

COVID-19/Coronavirus: Safety Advice for Survivors

women's aid
until women & children are safe

COVID-19/Coronavirus: Safety Advice for Survivors

We know that COVID-19 will have serious impacts on the lives of women and children. Survivors are telling us that they are feeling unsafe with the prospect of being isolated in the house with their perpetrator. We want to reassure survivors and local specialist services that we are here for you and we will be doing everything we can to support you during this challenging time.

Try and keep a mobile phone with you at all times if possible. The police are a key service when in immediate danger. Do not be afraid to call 999 in an emergency.

Silent Solutions

Familiarise yourself with The Silent Solution system. This is a system for victims of domestic abuse who might be afraid of further danger and escalation of harm if they are overheard when calling 999 in an emergency.

When somebody calls 999, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system.

If 55 is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency. [Click here to find out more.](#)

National helplines, email, text and live chat support services, and local specialist services, are currently open for business as usual, although their delivery is likely to have to adapt over the coming weeks.

Help and Support

Some local support services in the community may be temporarily suspended. This will mean that some survivors will feel particularly isolated.

If you were accessing counselling that has now been suspended; some counselling services can continue to provide helpline support. For example, Supportline provide a confidential telephone helpline and email counselling service. Particularly to those at risk of abuse or are isolated: www.supportline.org.uk

Women's Aid is continuing to provide the following services:

[The Survivors' Forum](#) is an online resource for survivors of domestic abuse. The Survivors' forum can be accessed 24/7. This is a place where survivors can support each other and share their experiences.

[Women's Aid Live Chat](#) is currently available Monday to Friday 10- 12pm. This could be a safer way to access some support; particularly if an abuser might also be in the property so it would be unsafe to make a telephone call.

Women's Aid [Email Service](#) is still operating and can also provide support.

For detailed information about national and local support services go to: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

For details of helplines, go to: www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse

At Women's Aid we would always want to encourage a survivor to be as safe as possible when accessing any form of support. It will be really important to familiarise yourself with information and guidance that will help to keep you as safe as possible when using online platforms: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/>

Looking after children can be particularly difficult challenging when isolating. Family lives have support available including online forums:

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Thinking of Leaving

At the moment leaving might feel particularly difficult and you might be worried about having to leave your home in an emergency. If possible pack an emergency bag for you and your children and keep it somewhere safe. Try to include essential things such as medication, identification, money or cards. Essential clothing for you and your children.

Due to self- isolation staying with family and friends might not be an option. You might be finding it harder to secure a refuge. The Local Authority has a responsibility to give you information about your housing rights.

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

www.england.shelter.org.uk

A Domestic Violence Protection Order can remove a perpetrator from the residence and from making contact with the survivor for up to 28 days. An Occupation Order is an injunction which removes an abusers' rights to reside in the family home. Find out more information from Rights of Women: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/family-la

Child Contact

Child Contact arrangements are of particular concern to many survivors at the moment. Perpetrators have always used child contact arrangements as a tool of coercive and controlling behaviour, and are likely to use COVID-19 as a way to threaten to not adhere to – or flout – contact arrangements. We are also hearing from survivors that the guidance given around 'isolation' can feel very unclear. Survivors are concerned that they will be accused of breaching a court order by not allowing contact for example. We recognise that accessing legal advice might be difficult at the moment.

The President of the Family Division has released ‘Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders’ during COVID 19:

<https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>

The guidance does not include specific advice in cases of domestic abuse, but states that if parents cannot agree to an arrangement they may exercise their parental responsibility and vary the arrangement to one that they consider to be safe. If a contact arrangement is varied as a result of COVID 19, the courts expect alternative arrangements – such as video calls – to be made.

If a survivor has concerns around the family court, it will be useful to take a look at the CAFCASS website for guidance. They are regularly updating their information: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/2020/03/18/coronavirus-covid-19-update-on-cafcass-preparedness/>

Be mindful of sharing details such as your address, phone number or email address with your abuser that could compromise your safety. If your abuser turns up at your property without agreement do not allow him in as this could escalate the risk to you and your children. Call 999 if you are feeling threatened.

Welfare Benefits

If you are concerned about your financial situation, you could 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 of the benefits you are entitled to: www.turn2us.org.uk

Financial Abuse

Many women experience economic abuse within the context of intimate partner violence. Surviving Economic Abuse can provide information and resources: <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/>

Immigration

Your abuser might be using your immigration status against you. If you need some guidance you could contact Immigration Advice service. They can offer expert legal

advice on all aspects of immigration, asylum and nationality issues:

www.iasservices.org.uk.

The NHS have confirmed that no charges will be made in the diagnosis or treatment of coronavirus (COVID-19). This applies to everyone living in the UK, regardless of your immigration status. No immigration checks are required for testing or treatment for COVID-19, so please access healthcare if you need to:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide>

Southall Black Sisters offer specialist support, advocacy and information to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk.

Opoka provide a national helpline for Polish women living in the UK:

<http://opoka.org.uk/en/>

Speakers of other languages

If English is not your first language, you can find information on Coronavirus (COVID 19) advice for patients in 21 different languages, Albanian, Dari, Pashto, Portuguese, Bengali, Vietnamese, and Kurdish Sorani is available at the moment, but more languages coming soon, Mandarin, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, Malayalam, Turkish, Farsi, Amharic, Tigrinya and Somali. [Click here for more information.](#)

Disability

Deaf Hope provides practical and emotional support to deaf women experiencing domestic abuse: www.signhealth.org.uk

Emergency SMS provides a text message service for deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired people in the UK to send SMS messages to the UK 999 service where it will be passed to the Police: www.emergencysms.org.uk

Are you worried about a friend, family member or neighbour?

You might be particularly concerned about a family member or a friend at the moment if they will be at home with their abuser. Always encourage them to call 999 in an emergency.

Encourage them to reach out for online support such as Women's Aid's [Survivors' Forum](#), [Live Chat](#) or [Email](#).

Do not approach the perpetrator about their behaviour, this could escalate the abuse and put them in further danger. It is also important that you do not put yourself in a dangerous situation.