

Covid-19 Information Sheet – Domestic Abuse

This information sheet has been produced by students from BPP's Pro Bono Centre under the supervision of legally qualified staff members for survivors of domestic abuse and their children who are cared for in domestic abuse safe accommodation settings. The information contained in this document is accurate as of 6th April 2020.

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STAYING SAFE ONLINE

If you share a computer or phone device or your abuser has access to your device, you may be concerned that they may know that you have visited the following websites. Please go to <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/> for information on how to cover your tracks online safely.

Emergencies

I am worried that if I phone 999, my abuser will overhear my conversation with the police?

If you follow the Silent Solution System, there is no need to talk to the Police over the phone. After dialling 999, press 55 on the keypad. You will be directly transferred to your local Police force and the call will be treated as an emergency, without the need for you to speak.

If I leave my home to escape my abusive partner or to seek help, will I be in violation of the lockdown rules?

No, the Home Secretary has made it clear that survivors can leave their homes to escape or to seek help. This is an essential reason to leave your home within the lockdown rules.

I have heard that police services may be reduced during the outbreak, will the police respond to calls about domestic abuse?

Yes, domestic abuse remains a priority for police officers despite the outbreak. The Police are aware of the increased risk that individuals may face whilst living in lockdown with an abusive partner. If you feel you are in immediate danger, please phone 999 and press 55 for the Silent Solution System.

The Police will have appropriate custody facilities so that they can arrest abusers and keep survivors safe – even if someone is showing symptoms of COVID-19.

Please remember: Domestic abuse support services are **not** emergency services and cannot assist you if you are in immediate danger. If you are not in immediate danger, but need some advice, you may wish to contact various support services by phone or live chat.

Support Service Providers

Now that my abuser and I are in the house together most of the time, I am worried that they will overhear any phone calls to domestic abuse support services?

If you are concerned that your abusive partner may overhear your conversations, you may prefer to use an online live chat facility. For women experiencing domestic abuse, Women's Aid offer a live chat service Monday to Friday between 10:00am and 12:00pm. An email service is also available with response time approximately 5 working days. See the Help and Advice section below for details on how to contact Women's Aid.

What services are available to support me?

Different support services are available that operate both nationally and regionally:

- Women's Aid is a national charity that provides both an email and a live chat service.
- The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is available to call, free of charge, at 0808 2000 247. The helpline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You will be able to speak with a female advisor, who may help to find you a refuge place or other specialist services.

In addition, you may have local support available which is able to provide more tailored advice, for example, as to available housing options in your area. See the Help and Advice section below for details on how to find your local support using the Domestic Abuse Directory.

These services are **not** emergency services. If you are in immediate danger, please phone 999 and press 55 for the Silent Solution System. For specific information regarding male and LGBTQ+ survivors, please see below.

Leaving home

What has the government and different organisations done to address domestic abuse during the pandemic?

1. The government has confirmed that refuges and other forms of domestic abuse safe accommodation will continue to operate; local councils will be provided £1.6bn to help those in need and those who are working with charities, and most importantly the National Domestic Abuse Helpline will continue to operate.
2. The Mayor of London, with the support from the government and working with Intercontinental Hotels Group, has secured 300 hotel rooms to enable Londoners sleeping rough to self-isolate. The rooms are being provided at a substantially discounted rate. The Mayor of London is also working with black cab drivers, via hailing apps FreeNow and Gett, who have volunteered to help transport people between support services. For example, the black cab drivers are helping to pick up people from the streets and sending them to the hotel rooms. This is to help avoid the use of public transport. FreeNow and Gett can both be downloaded on your smartphone. Please note that as of this date, these services are only available for individuals that are in London.
3. Solace Women's Aid (SWA) is an organisation that aims to prevent violence and abuse as well as providing services to meet the needs of survivors, particularly women and girls. SWA, along with many other different organisations, has written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to demand that urgent action is taken for survivors for domestic violence. The organisation demanded a separate emergency fund for local authorities to ensure that they are able to adequately house survivors of domestic abuse in hotels or other safe and suitable accommodation, and to publish clear information to make survivors aware of the additional support. Further, SWA is currently raising £150,000 to help women who are trapped in their homes with an abusive partner during enforced isolation due to the pandemic.
4. Women's Aid (WA) works with shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse. The organisation has confirmed that helplines and accommodation-based services remain open and refuges are 'preparing for women and children contracting the virus whilst living there – ensuring they can self-isolate from other residents. WA also work to support survivors directly through online means including its Live Chat, Survivors' Handbook and Survivors' Forum.

