

Beeston Free Church

Care Policy

Introduction

As God's people we have the privilege and responsibility of caring for our world, those in our community, our family and also our local church. We do that because the Lord cares for us (Zechariah 10:3, 1 Peter 5:7). We have particular responsibility to provide pastoral care and support for those who are members of Beeston Free Church. This policy primarily outlines our responsibilities as a church to our members. However, we recognise that it may, at times, also be appropriate to offer care and support in line with the principles and practices of this policy, to others who regularly attend or participate in our activities.

We want this policy to set out a basic theology and practice of member care at Beeston Free Church. We want all our care, in both its framework and practice, to be driven by biblical principles.

A brief theology of care

There are two important biblical themes which direct our convictions about congregational care; the image of 'shepherd' and the image of 'family'.

The Bible describes God as a Shepherd (Genesis 48:15, 49:24, Psalm 23:1-3). As a shepherd, God leads and guides (Ps. 23:2-3; Isa. 40:11), provides (Ps. 23:1; Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:5-6; Hos. 4:16; Mic. 7:14), protects (Ps. 28:9; Gen. 9:23-24), saves those who are lost or scattered (Jer. 31:10; Ps. 119:176; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 34:11-16; Matt. 18:12-14) and judges (Ezek. 34:17-22; Jer. 23:1; Zech. 10:2-3; 11:16; Matt. 25:32-46).

Jesus calls Himself the "good shepherd" who "lays down his life for his sheep" in John 10:11 and is also called the "great shepherd of the sheep" in Hebrews 13:20 and the "chief Shepherd" in 1 Peter 5:4. The Church is called God's flock in 1 Peter 5:2 and Acts 20:28-29. In these texts, the elders of the Church serve God's people as under-shepherds of the true Shepherd. Peter is building on the direction that Jesus gave him in John 21:15-17 to "feed my lambs...take care of my sheep...feed my sheep." Shepherds who do not care well for God's people are condemned in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 and Jesus contrasts himself with these bad shepherds in John 10:12-13.

God's people represent Him, in part, by shepherding each other (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4); To "one another" is found 59 times in the New Testament (eg Romans 13:8;15:4; Galatians 5:13; Colossians 3:16). As shepherds care for their sheep, so God's people are to care for one another. This is particularly true for those called to pastoral ministry in the local church.

The Bible also describes God as Father (Isaiah. 9:6). The Father has existed eternally as Father to the Son (John 1:1, 14; 17:24). As Creator and Sustainer of all things, God is called the Father of all creation (1 Cor. 8:6). In the Old Testament, God is called the Father of the nation of Israel (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10). He is also described as the Father of David (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron.17:13), of Solomon (1 Chron. 22:10; 28:6), of the fatherless (Ps. 68:5) and of the promised Christ (Ps. 89:26). In the New Testament, God is the Son's own Father (John 5:18) and also the Father of all the redeemed, whom He has adopted into His family (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5).

God's children then relate to one another using family images of brother and sister, mother and fathers (Hebrews 13:1, Mark 3:34-35, 1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Philosophy of care

The Bible gives us a beautiful picture of how believers are to interact with and care for one another: with love, humility and respect (Eph. 4:2, 32; 1 Pet. 3:8; Col. 3:13). As already noted, the New Testament identifies 59 "one anothers" that describe the way we care for and love other believers. We believe that the Lord has called us to belong to a local congregation of believers and that care is best provided in the context of community (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 12:25).

Elders shepherd through prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-7). Elders have the responsibility for oversight of the care of all the flock (Acts 20:20) as under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-4) to whom they are accountable. These Scriptures place a primary accountability for shepherding God's flock on elders but also elders will appoint others to help them carry out this important work (Acts 6:1-7, Titus 2:1-8, 1 Timothy 5:1-16).

Care includes both formative care (discipleship) and corrective care (discipline). As a covenant community of God's people, being a member of a church means we will both give and receive care. We both have a responsibility towards one another and the privilege of receiving care from others (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15).

Formative care at Beeston Free

We should expect to be discipled within Beeston Free Church growing in our knowledge and love of Christ (2 Peter 3:18). First and foremost, that takes place in our regular Sunday gatherings when we come to pray, praise, listen and respond to God's word, fellowship together and receive the blessings of baptism and the Lord's supper. It will also take place in various more specific ways including small groups and ministry focused on specific topics or sub groups of the church. We believe that formative care comes as the gospel is understood through God's Word, applied to life by God's Spirit and responded to in faith by God's people (1 Timothy 3:16-17, John 17:17, Acts 2:42-47). Individuals receiving formative care are called to be active disciples rather than passive recipients and to ensure they are pressing on in godliness (1 Cor 9:24-27, 1 Tim 4:7).

