

Supplement 09

Guiding Principles of Survivor Advocacy

Often abuse survivors will talk to church leaders first because of a pre-existing relationship of trust. We want to be good stewards of that trust.

We recognize that as pastors preach about holiness and sin, justice, and perfect love, a pastor's response to abuse will become intertwined with a survivor's understanding of the gospel.

To foster continued trust and honor the survivor's courage to come forward, we must handle disclosures of abuse with great care. It is so important to believe the survivor. **WE TAKE THE POSTURE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 13:7, "LOVE BELIEVES ALL THINGS" UNTIL THERE IS EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY.**

BEGIN WITH THE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SURVIVOR ADVOCACY:

- **SAFETY FIRST**- Attending to the survivor's immediate safety is the priority.
- **"DO NO HARM"**- Ensure that no additional harm comes to the survivor. Additional harm occurs when we do not believe the survivor or imply that the survivor is to blame.
- **EMPOWER**- Abuse is about denying a survivor power and control. Allow the survivor to reclaim control over his/her own decisions, opinions, actions, goals, and future.
- **TRAUMA-INFORMED**- Sexual assault and domestic violence are complex and traumatic events. Focus on *"What has happened to the person?"* not *"What is wrong with the person?"*
- **CONFIDENTIALITY**- Protect confidentiality, which is critically linked to safety and justice for the survivor.

(These suggestions are adapted from the *"Crisis Line Handbook"* provided by the Centers for Disease Control Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, pages 10-22).

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF SURVIVOR ADVOCACY

The following Do's and Don'ts is not an exhaustive list. We encourage church leaders to do more research regarding these best practices.

FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES IN SURVIVOR ADVOCACY

What to Do:

- Listen with compassion, talk little.
- Make sure the survivor feels heard, believed, and safe.
- Take notes, do not ask for details.
- Explore needed resources, refer them to experts.
- Plan a time to reconnect.

What Not to Do:

- Do **NOT** investigate the validity of the claims. Allow experts to determine legitimacy of the claims.
- Do **NOT** engage the abuser. This can be very dangerous for the survivor.
- Do **NOT** make any decisions for the survivor.
- Do **NOT** point out sin or blame the survivor in any way.
- Do **NOT** reframe the situation into *"What God is doing."*
- Do **NOT** question children or lead them during a disclosure in any way.

(These suggestions are adapted from *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*, "Lesson 3: Ministry Responsibilities").