

## Letter from the editor

As I pursued information on faith based issues for this edition of Reshape I became increasingly more excited about the possibilities presented here. So often we frame issues based on our personal perspective, and in this case these perspectives are often framed early in our lives by our parents, social communities and the particular faith community in which we grew up. Most of us were subtly (or perhaps not so subtly) taught what we have come to know as the "truth" with regard to spiritual faith. When talking about assisting members to serve victims of sexual violence, we would be remiss not to recognize that there are many types of faith and even though we may not be familiar with them we can not fail to recognize that faith is a very important facet of life for many people. Faith shapes us into who we are, it influences the way we structure life, dictates the rituals we observe and the holidays we celebrate. It is a very powerful force in our lives and spirituality has been studied for as long as we have tread the earth. To be successful in our mission to eliminate sexual violence we must recognize, engage and respect the many faiths of those around us.

I have divided the articles in this newsletter into two sections, the first section addresses the specific work coalitions are doing in collaborating with others in the faith community and the second section provides strategies that community based programs can use to better serve sexual assault victims or build their capacity to work with survivors in a particular faith. Throughout the newsletter I have endeavored to provide a platform for many diverse voices to be heard representing people of faith who are members of the Jewish, Buddhist, Christian or Muslim communities. Both sections will hopefully provide you with valuable assistance in increasing your ability to serve people in a variety of faith communities.

This edition of Reshape is an appetizer: just a little nibble that hopefully will inspire you to begin to

work with many different faith communities in your service area. So read up my friend and feast yourself on the good work and words from sister coalitions and others who support you in your effort to effect social change through building relationships with our communities of faith.

Evelyn Larsen

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### Section One:

The three articles in this section are filled with ideas and strategies for coalitions that are interested in working in collaboration with faith communities or in providing a conference or training for integrating community partners into faith driven working groups such as the one developed by South Carolina.

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### Section Two:

The information in this section can be used to support community based programs within our service areas that are working with members of particular faith communities or to further increase our understanding of particular faith groups and therefore increase our ability to support them and their work on ending sexual violence. This section provides information to use in building your own capacity with a particular faith community or to expand the ability to collaborate or provide assistance to both faith communities and those wanting to work with communities of faith.

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# Why We Do What We Do... Working to End Sexual & Domestic Violence

A speech by the Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune,  
reprinted with permission  
FaithTrust Institute, October 25, 2003

During my recent sabbatical, my writing focused on a complete revision of my first book: Sexual Violence-The Unmentionable Sin, which was published 20 years ago and is still in print. I wanted to do this revision to update the material and keep the book in print. But it has also allowed me to consider how far we have come in the past twenty years of this work.

*In summary, my conclusion is that: everything has changed and nothing is different...*

For example, our understanding of sexual assault and abuse is much more nuanced now. For awhile we were relying on the nature of rape to determine the wrong of rape. This suggests how difficult it is to make a moral argument against sexual violence in a patriarchal culture. In other words, if a rapist is motivated by a desire of power and control and uses violence to achieve that end, then we can condemn the behavior and hold him accountable for it. This argument rests on the assumption that violence against another person is wrong and unacceptable. If, however, a rapist is motivated by sexual desire, i.e., is aroused and forces another person sexually, the moral argument gets more difficult because sexual desire is viewed as "normal," a moral good. It also shifts

the focus to the victim, i.e., the "source" of the rapist's arousal: what was she (or he) wearing, doing, saying that "causes" the rapist to be aroused? Hence the moral question was turned on its head: it became about the victim's behavior rather than the rapist's behavior. Our ethics turned on our clinical assertions about the nature of sexual violence.

This is why in the 1970-80's, the anti-rape movement in the U.S. spent so much energy focused on "rape is violence, not sex." It was a valiant attempt to carve out a moral stance from which to work for legislative and judicial changes. It was also an effort to re-educate the public and to appeal to a new ethical norm. In many ways, the effort was successful. Public consciousness did change. Laws did change, e.g., many jurisdictions enacted rape shield laws which attempted to prevent a rape victims' s sexual history from being admitted as evidence at trial. Rhetoric shaped consciousness but didn't tell the whole story.

This is why Catherine MacKinnon's rebuttal of "rape is violence, not sex," is so important. She was willing to name the obvious: rape is the extreme expression of a male-defined sexuality of dominance in a patriarchal culture. Sexual violence is normative, not deviant or aberrant behavior. The evidence abounds: the widespread occurrence of sexual violence in multiple forms, the largely ineffective legal response, the overwhelming acceptance by society that "the way things are is the way they have to be."

When I wrote this book in the early 1980's, I did so to help reshape the cultural, political and ethical norms, to make the case that "rape is violence, not sex." I suggested that we have two options of how we might view the nature of sexual violence. I now realize that I was part of the effort to carve out an ethical stance from which to work against sexual violence in a culture which fundamentally accepted it as normative. I have no regrets about

this position. I will continue to argue as a moral norm that sexual experience should take place in a context devoid of coercion and grounded in equality and choice and that sexual violence is the opposite of this.

However wishful thinking cannot overcome the fact that rape is about sex in a patriarchal culture. In order to successfully counter, prevent, and confront sexual violence, we have to recognize that it is about violence and sex in a culture where violence is eroticized. But I will continue to argue from a theological perspective that, often contrary to experience, the coercive nature of sexuality is not an ontological reality which is to say that it is not natural or part of God's created order for men or women. I realize that at this moment in history, this may be more of a statement of faith than anything else. But it is where I have to stand as a woman determined to survive in the culture into which I was born and to change it.

*"Our work together is taking on a new phase..."*

Our work together is taking on a new phase. Although we originally had a naïve expectation that we would be done by now, that after 26 years we would have accomplished our goal of preparing our religious institutions to carry this work forward as an integral part of their ministries, we are not there yet.

And yet from this perspective of 26 years, we see much that has changed.

- Many of our religious institutions are no longer silent in the face of sexual and domestic violence.
- No more do victims of violence necessarily hear words of condemnation and blame from their faith communities.
- Fewer abusers and batterers misuse religious teachings with impunity to justify their actions.

- Abuse by religious leaders, which we did not realize at all 26 years ago, will not go back into the closet.

