

# Caring for Those at Increased-risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during COVID-19:

## *How Faith Communities Can Help*

Home is not a safe place for all people. Engaging in social distancing and working at home when possible is important, but it has meant increased vulnerability to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). As COVID-19 continues to spread across the globe, [Intimate Partner Violence calls for help have increased](#). How are we, as people of faith, acting upon God's call to protect those who are oppressed and vulnerable (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8, Proverbs 31:8)?

Intimate Partner Violence is defined as "behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors" (World Health Organization, 2017).

As you read through tips about how you can help, be mindful that in times of crisis, risk factors increase and overlap further for those who are vulnerable to harm. [Click here to learn more.](#)

### HOW CAN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES PROVIDE CARE AND SAFETY TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE VULNERABLE TO IPV?

Faith-based communities have a unique and crucial role in responding to IPV. Survivors of domestic abuse, and those at-risk of IPV, often turn to their faith community for spiritual support before, or in lieu of, community-based domestic violence programs. According to research, spirituality can provide hope, strength, and meaning, and enhances resilience.

Faith leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to care for IPV survivors and those at-risk by:

- Accepting individuals in their time of crisis;
- Providing individuals with a primary support system;
- Directing individuals to tools to make safe decisions.

Thus, here are some considerations:

### WAYS TO ASSIST IPV SURVIVORS AND THOSE AT-RISK DURING COVID-19

- It is important that faith leaders are [informed](#) regarding [IPV](#) so that you can respond with compassion, develop safe and effective response teams, and provide referrals to IPV experts.
- In social media, weekly e-newsletters, and prayers sent out to congregants, include a [lament](#) or general request to pray for IPV survivors and those at-risk. This is a safe way to bring awareness to the increased risk for individuals due to social-distancing and isolation.
- Regularly check in with someone you are personally worried about. When making a phone call to someone you know is in a violent relationship, listen well and always assume that the perpetrator could be listening in. You can offer to talk in code (e.g., asking about hand sanitizers could mean that the individual is asking you to check in regularly or asking to buy hand sanitizers and sharing a

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**National Network to End Domestic Violence:**

<https://nncdv.org/>

**Futures without Violence:**

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

**National Resource Center on Domestic Violence:**

<https://www.nrcdv.org/>

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:**

1-800-799-7233 (text or call)

shipping address could mean that the individual is asking you to contact the police).

- If appropriate, [bear witness to survivors' experience with empathy](#). It is important to listen well, believe them, respect their choice, and affirm them that it is not their fault. Protect the confidentiality of the individual and follow state laws on mandatory reporting.
- Offer [prayers](#) that comfort and affirm the dignity and strength of the individual for surviving an extremely difficult situation. If appropriate, here is an [online prayer book](#) for IPV survivors and those at risk.
- If applicable, offer your phone/computer as available resources to prevent the use of tracing technology. See [HDI tip sheet for IPV Survivors](#) (created by the contributors of this tip sheet).
- If possible, offer to do errands together while maintaining safe distances and upholding other [CDC recommended](#) protocols (e.g., grocery shopping, banking).
- [Help IPV survivors connect to available resources in the community](#) (e.g., shelters that are open or families willing to host). If applicable, be open to working together with advocates and mental health workers even though you may share different beliefs.
- Faith leaders and faith-based communities can offer financial support to survivors facing financial distress or unemployment. Research found that unemployment and economic hardship were positively correlated with IPV during the last recession (Schneider et al., 2016). Some common needs include payment of bills, provision of food, medication, toiletries, clothing items, and more. However, always ask the survivors what they need.
- Caring for IPV survivors and those at risk can be emotionally challenging for faith leaders. [Taking time to journal](#) and prayer can be helpful.

## FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES CAN DO MORE

Faith-based communities can be life-changing primary support systems for [IPV survivors and those at risk](#) if there is a willingness to:

- Build a culture of awareness and support within the leaders and congregation;
- Speak out against the violation of dignity and soul when teaching from sacred texts;
- Understand additional barriers and fears of vulnerable and minority population;
- Create a set of protocols and a response team.

*"IPV is a spiritual issue and against God's law. All people are made in the image of God, and as church leaders, we value what God values."* - Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent Emerita of the Wesleyan Church

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## Contributors

Tammy Schultz, Ph.D., LCPC. | Adam Dell, Psy.D, ABPP. | Belinda Bauman, M.Ed, Lay Trauma Counselor  
Joy Lee, M.A. Student | Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, Ph.D.