



lead by example

Pastors, rabbis, imams, priests and other religious leaders



**ACTION SHEET:
INTERFAITH**

A battered woman tells her priest that she has decided to leave her abusive partner. He encourages her saying that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.

At an interfaith meeting, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Christian religious leaders from across the Western Cape develop policies and strengthen their resolve to prevent violence against women.

After a domestic violence murder in the neighbourhood, a rabbi calls a meeting at the synagogue to discuss a community response.

Religious leaders must encourage men to take a stand against domestic and sexual violence

Many South Africans are active members of a religious, spiritual, or faith-based group and often turn to religious leaders for guidance in dealing with violence. Religious organisations play an important role in shaping community beliefs and are uniquely positioned to champion efforts to end violence against women.

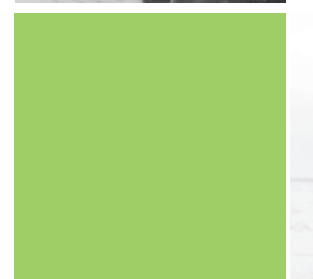
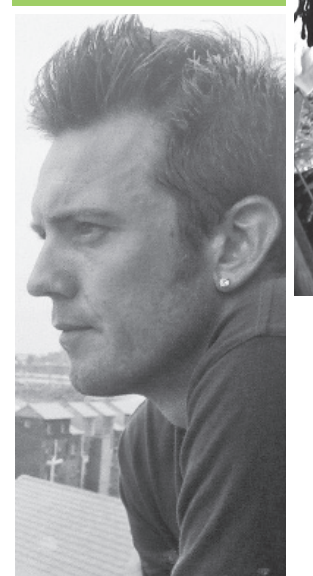
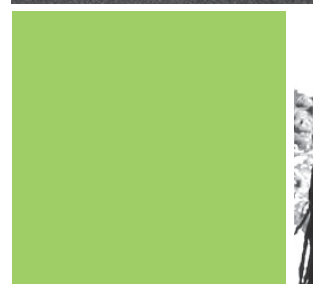
Religious organisations can reach the large numbers of people often underserved by other groups with messages of safety and support for victims and with information about offender accountability.

Establishing training for and by members of religious communities and building their capacity to address the issue will strengthen the role of religious communities in ending violence against women and girls.

Outlined below are specific actions religious, spiritual, and faith-based leaders can take to end violence against women.

Religious leaders can encourage men to be more active in ending violence against women and children

- **Be positive role models.** Faith based leaders occupy special positions of influence. Congregants and the broader community look to them for models of men who treat others respectfully, solve problems non-violently and participate in struggles to make our communities more inclusive and more just.
- **Lead by example.** Religious leaders can volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local sexual assault or domestic violence program or train to become crisis volunteers.
- **Encourage men to speak out** and use their influence to stop violence against women and girls in all forms. Support men to form a men's discussion group or to join existing ones.
- **Make the place of worship a safe place** for victims of violence against women. Display materials and referral numbers for survivors. Ensure the environment allows survivors of violence to discuss their experiences and seek healing.
- **Intervene.** If you have suspicions that violence is occurring in a relationship or in a family, speak to each person separately. Refer to the section below on talking with survivors and perpetrators.
- **Support the victims.** Form support groups for women who desire faith- or spirituality-based healing. Support the victim's continued inclusion in the community of her choice if the perpetrator is from the same community.
- **Educate the congregation.** Co-ordinate a common sermon for your religious





community on sexual and domestic violence on a dedicated day during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign. Regularly include instructional information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in pre-marriage and marriage classes, and sponsor educational seminars on violence against women. Inform the congregation of the policies that outline responses to victims and perpetrators of violence.

- **Use the pulpit.** A faith leader can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs, and his or her leadership is important. Commit to making the problem of violence against women and girls a critical concern. Emphasise the teachings, practices, and organisational structures that promote a woman's right to be free from violence, such as teachings that support equality and respect for women and girls.
- **Offer space for meetings.** Offer your venue for educational seminars and weekly support groups. It can also serve as a supervised visitation site when parents need a safe place to visit their children. Offer the use of venues and resources for male involvement efforts – rooms for meetings, walls for murals etc.
- **Partner with existing resources.** Adopt a local assault or domestic violence programme or shelter for which the institution provides material support or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following abuse.
- **Become a resource.** Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to sexual assault and domestic violence. Share this information and encourage others to do the same.
- **Support professional training.** Encourage training and education for religious leaders, lay leaders, religious teachers and seminary students to increase their awareness about sexual assault and domestic violence.
- **Address internal issues.** Encourage continued efforts by religious institutions to address allegations of abuse by religious leaders to ensure that religious leaders are a safe resource for victims and their children.



Responding to domestic violence: guidelines for pastors, rabbis, imams, priests and other religious leaders

DOs and DON'Ts with a survivor of domestic violence

DO...

- Believe her. Her description of the violence is only the tip of the iceberg.
- Reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, it is not God's will for her. Assure her of God's love and presence.
- Give her referral information (see the Directory of Service Providers in this Kit).
- Support and respect her choices. Even if she is aware of the risks and chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice.
- Encourage her to think about a safety plan. This is practical and helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence.
- Protect her confidentiality.
- Help her with any religious concerns. Explain that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.
- Support her and help her to mourn the loss to herself and her children, if she decides to separate and divorce.
- Pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.
- Consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response.



DON'T...

- Minimise the danger to her. You can be a reality check.
- Tell her what to do. Give information and support.
- React with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you.
- Blame her for his violence. "There is no excuse for abuse."
- Recommend couples counselling, "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop."
- Send her home with just a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to the place or worship or be a better religious wife.
- Encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
- Encourage her dependence on you OR BECOME EMOTIONALLY OR SEXUALLY INVOLVED WITH HER.
- Do nothing.

DOs and DON'Ts with an ABUSIVE partner

DO...

- Approach him, if he has been arrested, and express your concern and support for him. Encourage him to be accountable and to deal with his violence.
- Address any religious rationalisations that the perpetrator may offer or questions he may have.
- Name the violence as his problem, not hers. Tell him that only he can stop it; and you are willing to help.
- Refer him to a programme which specifically addresses abusers.
- Assess him for suicide or threats of homicide.
- Warn the victim if he makes specific threats towards her.

DON'T ...

- Meet with him alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the place of worship.
- Approach him or let him know that you know about his violence unless you have the victim's permission and she is aware that you plan to talk to him. You must be certain that she is safely separated from him.
- Pursue couples' counselling with him and his partner if you are aware that there is violence in the relationship.



DEMONSTRATE HIS FAITH THROUGH TENDERNESS AND COMPASSION

For information on where to get support, see the Directory of Service Providers in the One Man Can Action Kit, or see our website

www.genderjustice.org.za/onemancan

Adapted in part from the Nebraska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition and the FaithTrust Institute (formerly Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence) Seattle, WA www.faithtrustinstitute.org. Used with permission.



This document is part of the One Man Can Action Toolkit, an initiative of Sonke Gender Justice and the Provincial Government of the Western Cape. For more, see www.genderjustice.org.za/onemancan