All of this only means more work for *FaithTrust Institute*. Our leadership and resources are still needed. So we move into this new century with a new name, a new Board, and new program to respond to the issues before us. Isaiah's wisdom guides us:

*"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (43:18-19)*

Our job is to accept with surprise these new things among us. Our work on sexual and domestic violence requires that we bridge culture, politics, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability and religious affiliation because the work is there in every community, every faith group and our best efforts require us to pool our resources and our wisdom. This is the fundamental philosophy of *FaithTrust Institute* which continues to guide us into the future.

*"We are called to simply be faithful to this task."*

Our work is profoundly spiritual whether changing institutions and policies or supporting individuals who have suffered brokenness from sexual and domestic violence. We will only succeed, and I believe we will succeed, if we sustain our roots in our tradition of spirituality which guide and inspire us every day.

So we mourn and celebrate together, we rage at injustices and we lift up the small victories wherever we find them, because what we do,

or don't do, matters very much to many people. People whose lives have been literally saved, changed, transformed by what we do. Jewish teaching reminds us that to save one life is to save the world.

#### The Way Things Are...

The way things are is not the way they have to be. Do not accept it because your mother did. Perhaps she did what she had to do then.

Do not follow unquestioning in your father's footsteps. He may have chosen a path you do not want. You must do what you can do now. You must choose for yourself.

Someday sexuality will be celebrated and shared as God's gift by all people. Someday equality will be an erotic experience and violence will be abhorred. Someday people will choose one another freely and rejoice in their choosing.

That day is within our reach. We need not wait for another life, another incarnation, another generation. In the dailiness of our lives, with those we love, we can do this differently.

# Pathways to Peace: South Carolina's Conference to Involve the Faith Community in Issues of Domestic Violence.

South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault  
with the Rev. Robin Griffeth  
United Methodist Pastor  
Cameron Charge, Orangeburg, S.C.

Domestic violence is a major problem in South Carolina and it is more often clergy who hear the abused person's first plea for help. But what should be their response?

A South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) conference in November 2003 provided some suggestions to address that question and other needs of women who are members of faith communities. We know and understand that domestic and sexual violence are unique problems requiring specialized counseling and solutions, and faith leaders welcome specific training to help them assist these victims. This conference was designed for pastors, rabbis and imams, as well as other interested faith leaders. The hope of SCCADVASA was that leaders of the faith community come away with a

better understanding of the nature of religious concerns for survivors and perpetrators of family violence, to increase their skills for responding to Christian, Jewish and Muslim survivors, gain knowledge of appropriate referrals, and increase collaboration with community domestic violence and sexual assault services.

The South Carolina Coalition recognized the need for addressing this group as South Carolina ranks third in the nation for women killed by abusive partners. Helping women recognize their situation and find support and safety was recognized as a vital ministry. One pastor said every time she leads a prayer for domestic violence and sexual assault victims, several women will contact her for counseling afterward.

Discussions at the conference included religious responses to domestic violence, what the church can do, ways to reach out to the gay and lesbian community, interventions that can be used with batterers, child sexual abuse and Islamic spiritual sources. An ecumenical group of clergy participated in a roundtable, giving their perspectives. Thelma Burgonio-Watson from the FaithTrust Institute in Seattle, WA gave a keynote speech and there were specialized workshops on the military and family violence, the impact of child abuse, work with Hispanics and those of the Muslim faith.

This conference opened with a dialogue between clergy and domestic violence advocates in the state. According to the Rev. Robin Griffeth, United Methodist pastor of the Cameron Charge in Orangeburg, S.C. "Pathways to Peace" was a way of helping clergy to recognize some of the issues of violence in women's lives and a way to make advocates aware of what resources pastors need.

*"Each side is uneasy about what the other is trying to do. Thus we hope to build some bridges."*

"In the past, poor messages have come from some pastors," Griffeth said, "such things as women needing to submit, 'God won't put more on you than you can handle,' and forgiving seventy times seven." But she noted some clergy also are wary of battered women programs, as well as sexual assault centers, seeing them as places where women are instructed to move toward divorce or to end relationships. Each side is uneasy about what the other is trying to do. Thus we hope to build some bridges. We want clients to get healthy messages; we want clergy to get a reputation about being open to discussing these issues so victims will seek help; and we want clergy to know about the shelters and sexual trauma centers and to feel good about recommending them."

Griffeth worked as counselor at Sistercare and was the training coordinator for SCCADVASA for three years prior to entering seminary to prepare for a pastorate. "I've been able to see the issue from both sides." Although many pastors are aware of the issues and address it from pulpits on occasion, by and large, there are too many who really don't know much about it," she said.

Candler School of Theology at Emory in Atlanta didn't require a pastoral care class; Griffeth took it as an elective. "To think, people are going to go to pastors and bring these enormous life issues. When you add the issue of violence and all that surrounds it – safety, law enforcement – then it adds a level of intimidation for clergy. The issues are complex and pastors are trained to be generalists. They need more information."

An ongoing outcome from this conference was the establishment of the Clergy Advisory Council. SCCADVASA hosts this council and provides technical support. Since inception they have changed their name to the Faith Leaders Advisory Council which they believe reflects their hope that laity will also want to become involved with the council. One of the first tasks they undertook was to create a mission and vision statement:

*“The Mission of the Faith Leaders Advisory Council of the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is to denounce in words and actions all forms of domestic violence and sexual assault in order to respect the dignity of all persons.”*

*“The Vision of the Faith Leaders Advisory Council is to collaborate with the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to inform and educate faith communities about domestic violence and sexual assault, in order to encourage all faiths to take an active stand to eliminate interpersonal violence and to promote healthy relationships with all creation.”*

Some of their goals for 2005 include: 1) being involved as legislative advocates, 2) providing training to clergy and laity to improve the response to issues of violence, 3) developing a short-term support group curriculum that addresses issues of faith, and 4) writing articles for denominational newsletters.

For more information on the “Pathways to Peace” conference call contact Vicki Bourus, Executive Director, South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault at [vkbourus@sccadvasa.org](mailto:vkbourus@sccadvasa.org). For additional information on the Faith Leaders Advisory Council contact the Rev. Robin Griffeth at [RAGriffeth@aol.com](mailto:RAGriffeth@aol.com)

## Following a Different Path: Reaching Out to Communities of Faith, One Step at a Time

Deborah K. Shepherd  
Executive Director, New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault

It seemed pretty straightforward at first: To launch NJCASA’s public education campaign, “Let’s Talk About It” (“It” being sexual violence and the ways communities can work together to eliminate this scourge), we should go where we could find the most people to “Talk About It.”

