



Domestic Abuse & Covid-19

Managing risk and safety

Guidance for front line workers supporting people who are at risk from domestic abuse

We have created this guidance for anyone who may support people at risk from domestic abuse. Government and Public Health England Guidance is likely to change. Any national guidance should be prioritised over recommendations in this document.

IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Services) are determined to keep our helplines and refuges open in this extremely challenging time. To adapt to the changing circumstances, we have reduced face to face appointments and are supporting clients on the phone, via text messages, online video calls, Live Chat and through our website and helplines in the majority of cases. Call 03000 110 110 for North Yorkshire and Barnsley and 0808 808 2241 for Sheffield. You can also call the National 24-hour Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247.

Following Government and PHE guidance, many people will now be much more isolated than they have been previously. Even if they are not self-isolating, they are likely to have their space for action and their options for support reduced as their time away from home becomes more limited, schools and places of work close. Working together creatively and flexibly during this time will be crucial in ensuring that anyone at risk is supported.

It will therefore be helpful for you to understand the approach local key agencies are taking in response to the virus, your local Police Domestic Abuse Coordinator, Housing Options team and social care leads can ensure that you and your teams have the up to date picture. MARAC is still operating in all areas so please use normal routes / local agreements (including the completion of DASH forms) to refer to this when supporting a person who is at high risk of harm.

The following guidance will help you consider factors that could increase the safety of people in a range of different circumstances and will provide you with useful additional information to pass on to people you are supporting:

Contents

- Discuss ways to manage the time spent with the abusive person: 2
- Look for ways to increase physical distance from the person causing harm and exit safely:..... 2
- Consider how to set-up a network of connections to help keep your client safe: 2
- Consider the potential for increased monitoring and control:..... 3
- Harmful behaviours may escalate, consider factor that could contribute to this and how to decrease the impact of these:..... 3
- Discuss how to manage illness and risk of infection:..... 3
- Safety and children: 3
- Additional Support..... 4
 - Domestic Abuse and sexual violence helplines 4
 - Domestic Abuse Live chat and online support 4
 - Domestic Abuse and stalking support applications 4
 - Support for people who are abusive 4
 - Mental Health and Emotional Support 4

Discuss ways to manage the time spent with the abusive person:

- Discuss how a typical day is likely to be. Could implementing a routine help? Can the person you are supporting factor in opportunities for time away from the person causing harm so that they can seek specialist support / have some respite.
- Discuss the possibility of them factoring in activities outside the home where there may be opportunities to access support, seek help or raise the alarm. This could include taking exercise outside, doing jobs in the garden or on the outside of the house, visiting the shops or local pharmacy. People could be advised to raise the alarm if they don't see them.
- Talk about opportunities to increase physical separation for periods of time, if physical distance is difficult, consider methods that can provide a feeling of distance or separation or that increase space for action. For example, taking a long shower may provide the space to send a message, listening to a podcast with headphones in could enable someone to take a call, or listening to calming music or meditating may help to alleviate anxiety.
- If your client is not living with their abusive partner, work might be done around reducing isolation e.g. how-to re-structure their day- how can they use podcasts, phone Apps, Facebook Live events, YouTube channels and other resources to enjoy their day and feel connected.
- There will be an added element of impact if abusive (ex) partners are maintaining contact with children during this time, anxieties may be raised re. whether they are following social distancing protocol, if they are caring for the children appropriately; abusers may seek to find other ways to increase anxiety using the current virus threat.

Look for ways to increase physical distance from the person causing harm and exit safely:

- Consider the layout of the property and the safest rooms to go to and rooms to avoid. If someone's partner is violent, rooms to avoid include anywhere there will be weapons – e.g. the kitchen, garage etc. Ask people you're supporting to think about possible scenarios and possible routes to exits.
- Your client may be able to predict times when their partner is likely to become aggressive. Understanding these times can help them tell when things might escalate. Because of this, there may be opportunities to de-escalate or avoid certain circumstances.
- Take time to reflect on ways to raise the alarm and put potential measures in place that can be accessible but secure, such as a spare phone or personal alarm if it is safe.
- Reassure your client that it is ok to leave your house if they are fleeing for their own and/or their children's safety. Discuss how to plan for this.

Consider how to set-up a network of connections to help keep your client safe:

- Consider all the agencies involved and work collaboratively to establish safety measures that won't arouse suspicion. This could involve setting up regular check-ins. If social care is involved share any plans with the lead worker.
- Can agencies help to put a watch around the home? The police can set up a cocoon watch.
- Discuss the possibility of alerting the neighbours and establishing a safe word or a sign so that they can raise the alarm. This could include putting an object on a windowsill to indicate help is needed.
- Discuss which family, friends or colleagues can help to keep in regular contact and ways that this could be done without raising suspicions. If these networks are not available councils are setting up schemes to check in on people who are vulnerable.
- Discuss where to flee to in an emergency and the need for a backup plan if they are unwell or their circumstances change.
- Discuss calling the emergency services and the possibility of delayed response time and how this can be managed.

