



Respond
Inform
Support
Empower

Unite
Pray

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year Well, until it isn't.

Over the Christmas period, reports of domestic abuse always go up, and this year we've had the added element of the World Cup - another point in the calendar when incidents of domestic abuse increase. It's important to remember that it's not the events themselves that cause this rise, but the opportunity for power and control to be exerted by the abuser.

In 2021 a survey by the UK's largest family law firm Stowe Family Law found that one in six respondents believed they were more likely to suffer emotional or physical abuse from their partner over the Christmas period.

How can we respond to this?

As Churches we can

Be proactive. Ensure that the signage around any buildings or events is obvious, directing people to agencies or individuals that can support and help during this time. Ensure our messages are sensitive and bring the joy of Christmas.

Be alert. While this time is super busy, try your best to be aware of the relationships around you. Do you notice any differences? Who isn't present who usually would be? Do you know the reasons why?

Be educated. A perpetrator's past behaviour is the best indicator of future behaviour. Just because an individual has been able to leave their abuser, it doesn't mean that the abuse has ended. Post-separation abuse can continue years after they no longer live together, and the first six months of leaving are when there is the highest risk to the victim.

Be aware. Ensure that the victim's safety is at the forefront of your mind, and make any decisions on the basis of this. Know your own feelings and reactions; this is often the place we make decisions from, which can mean that our own biases get in the way of the safety of the individual and their family.

Be respectful. Don't presume someone wants you to help; be generous, but be kind and sensitive as well. We might think inviting someone round who will be alone is the obvious thing to do, but check with them as being with others may not be what's helpful to them.

Be generous. With the above in mind, if you know of individuals who have left an abuser, offer some financial or practical assistance to them. With the utility prices so high, top up their gas and electric so they can be warm, and cook or provide a hamper or gifts for family members.

As Victim-Survivors

Be honest. If things are feeling too much for you, ask for help. There is a list of helplines below, or contact a friend or family member if that's a possibility.

Be safe. If you'd like it, there are professionals who are available and willing to support you. Put your safety first in any decisions you make.

Be clear. If you're having to navigate complex relationships with family, or child contact with the perpetrator, it can be helpful to first be clear in your own mind about what you do and don't want. We may not be able to have it exactly as we'd like, but to be able to find our peace with what is possible will help. Maybe find someone to talk this through with and then communicate in a way that means as little contact as possible.

Be sure. For those who have been able to leave, one might need some extra confidence in the decision we made; rose-tinted glasses can mask the harsher realities of past Christmases.

Be. Christmas will bring up so many emotions and feelings for you, and some will be very difficult. Allow yourself to feel them; the more you try not to, the more they'll be there. If you feel like you can't deal with them right in the moment, it might be helpful to 'park them': write them down, text them to a trusted friend or family member...there'll be time to deal with them in the New Year.

In short: Be kind, gentle and patient with yourself - Plan ahead - Manage relationships - Look after yourself - Talk to others - Get support

You will find tips on how to cope and ways to support someone else at

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/christmas-and-mental-health/christmas-coping-tips/

RESTORED: Our thanks to RESTORED. This blog was originally published for members of *Restored Survivors' Network*. It has been made publicly available so anyone can benefit from the suggestions. If you're a survivor of domestic abuse and would like to receive blogs like this, you can sign up to the RESTORED Survivors' Network. www.restored-uk.org/survivors/i-need-help/survivors-network/



**Help is at hand from specialist domestic abuse services:
If there is ever an emergency, call 999.**

Republic of Ireland 24hr National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900

Safe Ireland – find a comprehensive list of domestic abuse services at www.safeireland.ie

Women's Aid website offers help and support: www.womensaid.ie

Men's Aid, Ireland - Confidential Support Line: [01-5543811](tel:01-5543811) www.mensaid.ie

Gardaí - www.garda.ie/en/crime/domestic-abuse/

Northern Ireland Freephone 24hr Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline 0808 802 1414

Women's Aid NI website offers help and support: www.womensaidni.org

MAPNI – Men's Advisory Project - BELFAST: (028) 9024 1929; www.mapni.co.uk

The PSNI have an excellent section relating to domestic abuse on their website: www.psni.police.uk/safety-and-support/keeping-safe/domestic-abuse