

A Call to See and Respond to the Crisis of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence

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We have been living through a difficult social landscape, known as a pandemic. This pandemic, known as the novel coronavirus, has claimed more than 138,000 lives in the United States alone. Worldwide the virus has claimed more than half a million lives. These numbers are staggering and heart wrenching. One of the methods to curtail the spread of the virus was the mandate to shelter in place. The world, in different phases, did just that—sheltered in place—to flatten the curve of the virus.

For some, it was difficult to remain in isolation without in person interconnection with others. Many lost their jobs, schools closed, and folks began to experience depression, anxiety, and a myriad of expressions of mental health issues. Our lives during this time of social distancing went virtual.

The novel Coronavirus is an invisible threat that is very real. We cannot see the virus and because we cannot see it, some believe the threat is gone or greatly reduced. I relate this invisibility to the public health crisis of Domestic Violence. In 1996, The Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Assembly, [named Domestic Violence a “public health crisis.”](#) Many deem Domestic Violence, a threat that occurs somewhere else, as it is also an invisible threat. Domestic Violence is the public health crisis that is hidden in plain sight.

The *Guardian*, a news outlet based in the United Kingdom, reported that [domestic violence killings more than doubled during the shelter at home](#) period. They also reported, “Calls to domestic violence helplines have increased by 120 percent, while traffic to their websites is tripling. There’s an unprecedented demand for refuge places. Children, too, are more vulnerable than they have ever been.”

Similarly, *The Huffington Post* reported that [U.S. Senators were pushing to prioritize domestic violence survivors in COVID-19 bailout bills.](#) This push for survivors was a reaction to a rise in domestic violence cases during the pandemic. Advocates also

warned that “the actual number of [domestic violence] cases is likely much higher since most victims are unable to report or seek help when they’re stuck at home with their abuser.”

Violence is a part of our collective normative culture. We accept it in movies, and music. We are lulled into an eerie comfort with violence, we even expect it in some contexts. We have been programmed subconsciously, that violence fits in some areas of our lives and that it is even warranted. As a result, some live with the daily or weekly experience of violence in intimate spaces, as the rest of the world believes it is not happening in their communities.

The mandate to shelter in place, along with the catastrophic job loss and the sudden need to homeschool, meant that those who lived in abusive homes were now forced to isolation with their abuser with no outlet or respite from them. Tensions rose as financial burdens intensified; anxiety and irritation mounted as individuals who usually had some other outlet, such as working out or spending time with others, were suddenly shut down.

How does one save themselves from the terrorism in their own home? De-escalation could be a helpful methodology depending on the level of abuse one is exposed to. If a person is dealing with a very violent individual, the only real solution is to strategize a safe escape. “Safe” is the operative word. Shelters can assist in safety planning. If a person’s life is in jeopardy it is imperative to consider themselves, their children, and pets as the most important items to take from a home. A shelter can provide assistance with recovering vital records like birth certificates and driver's licenses.

When leaving is not an option, it is good to know some methods to navigate the cycle of violence. There are three very real experiences that can cause an abuser to lash out. Any feeling of shame, rejection, or jealousy could lead an abusive person to rage. It is important to understand that abuse is a choice and is not the inability to control one’s anger or rage.

There is often no warning when an abuser feels slighted. However, being mindful of these common triggers can help one navigate away from those landmines that usually cause an eruption. Please know that I am not blame shifting and implying that the victim is the cause of the violence against them. That is never the case.

Often abusers blame, accuse, control, and intimidate others and trying to reason with them or negotiate with them is futile. Here are some tips to de-escalation:

- Try to stay calm and offer a non-threatening tone and body language
- Do not meet yelling with yelling
- Remember to breathe, individuals usually hold their breath when fear sets in
- Try to be agreeable even if it is challenging
- Try to maintain a safe distance from the abuser
- In the aftermath, one should nurture one's self and swaddle themselves in self-love, self-forgiveness, and self-compassion
- Often individuals who live in abusive situations also live with PTSD and trauma, it is helpful to find a therapist, meditations or yoga practices to aid in processing the trauma

It is important to note that a cycle of abuse is repeated. It is never just a one-time occurrence, even though an abuser will promise that it is and possibly apologize for the abusive behavior. Shutting down all contact with the abuser is the best way to live in a deescalated space.

My work has centered around clergy for many years. If you're a clergy member looking for additional information on domestic violence, or interested in trained, please visit tethered1.org or [my Instagram page](#) for more information.

Additionally, if you are interested in clergy training to discover how to respond appropriately to an individual who may be experiencing abuse, here is a resource and presentation that I have given on domestic violence and how to be a [sensitive responder](#).

Lastly, if you or someone you know is in a domestic violence situation currently and looking for support please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233. If you'd prefer to chat, visit <https://www.thehotline.org/> for live chat options. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.

Courtney Armento is driven to inspire the power of community to create systemic change. In that vein, she co-authored resolution [GA-1928](#), A Call to See and Respond to the Crisis of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence. This resolution is a call to action for the whole church around education, support and reduction of violence at every level of the church and community. Currently, due to the subversive nature of

abuse, leaders do not believe that abuse is happening in their communities. Courtney is intentionally Un-Silencing Domestic Violence with her clergy training curriculum. Courtney graduated from Claremont School of Theology with her Master of Divinity and earned a 40-hour certificate Domestic Violence Crisis Intervention, Illinois in 2018. She is currently the Pastor of The First Christian Church of Antelope Valley, in Lancaster California.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.