What options are available if I am planning to leave my abuser?

- Contact one of the support services – they may be able to provide initial advice.
- Create an emergency bag
 - If safe to do so without your abuser noticing, keep a bag with some cash, important documents (including birth certificates, marriage certificates, tenancy/mortgage documents, ID documents, National Insurance Number, driving licence), a set of keys, some clothes, any medication, phone charger and emergency numbers. This

could be kept safe at a neighbour or friend's house, so you can leave in a hurry and still have your essentials.

- Make a plan
 - Think about your partners' routines and choose a safe time to leave your home. Consider where he will be, and plan a safe route – for example, you might want to avoid using a local taxi service in a small town, in case the driver tells your partner where you have gone.
- Arrange a place to stay
 - This might be the home of a trusted friend or family member, but make sure your abuser doesn't know the location. Consider applying to go to a refuge. A refuge is a safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence. The address is confidential and no men are allowed in the building. Specialist staff at the refuge provide residents with the building blocks they need to begin a new life, free from fear. They help women and children to overcome the impacts of violence and abuse and offer a huge range of practical and emotional support. This might include support on housing, education, accessing benefits, employment, or immigration, or it might mean helping victims achieve better health and wellbeing.
 - Seek housing advice from local authority. The local authority is likely to have a legal duty to re-house anyone experiencing domestic abuse. In the majority of cases, you will be considered 'unintentionally homeless' under the law. You will be legally considered homeless when you are living with a perpetrator or living in a refuge. Even if you are not living with a perpetrator, but the perpetrator knows where you live, you might still be considered legally homeless.

What if I have already left my abuser?

- Explore civil orders:
 - A non-molestation order will prevent the perpetrator from approaching you or contacting you. If your perpetrator breaches the order it is a criminal offence and they can be arrested by the Police.
 - An occupation order can temporarily redefine property rights and exclude the perpetrator from the family home for your protection.

You can access support with applying for these orders online using FLOWS -see below for website details.

- Keep a record
 - Think about ways you can gather evidence of your partner's behaviour safely. Make notes of abusive incidents, including times, dates, names and details of how it made you feel. Tell your GP, so they have a record of the abuse. Save any abusive messages. These can be used as evidence at a later date. However, make sure they aren't stored anywhere (physically, or digitally) where your partner might find them.

- Contact the police
 - Be ready to call 999 if you or your children are in danger. You can also call 101 in a non-emergency situation to report previous incidents, get advice from the local domestic abuse team, and let them know about any civil orders in place.

Contact with Children

What if I co-parent with my ex-partner?

Every family's situation is unique, it's important to find bespoke solutions to the range of issues separated parents are encountering. NFM's 'Co-parenting through Coronavirus' video conference consultations help parents work with an expert mediator to work out what can be done now to reduce the impact on children's lives. They will help parents make new or changed plans to help get through the next few months, which includes the economic impact on financial arrangements for children as people find themselves losing work.

BPP Pro Bono Centre has also produced an Information Sheet for parents who need to handle arrangements about children with ex-partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is available on the Pro Bono Centre website: <http://probono.bppuniversity.ac.uk/blog/>.

Support for Men

I am a man experiencing domestic abuse. Are there any options for me?

Men's Advice Line provides help for male victims of domestic abuse. They can offer you emotional support and keep you informed about services that will help keep you and your children safe. The Men's Advice Line can be contacted on 0808 801 0327. This number is free to call from landlines and mobile phones within the UK and will not appear on itemised bills. The Advice Line is still operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. If English isn't your first language, you can ask for a telephone interpreter.

Men's Advice Line provides support for men in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

I am unable to hear or speak. Are there measures in place to help me communicate with Men's Advice Line?

