteem, growth and development of the child are endangered. There are four main types of child abuse: neglect, emotional, physical, and sexual.

**Neglect:** failure to give due attention or care to a child resulting in serious emotional or physical harm.

**Emotional Abuse:** verbal attacks or demeaning actions that impact on a child's self-esteem and self-worth.

**Physical Abuse:** the intentional use of force against a child resulting in injury or causing bodily harm.

**Sexual Abuse:** any form of sexual conduct (touching, exploitation, intercourse) directed at a child.

Further information can be obtained by accessing the RCMP website: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/ccaps-spcca/chi-enf-eng.htm>.

Child abuse usually reflects patterns of behaviour rather than an isolated incident. The vast majority of child abusers are parents, relatives, or trusted adults, not strangers. Children rarely lie about abuse. Child abuse knows no class boundaries.<sup>6</sup>

### **Forms of abuse include:**

- Non-accidental injury including striking, kicking, burning, choking or biting.
- Manufacturing, selling or handling of a controlled substance (illegal drug) in the presence of a child, or on the premises occupied by the child.
- Selling, distributing or giving drugs or alcohol to a child.
- Deprivation of adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care.
- Verbal assault, isolation or rejection.
- Abandonment.
- Offering pornography.

---

6           retrieved from the internet July 2, 2014.

Church leaders should not attempt to gather detailed evidence from the person who discloses. This is the responsibility of child protective services or child welfare agencies.

Again, the safety of the child victim of abuse is of utmost importance. Once a church becomes aware of abuse, church leaders should work with the non-abusive parent and child welfare authorities to remove the child from danger and find a safe place to live.

## **Abuse against elders and other vulnerable people**

When a senior citizen or a person with cognitive or physical disabilities has been abused and cannot defend themselves, church leaders are often called upon to give assistance. Should a vulnerable person disclose abuse, it is the moral obligation of clergy to notify the authorities. Most provinces have advocacy agencies for seniors and those with mental or physical disabilities who can provide valuable resources and assistance.

Most commonly, an elder is abused by someone who is in a position of trust or authority. It may be a spouse, son or daughter, other family member, friend, paid caregiver or Power of Attorney (POA).

### **Forms this abuse can take are:**

- **Financial:** Improper or illegal use of money, assets or property, without the older person's permission or knowledge, misuse of the power of attorney.
- **Physical:** violence or rough treatment, even if it does not result in injury, threat of physical force, inappropriate use of medications or restraints.
- **Emotional:** Name calling, Intimidation, threats, yelling, ignoring, social isolation, treat like a child.
- **Sexual:** Sexual contact without consent, pressure of intimacy, fondling, touching, sexual assault, sexual comments, jokes and leering.
- **Neglect:** abandonment, physical, emotional or financial neglect, situations where a person has a responsibility to provide care or assistance but does not.

## **Abuse against adults**

If an abusive act is committed against an adult, it is their responsibility to file a report. However, the church must come alongside the victim and provide support. The church can also play a significant role in providing accountability and support for the offender.

In some situations, court orders, such as “protection from abuse” or “no contact” orders, may be helpful. These can discourage the offender from continuing to contact, threaten or stalk the victim. However, these orders cannot guarantee safety and the victim will continue to need support and assistance. Always encourage the victim to document any violations of these court orders. Domestic violence shelters, legal clinics, counsellors and other community agencies can provide much helpful professional and legal assistance and the church should assist the victim in gaining access to these resources.

## **Abuse by a church leader**

When a child or adult is abused in any way by a member of the clergy or by a youth leader, Sunday school teacher or another person from the congregation, it is an abuse of power, and the church must deal with the abuse immediately. While an investigation takes place, the responsibilities of the alleged offender should be suspended.

When there is reasonable cause to believe the abuse is a criminal offence, the authorities must be notified. All other types of abuse are still an offence of one person against another and should be addressed. This should include an investigation and a process which assures the protection of the victim/s, holds the abusive person accountable and provides forums for healing for all concerned. It is essential to seek assistance from outside the congregation, such as denominational leaders and professionals trained in dealing with abuse by a church leader or caregiver. MCC resources listed on p 30 and 31 are helpful in responding to abuse by a church leader.