*“We knew faith-based communities were more than houses of worship, and were accustomed to extending themselves to provide support services...”*

Our decision to begin our outreach with faith-based communities was based on several factors. We knew faith-based communities were more than houses of worship, and were accustomed to extending themselves to provide support services—day care centers, senior citizen groups, after-school programs, parenting classes, 12-step programs, men’s groups—for their congregations and the surrounding communities. Moreover, we also knew that there were a large number of survivors of sexual violence who might be

more comfortable confiding in a spiritual advisor than first calling a rape crisis hotline, going to an emergency room, or calling the police. And, finally, we believed that we shared similar goals: to encourage appropriate behavior and present opportunities for healing. This is the message we conveyed in the letter that was sent to clergy in 7 of our 21 counties. The letter accompanied a brief questionnaire that would ascertain how we could be of service to clergy and to the survivors among their congregants: Might we send them hotline cards, listing the numbers of all of the state's rape crisis centers? Brochures about our services? Posters to display in their community rooms? Would they be interested in attending trainings or interfaith discussion groups? Could we send them sample sermons to deliver during Sexual Assault Awareness Month? How could we make it more comfortable for them to start anti-sexual violence work from their pulpits?

We sent letters and questionnaires to 1630 churches, synagogues, mosques and temples and waited eagerly for the responses to start pouring in...and waited...and waited...

Eventually, we received 47 replies. Of those 47, only 15 expressed an interest in attending our initial training for clergy. Of those 15, about 10 actually showed up.

How did we miss the mark and what lessons did we learn?

Our first misstep was the erroneous assumption that we saw faith communities as ripe for conversion to our cause, they were ready to hear and accept our message (a few were, most were not).

The second was the tenuous ties staff members had to any faith communities (most of us were lapsed-something-or-others and not well-versed in scripture). We would never have approached other unserved or underserved communities with this degree of ignorance and dearth of connection—we should have been better prepared and connected to this one, as well. Our knowledge of sexual assault issues, our passion for ending sexual violence, and our dedication to our mission was not enough. We did not have a strong enough working knowledge of and sensitivity to the spiritual needs of the communities we were approaching.

A third misstep was to underestimate the effect on all clergy of the increasing revelations of and media attention to the scandal of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church (our campaign began at the height of these revelations in 2002). In retrospect, we surmise that some of those we were trying to reach may have felt that we were pointing the finger at them by focusing on survivors in their congregations. If timing is everything, then this was certainly a less-than-fortuitous time to begin this campaign.

And the final barrier we faced was an unexpectedly high level of denial: Not in my (fill in the blank...church, synagogue, mosque). This doesn't happen here.

Lessons learned:

- This is a much slower process than we initially estimated.
- Mass mailings don't work, personal connections do.

- Don't assume that a passion and commitment to a cause can take the place of truly understanding the community you are trying to reach with that passion and commitment.

After the first wave of less than optimum response, we brought on board an advocate with very strong ties to her church, unwavering faith, and a high comfort level with religious teachings and scripture. She also took it as her mission to convey our message in a way that faith communities would be able to hear.

It was still a slow process and we had to readjust our expectations. What we were now seeing however, was the establishment of very real partnerships with members of faith communities. As this outreach effort proceeded it turned out that it was not quantity but it became one house of worship, one meeting with clergy, one speaking engagement at a time, but definitely quality, as we took our slower, but steadier, more grounded steps. We know, by reframing our efforts, that we are helping clergy to understand the issues and thus aiding them in being open and available to help survivors.

And if one leader of a faith community helps one survivor to heal....well, to paraphrase an old Hebrew proverb: "(S)he who saves one life, saves the world entire."

## Strategies for Building a Church Based Alliance

The Reverend Barbara Smith-Moran  
Interim Assistant Priest  
Christ Church (Episcopal)  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Building an alliance of churches around any cause can be a lot like herding cats. Each congregation has its own set of priorities, and adding yet another one can seem like asking for the moon. It can be a daunting undertaking; I know since I speak from experience. I've been part of building two church based alliances, each with a distinct goal, one to organize an awareness-raising event and the other to organize a demonstration against domestic violence. One was a great success, and the other one fizzled. I guess that qualifies me to give a few tips about working with Christian based churches.

Let's start with the success story. The end goal was to have a large community event to call attention to the problem of domestic violence within that particular community. We, the organizers, recognized that it was important to identify a person whom we refer to as the "Passionate Coordinator;" someone with time and energy to follow through until the event is over—and then be willing to do a little more because follow-up is important for changing our culture—which is never easy.

We knew that this was an important first step and if you are planning to organize around an event you might consider this strategy. After your Passionate Coordinator has been identified, try

to get the “bandwagon effect” working for you. Find a “Local Celebrity” to join the alliance and be its spokesperson. The town’s chief of police or a state legislator, a renowned author or the mayor are all good choices. The public stature of such a person can really get an alliance rolling, because people naturally coalesce around a popular celebrity.

Your Local Celeb has the ability to be a headline-grabber, which can keep the planned event in the press and before the public. You’ll want someone to take charge of press relations, to feed regular updates to the church newsletters as well as to the secular press. Churches are often shy by nature, and getting their names into the newspapers as sponsoring something really positive for the community can be a boost to them.

*“It’s vitally important that your headliner give the correct message when s/he is speaking on record.”*

It’s vitally important that your headliner give the correct message when s/he is speaking on record. In other words, your Local Celeb should not be on board just to get votes or just for the limelight. Pick a person who has a good public record on the subject and who will remain accessible to some degree to your alliance. Give your Local Celebrity sound-bites or talking points to use when being interviewed or when giving a speech. Your Local Celeb needs to commit to being present for the actual event, so get it on her/his schedule in bold letters.

Another great bandwagon strategy is to situate the event you’re planning squarely within a larger ecumenical movement. For example, the World Council of Churches has designated the years 2001-2010 as “The Decade to Overcome

Violence,” which is perfect for contextualizing your DV/SA event (see [www2.wcc-coe.org/dov](http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov)). Not every denomination supports the WCC, but no church will deny that peace-making is important, because Jesus himself blessed the peacemakers—and he didn’t mean to sacrifice justice just for the sake of a superficial peace.

Buttons saying “Peace is the Church’s Business” are available from the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, [www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org](http://www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org). Or choose buttons that read: “Peace in the World Begins at Home” available from Peace at Home, [www.peaceathome.org](http://www.peaceathome.org) or use a kit to make your own buttons for members of the alliance, to help build spirit in event-planning.

