



# Calvary Chapel Sydney Domestic Abuse Policy

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## **1. Intent of Domestic Abuse Policy**

Domestic abuse occurs regularly in all parts of our society, including in church communities such as Calvary Chapel Sydney (CCS). Though such abuse can be difficult to identify it is a sin that violates Scripture and can also be a crime. We are called as followers of Jesus Christ to uphold righteousness, walk in love, support the weak, and help the oppressed.

There are various terms used to describe abusive relationships and these descriptions can overlap. To avoid excluding those in need of our empathy, support and services, this Policy responds broadly to abusive behaviour that might be of a physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, financial, social, emotional or spiritual nature and occur in combination:

- between people over 16 years who are or were intimate partners or spouses
- which could involve children witnessing or hearing the abuse thereby seriously impacting them (the CCS Child Protection Policy deals what constitutes the direct abuse of children)
- that by themselves or as a pattern aim to assert power over and control of another.

This Policy seeks to help the congregants and staff of CCS to recognise and respond appropriately to domestic abuse in two broad situations:

- where abuse is directly experienced themselves or where someone else who is personally experiencing it has disclosed the abuse to them
- where, as bystanders, congregants or staff, there is a reasonable basis for concern that domestic abuse is happening to someone in our community.

The safety and empowerment of victims and any children involved to receive help is paramount in every case. All victims need to be believed whether male or female and need skilled support to restore safety and promote healing. Perpetrators often require professional support to change. This Policy is supplemented by resource lists to provide safe and appropriate responses. Materials published by other champions in this area (notably Common Grace's SAFER; Restored Relationships; Anglican churches, Baptist churches and other churches) have been gratefully received, drawn from and are here acknowledged.

## **2. Calvary Chapel Sydney Commitment**

CCS pastoral leadership is committed to fostering a safe community for all that:

- recognises the great value of all people and defends the vulnerable
- promotes a culture of healthy relationships marked by mutual love, service, respect and responsibility in marriage, families and congregations
- strives to ensure that all people feel welcome, accepted, respected and safe from abuse
- labours to follow best practice in responding to and helps protect those experiencing domestic abuse
- refuses to justify or condone violence, abuse or neglect
- enables concerns to be raised and responded to Biblically and consistently
- empowers all people to raise difficult issues and be confident that they can speak about these matters confidentially
- enquires when safe and appropriate as to whether domestic abuse is involved in relationships
- aims to help believers recognise and respond appropriately to domestic abuse and refer victims to expert services.

We uphold Scripture and in our actions and words by clearly promoting an awareness of what domestic abuse is and teaching:

- it is unequivocally sinful and wrong
- it significantly harms the victims and children who witness or hear the abuse
- there is never any justification for domestic abuse in Scripture or otherwise. The Bible cannot be used to demand a spouse or person to tolerate or submit to domestic abuse. Doctrines of headship and submission do not give a man authority or power over a woman that infringes her right to live peaceably without fear for her well-being due to coercion, physical or verbal attacks.
- the contrast between healthy and unhealthy relationships

We undertake to maintain confidentiality in that any verbal and written information will remain confidential and be kept secure except where:

- information is subpoenaed by a court
- failure to disclose information would place the abused person or another person at risk

### **3. Recognising Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse occurs within a spectrum of behaviours and can be difficult to recognise. Conflict between two adults in a relationship is normal and not necessarily abusive. There is a difference between a struggling marriage and relationship where a couple needs to seek counselling to restore and a marriage or relationship marked by abuse. Arguments and disagreements with our spouses, partners, and family members are common, as well as saying or doing hurtful things that we regret that are not inherently abusive. An isolated “abusive” event can harm such relationships and can warrant a range of interventions from support to repair the relationship and to ensure the behaviour is not repeated to calling for immediate emergency services. This policy can respond to one-off instances as well as patterns of behaviour which have as a goal the assertion of power over and control of another. Whilst the tactics of those committing abuse may vary, the fostering and use of fear and intimidation by words and conduct are the key elements within this dynamic. Such abuse inherently and inevitably disempowers another and is the opposite of love.