## **VII How the church can be proactive in abuse prevention**

### **Address through Christian education**

- Offer classes on parenting in respectful, non-violent ways.
- Teach mutuality and equality between men and women and offer classes to address sexism and abuse issues.
- In marriage retreats or enrichment programs, stress that violence or coercion is never acceptable.
- During pre-marital counselling, include topics such as mutuality, communication, conflict, violence, power, control and decision-making.
- For youth, plan sessions on issues related to coming of age, identity, relationships and sexuality. Separate sessions for women and men may facilitate more honest discussion and teaching.
- Offer assertiveness and safety training and classes on conflict transformation.

### **Adopt policies and procedures to prevent sexual harassment and abuse**

- Create safe meeting and counselling places, by having windows in all doors and two adults present when meeting with children and youth.
- Screen all volunteers and staff and require that volunteers attend church for at least six months prior to working with children and youth.
- Provide regular training for parents, Sunday school teachers and youth workers about harassment and abuse.
- See the MCC booklet: *Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver*.

## **Address in worship services**

- Plan special worship services and prayers for those affected by abuse and violence at home, nationally and internationally.
- Study and preach from difficult texts, such as the rape of Tamar.
- Use texts that advocate mutuality between men and women, and mutuality between those with power and those without.
- Include stories of healing from abuse as appropriate.
- When praying for peace in the world, pray also for peace and safety in our homes.
- Observe Domestic Violence Prevention Month (October) and Child Abuse Prevention Month (April).

## **Pay attention to theology and how we speak of God**

- Be alert to how teachings about forgiveness, obedience and bearing the cross may affect those suffering abuse.
- Stress God's concern for life, healing and wholeness. In addition to Jesus' experience of the cross and resurrection, emphasize his example, teaching and ministry with those who were suffering.
- Be aware of images or language for God such as Father, King or Lord which may be painful for victims. Balance these with other biblical images of God, such as Redeemer, Creator, Healer.
- Make sure the church's portrayal of God matches what Jesus taught and modelled: that God cares deeply for those who are weak and vulnerable.

## **Interpret the Bible carefully**

- Understand the Bible in its cultural and historical contexts and make careful application to our present day situation.
- Include biblical texts with women in major roles. Note that set lectionaries do not necessarily do this.
- For children's story times include Bible stories that highlight women, and use inclusive language to help children understand that all people are valued by God.
- Consider using an inclusive language version of the Bible such as New Revised Standard Version, New International Version (2011), New Living Translation or The Message.

## **Model mutuality and respect in all relationships**

- Give attention to complementary teams of male and female leadership at all levels.
- Use respectful language and tone in all relationships.
- Avoid jokes about family violence or destructive metaphors such as “rule of thumb.” (This originated as a guide for the thickness of the stick with which a husband could beat his wife.)
- In decision-making, commit to listening to all voices and make decisions that serve the common good.
- Expect all congregational leaders to use healthy conflict transformation skills.
- Be careful not to imply that positions of authority are divinely ordained and cannot be questioned. Assume that all human authority is subject to sin, and must be held accountable.

*Adapted from material by Linda Gehman Peachey and Steve Thomas, September 2005*

## **VIII Checklist for preventing and responding to abuse**

Pastors and church leaders play a crucial role in creating communities that are safe, respectful and nurturing. It is therefore essential for church leaders to be self-aware and have healthy personal boundaries. It is also important for them to model and actively encourage mutuality and partnership between men and women. These qualities, along with the skills and tasks listed below, all contribute toward helping congregations and families become abuse free.

### **Skills and knowledge for church leaders**

- Understand the biblical basis for mutuality between men and women.
- Identify signs of a healthy relationship and signs of an abusive relationship, with special attention to relationships where there is an imbalance of power, such as between men and women, adults and children, congregational leaders and lay people.
- Identify elements of healthy sexuality and actively promote this in the congregation.
- Know the steps to be taken when a child discloses abuse, and when an adult discloses abuse.
- Be aware of the consequences for survivors of sexual violation and/or intimate partner abuse.
- Understand why it is essential to refer survivors and perpetrators of abuse to counsellors with specialized training.
- Understand why couple's counselling is not appropriate in situations of abuse.
- Be familiar with your denomination's policy regarding sexual misconduct.
- Identify why pornography use is harmful and dangerous.
- Prepare a list of reputable counsellors in your area who specialize in abuse dynamics.

