

## When Someone Discloses Abuse: A Safety-First Guide for Pastors & Ministry Leaders

### 60-Second Response (what to say right now)

- “Thank you for trusting me. I believe you.”
- “Your safety is my first concern. You do not have to decide anything today.”
- “Let’s talk through options and connect you with a confidential advocate.”

### Do

- Listen without interrupting. Reflect feelings, not judgments.
- Ask safety questions: “Are you safe to go home today?” “Is the abusive person here/on staff?”
- Offer private space, water, and time.
- Contact a **confidential advocate** (with consent) to begin a **safety plan**.
- Know your **mandatory reporting** duties (minors, vulnerable adults, imminent danger).
- Document factually (date, time, what you heard, next steps), store securely.

### Don’t

- Don’t suggest couples counseling or meetings with the abusive partner.
- Don’t pressure forgiveness, prayer meetings with the partner, or “reconciliation.”
- Don’t minimize (“everyone argues”) or theologize away danger.
- Don’t investigate like law enforcement—preserve the person’s agency and privacy.

### Scope & Referrals

- Pastoral care ≠ clinical care. Your role: **believe, protect, refer, support**.
- Build a trusted referral list (trauma-informed therapists, DV advocates, legal aid).

### Policy Checklist (start this month)

- ☐ Written policy & survivor-centered reporting pathway posted on your site
- ☐ Anonymous reporting form + third-party hotline option
- ☐ Annual abuse-prevention training for staff, elders, and volunteers
- ☐ Background checks for all who serve with minors/vulnerable adults
- ☐ Clear pastoral-care boundaries (location, documentation, scope, referrals)
- ☐ Safety language in membership materials and premarital programs
- ☐ Platform policy: no stage/leadership for substantiated abusers
- ☐ Child/youth two-adult rule & room visibility standards
- ☐ Annual public safety update to the congregation

### **Sermon/Teaching Commitments (sample lines)**

- “Abuse is sin. We will protect people made in God’s image, even when that costs us.”
- “Betrayal breaks covenant; safety and truth come before ‘saving appearances.’”
- “If you need help today, we have private, confidential options—come see a pastor or text the number in the bulletin.”

### **Charleston-Area & National Resources (share discreetly)**

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | Text **START** to **88788** | thehotline.org
- **My Sister’s House (Lowcountry):** Advocacy, shelter, safety planning — mysistershouse.org
- **SCCADVASA (State Coalition):** sccadvasa.org (find local programs)

Visit [www.steadfastchristiancousenling.com](http://www.steadfastchristiancousenling.com) for more resources to help make your church more trauma-informed and full of care.