Corrective care at Beeston Free

When a church member departs from living under the lordship of Christ, the loving implication of being in a covenant community is that the church, represented by the elders and fellow believers, calls that member back to a holy life that honours God. This process of calling a church member back to his or her commitment to Christ is often referred to as corrective care. As examples, this may involve challenge, regular input over a period of time, asking an individual to step out of serving or consideration of removal from membership in line with the church rules (see rule 2.4).

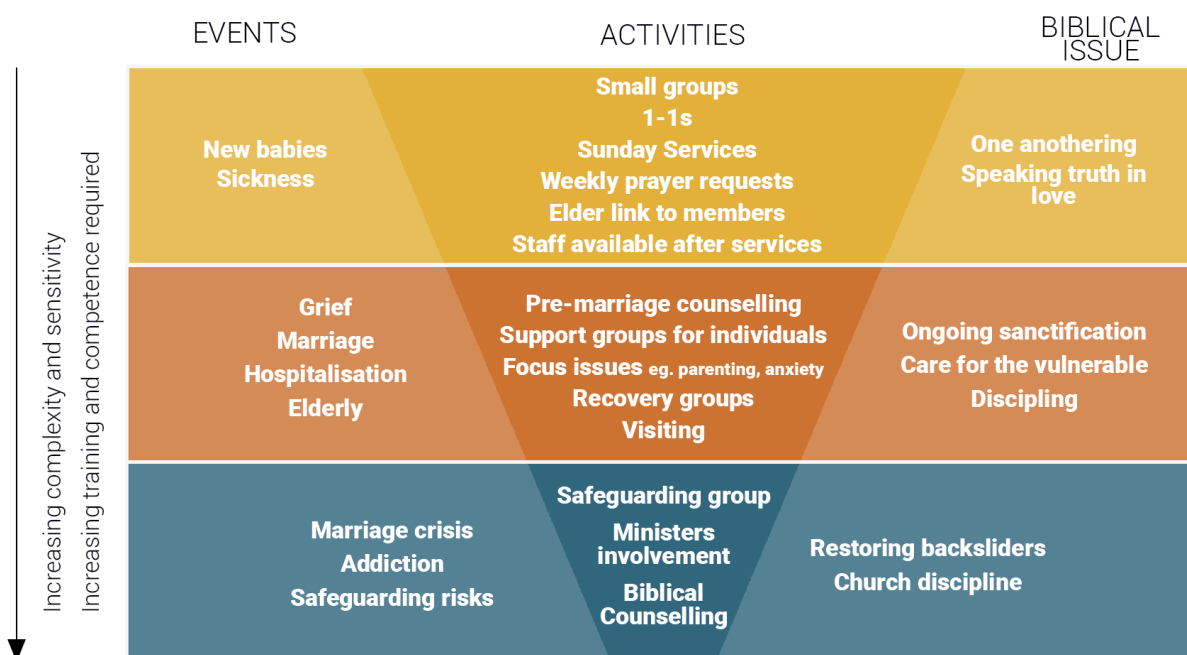
Like formative care, corrective care is about love. The author of Hebrews contends: "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6). So the motive for practising corrective care is always love, and the ultimate goal is restoration (1 Cor. 5:5). When the motive of love and the goal of restoration are lost, then the church will become liable to abuse the

practice of correction. There will be a tendency to then put policies before people and practices before pastoral sensibilities. The church must always enter into the practice of corrective care with sobriety, humility and love.

When practised rightly, corrective care will result in the good of the person being disciplined, the good of other Christians, a healthier church and a gospel-focused witness, which exalts Christ.

The practice and structure of care

Both formative and corrective care may take place, to some extent, in any interaction where the gospel is applied to individual lives. Care at Beeston Free is understood to move from more general to more specific care. General care will apply to everyone within the church, whilst more specific care relates to those facing particular issues. Also we recognise that in God’s providence he brings us into different situations in life which will need different levels of care. The funnel below shows this movement from more general to more specific care. The more specific care will generally involve more complicated issues and require more focused care, often relying on those with the appropriate gifts, skills, recognised role within church to support people in such situations. Sometimes specialised care is needed alongside general and specific care. This should be provided by those most skilled to provide it and may include involving external support services (eg medical, social care, support groups with expertise in a particular area).



