



Reaffirming Individual Dignity: Exposing Coercive Control

CAUTION: If you suspect that your loved one or a parishioner is a victim of abuse, proceed cautiously and remember that your own safety (and that of your own family) is also at risk.

Note that abuse counselors customarily have security measures in place before they attempt to help a victim. Others ordinarily have no such protection. Your own reputation, psychological well-being, and physical safety could be targeted when you help someone who is a victim.

Listen to podcasts that allow victims to tell their dating & domestic violence stories to become aware of the risks that could be involved in controlling relationships. Reach out to Cleveland's Family Justice Center, or other domestic abuse organizations, for guidance when you help a victim. One of the least risky ways that an outsider can help prevent coercive control and abuse is to encourage every person (no matter their marital status) to maintain historically important relationships meaningfully and independently.

For help, contact the **Cuyahoga County Family Justice Center** at 216-443-7345 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233. Read USCCB's "[When I call for Help](#)" for more information on the Church's response to domestic violence.

Segment #1

Hope and Healing - Reaffirming Individual Dignity: Exposing Coercive Control

Some abused spouses believe that the Catholic Church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. Well-meaning family members, fellow parishioners and clergy may further encourage a person to stay in an abusive relationship. However, the US Catholic Bishops emphasize that "no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage". ("When I call for Help" <https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence>). Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. The abuser has already broken the marriage covenant through his or her abusive behavior.

Children suffer abuse *just by witnessing* one spouse abuse another. For the wellbeing of the children and of the target spouse, it is important to highlight that primary needs of victims are: being heard, being believed, having knowledgeable people available to speak with, eventually learning about coercive control, and, if needed and when ready, reasserting their own dignity and/or getting safely away from the abusive situation. Safety from abuse is a primary concern but it must be coordinated carefully, since any form of abuse can escalate the situation into violence. Clergy, family members and friends are all welcome to call domestic violence hotlines and shelters to get more information any step of the way.

Church clergy, family and fellow parishioners prevent harm by educating themselves about coercive control and abuse. They can become proficient in recognizing and resisting coercive control tactics - tactics such as covertly controlling and isolating. Motivated parishioners and clergy are welcome to connect with local abuse victim centers for continued education. This summer a team of trainers will be presenting to deacons and their wives at the St Lawrence institute and that presentation can be replicated at a deanery or parish. We will continue to have content in this newsletter also.

Stay tuned in the following months to learn more.