## Tasks for congregations

- Promote healthy relationships in families and the congregation in Sunday school, worship times, pre marital counselling and church membership preparation.
- Implement child protection policies and procedures for your congregation.
- Provide safety, support and healing in tangible ways for survivors of abuse, including sensitivity to how sermons, songs and prayers may affect those suffering abuse.
- Develop a support, accountability and healing plan for those who have been abusive.
- Offer and lead rituals of lament, healing and hope which respond to abuse, in both private and corporate settings.
- Place *Home Shouldn't be a Place That Hurts* brochures in washroom stalls. Brochures are available from MCC.
- Have resources in your library that can help survivors of abuse.

## **IX Resources available from Mennonite Central Committee**

This booklet is available in Spanish and German:

*Respondiendo y Previniendo el Abuso, booklet, 2009*

*Missbrauch: Hilfe und Vorbeugung, booklet, 2010*

### **Website**

The Mennonite Central Committee website [abuse.mcccanada.ca](http://abuse.mcccanada.ca) includes numerous articles, stories and tools for people who have experienced abuse and for those who are supporting them.

### **Brochures (free)**

The brochure *Home Shouldn't be a Place that Hurts* can be obtained from your nearest MCC office and is available in English, French, German, Chinese, Swahili and Spanish.

These brochures can be placed in women's and men's washroom stalls in your church to be available in a safe, anonymous manner. A holder to display them can also be ordered.

### **Booklets**

- *Created Equal, Women and Men in God's Image*, booklet, by Linda Gehman Peachey, 2009
- *Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver*, booklet, by Heather Block, 2003, Revised 2nd edition, 2011
- *Pornography: Lies, Truth and Hope*, booklet, 2013

### **Other resources**

MCC also has books, videos, worship resources and other materials that can be purchased or borrowed. Contact your nearest MCC office for more information, or see the MCC website: [mcccanada.ca](http://mcccanada.ca).

## **Programs in Canada which address abuse response and prevention:**

### **MCC British Columbia, End Abuse**

33933 Gladys Ave, Box 2038  
Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada V2T 3T8  
(604) 850-6639 or toll free (888) 622-6337  
endabuse@mccbc.com  
<http://mcccanada.ca/learn/more/end-abuse>

### **MCC Manitoba, Voices for Non-Violence**

159 Henderson Hwy.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2L 1L4  
(204) 925-1917 or toll free (866) 530-4450  
vnv@mennonitecc.ca  
<http://mcccanada.ca/learn/more/voices-non-violence>

### **Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Resource Response Team (SMARRT)**

203-50 Kent Avenue  
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2G 3R1  
(519) 745-8458 or toll free (800) 313-6226  
eileenh@mennonitecc.on.ca  
<http://mcccanada.ca/learn/more/sexual-misconduct-abuse-resource-response-team-smarrt>

### **MCC Ontario, Circles of Care**

203-50 Kent Avenue  
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2G 3R1  
(519) 745-8458 or toll free (800) 313-6226  
chrisd@mennonitecc.on.ca  
<http://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/serve/volunteer/circles-care-volunteer>

## **X Additional resources**

### **Child abuse**

Hegstrom, Paul. *Broken Children, Grown-Up Pain: Understanding the Effects of Your Wounded Past*. Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press, 2006.

Fortune, Marie M., *Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting: A Clergy Dilemma?* <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/child-abuse>.

Harder, Jeanette. *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010.

Pais, Janet. *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991.

### **Sexual abuse**

Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Heggen, Carolyn H. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, reprint 2006.

Heitritter, Lynn & Voight, Jeanette. *Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse: A Sensitive, Biblical Guide for Counselors, Victims and Families*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1989.

McClintock, Karen A. *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations: A Resource for Leaders*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004.

Yantzi, Mark. *Sexual Offending and Restoration*. Waterloo and Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998.

