



# Staying safe during COVID-19

## A guide for victims and survivors of domestic abuse

### Our message to victims and survivors of domestic abuse<sup>1</sup>

We know that if you are currently experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse you will know what being isolated and frightened will feel like. You might be worried about self-isolating with someone who is harming you. We've created this document to help you think about what you might do over the coming weeks to stay safe.

You are not alone in this.

You are a survivor, equipped with the knowledge, strength and tools that help keep you and your family safe every day.

Below are some things you can think about if this is happening to you. Remember that you are an expert in your own situation and only take on advice that feels safe and relevant to you. It is important to try and think about the things that may change or make you more unsafe, especially thinking through now how you might get help if you need it. We also know that, like everyone, you could be worried about contracting the virus and the HSE website can give you advice around this.

Always remember that the abuse you are experiencing is not your fault.

### General points to consider

Self-isolation means different things in different countries but usually it means only leaving the house for essential reasons. Unfortunately, this means you and the person harming you could end up spending more time together in the same space.

Also, we talk about DDVS in this guide but instead you may have a social worker or other professional that you trust. Think about who this trusted person is for you. Below are things you might want to think about:

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks and acknowledgement to safelives.org.uk for their original document on safety planning which was adapted by us.

## Support from family, friends and neighbours

Family, friends and neighbours can be another way to get support that you need.

- ✓ Can you FaceTime or call someone you trust?
- ✓ Can you talk to them about what you are experiencing and what your concerns are?
  - Do you have a code word/phrase to let someone know that it is not safe to talk or to ask someone to phone the police?
- ✓ Could you set up with someone you trust a check in call so you know that someone will contact you at certain times of the week?

## Self-care

How can you look after yourself?

- ✓ As much as possible stick to usual routines. Maintaining basic self-care like eating, showering, sleeping and exercising can all help your mental health.
- ✓ Take whatever breaks you can, walk around any outside space you might have, read a magazine, get the kids involved in an online exercise class.

## General safety planning

Do you have a personalised safety plan?

- ✓ Think about what needs updating or changing because of what is happening now.
- ✓ It is ok to tell your specialist worker that the person harming you is living in the property, they will not judge you and can better help you think about your safety.
- ✓ Can a DDVS worker help you do this?
  - If you can't see or speak to them are there other professionals you trust and can talk to? -
  - Do you have a supportive employer? Can you talk to them about what is happening?
- ✓ If you can, download phone apps which will help you. The [Bright sky Ireland](#) app will help you find services and the [Hollie Gazzard](#) app turns your smartphone into a personal safety device.
- ✓ What is the usual pattern of abuse? e.g is it worse when the kids are around or not around?
  - This might help you think about times when things might be calmer.

- What are your main concerns and worries?
- These are the things you need to share with your specialist domestic abuse worker, trusted professional and if you need to ring 999 for help, the police.
  
- ✓ Will the person who is harming you be out of work or working from home?
  
- ✓ Will your family income be affected?
  - How could this affect things?
  
- ✓ Does the person harming you use drugs and/or alcohol?
  - How could their use change and what could this mean?
  - Do you know how they might respond to self-isolation?
  - Think about whether this might increase the sexual violence/ coercive control/ physical abuse
  
- ✓ Do you think there is software on your IT?
  - Any listening devices? Cameras in the home?
  - How will this change the way you might get help?
  
- ✓ Do you know what your options are if you want to leave?
  - Or what your options are if you want to stay but want the person harming you to leave? The DDVS specialist domestic abuse worker can help you think this through.

### **Safety planning suggestions:**

- Have you talked your DDVS worker through the layout of your house so you can think about any places of safety?
  
- If you had to leave in an emergency do you know where you would go? Remember many shops/restaurants/pubs will be shut.
  
- If someone you trust is doing your shopping for you could you write a message on the shopping list asking for help?
  
- Have a bag packed ready and if you can, leave this at a trusted friend/family/neighbor's home:
  - This should contain medical essentials, important documents including passports/driving license. Maybe the service you are in touch with could keep copies of these documents?
  
- Have a code word/sign to signal you are in danger – set this up for family and friends to let them know by text/FaceTime/skype. The code will need to alert them to contact the police if you are in danger.

- Teach the code to children who are old enough to understand what you are asking of them and why.
- Have a little bit of money hidden away in case you need this to leave.
- Do you need a separate mobile which you can use just to call for help? The service you are in touch with may be able to supply this.
- If there are times you know you can talk, share this with your specialist worker and agree how you will reach each other.
- Use the fact that there are no online shopping slots available to go to the shop and speak to someone.
- Now would be a good time to consider whether there is someone else you could move in with
- e.g. a vulnerable family member who will need your support. Consider that you will be self isolating for long periods.
- Silent calls to police – dial 999 – We are talking to operators in Ireland but for the UK guidelines – see [here](#).

## Children

The person harming you may use child contact to further control and abuse you. If you have court orders in place which are not being followed please contact your solicitor or the police to enforce them.

If you have children living between two family homes this can count as 'essential travel'.

For some guidance using the UK model read [guidance about child contact orders during the crisis](#)