*“Besides the cat-herding challenge, there are some uniquely Christian attitudes that can seriously threaten any effort to address domestic or sexual violence within congregations.”*

Besides the cat-herding challenge, there are some uniquely Christian attitudes that can seriously threaten any effort to address domestic or sexual violence within congregations. It is a savvy strategy to know attitudes and to develop a plan to confront them to the best of your ability. Here are four biggies:

- I. Some church leaders, sad to say, are still ignorant about the importance of witnessing against domestic violence. It’s a fact that church communities have a poor record in actually helping victims. The “a man’s home is his castle” attitude is alive and well. Though that adage is not found in scripture anywhere, it’s easy to find other adages in the Bible that seem to support the belief that a man has the control in a household, including control over his wife and his children.

2. Some pastors maintain the attitude that a woman's suffering (even at the hands of someone who claims to love her) is part and parcel of Jesus' own suffering, and therefore sanctified. Theology that glorifies suffering can be a killer. Literally.
3. Some pastors continue to counsel a woman with such words of Jesus as "Forgive seventy times seven times" and "turn the other cheek" without concern for the spirit-eroding effect these words, delivered uncritically, have to women in abusive situations. They also seem to overlook the necessity of deep remorse and restitution—which is not at all the same as "I'm so sorry" with roses, delivered after every episode of violent behavior.
4. Some pastors advise people to save their marriage at any cost. They counsel the partners to do whatever it takes to stay together, for the sake of the vows taken before God—or sometimes, for the sake of the children in the family. Again, potentially a real killer.

Pastors who believe or practice any of these attitudes might, behind the scenes, work against the aims of the alliance within their own congregations. They might, for example, use pulpit-time to minimize or make jokes about the goals of the alliance in order to reassure their congregation that the privacy of home behavior will not be challenged by this pastor, and no apple-carts will be upset.

This can be especially true if their churches are struggling. Financial considerations can confuse the view of clergy, sometimes to the extent of knowing what is right and just and what they should do in a given situation. They may worry that a church member may withdraw their pledge or tithe or other

support from the church if the church comes out in support of their partner and offers assistance in addressing the abusive situation.

To avert the undermining effects of these beliefs and actions, you'll need to educate, educate, educate. It's a good idea to hold a small educational event just for the clergy and lay leaders who are part of the alliance, to be sure that concerns can be voiced to peers and hearts can be turned in a situation of confidentiality. Some denominational magazines feature articles on domestic violence from time to time, and these can be used to show that cultural attitudes are indeed changing—and for the better, for all God's People, men, women, and children alike.

Another recommendation for alliance formation is to build in some fun for the planners and for the participants in the actual event. For example, include spirited music and musicians playing interesting instruments. Look for a corps of women drummers to model strong, assertive—and joyful—musicianship in leading the songs and chants during a march and/or worship service. Or maybe a feminist country band or gospel choir. Or organize your event around a liberating and funny play, such as Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues."

And one final thing: hand out awards or other expressions of gratitude to all the alliance participants. Get your Local Celebrity to sign framed certificates for everyone, for instance. Those certificates will find their way onto the wall in the church study or library, which might well spark more interest in another event.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE FIZZLE?

So why did the failed alliance-building flop? It

had to do with the nature of my church work. I'm a clergywoman who specializes in "interim ministry." This involves pastoring a given congregation through a period of change and self-examination between the time when one "permanent" pastor leaves and the next one arrives. Interim periods are typically 1-2 years in length, so I'm always just arriving or just leaving a congregation, it seems.

When I started a new ministry in the particular town in question, I thought that my parish would be great to lead a church coalition in planning a town wide DV education event. We started with a three-part educational series in the parish to get church members up to speed. Guest speakers came from the local agency specializing in advocacy for DV victims. The parish leadership voted to begin alliance-building and it looked like a "go."

*"I really wanted to do this alliance building, and I really wanted this parish to find a new identity..."*

Then I made a misjudgment: I set myself up as the "Passionate Coordinator" with time and energy mentioned above. I did that even though I knew that my ministry there might not last long enough for me to see the project through to the end. I really wanted to do this alliance building, and I really wanted this parish to find a new identity, during its interim period, I saw this congregation as becoming an advocate for social change in the town. It had a real logic to it, because that church is situated at the edge of a neighborhood well-known to police for its high rate of DV.

In fact, I was able to recruit the town police chief himself to be our Local Celebrity. The clergy in

two other congregations were expressing their interest in coming on board and things were looking good. And then it happened: my job at that parish ended, and I moved to a new interim position in another town.

I told my clergy successor about the DV event the parish had begun to plan, but it was too much to hope that he would catch the ball and run with it. It didn't happen, and the alliance died. There's always the possibility that the Police Chief himself will call the parish and ask how the plans are going. That is my hope and that may be enough to re-ignite interest.

So lessons learned. It is critical to have a person identified who is aligned with the mission of working in domestic and sexual violence and faith communities to be your Passionate Coordinator. It is also important that they have the ability to commit to a long term project in order to build in continuity and to give a good foundation to a new organization that will be faced with some challenges as evidenced by preset attitudes and judgments. I also believe that the addition of a local celebrity persona is invaluable to enhancing community buy-in along with the leaders of the faith communities. Be sure to take ample advantage of resources already out there, there are a number available now and more developed all the time. And don't forget to recognize those involved and verbalize or otherwise demonstrate your appreciation of their hard work in the difficult area of ending domestic and sexual violence.

*The Rev. Barbara Smith-Moran has been a volunteer counselor for more than five years with an agency in Massachusetts called Domestic Violence Victim Assistance Program (see [www.dvvap.org](http://www.dvvap.org)). For a year she served on staff as the Coordinator of Volunteers. Between and during interim church assignments, she is working toward a doctorate in the ministry of reconciliation.*

# Providing Culturally Competent and Religiously Sensitive Services to Jewish Survivors

Nicole Lesser  
Kol Isha – D V Coordinator  
Jewish Family and Children’s Service

As providers of services to survivors of sexual and domestic violence, our movements have often been reluctant to address issues of faith with our clients. There are many good reasons for this reluctance:

- Historically, many religions have been a patriarchal formulation. The majority of leaders tended to be male, women’s roles were narrowly defined, and the structure of the institutions often replicated the dynamic of power and control.
- The myths that many people hold about sexual and domestic violence lead religious institutions to deny that clergy, staff and prominent community members could ever be perpetrators. A lack of training for clergy and staff leads to a reluctance for the institution to create an atmosphere of safety in disclosing.
- Religious institutions are often reluctant to be transparent. Their refusal to “air dirty laundry” leads to a lack of perpetrator

accountability and sends a message condoning the abusive behavior.