#### **What domestic abuse might look or feel like:**

- controlling behaviour designed to make a partner subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour; controls how the other spends money and includes withholding money and/or giving them an unreasonable allowance, or one that cannot be spent on anything for the victim; controls their access to medicine and medical assistance; says things like “if I can't have you, no one can” or “No one else would want you” or “No one will believe you.”
- coercive & physical behaviour includes assault on the person or body, punching, hitting, kicking, biting, pushing, shoving etc., the use of weapons (including objects), assault of children, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim, like locking the victim out of the house or sleep and food deprivation.

- destructive criticism and verbal abuse: shouting, mocking, accusing, name-calling, verbally threatening, violent outbursts, blaming the victim repeatedly; humiliates the victim by insulting or belittling them in front of others.
- power abuse: a spouse believing they are entitled to more decisions, money and rights than the other, acting like a master and the rest of the family are slaves who are forced to comply.
- pressure tactics: sulking, threatening to withhold money, disconnecting the phone and internet, taking away or destroying their partner's mobile, tablet or laptop, taking the car away, taking the children away; threatening to report the partner to the police, social services or the mental health team unless their demands are met; threatening or attempting self-harm and suicide; withholding or pressuring the partner to use drugs or other substances; lying to their partner's friends and family about their partner; telling their partner that they have no choice in any financial or spiritual decisions; threatens to harm themselves when upset with the other.
- sexual abuse: any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation, intentionally causing pain during sex, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, secretly recording sex, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly or using degrading insults; withholds affection and gives silent treatment as a way of getting what they want.
- disrespect: persistently putting their partner down in front of other people and humiliating them; not listening or ignoring when the partner is talking; interrupting their phone calls; removing money from a partner's purse or wallet without asking; gaslighting by often telling the other they are crazy or mentally unwell; dismisses the other's feelings, opinions and reality by convincing them they imagined it.
- breaking trust: lying or withholding important information from their partner; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.
- isolation: monitoring or blocking their partner's phone calls, e-mails and social media accounts, telling their partner where they can and cannot go; preventing them from seeing friends and relatives; shutting them in the house.
- harassment: following or checking up on their partner; not allowing their partner any privacy (for example, opening their mail, going through their laptop, tablet or mobile), repeatedly checking to see who has phoned them; accompanying them everywhere they go, repeated monitoring of their whereabouts including their online activities; secretly accessing private accounts without permission; accusing them repeatedly of unfaithful behaviour and other associated jealous behaviours.
- threats: making angry gestures; using physical size to intimidate; shouting their partner down; destroying the partner's possessions, breaking things, punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm their partner and/or the children; threatening to kill or harm family pets; threats of suicide. Blames the other for their own behaviours (e.g. their violent outbursts).

Though these acts may be sinful and fleshly conduct, the behaviour may not necessarily constitute abuse. Yet some, even if committed just once, are abusive (i.e. physical violence). What categorises abusive relationships is they are marked by patterns of behaviour that are about exercising power and control over the other in a range of possible ways. It is important to note that domestic abuse occurs in all parts of society. Perpetrators may appear to be pillars

of the community and can be skilled at maintaining a very respectable external persona which disguises their controlling and abusive behaviours.

### **Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children**

It is important to recognise that children who witness abuse between adult partners are likewise traumatised and can, like adult victims, suffer long term psychological, physical, emotional and relational problems. Allowing a child to witness or hear abusive behaviour between adults is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator and can be a crime.

As SAFER acknowledges, research shows that witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly. Whilst parents may believe that they have shielded their children from spousal violence, research shows that children see or hear some 40% to 80% of it. For a more detailed account of how severely witnessing family violence impacts children, please see [https://www.saferresource.org.au/children\\_who\\_witness\\_domestic\\_violence](https://www.saferresource.org.au/children_who_witness_domestic_violence) . Domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour.