Men's Advice Line's advisors are trained to communicate with persons who are unable to hear or speak via the Next Generation Text Service (Relay UK). See the Help and Advice section below for more information about the Next Generation Text Service.

Will the calls I make be kept confidential?

Yes, they will. The Men's Advice line will not ask for your personal information unless they need it. If there is a concern over your safety, they may be required by law to disclose information about you to other parties.

Support for LGBT+ persons

I am a member of the LGBT+ community who is experiencing abuse. Are there any options available for me?

Yes, there are options available. Galop provides a safe space for you to talk and explore your options when experiencing domestic abuse. They can also help you to plan to make your life safe, look for safe housing or speak with the Police.

The LGBT foundation also provides practical and emotional support to persons who are currently at risk of or who have previously experienced domestic abuse. They can help you with safety planning, practical housing advice and budgeting to ensure long term security.

How can I get in contact with those organisations?

Galop can be contacted by a specialist helpline on 0800 999 5428 or by email at help@galop.org.uk. See the Help and Advice section below for the link to access help from The LGBT Foundation by filling out their online self-referral form or by calling them at 0345 330 3030.

Can I still get help during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, you can. Galop has stopped all face-to-face services but has put measures in place to help persons remotely. They might be slower to respond to some requests but they continue to do their best to provide services to LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse. You will still be able to use their service during this time.

The LGBT Foundation has also shifted to give remote services during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are still providing support for domestic abuse victims and survivors but will now be doing that through telephone support, online platforms like Zoom, email or text.

Support for persons under 25

I am a person under 25. Are there any options available for me?

Yes, there are options available. Childline provides support for young people experiencing domestic abuse. You can call them for free on 0800 1111.

The Mix also provides support specifically for persons under 25 in the UK. They can support you emotionally and suggest other organisations that would help further. You can contact their helpline for free on 0808 808 4994, text THEMIX to 85258, or chat with them on their website. See the Help and Advice section below for more information.

Can I still get help during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, you can. You can still call Childline for free on 0800 1111 from 9 AM – Midnight during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can also still use their website features and reach other young persons experiencing the same things you are through their message boards.

The Mix continues to provide support for persons under 25 through their helpline, website and text.

Further Information

BPP Pro Bono Centre has produced a series of Factsheets looking at how COVID-19 impacts on a range of different people. All of our factsheets can be viewed on the Pro Bono Centre Blog here: <http://probono.bppuniversity.ac.uk/blog/>

Help and Advice

On the 11th April the Home Secretary announced a new Public Awareness campaign to highlight the help still available to anyone at risk of Domestic Abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. The #youarenotalone campaign will run across mainstream and social media and aims to encourage survivors to seek support. Further information is available :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-support-for-domestic-abuse-victims>

Below are a number of organisations and charities that can help provide further advice:

- Women's Aid - <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk>
- Men's Advice Line - <http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/>
- Next Generation Text Service - <https://www.relayuk.bt.com/>
- Men's Advice Line confidentiality policy - <https://mensadvice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Respect-Helplines-Confidentiality-Policy-2018.pdf>
- Men's Advice Line - <https://mensadvice.org.uk/contact-us/>
- ManKind - <https://www.mankind.org.uk/>
- Galop - <http://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/>
- LGBT Foundation - <http://lgbt.foundation>
- The LGBT Foundation <http://lgbt.foundation/how-we-can-help-you/lgbt-foundation-self-referral-form-da>
- The Mix - <https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team>
- Childline – www.childline.org.uk
- NSPCC National Child Protection Helpline – <http://www.nspcc.org.uk>
- The Hideout - www.thehideout.org.uk
- FLOWS (support with non molestation and occupation orders) - <https://www.flows.org.uk/>

Information and Updates

The UK Government publishes a number of documents and updates as part of the ongoing response to Covid-19. These can be found on the UK Government website here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Wellbeing

This is an extremely difficult time for everyone. There is much uncertainty and a lot of anxiety. Along with your physical health, it is important to look after your emotional wellbeing during this period.

If you need support, contact:

Mind - 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm) www.mind.org.uk