

Domestic Abuse & safety planning during COVID-19 a guide for professionals



If you need to make contact with a survivor, consider how you will do this safely. When making contact by phone always check if it is safe for them to talk and whether their partner is present. Explore when is a safe time for them to talk and agree a means of contact and communication. Do not vary this arrangement as this may put the victim at increased risk.

Avoiding public spaces and working remotely can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However for many survivors of domestic abuse staying home may not be the safest option. Domestic abuse is about power and coercive control. When survivors are forced to stay in the home or in close proximity to the abuser they may use the COVID-19 pandemic to exert more control over their victim. In a time where employers may be encouraging employees to work remotely and the government is encourage social distancing an abuser may take advantage of an already difficult situation to gain more control.

Domestic Abuse Services available;		Website	
Hull DAP	01482 318759	hulldap.co.uk	
Hull Women's Aid	01482 446099	hullwomensaid.org	
Preston Road Women's Centre	01482 790310	purplehouse.co.uk	
ChildLine	08001111	childline.org.uk	
Website information for young people;			
thehideout.org.uk	hesslerdnetwork.org	gybhull.com	howareyoufeeling.org.uk

How COVID-19 could uniquely impact on victims:

- Abusive partners may withhold necessary items, such as hand sanitizer or disinfectants.
- Abusive partners may share false / distorted information about the pandemic to control or frighten them, or to prevent them from seeking appropriate medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Abusive partners may withhold prevent them from seeking medical attention if they need it.
- Services that offer support may be significantly impacted and survivors may feel that there is no support available.
- Survivors may be fearful of leaving their home because of the possibility of being in close proximity with people or groups of people and maybe worried about their health and that of their children.
- Survivors who are older or who have an underlying health condition may be at increased risk in public places where they would typically get support.
- Travel restrictions may impact a survivor's escape or safety plan – it may not be safe for them to use public transportation or it may not be available.
- An abusive partner may feel more justified and escalate their isolation tactics.
- Abusive partners may use child contact as a means to further abuse and to gain contact with the survivor to exert further abuse and coercive and controlling behavior.

Survivors are equipped with the knowledge, strength and tools to keep themselves, their children, family and friends safe. They are the experts on their own situation and the abuse they are experiencing. The safety planning examples below can be suggested to survivors, but remember if a survivor feels any suggestions made are not safe for them, then this shouldn't be pushed, they are the experts.

Silent calls to the police – dial 999 – when the operator is on the line press 55.
No credit is needed to call the police

Domestic Abuse & safety planning during COVID-19 a guide for professionals



Safety planning examples;

- Consider their partner's use and level of force so that they can assess the risk of physical harm to them and their children before it occurs.
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons (or objects that can be used as weapons) and there are ways to escape. If arguments occur, try to move to those areas.
- Don't run to where the children are; their partner may hurt them as well or they may be caught in the cross fire.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know what numbers to call for help. If in immediate danger call the police.
- Accessing information online, delete browser history, or use private browsing to hide searches.
- Family, friends, or neighbor – can they face time or call them as often as possible and let them know if they need help. Ask them to check in with the survivor each day.
- Have a code word or sign to signal they are in danger and set this up with family / friends / neighbours to let them know by text, FaceTime or skype. The code will need to alert them to contact the police if they are in danger.
- Teach the code to children who are old enough to understand what they you are being asked of them and teach them how to get help. Instruct them not to get involved in any escalation or increase in physical violence, or get in between them. Plan a code word to signal to them that they should get help or leave the house.
- Tell children that violence or abuse is never right, even when someone they love is being abusive or violent. Tell children that the abuse or violence being used is not their fault and that they are not the cause of the abuse or violence and neither is the survivor - what is important is that they stay safe.
- Practice how to get out safely and practice with their children.
- Plan for what they will do if their children tell their partner of their plan or if their partner finds out.
- If they have to leave in an emergency where will they go? If they can have a plan for this in place.
- If someone they trust is doing their shopping can they write a message on the shopping list asking for help.
- Have a bag packed ready and if they can leave this at a trusted friend/family/neighbours house. Store copies (if it's not safe to pack originals) of important documents; passports, driving license, NI number or bank statement and small amount of money.
- Tell agencies you are in contact with when it's a safe time for you to talk.
- Make a habit of backing the car into the driveway and keeping it fueled.
- Try not to wear scarves or long jewelry that could be used to strangle or choke.
- Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times of the day or night.
- If they are attending work can they discuss what going on with their employer and develop a safety plan with them, including a code word or what they should do if they don't come into work and don't contact them to explain why.
- Are there any cameras or recording device in the home, this may change their safety planning options.
- Use the fact that there are no online shopping slots available to go to the shop and speak to someone.
- If there is a child contact order in place which is not being followed contact their solicitor or the police to enforce it.
- If they see the abuser near their home and they feel in danger call the police.

Silent calls to the police – dial 999 – when the operator is on the line press 55.
No credit is needed to call the police