Supporting Survivors of Domestic Abuse (DA) Going During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Health Staff – Immediate Safety Planning for Survivors of DA Going into Self-Isolation:

(See below for further safety planning information)

If you are being subjected to DA and concerned about your safety going into self-isolation, you should:

- Seek safety information and support from an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA):
  - Contact the IDVA Co-located/Affiliated with your service to request support (via their agreed pathways)
  - Or
  - Find your local specialist DA service - https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/ or call the National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247

- Raise any concerns with your line-manager to discuss how your employer can support you to stay safe:
  - For example, ask your manager to call to check in on you on at scheduled times:
    - Plan what your manager should do if they can’t reach you, for example, try again, call your support worker, call the police.
    - Think of a reason to justify why this contact needs to take place, for example saying that your employer is checking on all employees daily.
  - An IDVA can support you to liaise with your line-manager / employer if required.

Immediate Safety Planning for Survivors of DA Going into Self-Isolation:

Information health staff can offer survivors to support their safety when going into self-isolation:

- Call 999 if you feel at risk of immediate harm
  - Silent Solutions: If you feel afraid or further danger or escalation of harm if you are overheard calling 999
    - When you call 999 an operator will ask you which emergency service is required
    - If you do not respond, the call will be put through to silent solutions
    - Press 55 and the call will be transferred to the police.

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• **Contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline** on 0808 2000 247 for 24-hour information on safety and support.

• Contact the [Women’s live chat](https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/) (10am – 12pm Mon-Fri)


• Seek safety information and support from a specialist DA service, such as an **Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)** in your local area:

  - **Find your local specialist DA service** - [https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/) / call the National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247

• **Make a safety plan:**

  - **Plan in advance** how you would act if you feel at risk of harm. An IDVA can help you create a tailored safety plan. General safety planning advice can be found here: [https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/making-a-safety-plan/](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/making-a-safety-plan/)

  - **Some key considerations** if you are going into **self-isolation:**

    ▪ Your safety is of paramount important - follow your safety plan regardless of isolation.

    ▪ **Maintain links** with those around you:

      • **Let those around you**, such as your family, friends, employer, neighbours and/or support worker, **know** that you are going into self-isolation.

      • **Arrange safe contact** with someone you trust to check in on you on at scheduled times:

        o Think of a reason to justify why this contact needs to take place, for example saying that your employer is checking on all employees daily.

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- Plan what your trusted person should do if they can’t reach you, for example, try again, call your support worker or call the police.

- If your phone is monitored, create a code word with your trusted person that the perpetrator will not understand. For example, code words could mean ‘I am safe’ or ‘call the police’.
  - Ask a (close by) neighbour you trust to call 999 if they hear shouting or unusual noises coming from your address.
  - Use the excuse of ‘feeling unwell’ to take yourself away from the perpetrator, to another room or area of the property, if needed.
  - If you feel at risk, try to get to a room where there is a phone and/or exit and avoid rooms which may be dangerous such as the kitchen or bathroom.


Guidance for health staff undertaking DA enquiry over the phone (for example, during pregnancy booking) during this period:

- Check the patient is alone in the property before asking any questions:
  - Specifically ask that they not be on speakerphone.
  - DO NOT ENQUIRE IF THE PATIENT IS NOT ALONE

- Confirm whether the patient can communicate in English:
  - If required, call back using an independent phone interpreting service. Request a female interpreter where possible.
  - DO NOT USE A FRIEND/FAMILY MEMBER AS AN INTERPRETER

- IF IT IS SAFE TO ASK:

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- Explain confidentiality and information sharing procedures

- Frame the question to explain rationale for asking, for example:

  “Domestic abuse is extremely prevalent in society, affecting [1 in 3 women / 1 in 6 men]. Domestic abuse does not just include physical violence but also [...]”

  “We routinely ask all women about domestic abuse because it is so common affecting approximately 1 in 3 women, with approximately 30% either starting or escalating in pregnancy. Domestic abuse does not just include physical violence but also [...]”

- Ask a direct question to clearly enquire about whether they are a survivor, for example:

  “Has anyone close to you (family members or sexual partners) ever made you feel afraid, controlled or isolated, or physically hurt you?”

- IF IT IS NOT SAFE TO ASK:

  - DO NOT ASK
  - Let the patient know you will call them at a later date and do so within 48 hours.
  - If you have a concern that the person is being subjected to DA, escalate to your manager/safeguarding lead to plan of action as a matter of urgency.

- IF A DISCLOSURE IS MADE:

  - Confirm safe contact information including times to call, whether it is safe to text/leave voicemail, whether calls should take place from a withheld number. Ask if they have a safe email address for ongoing support.

  - Offer a referral to an IDVA service (whether it is a local service or your co-located/affiliated IDVA):
    - Advise that due to the Covid-19 pandemic face to face contact with an IDVA will not be available and discuss how safe contact can be facilitated.

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- Consider if a MARAC referral will need to be made and refer as per your organisation/local MARAC referral pathways.
- Advise them to call 999 in an emergency
- Provide them with the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline Number 0808 2000 247:
  - Discuss how they can safely store this number.

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