## **4. Responding to Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse requires a serious, safe and practical response. CCS leadership will offer support to victims and supporters of victims alike. More specifically, we recommend the following response to domestic abuse when a victim has directly shared a concern of abuse.

### **If someone comes for help (either directly or through a supporter):**

- Believe them
- Be compassionate and recognise the likelihood of feelings of fear and shame
- Prioritise their safety—if they are in immediate danger or you witness violence firsthand, call 000 immediately
- Seek advice from a CCS pastoral staff, elder, or director (on a no names basis if permission to discuss has not been provided).
- Listen with care and confidentiality: if you cannot gain permission to escalate or support further, you cannot take any further action as confidentiality must be respected (subject to specific instances relating to mandatory reporting and emergencies).

### **Support the victim regarding their safety**

- find out what they are already doing to keep safe
- assess the current risk for them and any children, then help them get support to develop a plan to keep safe if the situation escalates
- be aware that any intervention may put the victim, their family, you or your colleagues in danger
- Empower the victim by allowing them to lead and direct the response at their own pace unless required by law to escalate or report to external agencies.
- refer to [https://www.saferresource.org.au/safety\\_first](https://www.saferresource.org.au/safety_first)

Just because the victim may have confided in you this does not mean they are yet ready for the next step. Be guided by what the victim wants, not by what you think they need or what you assume is right. Offer informed support and care in the ways provided in this Policy and external support resources with the aim of:

- empowering the victim and this can be accomplished in many ways; by knowing they can stay in contact, by you not taking over (and further dis-empowering)
- supporting the victims to get help, by consultation or referral from those with appropriate specialist expertise
- coordinating their care to ensure appropriate pastoral care as well as relevant (and separate) referrals to experts relevant for both victims and alleged or a known perpetrator
- consideration of practical ways you can further support them; talk with a pastor, elder, or ministry leader about how those affected by abuse can access appropriately trained pastoral and practical support, potentially including financial, accommodation and clothing support
- not acting as judge or a mediator between couples or suggest counselling as a fix-all
- supporting biblical reconciliation comes with conditions, principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender demonstrated over time, and also upon the forgiveness and willingness of the victim
- refusal to overpromise: you are not an expert and cannot “rescue” the victim. Domestic abuse is a complex issue.
- taking notes of conversations and always keep them confidential. The victim may need these at a later date.
- Refer [www.saferresource.org.au/dealing\\_with\\_disclosures\\_of\\_abuse](http://www.saferresource.org.au/dealing_with_disclosures_of_abuse)

The recommended action to be taken by anyone who becomes aware of a domestic abuse situation when there is concern abuse is occurring (often as abusive behaviours or patterns of behaviour in others are identified):

- seek advice from CCS pastors, elder, director, or ministry leader on a no names basis where no direct disclosure has been made, but there are reasonable grounds to suspect or be concerned that domestic abuse is occurring.
- stay in touch with the individual so they are supported and may choose to raise any issues with you
- ask after them as most victims want you to ask how they are doing. Your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help. For example:
  - ‘How are things at home?’
  - ‘I noticed (e.g. your partner speaking disrespectfully to you before), how are things going at home?’
  - ‘I noticed (e.g. your partner was short tempered with you and the kids the other day), would you like to talk about it?’
  - if it becomes appropriate, “Is anyone hurting you?” or “Do you ever feel afraid?”
- take time to listen and believe what they say and don’t judge. If they sense scepticism they may be discouraged from speaking again.
- choose the place wisely. If it is at all possible, speak with the victim in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again, and keep in mind that someone in distress may start talking anywhere.

More detailed response considerations:

- when you haven’t personally experienced abuse, it is easy to listen with an attitude of assessing whether what is being reported is really abuse. ‘Would I find that abusive?’

Doesn't everyone argue sometimes?' However, when a person has repeatedly been victimised and feels powerless, our response always needs to be to offer support, to listen, not judge, and give the victim the respect of being believed.

