



“In Faith They Trust.”
CSSP Institute 2019


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Overview

- ✿ Victims view domestic and sexual violence and options for services through the lenses of their faith
- ✿ Getting started working with local faith communities
- ✿ Engaging Faith Leaders as a part of the coordinated community response.



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- ✿ Domestic Violence affects the entire ***FAMILY*** and the ***COMMUNITY*** (even victims of ***FAITH and the faith COMMUNITY***).



Why Work with Faith Communities?


According to a 2014 study conducted by Pew Research Center's Forum Religion and Public Life, some 87% of Americans describe themselves as belonging to one religious group or another.



Why Work with Faith Communities?

Abusers misuse texts and traditions to support domestic violence (and sexual violence).

Survivors need faith leaders to counteract the abusers' misuse of texts and traditions.



“ . . . during a trauma, victims are five times more likely to seek the aid of clergy than any other professional. Clergy are people they know and trust.”


Why Work with Faith Communities?

Religion, spirituality, or faith may connect victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault

- ✿ To their community
- ✿ To their language
- ✿ To their history
- ✿ To their family
- ✿ To their country of origin
- ✿ To their memories
- ✿ To their culture
- ✿ To their Creator, God, Great Spirit, Higher Power . . .
- ✿ To themselves

Question:


- ✿ What can service providers and faith leaders do collectively to strengthen families and thereby strengthen communities?

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- ✿ We can work together to develop a coordinated community response.
 - ✿ We come to the table collectively with the safety of the victim at the center.



Question:

What are some appropriate ways that domestic and sexual violence service providers can provide support for faith-based victims and survivors?



You can:

Within the context of a supportive counseling, ask about faith community involvement as part of an overall assessment of family or community support networks.




Questions:

Where have they turned in the past for solace and support?

Which support networks, if any, can be accessed safely? Which practices or traditions can be reclaimed?

How can you support them as they reclaim or reconnect with those practices or traditions?



These practices or traditions could include prayer, scripture, poetry, meditation, attending services or rituals (if safe), guided reading, singing, journaling, contemplation, music, reconnecting with friends and family (if safe), maintaining dietary restrictions and personal rituals, celebrating holy days



Questions:

How can I affirm the resources and strength present in this person?

How can I encourage them to take care of themselves?

How can I encourage them to seek safety?

They may ask:

Victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence may be asking:

“Why is this happening to me?”

“Is God punishing me?”


“Is this disaster part of God’s plan for my life?”

“Why are innocent children hurt?”

“Why aren’t my prayers answered?”

“How do I make sense of all this?”

“Where is God in all this?”




While honoring their beliefs and traditions, respectfully affirm their need for and right to safety.

Affirm that you and your agency believe that everyone has the right to be safe in their home and in their intimate relationships.



Question:


How can I work with local faith leaders to make sure that victims in our community can be both safe and faithful?



It is NOT necessary to have the answers.

It IS necessary to hear the questions.


By hearing and focusing on the questions, we help a survivor find their own answers.




Build a library of faith-based resources from many faith traditions that is available to your clients.



✿ Let's start building bridges and removing barriers.


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- ✿ Let's start by acknowledging that there are concerns on both sides, for service providers as well as clergy.