Consider the potential for increased monitoring and control:

- Discuss the safest way to keep in touch during this time. You may need to think creatively about how you do this. WhatsApp and similar apps may offer more secure options than phone calls. Suggest storing your number under a name that won't arouse suspicions.
- Discuss the possibility of obtaining a spare pay as you go phone to store emergency numbers in or to raise the alarm.
- Discuss whether it is possible to gather important documents, emergency funds etc and where these could be stored safely.

Harmful behaviours may escalate, consider factor that could contribute to this and how to decrease the impact of these:

Increased stress is never an excuse for people to cause harm.

- The withdrawal of face to face support is likely to increase anxiety and feed into the abusive person's ability to control. Consider measures that can increase safe connections and offer reassurances.
- Discuss whether the person causing harm would access support and engage in advice around methods of taking time out and de-escalating situations more safely.
- Talk to your client about the situations that they might anticipate during this period of self-isolation and scenarios for responding to reduce the risk that the abusive person can cause serious harm.
- Financial pressures may increase during this time. Citizens Advice, the DWP and other charities may be able to help ease these pressures. However, they are all experiencing high call volumes and have reduced Face to Face contact.
- Consider what the options are for additional support.

Discuss how to manage illness and risk of infection:

- Consider how to prepare for someone being ill so that they can be as far away from other members of the family as possible and be as comfortable as possible.
- Consider measures that may need to be put in place to support your client if they are ill and arrangements for the children if they become so ill that they cannot care for them.
- Get together a list of health services and their numbers.

Safety and children:

- Discuss how child contact arrangements or blended families will manage. There is more information / advice about this here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>
- Discuss what a typical day will look like and how to keep children occupied and calm.
- Discuss how to give the children space to talk about their feelings.
- Discuss sharing safety plans with children and how they may be able to raise the alarm.
- Discuss their fears about the children's well-being and safety and what preventative measures can be put in place.

Additional Support

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helplines for people who are experiencing abuse

- Call **03000 110 110** for North Yorkshire and Barnsley and **0808 808 2241** for Sheffield. Interpreters are available via Language Line.
- You can also call the National 24-hour Domestic Abuse Helpline on **0808 2000 247**.
- [Rape Crisis England & Wales Helpline](#): **0808 802 9999** between 12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm
- [National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline](#): **0800 999 5428** Open Monday to Friday: 10:00am – 5:00pm; Wednesdays and Thursday 10:00am – 8:00pm E: help@galop.org.uk
- Karma Nirvana support for so-called honour-based violence and domestic abuse support. Helpline number **08005999247** or Email support@karmanirvana.org.uk
- Advice specifically for men who are being abused - Respect run an advice line for men: **0808 8010327** / <https://mensadviceline.org.uk>

Domestic Abuse Live chat and online support

- IDAS provide a Live Chat service on our website, usually between 3-6pm Monday to Friday. We provide a session for professionals between 10am and 12noon Monday to Friday. www.idas.org.uk. Both live-chat and our website are translatable into a range of languages.
- Chayn is an online support service for anyone affected by domestic abuse. They are running a Telegram app support channel: <https://chayn.co/>
- Women's Aid also run a Live Chat service <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>
- [Rape Crisis England & Wales Live Web Chat](#) – days and times listed online

Domestic Abuse and Stalking Support Applications

- Bright Sky is an app that is available on most smart phones. It is disguised as a weather app and has a range of tools and a directory of support services. It is available in different languages including, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish. <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>
- Hollie Guard can also offer some reassurance to people experiencing abuse: <https://hollieguard.com/>

Support for people who are abusive

- Respect are a national charity which offers advice, support and interventions to people who are abusive: <http://respect.uk.net> / 0808 802 4040
- Inspire to Change offer programmes for perpetrators across South Yorkshire: <http://inspiretochange.co.uk/>
- Foundation charity provide programmes for perpetrators across North Yorkshire: <https://www.foundationuk.org/>

Mental Health and Emotional Support

- [Samaritans](#): Call **166123** for FREE. Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. Open 24/7, 365 days a year.
- [Mindline Trans+](#) : Trans specific emotional support helpline, w/ trans listeners. **0300 330 5468**; Mondays and Fridays 8pm-midnight.
- The SilverLine run a [telephone befriending service for the elderly](#)
- 7 Cups provide [free emotional support from trained listeners: online counselling](#)
- [CALM helpline](#): Confidential Emotional Support for Men: Mon-Fri 1pm-11pm **0800585858**
- [Shout](#): 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for people struggling to cope. Text: **85258**