- Institutions’ reliance on philanthropic support creates a conflict of interest when the donor is a perpetrator. Often clergy may know about the abuse, but may do nothing to protect the victim, once they become indebted to the perpetrator.
- The view that marriage is something that is “holy”, “sacred” or “created by God” leads some religious institutions to put great pressure on couples to stay together, thus endangering victims.
- The stigma of divorce is often placed on the victim. People who are active in their religious community are sometimes ostracized and lose the supports they have there.

Having said all that, I believe we make a grave mistake when we ignore a client’s religious background and beliefs. Advocates’ rejection of religion as a tool for change, due to the above reasons, has led us to overlook the power of religion to provide strength, hope, solace and guidance to survivors. For those assaulted by a partner, it is imperative that the religious roadblocks be addressed in order for victims to feel they have a choice about whether to leave the abuser or not. Just as the movements recognize the need to provide culturally competent services, we need to recognize the influence of religion and become comfortable talking about its role in abuse. By collaborating with the faith community, we educate, change attitudes, and help to create a society a few steps closer to a world free of abuse and fear.

[Cultural and Religious Roadblocks to Safety for Jewish Victims](#)

Let me first say that the Jewish community is extremely diverse and heterogeneous.

There are many different religious movements, from Orthodox (very traditional) to Reconstructionist (considered more modern or progressive), and an additional cultural component that comes into play even for those Jews who are not “religious”. It is important to note that within each movement there are divergent beliefs about Jewish law and observance. As a result, it is somewhat difficult to represent “the Jewish perspective” on sexual violence. The information below should be considered a guide, but not necessarily *the* experience for each Jewish survivor.

While incidents of sexual and domestic violence are found all the way back in the Torah (the Hebrew Bible) – the binding of Isaac, the rape of Dinah, the rape of Tamar, the Jewish community has been slow and extremely reluctant to recognize that Jewish people are perpetrating abuse. As the director of a Jewish domestic violence program for the last five years, I have been told countless times, “but Jewish men don’t hit their wives,” and sexual assault is still very much a taboo subject. Yet, Jewish women are abused at rates comparable to those of other communities, approximately 1 in 4.

The myth of “the nice Jewish boy” lead many to think that it doesn’t happen here and that if it has happened, there must have been something the victim did to provoke it. Other myths, such as, it does not happen to educated people of means, (which is a myth in and of itself, as all Jewish people are not well educated or rich), also creates a very strong denial.

*“The concept of “shalom bayit” (peace in the home), is an ideal that all of us are encouraged to strive for. While Jews who are not observant may not formally know this concept, the idea is still passed down culturally.”*

Like many other cultures and religions, Judaism puts a tremendous emphasis on the family. The concept of “shalom bayit” (peace in the home), is an ideal that all of us are encouraged to strive for. While Jews who are not observant may not formally know this concept, the idea is still passed down culturally. As the home has traditionally been the domain of the woman, perpetrators will twist this concept, telling their female victims that it is their responsibility to keep peace in the home, and therefore if something horrible is happening in their home or bed or to their children, it is their fault.

While abuse is no different in the Jewish community, the pressure to be married is so great and the stigma associated with abuse within the family so strong, that it is believed that Jewish victims of domestic violence tend to stay with their abusers 5-7 years longer than those from other communities. For observant Jewish women, there are additional roadblocks to leaving. If a woman needs to go to shelter, how will she obtain kosher food and practice her other religious observances? Even if she is able to leave and obtain a civil divorce, she still needs to be granted a religious divorce (a “get”) from her ex-husband if she wants to remarry.

In addition, shame (“shanda”), often keeps Jewish victims silent. Not only do they fear bringing shanda to themselves and their families, but they also worry about bringing shanda to the community. Those who come from oppressed and minority groups often feel they have to live up to a higher standard, and are afraid of further harming the reputation of their group. As a result of anti-Semitism, many Jews are reluctant to give the world anything else for which to dislike them, and therefore try to protect the community with their silence. Prohibitions against gossip and slander (“lashon hara” – the evil tongue) also make victims feel that they cannot come forward.

As a result of our community silence, Jewish victims are very isolated. Clients usually tell us that they thought they were literally the only Jewish person this had ever happened to.

#### Further Considerations for the Observant Victim of Sexual Assault

For the observant Jewish victim, the shame that they must grapple with goes beyond the emotional and has severe consequences. Victims are extremely afraid of reporting sexual assault for fear that this information may become public knowledge. As the observant community is quite small, many know each other. Not only would the victim be embarrassed, but if this information were to become public, this person may be stigmatized in her/his community.

For a single woman, it may greatly minimize the chance that anyone would ever marry her. For a married woman raped by her husband, it could ruin the family reputation, as the husband would have transgressed Jewish law. For a child who is assaulted, the community would tend to rally around the observant abuser, not believing that this could happen, and the family would be ostracized and maybe have to move. Depending on the situation, the stigma may follow the family for generations, making it difficult for future children to marry.

#### Collaborating with the Jewish Community

While these barriers may seem insurmountable, they are not. Though not bright on the radar screen of the Jewish community, there are many organizations and resources that are starting to illuminate these issues.

For specific information about sexual assault in the Jewish community, The Awareness Center is the resource ([www.theawarenesscenter.org](http://www.theawarenesscenter.org)). It is the Jewish Coalition Against Sexual

Abuse/Assault. They have resources for Jewish survivors, information on support groups, and information on Jewish clergy abuse.

All Jewish women's organizations throughout the different religious movements have the issue of abuse on their national agenda. One organization, Jewish Women International ([www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org)), has made it their mission. Not only do they have fabulous materials on Jewish domestic violence (both in English and in Russian), but they also host an international conference on Jewish domestic abuse (held this year in Washington D.C., March 20-23rd). They also have connections to Jewish service providers throughout the country and beyond.

Utilizing the benefits of the internet, [www.jewishsurvivorsofsexualabuse.org](http://www.jewishsurvivorsofsexualabuse.org), provides message boards for those who want to discuss sexual abuse and domestic violence, offering peer support and a way to share resource information in a safe and confidential forum.

