

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for social care

Domestic violence and abuse: Safeguarding during the COVID-19 crisis

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This quick guide is aimed at professionals and organisations who are involved in supporting and safeguarding adults and children. The importance of safeguarding adults who are experiencing domestic abuse has not diminished during the COVID-19 crisis. Emerging evidence from statutory and voluntary agencies across the UK emphasised the increased risks of domestic abuse, with [Refuge](#) ^{link 1} reporting a 25 per cent increase in calls and online requests since the lockdown began in March 2020. The risks were not unique to the UK and were reported to be affecting society worldwide, including China, Italy and Spain.

Domestic abuse organisations observed increased household tension and domestic violence due to forced coexistence, economic stress, and fears about the virus. Increased isolation could create an escalation in abuse, where those who are living with an abusive partner or family member, may be less likely to ask for help. Fewer visitors to the household mean that evidence of physical abuse could have gone unnoticed.

The COVID-19 outbreak also curtailed access to support services for survivors, particularly in the health, social care, police and justice sectors. Emergency services experienced an overstretched workforce concentrated on tackling the pandemic.

Evidence from past epidemics such as Ebola (in West Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo), Cholera (in Yemen and Haiti) and Zika (in the Americas) suggest the importance of a 'twin-track' approach that combines support to organisations so they can continue their work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, and integrating Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) risk mitigation measures into sectoral responses (e.g. health, education, child protection, security and justice, social protection and job creation, and humanitarian responses).

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, please call 999 and ask for the police. If you are unable to speak you can use the [Silent Solution](#) ^{link 2} system from a mobile phone: call 999 and then press 55. The operator will then put you through to the police.

The police will try to communicate with you by asking simple yes or no questions. If you are not able to speak, listen carefully to the questions and instructions from the call handler so they can assess your call and arrange help if needed.

Types of abuse

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, [coercive](#) ^{link 3} or threatening behaviour, damage to property, violence or abuse, between those aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners, or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) is included.

There are numerous [types and indicators](#) ^{link 4} of abuse to look out for:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological or emotional abuse
- financial or material abuse.

In some families, domestic violence and abuse could be perpetrated by extended family members living in the same home. It may include honour-based violence, forced marriage or female genital mutilation. Some of these victims also experience racism and prejudice so may not be forthcoming to services and fear rejection from their whole community if they ask for help. Some people may not be fluent in English and could find it hard to communicate their circumstances.

It is important to recognise that abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships and the above advice applies to these groups. [Stonewall's domestic violence page](#) ^{link 5} contains resources and information for people in the LGBTQ+ community, including housing support.

Men can also be hidden victims as many male victims fail to tell anyone:

- ManKind's [Help for male victims](#) ^{link 6} provides training, advice and support to professionals and victims.



- Respect's [Men's Advice Line](#) ^{link 7} takes calls from men, and their families and friends and practitioners.

Recognising types of abuse

NICE/SCIE has produced [Recognising and responding to domestic violence and abuse: a quick guide](#) ^{link 8} .

This quick guide offers social workers and other professionals a summary of NICE guidance on how to identify and help stop domestic violence and abuse.

SCIE's [Adult safeguarding practice questions](#) ^{link 9} identify a number of challenging safeguarding dilemmas to help people support adults with care and support needs who are experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect.

Multi-agency forums

We know that agencies need to work together to gain a picture of the life of a person living with domestic abuse which includes older adult abuse.

- Agencies need to share plans about how they will manage the increase in domestic violence and abuse.
- Each agency should clarify how it intends to engage with families over this period and as restrictions continue.
- Although many agencies may be working remotely, it is important that information sharing and engaging with families and victims continues regularly and in creative ways, safely and securely.
- Multi-agency forums should be led by their agency online protocols and agree a joint approach to determine which virtual platforms are appropriate.
- Chairs of multi-agency forums should be skilled in managing virtual meetings. [SafeLives](#) ^{link 10} recommends using the case structure and sending it to all agency representatives beforehand.
- If virtual meetings become a challenge, agencies could consider report submission to be discussed within a smaller group of key professionals but should only be used as a last resort and non-attendees should provide the same level of commitment and creative solution.

