Guidance

Domestic abuse: get help during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

English | Cymraeg

Find out how to get help if you or someone you know is a victim of domestic abuse.

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Domestic violence disclosure scheme: guidance
Three steps to escaping domestic violence
Settle in the UK as a victim of domestic violence: form SET(DV)

Call Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline for free and confidential advice, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Visit the helpline website to access further information, a contact form and the live chat service. If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.

If English is not your first language you may find our translated guidance or easy read version useful. Women's Aid also have guidance documents on domestic abuse and coronavirus available in a number of languages for victims, family and friends, and community members of those affected.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and domestic abuse

The government acknowledges that coronavirus household isolation instructions can cause anxiety for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. There is never an excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what the circumstances are.

Household isolation instructions as a result of coronavirus do not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.

If you feel at risk of abuse, there is help and support available to you, including the police, online support, helplines and refuges. You can find more information about these and other services on this page.

Recognise domestic abuse

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is not always physical violence. It can also include:

- coercive control and 'gaslighting'
- economic abuse
- online abuse
- threats and intimidation
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

What signs to look for

If you believe that you or someone else could be a victim of domestic abuse, there are signs that you can look out for including:

- being withdrawn, or being isolated from family and friends
- having bruises, burns or bite marks
- having finances controlled, or not being given enough to buy food or pay bills
- not being allowed to leave the house, or stopped from going to college or work
- having your internet or social media use monitored, or someone else reading your texts, emails or letters
- being repeatedly belittled, put down or told you are worthless
- being pressured into sex
- being told that abuse is your fault, or that you're overreacting

See more signs to look for.

Support a friend if they're being abused

Let them know you've noticed something is wrong.

If someone confides in you, there is more information on how to support a friend who is being abused.

If you are worried that someone you know is a victim of domestic abuse, you can call Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline for free, confidential support, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Visit the helpline website to access information on how to support a friend.

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, always call 999.

Report it

If you, or someone you know, is a victim of domestic abuse find out how to report domestic abuse.

If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.

If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and listen to the questions from the operator and, if you can, respond by coughing or tapping on the handset.

Call 999 from a mobile

If prompted, press 55 to Make Yourself Heard and this will transfer your call to the police.

Pressing 55 only works on mobiles and does not allow police to track your location.

Call 999 from a landline

If the operator can only hear background noise and cannot decide whether an emergency service is needed, you will be connected to a police call handler.

If you replace the handset, the landline may remain connected for 45 seconds in case you pick up again.

When 999 calls are made from landlines, information about your location should be automatically available to the call handlers to help provide a response.

If you are deaf or can't verbally communicate

You can register with the emergencySMS service. Text REGISTER to 999. You will get a text which tells you what to do next. Do this when it is safe so you can text when you are in danger.

Get help if you, or someone you know, is a victim

We publish a list of the main organisations you can speak to for support. Women's Aid also has a list of useful links for websites and organisations providing relevant information and support.

Organisation	Contact
Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline - free confidential support 24 hours a day to victims and those who are worried about friends/loved ones	Phone/TypeTalk: 0808 2000 247 or visit the helpline website to access further information, the live chat service or contact form to book a safe time for a call.
Wales Live Fear Free Helpline - help and advice about violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence	Phone: 0808 8010 800 TypeTalk: 18001 080 8801 Text: 078600 77 333
Men's Advice Line - confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse	Phone: 0808 801 0327 info@mensadviceline.org.uk
Galop - national LGBTQ+ domestic abuse helpline and webchat service	Phone: 0800 999 5428 help@galop.org.uk
Women's Aid live chat service - Mon-Fri 10am-4pm and Sat-Sun 10am-12pm You can also find your local domestic abuse service on their website	Live chat
Karma Nirvana - national helpline for victims of honour-based abuse, forced marriage and domestic abuse	Phone: 0800 5999 247 support@karmanirvana.org.uk or send a secure message via the website
Hestia - support and information for anyone who might be in an abusive relationship	Download free mobile app, Bright Sky
Hourglass - confidential helpline for anyone concerned about abuse of an older person	Phone: 0808 808 8141
Chayn - online help and resources in several languages about identifying manipulative situations and how friends can help	
Muslim Women's Network Helpline - national specialist faith and culturally sensitive helpline that is confidential and free to access	Phone: 0800 999 5786 Text: 07415 206 936 info@mwnhelpline.co.uk
NSPCC female genital mutilation (FGM) helpline - if you are worried about a child at risk or someone who has already undergone FGM	Phone: 0800 028 3550 fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk
Victim Support - free confidential 24/7 support line for victims of crimes and free 24/7 live chat support in England and Wales	Phone: 0808 16 89 111 Live chat
Crimestoppers - anonymously report suspicions of domestic abuse online or call free	Phone: 0800 555 111
National Stalking Helpline - for victims of stalking, their friends, family and professionals - Mon, Tue, Thu and Fri 9:30am-4pm, Wed 1-4pm	Phone: 0808 802 0300 Stalking helpline enquiry form