- those faced with the news or suspicions of domestic abuse often feel ill-equipped. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between other types of marital dysfunction and domestic abuse, or it may be that concerns about abuse only emerge gradually. Congregants and pastoral staff should acknowledge their professional limitations and should consult experienced domestic violence services for advice.
- the safety of victims and children is paramount. All actions should carefully consider the risk to their safety (and your own). Making phone calls, possessing information about support services for domestic abuse, the use of texts and emails, and accessing relevant websites all create potential risks for those experiencing abuse. Consider how you provide the victim with information and support so risks of further abuse are not increased.
- do not rush. Unless the victim (or children) is in immediate danger, it is not necessary to act hastily. A measured safe response can be developed with appropriate support for as long as is needed.
- risk of significant escalation of abuse. Be aware that any intervention may put the victim, their family, you or your colleagues in danger, as this may escalate the level of abuse. Therefore, it is important to seek the help of an experienced professional if the victim is considering an intervention, exit or public exposure. IF there is risk of immediate danger ring the Police on 000. The professional is likely to support and empower the victim and is likely to also best help them develop a Safety Plan which is a list of actions that can be taken by the victim, or trusted supporters to help secure the victim's safety.
- limits of confidentiality. Make it clear that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, depending on the nature of what is disclosed. It is important to confirm confidentiality is essential. As a general principle, permission must be granted by the victim before any information is shared UNLESS there is significant risk of harm and/or victim is child or unless mandatory reporting or otherwise required by law.

Further, if abuse involves ministry staff, the issue must be escalated according to the process outlined in the CCS Constitution or to the local authorities as needed. In matters of domestic abuse the matter often cannot be managed in-house. It is recommended you seek a victim's consent in writing if possible prior to any sharing of information, referrals, etc. unless there is a serious risk of imminent harm. This protects both them and you and may provide evidence which may be required later as to when abuse was occurring.

### **In regard as to how to support a perpetrator:**

Keeping victims safe in churches means holding perpetrators accountable. It also means not ignoring their abuse, excusing it, minimising it, covering it up or enabling the behaviour to continue. Therefore, perpetrators need our support too, and often professional help.

Assuming it is agreed to, CCS pastors, elders and directors will ensure there is a different person (and tertiary services) supporting the perpetrator than those supporting the victim. This is essential to ensure the perpetrator does not feel "ganged up on," has someone's ear, is given grace, and has the right to the presumption of innocence. Some considerations are:



- remember there are often deeper causes behind the abuse, and so it is important not to merely refer a perpetrator to (say) anger management support as though that will suddenly “solve” everything. Only those with professional training should discuss such issues and provide support in this area
- in some circumstances, and subject to the safety of the victim, it may be necessary for a perpetrator to attend another service or church in the interim.
- regardless of the level of remorse, do NOT pursue couples’ counselling with them and their partner if you are aware of abuse in their relationship.
- do not meet with them alone and in private. Meet in a public place and with several others around.
- Refer [www.saferresource.org.au/how\\_churches\\_can\\_support\\_perpetrators](http://www.saferresource.org.au/how_churches_can_support_perpetrators)

## **5. Calvary Chapel Sydney Domestic Abuse Action Framework**

CCS is committed to a culture of:

- safety
- loving concern
- awareness and taking responsibility (i.e. not turning a “blind eye”)
- healthy relationships with God and others

and guided by the Scripture and the Holy Spirit will walk beside and patiently care for people with a long-term view.

CCS pastors, elders, directors, and volunteers are not experts or professional Domestic Abuse counsellors but rather are often the “first responders.” When necessary they may refer the victim to appropriate tertiary services. The CCS Domestic Abuse policy is part of an initial training to raise awareness with a refresher annually, and it will be offered to homegroup and ministry leaders as well. The aim of making this available is to promote healthy relationships in the church as well in our families, communities, and workplaces.