General care

General care is the foundational level for care and is provided by and for the members of the church. This care occurs as the body of Christ lives out the “one anothering” found in the New Testament. General care occurs at services, in homegroups and other bible study groups, in weekly prayer, through ministry teams and wherever else the church gathers together.

Formative teaching from these settings can be applied to situations that may be difficult and so challenge our faith. They can also expose areas where we're prone to self-sufficiency or complacency. Teaching and care at these times also prepare us for times of deeper struggle.

All believers can do a great deal to serve the body of the church as we speak the truth in love and care for one another. However, all believers should care for and love one another with great humility and gentleness, bearing with one another (Ephesians 4:1-2), so that we do not unwittingly do harm to one another.

General care is:

- a place to practise "one anothering" in community
- a place for one-on-one or small group discipleship.
- a place to share common experiences, struggles and victories.
- a place to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.
- a place to point each other to Christ and the gospel for daily life.
- a place to pray together, looking to the Spirit for his help
- a place to provide support and encouragement for the efforts that are being made at the specific and specialised care levels.

General care is not:

- a place to offer advice which is outside one's general life experience.
- a place to offer advice regarding matters about which one's personal experience cannot be safely generalised—for example, mental health issues, abuse, biblical permissibility of divorce/remarriage, etc. (Example: "I went through a season of depression and didn't need medication, so you don't either.")
- a place to offer authoritative advice beyond what is explicitly prescribed by the Bible.
- a place to undermine or invalidate the work that is being done at the specific levels.
- a place for making psychiatric or medical "diagnoses."

This care is overseen by the elders and ministry staff. Training in specific areas, including general safeguarding training aimed at raising awareness and confidence, is offered to all ministry groups. Support guidance and signposting to other resources is available from the ministry and safeguarding teams.

Specific care

The transition to specific care occurs when a more particular discipling need is identified or when someone faces a particular stage of life issue which needs more support.

This more specific care often happens when a church member or someone supporting them, reaches out to an elder, a member of staff or a trusted individual (like a small group leader) for additional support.

The ministry staff and elders have overall responsibility for making sure that general care stays within the bounds of general care. We want to support those administering general care to know that they look for support from staff or elders and that when needs become more acute, they do not take on more responsibility for individuals than they are able and equipped to do.

Each area of ministry is overseen by a member of the ministry staff. Each homegroup and individual member also has a link elder whose role it is to provide a point of contact and a source of support and guidance in identifying support needs and facilitating additional support where required.

No two people are the same and so therefore the care each person needs is different. By its very nature, care ministry is often messy and hard. When someone reaches out for additional help, the specific case should be assessed and wise, helpful and situationally-appropriate next steps can be pursued.

Helpful questions to ask at this point include:

- How can this individual's "general care" community come alongside him/her in this season?
- Is there a wise, more mature believer in the church body who has some level of training or experience and can provide more extensive accountability and support?
- Is a specific support group an appropriate community for this individual at this time i.e. a group for accountability regarding sexual sin?
- Is there a need for a small group to provide practical support and care outside of existing structures ie to visit regularly or help with practical tasks?
- Is there a need for a training course/ad hoc support group that the individual would benefit from alongside others i.e. training in responding to those who have experienced trauma?
- Is this individual a candidate for some kind of specialised help? Would meeting with a staff member for a season be helpful? Would this individual benefit from a period of biblical counselling? Should they be encouraged to seek external support or care, for example from a medical professional?

Ministry staff, volunteers and elders serve primarily to provide spiritual direction based in God's Word and how it applies to one's life before God. We therefore encourage one another to limit the scope of our care to guiding people spiritually, pointing them to Christ and the gospel, looking to God's Word, praying for people and depending on God's Spirit to bring change. As in general care, we ask them to avoid the use of psychiatric labels or clinical "diagnoses", to not counsel outside the bounds of general spiritual guidance. We want to support the work of mental health providers and other outside agencies with appropriate expertise. We recognize that some members of our church have professional expertise in some medical areas and we will seek their input when appropriate.