## Family Violence

Alsdurf, James and Phyllis. *Battered Into Submission*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998.

Bancroft, Lundy. *When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse*. New York: Berkley Books, 2004.

Block, Isaac I. *Assault on God's Image: Domestic Abuse*. Winnipeg: Windflower Communications, 1991.

Cory, Jill and McAndless-Davis, Karen. *When Love Hurts: A Woman's Guide to Understanding Abuse in Relationships*. New Westminster, BC: WomanKind Press, second edition, 2008. <http://whenlovehurts.ca/>

Cunningham, Alison and Baker, Linda. *Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as They Grow*. London, ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System, 2007.

Available as a free download from

[http://www.lfcc.on.ca/little\\_eyes\\_little\\_ears.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/little_eyes_little_ears.html)

Fortune, Marie M. & Marshall, Joretta, Editors. *Forgiveness and Abuse: Jewish and Christian Reflections*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., 2002.

Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Nason-Clark, Nancy. *No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2010.

Miles, Al. *Domestic Violence, What Every Pastor Needs to Know*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.

Miller, Melissa, *Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds*, Waterloo and Scottdale: Herald Press, 1994.

Penner, Carol. *Healing Waters: Churches Working to End Violence Against Women*. Toronto, ON: Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 2003.

The Rave Project: Religion and Violence e-learning  
[www.theraveproject.com](http://www.theraveproject.com).

Soto Albrecht, Elizabeth, *Family Violence, Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

## **Prevention**

Miles, Al. *Ending Violence in Teen Dating Relationships: A Resource Guide for Parents and Pastors*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Yarrow Morris, Susan in collaboration with Jean Anton. *Opening the Door: A Pastor's Guide to Addressing Domestic Violence in Premarital Counselling*. Seattle, WA: FaithTrust Institute, 2006.

## **Spiritual abuse**

Johnson, David & Van Vonderen, Jeff. *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing & Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority Within The Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishing, 1991.

Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Beck, James R., eds. *Women, Abuse and the Bible, How Scripture Can be Used to Hurt or Heal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 3rd printing, 2004.

## **Working with those who behave abusively**

Bancroft, Lundy. *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. New York: Berkley, 2002.

Livingston, David L. *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Communities*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

## **XI Contributors**

Contributors to the initial production of this booklet, 2008 were:

Lynell Bergen, MCC Manitoba  
Mental Health and Disabilities Program Coordinator

Linda Gehman Peachey, MCC US  
Women's Advocacy Director

Elsie Goerzen, MCC British Columbia  
Abuse Prevention Program Coordinator

Angela Klassen, MCC Canada  
National Programs Assistant

Jane Woelk, MCC Manitoba  
Voices for Non-Violence Program Coordinator

Voices for Non-Violence Advisory Committee: Linda Dueck, Connie Epp, Roberta Fast, Gordon Kroeker, Maria Lodge, Deborah Martin-Koop

**MCC Canada and MCC U.S. provided financial resources for the initial production of this booklet in 2008.**

**MCC Abuse Network updated the booklet and MCC Canada Restorative Justice generously financed this reprint in 2014.**



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

---

**MCC Alberta**

#210, 2946-32nd Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7  
(403) 275-6935

**MCC British Columbia**

33933 Gladys Ave, Box 2038, V2T 3T8, Abbotsford BC  
(604) 850-6639

**MCC Canada**

134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9  
(204) 261-6381

**MCC Manitoba**

134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9  
(204) 261-6381

**MCC Maritimes**

27 John Street, Moncton, NB E1C 2G7  
(506) 383-9339

**MCC Newfoundland and Labrador**

Box 850, Station B, Happy Valley, NL A0P 1E0  
(709) 896-3213

**MCC Ontario**

203-50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1  
(519) 745-8458

**MCC Québec**

200-4824 Chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal QC H3V 1G4  
(514) 278-3008

**MCC Saskatchewan**

600-45th Street West, Saskatoon, SK S7L 5W9  
(306) 665-2555

**Call your nearest office in Canada toll free 1-888-622-6337.**

**[mcccanada.ca](http://mcccanada.ca)**

*Printed in Canada on recycled paper using vegetable based inks.*