Sexual assault referral centres

Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) offer non-judgemental medical, practical and emotional support for anyone (adults and children) who has been raped or sexually assaulted, regardless of when the incident happened. They provide advice in a safe environment and have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers to care for you.

SARCs can support you whether you choose to report the assault to the police or not and will arrange the appropriate care and support based on your decision.

Specialist services for people from ethnic minorities

Organisation	Contact
Latin American Women's Rights Service - support services for Latin American women suffering from domestic abuse. If calling is not safe, email with your name, phone number and the best time to call you	Phone: 0771 928 1714 Mon-Thu 10am-1pm 0759 597 0580 Mon-Fri 10am-1pm referrals@lawrs.org.uk
Iranian Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation - support for Middle Eastern, North African and Afghan women and girls living in the UK suffering from domestic abuse, forced marriage, FGM and honour-based abuse	Phone: 020 7920 6460 Mon-Fri 9:30am-5:30pm Out of hours: Kurdish, Arabic, English 07846 275246 Farsi, Dari, English 07846 310157
Imkaan - women's organisation addressing violence against black and minority women and girls	
Southall Black Sisters - advocacy and information for Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse	

Specialist services for people with disabilities

Organisation	Contact
Stay Safe East - advocacy and support services to disabled victims and survivors of abuse	Phone: 0208 519 7241 Text: 07587 134 122 enquiries@staysafe-east.org.uk
SignHealth - domestic abuse support for deaf people in British Sign Language (BSL)	Phone: 020 3947 2601 Text, WhatsApp, Facetime: 07970 350366 da@signhealth.org.uk

Get help for children and young people

Witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse can have a serious impact on a child's long-term health. It is a top priority that vulnerable children and young people remain safe during this uncertain period. If you are concerned that a child is at risk of harm, you should refer this information to children's social care, or to the police if you believe the child is in immediate danger.

If you are a young person, and adults around you are affected by domestic abuse, this can also affect you. If you are a young person who is experiencing domestic abuse in your own relationship, this is called teen relationship abuse. There is support available for you on both domestic abuse and teen relationship abuse.

Organisation	Contact
NSPCC helpline - advice and support for anyone with concerns about a child	Phone: 0808 8005000 help@nspcc.org.uk
Childline - help and support for children and young people	Phone: 0800 1111
The Children's Society – guidance for young people on both domestic abuse and teen relationship abuse	
Barnardo's - support for families affected by domestic abuse	
Family Lives - support through online forums	
Rights of Women - guidance about child contact arrangements relating to coronavirus	

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can contact the NSPCC via SignVideo using your webcam. SignVideo, using British Sign Language, is available on PC, Mac, iOS (iPhone/iPad) and Android smartphones (4.2 or above). This service is available Monday to Friday from 8am to 8pm and Saturdays from 8am to 1pm.

Adolescent to parent violence (APV)

Domestic abuse also covers abuse between family members, such as adolescent to parent violence and abuse. You can read our guidance on adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) (PDF, 682KB, 35 pages).

If you are a kinship carer looking after a child who can no longer live with their birth parents and are experiencing domestic abuse you can get help and advice.

Organisation	Contact information
Grandparents Plus - supports kinship carers raising children who aren't able to live with their parents	Phone: 0300 123 7015 advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk
Family Rights Group - independent specialist help and advice for parents and kinship carers involved with local authority children's services	Phone: 0808 801 0366 Mon-Fri 9:30am-3pm

Special guardians of children who were previously looked after by their local authority can get also get therapeutic support from the adoption support fund. Special guardians who meet the eligibility criteria should contact their local authority for more information.

Economic abuse

If you are concerned about how coronavirus may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, see the advice provided by HM Treasury on what support is on offer.