For the most complex cases and situations, we anticipate that a combination of staff, safeguarding team, elders and our biblical counselling coordinator will be involved. Where there are safeguarding aspects, the safeguarding team will certainly be included in determining the appropriate formative and corrective care. Where there are issues that could lead to formal church discipline, two or more elders will certainly be involved.

Care which needs external intervention

Some situations a care need may be beyond the expertise or care the church can or should offer; this may be because medical intervention is needed (for example mental health issues that require treatment by professionals), police involvement is required (in cases of fraud, crime, abuse) or social care involvement is required when abuse that has reached the threshold for reporting.

In these situations we will, as appropriate, either encourage the individual to seek help from the relevant agency or report to the agency directly. This will not remove the need for ongoing care from the church, but such care should support the work of the external agencies.

Confidentiality

We are committed to handling all personal information sensitively and with integrity, whether in small group settings or in care given by the ministry team. We will seek to be clear and honest about the sharing of information at all times.

It would not normally be appropriate to share information which has been shared in confidence without consent. However there are exceptional situations where there are significant risks to the individual or others where consent to share such information may not be required. This may include:

1. When there are concerns that the person is at risk of harming themselves or harming others
2. When we believe there may be ongoing abuse taking place that requires the information be shared with statutory authorities and shared with safeguarding officers within the church as per the church safeguarding policy
3. When someone mentions something that raises a concern of risk to someone else, especially where that person is under the age of 18. For example, if there's reason to believe that someone who has caused harm to the individual may continue to pose a risk to others.
4. When there is a legal requirement to share information with authorities (for example a court of law requests the information is shared).

When it is necessary to share information without consent we will, wherever possible, inform the individual(s) what information has been shared, with whom and for what purpose.

Affirmations and Denials for Care

The interaction of discipling, pastoral care, biblical counselling and safeguarding can be a challenging one. The affirmations and denials below look to give us some tracks to run on as we try and navigate what are sometimes competing concerns.

We affirm that God created men and women with both a soul and a body, which are both distinct and yet united. We have both an “outer self” and an “inner self” (Gen. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:16).

We deny that the human person can be simplistically split so that we will disciple with the whole person in mind. Biblical counselling views our human problems as issues of the whole person.

We affirm that all of humanity, though created good, was pervasively corrupted in the Fall (Gen. 3), resulting in varying degrees of sin and suffering affecting all members of the human race. Our issues are rooted in humanity’s rebellion though not all issues we face directly arise from our personal sin. In our care, we want to give adequate recognition to the categories of suffering as a result of sin against us, as well as the issues of our personal sin.

We deny that all issues are simply spiritual issues or rooted in personal sin. For this reason, we gravitate away from potentially reductionist approaches which would root every issue in our personal sin without giving adequate recognition to the fallen world we live in and the suffering we experience.

We affirm that the Bible is God’s self-revelation. As His inspired Word, it is authoritative, inerrant, clear and sufficient to tell us everything that we need to know about God and ourselves in relationship to Him. It is the final, ultimate authority regarding human beings so it must inform the use of knowledge from other disciplines.

We deny that Scripture intends to provide exhaustive knowledge about people and the diversity of problems in a broken world. The sufficiency of Scripture is a sufficiency of divine words. However the doctrines of general revelation and common grace, are important for us in providing care and understanding of individuals. Rightly understood, general revelation and common grace will not contradict the clear testimony of Scripture.

We affirm that extra-biblical knowledge and means are important provisions of God for humanity. Medical treatment, psychological research, psychotherapy and counselling, and psychoactive medication provide real help and healing to people but should be approached with discernment.

We deny that the Bible intends to serve as a textbook for biopsychosocial (biological, psychological and social factors and their interaction) problems, although it does give insight into them.

Theology of Oppression

The Church needs a theology of oppression to accompany her theology of suffering. The theme of suffering is found throughout the Scriptures, but so is the theme of oppression. God's Word teaches us that suffering produces sanctification (Rom. 5:3–4) and that pain has good purpose (Rom. 8:28–29). The Bible also tells us that God comforts us in our suffering so that we can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3–4) and that we suffer because Christ suffered (1 Pet. 2:21), among other things. But whilst we recognise the inevitability of suffering and God's working in it, this is not a reason or excuse or justification for causing suffering. We also don't want to minimise or play down the harmfulness of suffering that church members experience. In particular we want to stand against oppression, the harmful and unjust treatment of others by those in authority.