### **The principles which support the CCS Domestic Abuse Action Framework:**

- support must be tailored to the individual as it is impossible to craft a response that fits the circumstances of all victims
- support will ensure the victim is walked alongside and knows they are believed
- confidentiality is paramount (except if danger is present, or children are at risk)
- tertiary support services referred to must be specialist Domestic Abuse services and should not involve a counsellor who attends CCS
- separate support is provided for the perpetrator to the victim
- provide equal support to a victim who has spoken out, as to a potential victim or query about a “hypothetical” situation
- the victim should ideally provide written approval to discuss the situation with others (i.e. such as email, letter or text message that can be stored as a record)
- Any staff or congregants supporting a victim or perpetrator through a Domestic Abuse issue in encouraged to access counselling support to debrief after providing assistance.

## **Appendix 1: Thinking Biblically—10 Statements about Domestic Abuse**

(from St. Matt's Domestic Abuse Policy found at <https://www.stmattsmanly.org.au/about> )

- 1.** All human beings, both male and female, are created equal in the image of God, and are precious to him. As such their value and dignity rightly commands our respect and protection and should be upheld by all (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 82:3-4; Matthew 22:37-40).
- 2.** Marriage is given by God as a good part of his creation for human wellbeing and should be honoured by all. It is intended as a lifelong union of a man and a woman. Healthy Christian relationships are characterised by servanthood and sacrifice, supremely modelled by Jesus Christ. Within a marriage relationship both husband and wife are to respond to one another by building each other up, which includes mutual love, nurture and respect. Attempts to distort the biblical concepts of headship and submission to justify abusive behaviour is intolerable (Mark 10:42-45; Ephesians 5:18-33; Hebrews 13:4).
- 3.** The Bible rejects all abuse, whether physical, verbal, or otherwise expressed from one person towards another and always condemns the misuse of power to control or exploit others. Therefore, domestic abuse is sin. Such sin is deceptive in its power and damaging in its effects (Galatians 5:19-26).
- 4.** When domestic abuse in marriage is reported, then separation of the spouses for the sake of the safety of a victim and any children is always an appropriate step to be considered and should never be discouraged (Proverbs 27:12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11).
- 5.** Victims of domestic abuse should be encouraged to seek help from the Police, from child protection authorities and other relevant domestic violence services. Church leaders who become aware of situations of domestic abuse should always ensure they meet their mandatory reporting obligations, and obtain professional advice (Romans 13:1-5).
- 6.** When a wife or husband separates for the sake of their safety (or that of their children), such action should not mean the person is deemed to have deserted the marriage or have abandoned their responsibilities as a parent even though they may have physically left the common home. Church leaders should support those who have separated for such reasons (Psalm 82:3-4).
- 7.** The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ flows from justice, love, and grace. It offers forgiveness and calls for repentance. When domestic abuse has been indicated as a factor in separation, attempts made at reconciliation should not be suggested until it is clear the perpetrator has demonstrated over time a genuine repentance and taken full responsibility for their actions. Such repentance includes being able to demonstrate an understanding of what led the person to behave in an abusive manner, and an understanding of what was wrong with their behaviour (Luke 3:8-14; Romans 12:9; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11).
- 8.** Any attempts made at reconciliation should only proceed slowly and cautiously, after consultation with experienced domestic abuse services. Domestic abuse research and statistics showing that true reformation in such cases takes time and considerable effort on the part of the perpetrator, and, for some, may never be achieved. Therefore, the caution of a victim in being reconciled to an offender should not be mistaken for 'unwillingness' to forgive or be reconciled.

**9.** The grace of the gospel extends to all sinners. Church leaders have an obligation to provide support, pastoral accountability and supervision to any person who remains within their church communities known to have been a perpetrator of domestic abuse. However, such support should only be given in a manner that does not compromise the safety or pastoral care of victims of domestic abuse.

**10.** Christians with a genuine desire to be faithful to Scripture will hold different views on the question of when divorce is appropriate. However, such views should not impact on a Christian's support for a victim of domestic abuse separating from their spouse for the sake of safety. For a discussion of when divorce might be a sad but appropriate action in the circumstances of domestic abuse please see the Senior Pastor.

