

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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- https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf
- **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)
- **Victim Support 24 hour Live Chat** <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat>
- 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/> / 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/>
 - 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**:
 - 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.
- Information relating to **Covid-19 and immigration**:
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/visas-extended-for-those-currently-unable-to-return-home-due-to-covid-19?utm_source=e042435d-2e21-4022-a0c4-448c75757472&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

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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