God hates oppression. We should hate what God hates. "The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence" (Ps. 11:5).

God hears the cries of the oppressed and delivers them. In Scripture when the oppressed cry out to God, He hears them and He does something about it. God sees and hears the oppressed and he acts on behalf of the oppressed to deliver them (see Gen. 16, 31 and Ex. 1–2).

God's people must respond to human oppression as God responds to it. Because God sees the oppressed, hears their cries and acts with compassion, mercy and justice, we should do the same.

Domestic Abuse Policy

Domestic abuse is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser's spouse through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify themselves.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse may occur in a pattern that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated by accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual and/or psychological means.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification—to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term “domestic violence,” is pervasive in our culture. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime ([see here](#), pg 99). Domestic abuse is underreported, so those statistics are conservative. The statistical probability is that domestic abuse is just as pervasive at Beeston Free as it is in the culture outside of the church, so we must be alert to it.

Domestic violence in any form—physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological or spiritual—is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being and is therefore an assault upon God Himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the victim. Domestic abuse severely damages relationships and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages flourishing, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear. Given this acknowledgment, Beeston Free Church affirms the following:

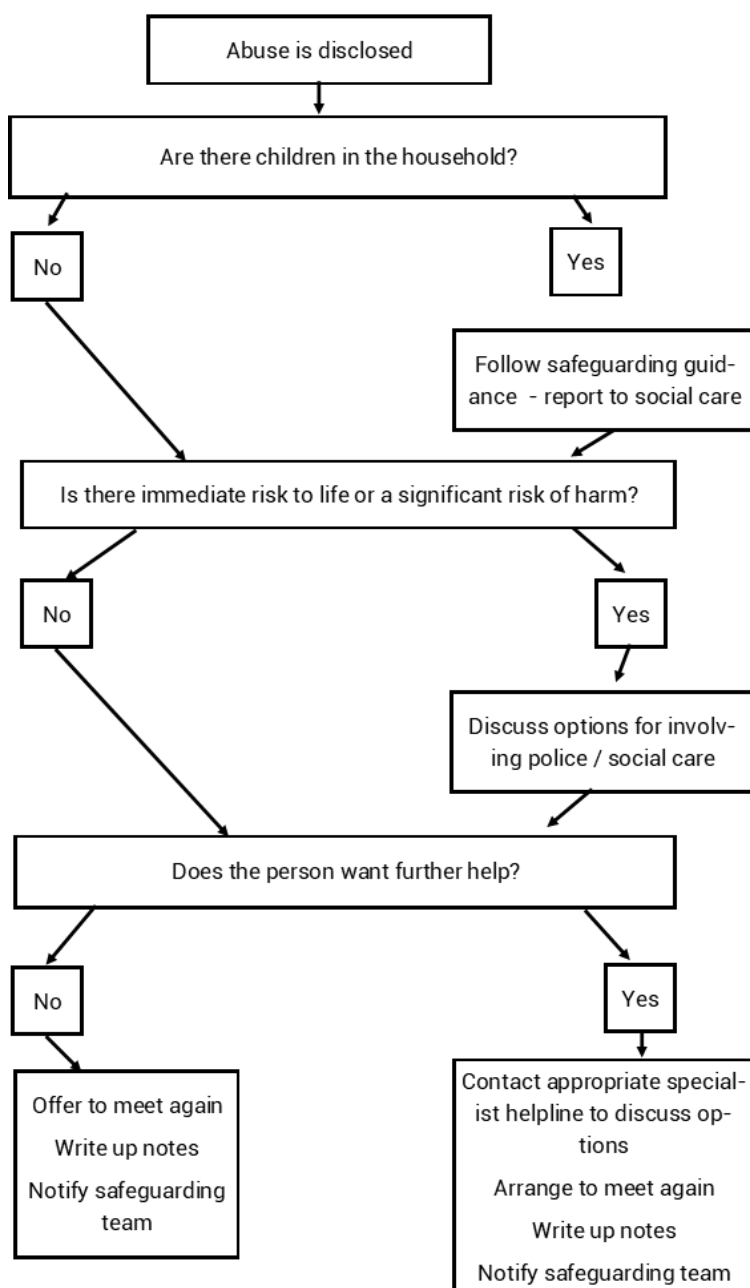
- Domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.
- All abuse is spiritually damaging for both the victim and the abuser and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family and close friendships.
- Domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
- Domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage problem, the victim's problem or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem.
- Domestic abuse should be a topic that people feel is acceptable to raise within the church.
- We will listen to, take seriously, support and care for those reporting or affected by domestic abuse.
- We will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counselling and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship.
- We will not seek to investigate charges of abuse but will refer both the abused person and the perpetrator of the abuse to competent professional counsellors, and potentially legal counsel, and rely upon their determinations. We will report to social care where appropriate. We will stand with victims in seeking legal remedies should that be their decision.
- We will discipline abusers and remove them from church membership if they are unrepentant.