The Faith Trust Institute ([www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)), formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, is an interreligious educational resource, with many books, videos and other materials including:

- Shine the Light: Sexual Abuse and Healing in the Jewish Community, Rachel Lev, Northeastern University Press, 2003.
- Forgiveness and Abuse: Jewish and Christian Reflections, edited by Fortune and Marshall, The Haworth Press, 2002.
- You Are Not Alone: Solace and Inspiration for Domestic Violence Survivors Based on Jewish Wisdom, Toby Landesman, 2004.
- To Save A Life: Ending Domestic Violence in Jewish Families (video), 1997.

You may be tempted to contact the local rabbi to see how you could collaborate. Unfortunately, most rabbis receive very little training on these issues and are overwhelmed with the many tasks of their position. One place to start is with your local Jewish Family Service organization. These multi-service human service agencies often have dedicated Jewish domestic violence programs (some of which also address sexual assault), which can provide training and other services. They are usually very interested in collaborating with the secular community, as they do not have the resources to replicate secular services. They may also know which rabbis have received some training. To find out about the program in your area, contact the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies ([www.ajfca.org](http://www.ajfca.org)).

*"When thinking about collaborating with clergy, it is important to be creative."*

When thinking about collaborating with clergy, it is important to be creative. If you are planning on offering trainings, it has been my experience that clergy are reluctant to come because of their overwhelming schedules. However, if you offer to bring the training to them (the social work idea of "meeting them where they are") you are much more likely to get them to say yes. Another way to reach clergy is to work with an already sympathetic rabbi, and together offer a Jewish text study. Most importantly, be sure to be clear with the clergy that you are not asking them to counsel their congregants on this, but rather to learn what to say when someone discloses and to know the resources and make referrals.

An interesting model for partnering with clergy, begun here in Boston and now being launched nationally, is the Safe Havens Family Violence Prevention Project. Safe Havens is an interfaith partnership that trains clergy and

laity on the dynamics of domestic violence and helps congregations develop policies, procedures and resources in the community. For more information on their program, you can contact them at 617-227-6992 or at [safehavens@earthlink.net](mailto:safehavens@earthlink.net).

Through cultivating partnerships and providing mutual sharing of our expertise, victim service providers and the faith community have the ability to provide survivors with a comprehensive system of care that addresses the mind, body and spirit.

# Reclaiming Wholeness After Sexual Assault: Three heart/Mind-Healing Buddhist Practices

Nicola Miller, M.A., M.P.H.

Experiencing a sexual assault is a profound violation of one's fundamental sense of wholeness of heart/mind/spirit. The victim of a sexual assault needs to reclaim her/his sense of wholeness. The following are methods, or practices, drawn from several Buddhist traditions, which may be useful for Buddhists or non-Buddhists who are recovering from the trauma of sexual assault. They do not require any kind of religious belief.

The Buddhist body of teachings includes many approaches for dealing with suffering. Three approaches have been selected as helpful in responding to sexual assault, and have been offered by Buddhists from three traditions (Zen, Southern Asian (Theravadin), and Tibetan traditions).

*"A fundamental teaching of Buddhism is that suffering is an inescapable part of ordinary human life...through the use of ancient and tested methods of mind development...it is possible to reduce, and eventually overcome, suffering."*

A fundamental teaching of Buddhism is that suffering is an inescapable part of ordinary human life. It also explains that by developing awareness and compassion, through the use of ancient and tested methods of mind development, it is possible to reduce, and eventually overcome, suffering. These methods or practices can be used today to help sexual assault victims, trauma victims, or anyone who wants to exchange suffering for awareness in their lives. One of the most important tasks for a sexual assault victim is to restore her/his damaged sense of well-being, and trust in life. The three practices described below can assist the victim with this task. It is advised that anyone genuinely interested in these practices seek more in depth instructions before undertaking these practices, through books, tapes and CDs, or in-person instruction from qualified teachers.

## Loving-Kindness (Metta) Practice from the Southern Asian tradition.

In this practice, we start by focusing loving concentration upon ourselves. The thoughts are compared to a mother's loving feelings for her newborn child. To do this practice, we find a quiet place and time, free from distraction. Often people find it difficult to focus loving thoughts upon themselves, and find it easier to focus love on someone who has been very kind to them, or even on a pet.

If that is easiest, we can start there. Eventually, we can transfer these loving thoughts to ourselves, and then, over time, to others. A traditional wording for this concentration practice is, "May I be safe from inner and outer harm, may I be happy and peaceful, may I be healthy and strong, may I be able to live my life peacefully." This, or some variation that feels right to the person doing it, is repeated many times. It can be continued

during daily activities. For someone who has been victimized, the development of deeply kind feelings toward her/himself can bring great benefits.

### **Tonglen Practice** from the Tibetan tradition.

*Tonglen* is a breathing practice with visualization. In this practice, we take in the suffering of others, visualizing it as dark light and/or heaviness as we breathe in, and as we breathe out, we visualize coolness, lightness and whiteness, which we send to those who are suffering. With the outbreath, we release all suffering.

In doing this practice, we may suddenly note a sense of spaciousness and openness, when our minds are no longer concentrated on our pain. As we experience openness, suffering disappears. Continuing with this practice increases our heartspace, our compassion for ourselves and for others.

The victim can apply this practice by breathing in her own suffering as dark light, and sending herself white light with total love and caring as she exhales. If this is helpful, she can begin to inhale the sufferings of all other sexual assault victims, and send white light with total love and caring to them as she exhales. Working with a therapist or someone familiar with tonglen practice, eventually with support, she can apply the same practice to the perpetrator, and eventually to all perpetrators. Although this may seem very difficult, the effect is to free the victim from perpetrator's residual power over her/him.

**Mindfulness Practice.** (Variations of this practice are found in all three traditions.)

The practice of mindfulness, or moment-to-moment awareness, is moving into mainstream American culture. Jon Cabat-Zinn, Ph.D., founder of the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, is a noted proponent and researcher of mindfulness, and has proven the effectiveness of mindfulness practices for anxiety and depression.

Cabat-Zinn writes, "Mindfulness practice cultivates intimacy with one's own body, and through that, self-understanding, healing, and transformation." Mindfulness practices can be done in sitting meditation or as mindfulness in daily life, where one applies gentle, aware attention to one's daily life activities.