How are local authorities and national charities responding?

A number of local authorities and national charities responded rapidly, seeking to provide flexible safeguarding solutions during the initial challenging lockdown period.

Local authorities published information about supporting domestic abuse victims during the coronavirus outbreak. For example:

- [Liverpool](#) ^{link 11}
- [Hammersmith & Fulham](#) ^{link 12}
- [East Hampshire](#) ^{link 13}
- [Middlesbrough](#) ^{link 14}

National charities produced different guidance and continue to provide services for staying safe during COVID-19 for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

SafeLives produced [Staying safe during COVID:19: a guide for victims and survivors of domestic abuse](#) ^{link 15} .

Women's Aid is continuing to provide the following services:

- [Survivors' Forum](#) ^{link 16} is an online resource for survivors of domestic abuse. The Survivors' Forum can be accessed 24/7. This is a place where survivors can support each other and share their experiences.
- [Live Chat](#) ^{link 17} is currently available Monday to Friday 10am-12pm. This could be a safer way to access some support; particularly if an abuser might also be in the property so it would be unsafe to make a telephone call.
- [Email Service](#) ^{link 18} is still operating and can also provide support.

Surviving Economic Abuse produced [Resources for women](#) ^{link 19} guidance on economic abuse whilst self-isolating, as well as practical issues including benefits and sick pay. It is updated regularly as the situation changes.

Information to support survivors/victims of domestic violence and abuse

Direct practice workers (e.g. social care workers, occupational therapists and midwives) and community groups are the eyes and ears that may first pick up any signs of abuse. You can give practical advice and safety tips for those who may be self-isolating with a perpetrator, for example:

- Remind the person of their rights to seeking confidential housing information, or emergency accommodation from the local authority, which retains a duty to place them if necessary.
- Where possible keeping a mobile charged and on the person you are caring for.
- Agree code words, a blank text or emoji with friends, family or professionals, to alert them to call the police.
- Talk to children about where they should go in the house to keep safe.
- Consider asking the person to leave an overnight bag with someone, with some money and ID/passport.



- Signpost to digital support options, for example, [Hestia's Bright Sky](#) ^{link 20}, which provides support and information to anyone who might be in an abusive relationship.
- Inform the person about [Shelter](#) ^{link 21}, a charity providing free confidential housing information, support and legal advice on all housing and homelessness issues. It also offers an emergency helpline.
- Agencies and professionals should also be aware of working with those who harm. [SafeLives](#) ^{link 22} has a practical guide to help practitioners and perpetrators.

Here is a checklist of other things you can do:

- ☑ Talk to your patients, residents or clients about the increased risk of abuse at this time.
- ☑ If you know of a person who has been subjected to, or is at risk of, domestic abuse, talk to them to try to assess the current situation. Make sure they know that help is available if they need it, and who to contact both for advice and support and in an emergency.
- ☑ If you are a domestic abuse professional, part of a MARAC or work around domestic abuse in any other capacity, you can join the free [SafeLives Community](#) ^{link 23}. You can connect with other professionals and access the latest guidance from SafeLives.

Safety planning

Safety planning is a key area of any form of domestic violence and abuse. It can help with behaviour change with people who harm and support victim-survivors. It is important that all safety plans are regularly reviewed even when there does not appear to be significant change. [SafeLives](#) ^{link 24} has a practical guide aimed at victims and survivors and also contains helpful prompts for professionals.

Adolescent to parent violence

Adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) may be referred to as adolescent to parent violence.

APVA is likely to involve a pattern of behaviour. This can include physical violence from an adolescent towards a parent and a number of different types of abusive behaviours, including damage to property, emotional abuse, and economic/financial abuse.

Arguments could have escalated during isolation. It is important to establish a timeline and determine if this is a first occurrence or if it has been building up for some time. [Family lives](#) ^{link 25} gives some helpful information for professionals and families.

Shame and stigma are often attached to APVA and many parents may find it difficult to talk about it. Therefore, it is important that professionals ask questions to establish the relationship within the family. An [information guide](#) ^{link 26} from the Home Office provides some further insight for a range of professionals from social care to housing staff.