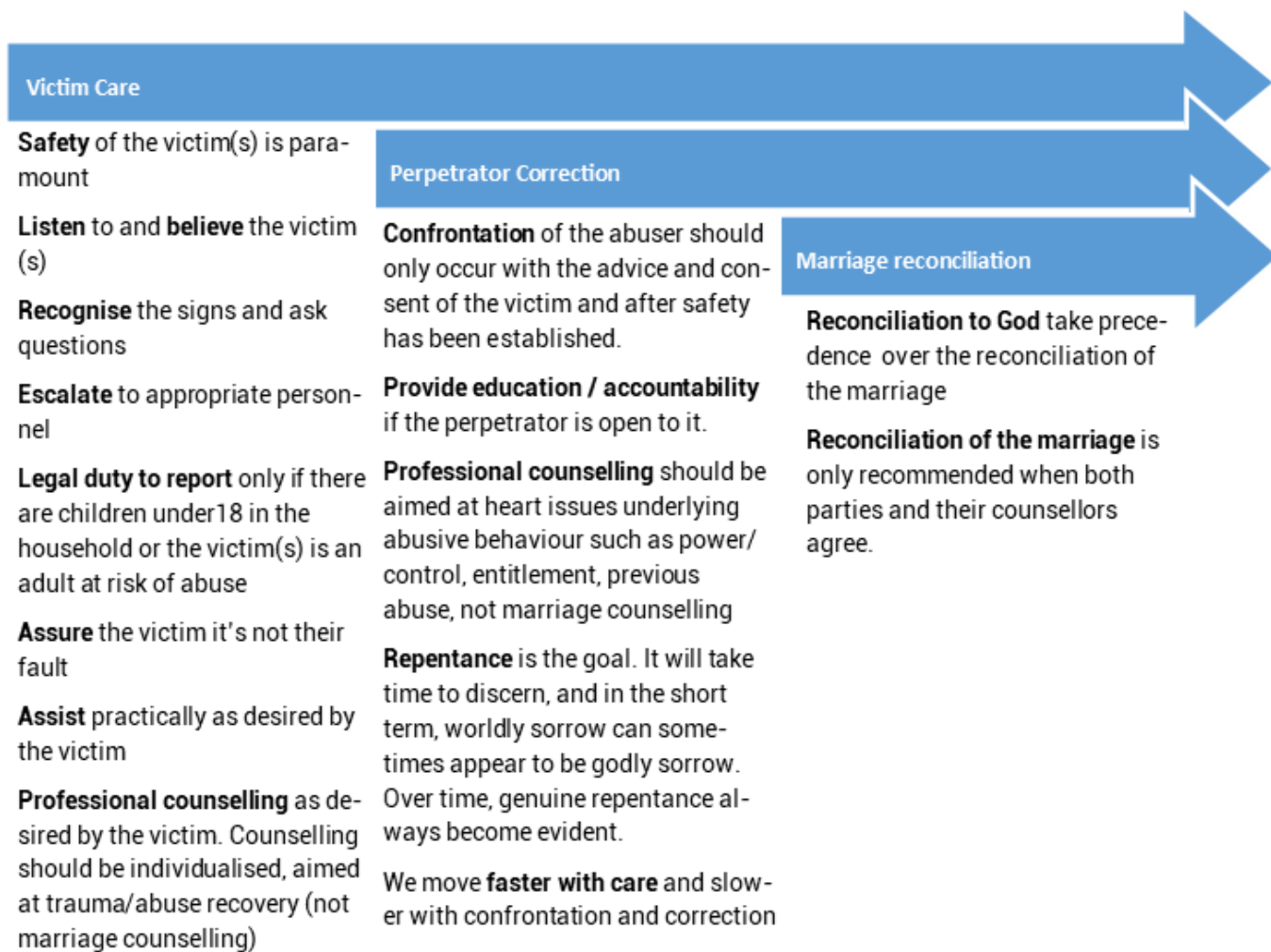
- We will work with local domestic abuse support agencies, will learn from them and will support them in appropriate ways. Details of local support services can be found here (<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-support>)
- We will teach what healthy relationships look like and that domestic abuse, in all its forms, is a sin.
- We will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity and worth.