In mindfulness practice, we focus our awareness on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. We can note the mind states we are experiencing, for example, worry, fear, or tension. We don't try to make these mind states go away. But as we become aware of our mind states, and simply notice them, they lose their power to control us. With the regular practice of mindfulness, thoughts of traumatic events no longer cause us suffering.

### **Resources:**

- Sharon Salzberg is a renowned Western teacher of Insight practice in the Southern Asian tradition. Her book, Loving Kindness, provides more depth on *Metta* practice.
- In her book, Radical Acceptance, psychologist and Buddhist teacher Tara Brach presents a deeply effective approach to therapy with a survivor of childhood sexual assault.

- Pema Chodron, the beloved Western Buddhist nun, has contributed much to Western knowledge of the Tibetan *tonglen* practice. Her book, When Things Fall Apart, has been widely read around the world, and may be helpful for victims of sexual assault.
- The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Thanh are world-renowned Buddhist teachers, who have experienced the extreme violence of war and oppression. Both teach ways to find wholeness in a violent world, and have authored many books, tapes, and CDS on this subject.

*Nicola Miller is the Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator for the Hawaii State Department of Health. She has been a Buddhist practitioner for over 25 years and has studied with teachers in the Zen, Tibetan, and Burmese traditions, and currently practices Insight meditation.*

## Understanding Muslim or Middle Eastern Women in Domestic or Sexual Violence Work

Farida Hakim  
Member of Peaceful Families Taskforce  
Seattle, Washington.

When working with people of the Muslim faith there are certain considerations that would benefit a non-Muslim advocate or coordinator to be aware of. These considerations are around Islamic marriage and family concepts. In this article I am attempting to identify some generalizations around this often misunderstood faith. Please understand that it is not an attempt to speak for all followers of the Muslim faith but rather just some ideas to assist in working in collaboration with people of this faith.

### **Do Muslims share a single culture?**

The Muslim population has exhibited tremendous growth in the United States. Muslims come from different countries and comprise more than 6 million of the U.S. population, including 2 billion worldwide. Muslim-Americans are a growing part of the American landscape, contributing to all walks of life, in a variety of professions. A better understanding of our Muslim neighbors and

co-workers will both enrich our own lives, and make theirs easier. In our increasingly diverse and multi-cultural society, education, understanding, and tolerance are the keys to a harmonious work place and society.

### **Who are Muslims?**

The word Muslim, like Islam comes from the three letter Arabic root s-l-m, and literally means one who willfully submits to God. Muslims are followers of Islam, which means peace and submission to God as a way of life. Islam teaches that everything in Creation- microbes, plants, animals, mountains, rivers, planets and so forth is 'Muslim' testifying to the majesty of the Creator and submitting to His Divine laws.

Human beings are also considered fundamentally 'Muslim' (submitters to God) in their original spiritual orientation, but being unique creations endowed with abilities of reason, judgment, and choice. They may remain on a God-conscious, righteous path towards divine reward, or may veer away as a consequence of upbringing and life choices.

### **Islamic Marriage and family concepts:**

It is important to first identify the differences in the cultural expectations and the Islamic way of life, which will aid in developing a positive relationship with victims or others with whom you are attempting to establish working relationships. The culture and ethnic background of the victim will have an impact on the way she is treated by herself and others in her family.

Since the word 'Islam' means peace and submission to the will of God and this governs all aspects of our life, the best way to create a peaceful, harmonious environment

in the home is to be loving and kind to one another. This involves being compassionate and respectful of each person's viewpoints and unique qualities. Each person in the family owns their own morality and it is only by consulting with all members and communicating clearly our intentions that a basic understanding is established.

Our primary responsibility is to be God conscious in everything we think, say and do, because this reflects the inner you and each one of us is a mirror to the other person. We have to lay the foundation, which empowers each individual to develop freedom of thought and ideas to seek knowledge of the Islamic way of life, which differs from the cultural expectations and traditions. To achieve this goal, every one will be committed to create an environment of peace and harmony in their household. The first step in this process is to educate ourselves about our duties to nurture our spirit, mind and body according to the Quran and the practice of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

In order to accomplish this task of managing our peace of mind we need to prepare for marriage and understand why God created man and woman. God created male and female from a single soul to worship God and establish peaceful families. The best worship of God is to be good to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

It is very important to outline the objectives of Family in Islam, which will enable the advocates to assist the Muslim women, who are involved in domestic violence resulting in sexual assault.

- I. Each family member is to guard and protect their own morality.

2. Provide a peaceful atmosphere where each person can worship in every aspect of his or her life as God's representative. See Quran 2:30 and 6:155
3. Encourage and maintain a household where each family member has the same privilege of peace, security, justice, love, kindness, equity and care. This means that there is no shouting, sarcasm, blaming, ridiculing, belittling or laughing at each other.
4. Develop a support system of family and community members, who will assist in practicing the Islamic way of life by increasing their knowledge and experience.

Both husband and wife are required to provide mutual comfort, protection, love and compassion by having open communication, consultation and counseling with each other. As equal partners in marriage, both men and women protect and support one another by having respect for feelings, and exhibiting patience, trust, mercy and kindness.

Why does the Muslim woman stay in an abusive situation? Again there are as many different reasons as there are people but the Muslim faith may influence the woman's decision. She may believe that her rightful role in the family is to accept whatever her husband exhibits in his behavior and that her patience in this matter is her God ordained role as a peacemaker. Her own family and the community may blame her alone and she may possess limited ability in the English language and have limited financial resources. All these things together make it very difficult to trust the legal system to be of help to her.

I wrote this article based on the study of "Understanding Muslim and Middle Eastern Women in Domestic Violence Work" by the late Sharifa Alkhateeb. She was a pioneer in this field and started the Peaceful Families

Project, which is now continuing as her legacy by her children and the Sharifa Alkhateeb foundation ([www.sharifaalkhateeb.org](http://www.sharifaalkhateeb.org))

Please consider contacting The Faith Trust Institute, (formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence). [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

It offers pioneer work in the many areas of violence that touch the family.

You can also identify resources within the Muslim community by contacting the local Islamic center or Mosque. Find out if they have a Peaceful Families Taskforce committee in their area. The Peaceful Families Taskforce is a collaborative effort with the Muslim community to address domestic violence in an Islamic context and create healthier Muslim families and communities. The taskforce is committed to social justice with the purpose to end all forms of violence and establish gender equity. They are dedicated to ensuring peace and well being for community members by working together with social agencies and individuals, who are willing to join this effort with their time and talents.