These incidences can be high in adoptive families and it is possible new cases could occur as a result of isolation.

Court orders

The President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice has released [Coronavirus crisis: Guidance on compliance with family court child arrangement orders](#) ^{link 27}.

The guidance acknowledges that advice is general as each individual circumstance will be unique. The key message is where COVID-19 restrictions mean what is actually written in the court order needs to be varied, its aim and purpose order should still be obeyed. Any alternative arrangements should be confirmed via letter or email.

When parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents' home. However, that does not mean that they must be moved between homes. The decision should be made by the parents after assessing the child's health, risk of infection and safety of the child.

Perpetrator programmes and support

While there is a justifiable amount of support and focus on victim/survivors of DVA, it is important we have a national focus on perpetrators to address the emotional and cognitive harmful behaviour that is often deep rooted. It is important that perpetrators have the tools to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and not blame victims/survivors for their actions.

There have been many perpetrator programmes over the years with varied evidence base and impact. It can be a challenge for commissioners to navigate what works.

The [Drive programme](#) ^{link 28} is well evidenced through randomised control trials. It is a tailor-made programme adopting a multi-agency, coordinated approach. The programme is aimed at high-risk, high-harm perpetrators who are usually repeat offenders, sometimes creating up to six different victims/survivors. The scaling of such programmes is welcomed. A coordinated national and local perpetrator strategy that includes systemic prevention and harm-reduction approaches across the ages of perpetrators will further support prevention and reduction of abuse.



For perpetrators who want support, there are helplines such as [Respect](#) [link 29](#) who can signpost to further vital services.

[Respect has guidance](#) [link 30](#) for those commissioning or delivering perpetrator support and programmes.

Guidance

The Government has produced [guidance and advice](#) [link 31](#) for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

For details of helplines, go to [Report domestic abuse](#) [link 32](#).

SCIE support

[SCIE's COVID-19 hub](#) [link 33](#) contains more relevant information including safeguarding, supporting people who are isolated and vulnerable, and infection control. It can be used when supporting and safeguarding adults and children during COVID-19, and can also be shared with community groups.

link 1 | <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52157620>

link 2 | https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf

link 3 | https://safelives.org.uk/practice_blog/introduction-coercive-control

link 4 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse>

link 5 | <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/criminal-law/domestic-violence>

link 6 | <https://www.mankind.org.uk/help-for-victims/>

link 7 | <https://mensadviceline.org.uk/male-victims/>

link 8 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/files/safeguarding/adults/prevention/Recognising-and-responding-to-domestic-violence-and-abuse.pdf>

link 9 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/practice/questions>

link 10 | <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Effective%20chairing%20at%20Marac.pdf>

link 11 | <https://liverpool.gov.uk/communities-and-safety/crime-and-safety/domestic-abuse/>

link 12 | <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/crime/domestic-violence/supporting-domestic-abuse-victims-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

link 13 | <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/domestic-abuse>

link 14 | <https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/community-support-and-safety/domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-support>

link 15 | <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safety%20planning%20guide,%20victims%20and%20survivors,%20COVID-19.pdf>

link 16 | <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/>

link 17 | <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

link 18 | <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/help-by-email/>

link 19 | <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources/#1510833166420-b4c23c47-7640>

link 20 | <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

link 21 | <https://england.shelter.org.uk/>

link 22 | <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Guidance%20for%20professionals%20working%20with%20perpetrators.pdf>

link 23 | <https://community.safelives.org.uk/default.aspx>

link 24 | <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safety%20planning%20guide,%20victims%20and%20survivors,%20COVID-19.pdf>

link 25 | <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

link 26 | https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732573/APVA.pdf

link 27 | <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>

link 28 | <http://driveproject.org.uk/>

link 29 | <https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/29-helplines>

link 30 | https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/respect/attachment/file/73/Respect_guidance_for_Domestic_Abuse_Perpetrator_Programmes-Covid-19_challenges.pdf

link 31 | <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>

link 32 | <https://www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse>

link 33 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19>

link 34 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/myscie/register>

link 35 | <https://www.scie.org.uk/myscie/login>