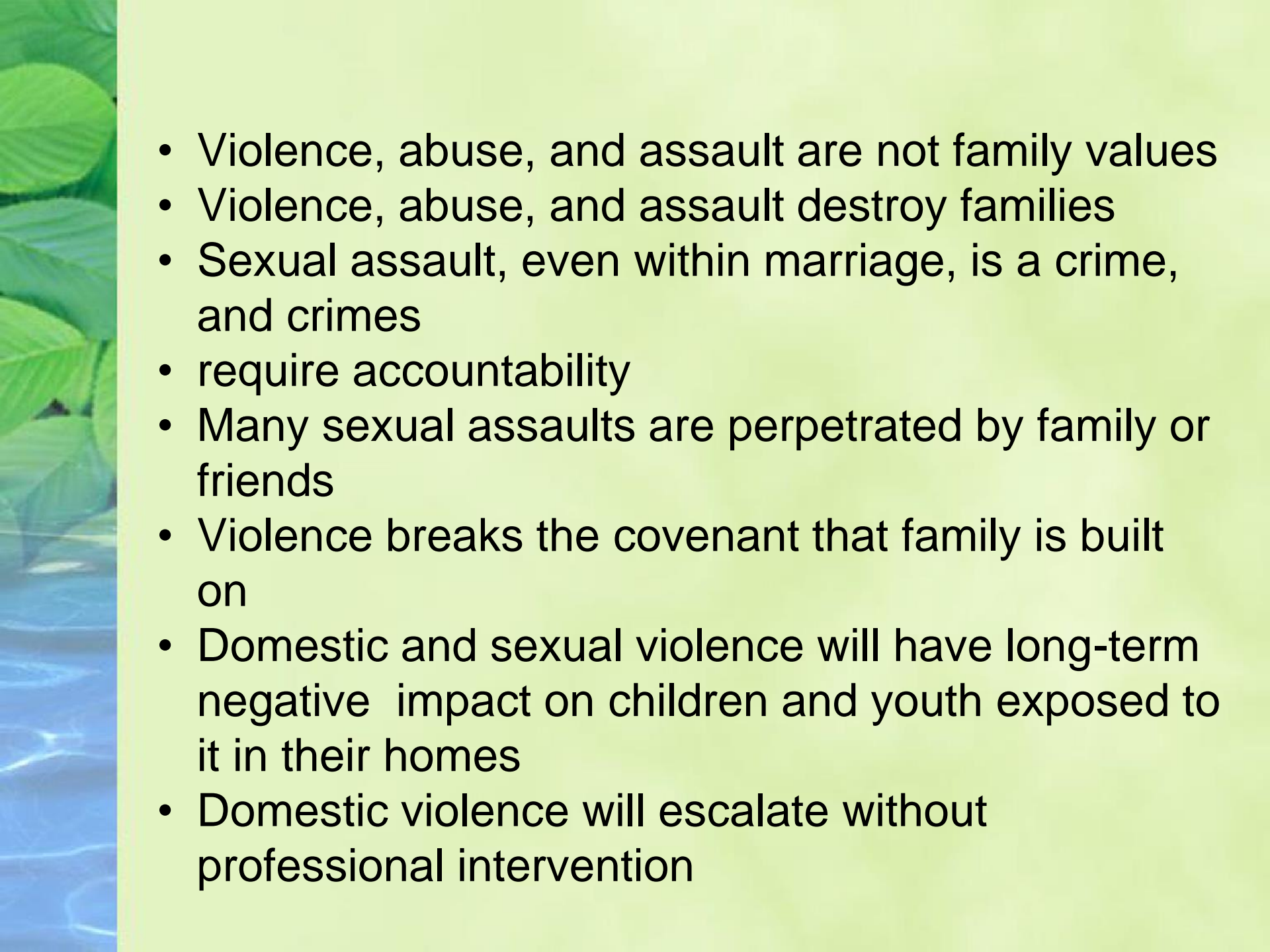
The faith leader and/or congregation distance themselves from the problem: “This isn’t happening here/in my congregation!!” or “No one ever talks to me about this.”


Distrust of service providers

Faith leaders fear that service providers may not honor marriages and families, may prescribe divorce, may interfere in families, may undermine male privilege/patriarchy/business as usual, may overlook essential ethical considerations, may turn all clients into radical feminists, may take away the faith of clients.



✿ Here's where we can all be in agreement:

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- Violence, abuse, and assault are not family values
 - Violence, abuse, and assault destroy families
 - Sexual assault, even within marriage, is a crime, and crimes
 - require accountability
 - Many sexual assaults are perpetrated by family or friends
 - Violence breaks the covenant that family is built on
 - Domestic and sexual violence will have long-term negative impact on children and youth exposed to it in their homes
 - Domestic violence will escalate without professional intervention



Faith leaders may have both victim and perpetrator in congregation.

Faith leaders should be prepared to hold abusers accountable, including asking them to attend a different church or service (if this is an option). And when a restraining order is in place, faith leaders must be prepared to uphold the law accordingly.

You can:

Reach out to local faith communities:

- ✿ Invite them to tour your program/office.
- ✿ Host an event specific for faith leaders.
- ✿ Build on any existing community relationships.
- ✿ Be prepared and willing to listen to any questions or concerns they have.

You can:

- ✿ Invite law enforcement in other agencies to be present at clergy meeting.
- ✿ Acknowledge what clergy brings to the table and their important relationships.
- ✿ Offer training to them at no cost and at their convenience.
- ✿ Be willing to learn as much as you're willing to teach/share.

Faith leaders can:

- ✿ Have a discussion about domestic violence during pre-marital counseling.
- ✿ They can introduce healthy relationship conversations to teens.
- ✿ Have age-appropriate conversations with children around anti-bullying.
- ✿ Because faith leaders often know families over generations, they are perfectly placed to address intergenerational concerns.



Questions???