Some valuable information on Islam can be found on [www.soundvision.com/domestic](http://www.soundvision.com/domestic)

You may also email the author of this article for more information. Contact Farida at [faridahakim@hotmail.com](mailto:faridahakim@hotmail.com)

# Other Useful Resources in Your Work With Faith Communities:

- For a brochure with tips and suggestions on “Engaging the Faith Community in Violence Prevention go to: <http://www.peacebeyondviolence.org/>
- Check out the “Black Church and DV Institute” Atlanta, Georgia [www.bcdvi.org](http://www.bcdvi.org)
- For Faith Based Protocol  
The New Hampshire Governor’s Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence drafted “The Clergy: Domestic Violence Protocol” in the mid-1990’s. The Commission is now working to update the protocol which will be titled: “A Faith Based Response- Domestic and Sexual Violence Protocol.” The drafting committee, comprised of survivors, victim advocates, clergy and representatives from various faith-based communities, hope to publish this Protocol by early next year.

Revisions to “The Clergy: Domestic Violence Protocol” include additional sections addressing issues of sexual assault, clergy abuse, children who witness domestic violence, mandated reporting by clergy of child abuse, the issue of joint counseling in domestic violence cases, as well as appropriate referrals being made to crisis centers, batterer intervention programs, and other trained professionals.

The drafting committee will create a series of pamphlets serving as quick- reference guides with referral information to distribute to the faith communities throughout the State of New Hampshire. The committee hopes this Protocol

will encourage continued collaboration between the advocacy and faith communities in New Hampshire.

“The Clergy: Domestic Violence Protocol”, the original version from the mid-1990’s, can be found at: <http://doj.nh.gov/victim/pdf/dvclergy.pdf>

- Check this great website for helpful information on working with faith based communities: [www.FaithTrustInstitute.org](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org)  
This is an amazing organization that has many useful tools for working within faith communities. It was founded in Seattle, Washington in 1977 by the Rev. Marie M. Fortune. FaithTrust Institute was designed as an interreligious educational resource whose mission is to address the issues of sexual and domestic violence. Their goal is to engage religious leaders in the task of ending abuse, and to serve as a bridge between religious and secular communities. Their website offers a wide array of resources such as publications, videos, handbooks, brochures, a newsletter, training announcements and copies of sermons. Check it out!
- Here is an article by Nora Alarifi Pharaon, Ed. D. that may shed some light on working with Arab Muslim women around issues of domestic violence. You can find the article at: <http://www.pharaonconsulting.com/20030218group.html>
- For more information on working with South Asian women go to [www.chayaseattle.org](http://www.chayaseattle.org). Chaya is a community based nonprofit organization established in 1996 to serve South Asian women in times of crisis and need, and to raise awareness of domestic violence issues. Chaya is a network of people who are primarily South Asian who understand the cultural norms and stigmas associated with domestic violence and believe in the inherent strength and potential of each woman to address situations in which there has been systematic emotional and physical violence. (The Peaceful Families Task Force is part of Chaya and Farida Hakim, author of “Understanding Muslim or Middle Eastern Women in Domestic or Sexual Violence Work” is a member of the Peaceful Families Task Force)

- More websites to visit:  
[http://www.themodernreligion.com/women/w\\_dv.htm](http://www.themodernreligion.com/women/w_dv.htm)  
<http://baitulsalaamnetwork.freehomepage.com/>  
<http://www.muslimsonline.com/mwhn/>

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## Ask the Tech

### Cell Phones, Privacy and Urban Legends

There is no Do Not Call registry for cell phones. You can dial \*77 for a non-emergency police line, but only in Toronto. Spammers are beginning to target text messages to cell phones, and, yes, you may have to pay for them.

I get a lot of email, I mean A LOT. Not as much as my director, but close. Colleagues, friends and family all send me virus warnings, hoaxes, and lately, a number of urban legends about cell phones. Happily, I am an At-Your-Service Geek (or I aspire to be anyhow). When I get these things I am intrigued, so I look them up. I check some sites I know, or, when all else fails, I google it.

One of the advantages of cell phones is that you don't get telemarketing calls. This wonderful freedom from, "...[pause]...is the lady of the house available?" is almost over. Our small vacation from the relentless drive of capitalism –AND our freedom to annoy our friends and family anywhere and everywhere (in the gym on the stairmaster, in the canned soup aisle, in the car?!) is fading like a mirage on the horizon.

So rather than debunking each one of these half-truths – I want to share with you the Way to

Find the Truth for yourself. First, find a couple sites you like best to start with. For virus warnings/hoaxes, I like <http://securityresponse.symantec.com> (any anti-virus company's site will do – but Symantec also generously donates their software through [techsoup.org](http://techsoup.org) – if you don't have anti-virus...well, GET IT NOW!).

Anyhow, for urban legends, our network consultant turned me on to [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com). This covers all urban legends, not just the computer-related variety – so beware – it is easy to get distracted on this site (did you know that The *Titanic* carried a cursed mummy in its hold??? Or visit the Glurge Gallery – it is cold season!)

If all else fails, google it! I have found all sorts of ammunition to debunk urban legends this way.

My final advice – before you sign and forward an email petition – check first. For example, that petition asking you to support NPR from funding cuts was from the days of Newt Gingrich – it is so not, like, happening.

Your Humble Geek at Work,  
Toby

Send your tech question to Toby at:  
360-754-7583 or [toby@wcsap.org](mailto:toby@wcsap.org)

# Contact your RSP Regional Coordinator for Technical Assistance

Northeast – New York, (518) 482-4222  
Southeast –North Carolina, (919) 431-0996  
Central – Iowa, (319) 339-0899  
Midwest – Minnesota, (612) 313-2797  
West – Washington, (360) 754-7583

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## About Reshape

Reshape is a publication of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2415 Pacific Ave. SE Olympia, WA 98501, (360)754-7583. Contact the editor, Evelyn Larsen at [evelyn@wcsap.org](mailto:evelyn@wcsap.org).

This project was supported by Grant No. 2003-WT-BX-K014 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

## Upcoming Events

For a list of conferences and training opportunities see: [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) and click on calendar.

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To join a listserv dedicated to conversations surrounding sexual assault and technology send an e-mail to [sacoalitiontechsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sacoalitiontechsubscribe@yahoogroups.com)

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## Comments?

Please send your questions or comments concerning ReShape to [evelyn@wcsap.org](mailto:evelyn@wcsap.org)

**Next edition:** Focus on Adolescence