Responding to Domestic Abuse

In cases of domestic abuse, we will move first to care for the victim, then to correct the perpetrator and finally, if appropriate, to reconcile the marriage.

To care for the victim we will use the following flowchart





Based on a model from the Village church

[https://thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Beliefs/Institute%20-%202018%20-%20Care%20-%20Process%20-%20Paper%20-%20Web%20\(1\).pdf](https://thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Beliefs/Institute%20-%202018%20-%20Care%20-%20Process%20-%20Paper%20-%20Web%20(1).pdf)

Appendix 1 Useful resources

Gospel Coalition / Jennifer Greenberg Instagram 21.10.2022 8 signs of true repentance

1. A repentant person is appalled by sin.

Horrified by what they've done they'll humble themselves, grieve the pain they've caused, and be cut to the heart in their conviction. As the prophet mourned in Isaiah 6:5, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips"

2. They make amends.

In Luke 19:1-10, we read the story of Zacchaeus – a tax collector, thief, and oppressor of God's people – made amends. **"..if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount"** (v8). Jesus confirmed the authenticity of Zacchaeus' repentance: "Today salvation has come to this house" (v9).

3. They accept consequences.

A genuinely repentant person will accept consequences. These may include losing the trust of others, relinquishing a position of authority, or submitting to worldly authorities such as law enforcement. When the thief on the cross repented, he said to his companion, "Do you not fear God? ...We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve" (Luke 23:40-41). And Jesus commended his repentance by assuring him of his salvation: "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)

4. They don't expect or demand forgiveness.

Often I've been told by my abuser, "If you don't forgive me, God won't forgive you". But this threatening posture indicates insincere repentance. It's unloving, manipulative and implies that the offender doesn't accept or comprehend the gravity of what they have done. **When Jacob approached Esau and repented he didn't expect mercy let alone compassion.** In Genesis 32 we read he felt "great fear and "distress" (v7). He anticipated an attack (v11) and considered himself unworthy of kindness (v10). In fact, so certain was Jacob of retribution that he separated his wives, children and servants from him lest Esau's anger fall on them too.

5. They feel the depth of the pain they have caused.

A repentant person won't try to minimise, downplay or excuse what they have done. They won't point to all their good works as if those actions somehow outweigh or cancel out the bad. They'll view even their "righteous acts" as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). They won't shame the offended party for being hurt or angry. They won't blame their victims or other people for making them sin. Rather, they'll take responsibility, acknowledge the damage they've done and express remorse.

6. They change their behaviour.

A truly repentant person will realise they need God to sanctify their heart. **They'll proactively work to change their behaviour and take steps to avoid sin and temptation.** That may mean seeing a counsellor, going to rehab or asking friends, pastors, or law enforcement to give them oversight

and hold them accountable. Consider the stark contrast between the church persecutor Saul before salvation and after. Acts 9 tells us that even though some Christians were understandably hesitant to trust him, his character had already altered dramatically.

7. They grant space to heal.

The fruit of the Spirit includes patience, kindness, grace, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23). A truly repentant person will demonstrate these consistently. They won't feel entitled to trust or acceptance; rather they will be humble, unassuming, and willing to sacrifice their own wants and needs for the benefit of the injured party. **They won't pressure us to hurry up and "get over it" or "move on"**. Rather they'll understand our distrust, acknowledge our grief and honour the boundaries we've requested.

As an abuser, they loved their sin more that they loved you. As a repentant sinner, they should love you more that their sin and pride.

8. They are awestruck by forgiveness

If a person feels entitled to forgiveness, they don't value forgiveness. When Jacob received Esau's forgiveness, he was so astounded he wept: "To see your face is like seeing the face of God, for you have received me favourably" (Gen. 30:10). **Jacob realised that forgiveness is a divine miracle, a picture of the Messiah, and a sign of the Lord's mercy.** Though Jacob and Esau hadn't spoken for 40 years, Jacob knew God had enabled Esau, by grace, to forgive him.