The charity Surviving Economic Abuse has also provided additional coronavirus guidance and support.

Technological abuse

If you are concerned about whether your phone or tablets are being compromised, visit Refuge's Tech Safety Tool and click on the three pink dots at the bottom of the homepage. The tool offers instructional videos as well as practical real-time tips on how to secure devices such as mobile phones and ensuring your location-tracking or map applications aren't accessible to abusive partners.

Welfare benefits and housing advice

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has published up-to-date coronavirus-related welfare benefits information.

If you are concerned about your financial situation, you can contact Turn2us. They help people to access the money available to them through welfare benefits and grants. Their website has an income-related benefits checker enabling you to check that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.

Shelter provide free confidential housing information, support and legal advice on all housing and homelessness issues. They also have an emergency helpline and a webchat service.

Support from your local jobcentre

Even if a jobcentre is closed, staff will still meet their most vulnerable customers including those fleeing domestic abuse.

Jobcentres are a safe space and the DWP supports victims of domestic abuse. This includes helping you access temporary accommodation and supporting you to make new applications for Universal Credit and putting you in touch with local experts and support networks.

Find out more about help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Get help if you think you may be an abuser

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be an abuser, there is support available.

The Respect Phoneline is an anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. The helpline also takes calls from partners or ex-partners, friends and relatives who are concerned about perpetrators.

A webchat service is available Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10am to 11am and from 3pm to 4pm.

Telephone: 0808 802 4040

Support for employers and professionals

If you are an employer, let your employees know that if they are facing domestic abuse you want to help them to get help. Stay in regular contact with employees you know, or fear, may be facing abuse and if you lose contact with them, take swift action to visit them. If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, always call 999.

Encourage employees to look out for others who may be facing domestic abuse and signpost them to support. Your staff may also be worried about their own abusive behaviour at this time. There is no excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what stresses you are under and support is available.

The Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse website provides resources to support employers including an employers' toolkit.

SafeLives provides guidance and support to professionals and those working in the domestic abuse sector, as well as additional advice for those at risk.

Get legal help

Apply for a disclosure of information

Under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as 'Clare's Law'), you can ask the police to check whether a new, former or existing partner has a violent past. This is called 'right to ask'. If records show that you may be at risk of domestic abuse from a partner, the police will consider disclosing the information. A disclosure can be made if it is legal, proportionate and necessary to do so.

The 'right to ask' also allows a third party, such as a friend or family member, to apply for a disclosure on behalf of someone they know. Again, the police can release information if it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.

To make an application under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, contact the police. You can do this by:

- visiting a police station (the household isolation instruction as a result of coronavirus does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse)
- phoning 101
- speaking to a member of the police on the street

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

Get a court order to protect you or your child

If you're a victim of domestic abuse you can apply for a court order or injunction to protect yourself or your child from:

- your current or previous partner
- a family member
- someone you currently or previously lived with

This is called a non-molestation or occupation order.

You can apply online, by email or by post.

Get a court order if you've been the victim of domestic abuse.

If you don't have settled status in the UK

Apply for settlement in your own right

If your relationship with a British citizen or someone settled in the UK has broken down because of domestic abuse you may be able to apply for settlement as a victim of domestic violence.

The destitution domestic violence concession provides help if you are in the UK on a temporary visa as a partner, your relationship has broken down because of domestic violence and you have no money to support yourself.

Apply for access to benefits

The destitution domestic violence concession offers domestic abuse victims 3 months' leave outside the immigration rules with the ability to apply for access to public funds. This provides the opportunity to gain a temporary immigration status independent of the abuser and to fund safe accommodation, where victims of domestic abuse may consider applying for indefinite leave to remain or deciding to return to their country of origin.

More support materials

Read information and practice guidelines for professionals protecting, advising and supporting victims of forced marriage.

Read the leaflet the Home Office developed with Southall Black Sisters Three steps to escaping domestic violence, aimed at women in black and minority ethnic communities.

Refuge's website includes resources to help you identify the signs of domestic abuse, and a safety guide for women and children who are living with a perpetrator. It also has a tech abuse chat-bot with step-by-step instructional videos on how to secure devices such as phones and laptops. Look for the pink button in the bottom-right corner.

The NSPCC has issued guidance for spotting and reporting the signs of abuse.

The Survivor's Handbook, created by Women's Aid, provides information on housing, money, helping your children and your legal rights.

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