What can we do?

"Violence against women comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. But at the heart of the Gospel, Jesus comes to us with the promise of abundant life."
Living a Theology that Counters Violence against Women
General Assembly Report 2014

Violence against women, girls and children prevents women and children from flourishing and enjoying fullness of life. It is critical that we break the silence that still surrounds this issue in the Church and in society.

Taking your first steps as a church

Churches and congregations are absolutely vital in our work to end violence against women, girls and children. There are lots of things that you can do to make your church a safer, more welcoming space for people who have experienced gender based violence:

- Find out what support agencies exist in your local area and display their posters and leaflets within the church
- Place information about support in places where people can access the material alone - a really useful place is on the back of your toilet doors
- Encourage your minister and people leading worship to speak out against violence against women and abuse in their teaching, preaching and prayers
- Work to involve all parts of your church on this issue including the Guild and any youth groups
- Consider giving financial support to a local support agency if you hold a fundraising event
- When talking about relationships, emphasise the importance of mutual respect and consent

- Encourage expansive language in your church services and communications and avoid any language that could accidentally blame survivors for their abuse

- Include conversations about equality, violence, control and coercion in marriage preparation conversations

- In church youth groups, encourage young people to think about healthy relationships and explore what abusive or unhealthy behaviour might look like in an age appropriate way

- If you have suitable spaces for support sessions or group work in your church, consider offering these for use by local support services

Things to bear in mind

This can be a very difficult subject to talk about and may provoke emotional reactions. Some people will have personal or close experience of violence and abuse and other people may find it difficult to believe or understand.
Due to this tension, presentations and talks should be delivered by people who are comfortable talking about the subject and who have a good knowledge of the issue. Often it may be best to invite someone from outside the local church or from a specialist service.

Make sure that people can share their feelings and ask questions about the issue. Try to create safe environments for discussion and ensure that there are breakout spaces where people can go if they are feeling uncomfortable or distressed.
There are lots of specialist training courses on these issues which are often very affordable - consider sending key people within the church to these sessions to help them respond appropriately and effectively.

Always have referral and support information available and in places which allow someone to look without drawing attention to themselves. This may include placing posters in toilet cubicles or handing out resources to every member of the congregation. Whenever you have contact with a survivor, remember to provide this referral information and if someone is in immediate danger, you should always contact the police.