## **Appendix 2: Additional Commentary on the Importance of Believing a Victim**

Believing a victim, any victim, is vital to the credibility of the Policy. Believing a victim is not about standing in judgement of or defaming a perpetrator. The major public resources concerning responding to Domestic Abuse all adopt this stance. The stance of believing the victim at CCS is one of empathy, care, respect, and love.

### **2.1 How to respond to victims**

*“When you haven’t personally experienced abuse, it’s easy to listen with an attitude of assessing whether what is being reported is really abuse. ‘Would I find that abusive? Doesn’t everyone argue sometimes?’ However, when a person has repeatedly been victimised and feels powerless, our response always needs to be to offer support, to listen and give those people the respect of being believed.”*

- Clinical psychologist and clergy wife

### **2.2 Initial Disclosure**

If a victim discloses or otherwise hints at abuse, the following factors are important:

- ask after them. Most victims want you to ask how they are doing. Your offer of help could be the first step in enabling them to seek help, e.g. ‘How are things at home?’ and if it becomes appropriate, ‘Is anyone hurting you?’ or ‘Do you ever feel afraid?’
- take time to listen. Take plenty of time to listen carefully and believe what they say. If they sense disbelief they may be discouraged from speaking again
- choose the place wisely. If it is at all possible, speak with the victim in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again, keeping in mind that someone in distress may start talking anywhere. As is the case in other ministry situations when speaking with a woman, male clergy should consider inviting her to bring a support person, or should conduct the discussion where there are others in the general vicinity.
- the limits of confidentiality. Make it clear that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, depending on the nature of what is disclosed. For example, further disclosure may be needed when someone is being hurt or is in serious danger, a serious criminal offence has been committed, or when children are involved because of a legal obligation.

All the resources reflected that a major deterrent in people (especially women) coming forward is the fear that they won’t be believed. We did not come across any resource that opposes or minimises the importance of being believed.

### Appendix 3: External Specialist Support Services --- Contact Details

**1800 RESPECT national helpline:** 24/7 for sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling and advice dial 1800 737 732 (free call) or <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

**Child Protection Helpline:** Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) dial 132 111 or <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters/how-to>

**LifeLine:** 24/7 telephone crisis line dial 131 114 or <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/get-help-home>

**NSW Domestic Violence Line:** 24/7 for comprehensive information and referrals to nearby support services, for all categories of domestic violence, dial 1800 65 64 63 (free call) or <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence>

**NSW Rape Crisis Centre:** counselling service for ANYONE (male or female) in NSW who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault Dial 1800 424 017 (free call) or <https://www.rape-dvservices.org.au>

**No to Violence:** men's Referral Service Telephone Counselling, information and referral service for men using violence in families, male victims, and for their friends or relatives dial 1300 766 491 or <https://ntv.org.au>

**MensLine Australia:** 24/7 telephone and online support and information service for Australian men, dial 1300 789 978 or <https://mensline.org.au>

**Aurora App (NSW only) Daisy App (Australia wide):** these domestic and family abuse apps are for people experiencing domestic abuse (DA) or for those worried about their relationship. The app contains useful information including emergency contacts, the kinds of behaviour considered to be DA, vital links to support services. Importantly, the app allows the user to message trusted friends and family or call emergency services immediately. The Aurora app has safety features that allow it to be used discreetly and seek assistance without "tipping off" a perpetrator and endangering themselves. It was developed in consultation with NSW Police and experts from the DA sector. Free to download from iPhone App Store or Android Google Play.

#### **Support for Perpetrators / Behavioural Change (NSW Accredited)**

- The Men's Behaviour Change Network
- BaptistCare Changing Men's Behaviour program
- CatholicCare Choosing Change Program
- No to Violence: Men's Referral Service
- Safer Website resources

**Victims Access Line:** is a first point of call for 24/7 access to all services. Provides confidential support, referral and information, including referral to specific support such as sexual assault, domestic violence and crimes against children services, dial 1800 633 063 (free call) or <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/legal/victims-of-violent-crimes/adult-survivors-of-sexual-abuse>

**Translating & Interpreting Service:** 24/7 Immediate phone service      Dial 131 450 or  
[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

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