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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2012 CONVENTION PANEL DISCUSSION

*The document shown below was submitted by Erin Callinan, Training Coordinator, **Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence** who spoke to over 400 delegates and guests at the 2012 Philoptochos Convention as a panelist at the Department of Social Work program on domestic violence.*

*In addition to the suggestions shown below as well as those in the partner document, “What To Do When a Woman Confides in You,” we recommend that you refer to the Philoptochos manual, “**Domestic Violence: Identifying and Responding to Domestic Violence in the Greek Orthodox Community**” as a resource. It can be found at:
http://philoptochos.org/assets/files/socialservices/factsheets/DVmanual-REV_2012.pdf.*

WHAT TO SAY TO A WOMAN YOU THINK IS BEING ABUSED

Many women involved with controlling partners need and use the help of an outsider to leave the relationship. Yet most of these outsiders never know how much they help. The problem is the lag between the time a woman receives helpful information or support and the time she feels ready to act on it. Kerry says, 'A social worker at the hospital gave me a card with my legal rights and a shelter phone number, and I carried it around for months before I was able to call.' Today Kerry wishes she could thank that worried social worker. (She tried but the woman had moved away.) Kerry says 'When I left her office that day, I told her I didn't need any help. I told her I was fine. I told her I loved my boyfriend! I'm sure she was totally frustrated. The sad thing is, she had no idea she saved my life.'

If you conclude that your relative, friend, neighbor, or co-worker probably is emotionally or physically abused, and that you want to help, keep in mind two fundamental principles. First, give yourself and the woman you care about some time to make changes. And second, remember that there is no single correct way to help. The important thing is that you try.

The hardest part of talking to an abused woman is getting started. Because a controlling partner lays all the blame on her, a woman is likely to hear any questions about her actions or her background or her personal life as accusations. Such questions will silence her. Many women feel particularly blamed when outsiders ask probing questions about their childhoods. Julia says 'I was afraid my husband might kill me any day, and everybody wanted to ask me a million questions about me and my parent-as if there was something wrong with us.'

Create enough privacy and enough time for her to talk at length if she feels like it. Then, it is often most helpful to say the obvious: 'You seem so unhappy. Do you want to talk about it? I'd like to listen and I'll keep it between us.' Even if she rejects the offer, your observation about her unhappiness supports her by affirming some of her feelings. And you've left the door open for a confidential conversation in the future.

If she wants to talk but can't get started, any of the following questions might help. Notice that these questions do NOT imply that you are psychoanalyzing her, looking for explanations of her behavior, challenging her, or passing judgment. Instead, they invite the woman to talk about what the controlling partner does and what she feels about it.

- What's it like at home for you?
- What happens when you and your partner disagree or argue?
- How does your partner handle things when he doesn't get his way? What does he do?
- Are you ever scared of him? Does he threaten you?
- Does he ever prevent you from doing things you want to do?
- Does he ever follow you?
- Do you have to account to him for your time?
- Is he jealous, hard to please, irritable, demanding, and critical?
- Does he put you down, call you names, yell at you, and punish you in any way?
- Does he ever push you around or hit you?
- Does he ever make you have sex? Does he ever make you do sexual things you don't like?

You can help a woman feel safe by assuring her that you'll keep her story confidential-and doing so. When she tells you her story, listen attentively. Don't interrupt. And don't let your facial expression or body language convey doubt or judgment of what she's saying. When she finishes talking, ask, 'How can I help?' Let her know that you care and that there are people and agencies that want to assist her. She may not know (and it is important to tell her) that thousands of other women experience such abuse and that, over the last [several] years, special shelters, services, and laws have been created to help them. Make clear that her partner has a problem, and that she cannot fix it, no matter how much she wants or how hard she tries.

And remember, if she refuses to talk to you today or says 'no' to your offer of additional help, she has her reasons. Express your concern for her anyway. Tell her that emotional abuse and physical abuse are wrong and she deserves better. Assure her that you will stand by, ready to talk or help, if she asks. Then give her time.

Suggestions from 'When Love Goes Wrong' by Ann Jones and Susan Schechter, 1992 Harper Collins, Chapter 13 'For Family, Friends and Helpers'