

Aberdeen City Council

Guidance for Front-line Staff about how to support victims or survivors of Domestic Abuse during the Coronavirus Pandemic

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KEY MESSAGES

NB The majority of referrals for support to domestic abuse services relate to women as victims – it is acknowledged that men can be victims too, however the reality of the situation is that the majority of victims are female and the majority of perpetrators are male. This Guidance therefore focuses primarily on support for women, however there are specific supports available for other groups – see a list of supports on page 8.

Domestic Abuse is not acceptable. It is not the woman’s fault and she is not alone. There are services available to support her and they are still open.

Domestic Abuse is when someone is hurt, bullied or frightened by

- Their husband or wife
- Their boyfriend or girlfriend
- Their current or ex-partner

Domestic Abuse is when they do any of the following things (although this list doesn’t cover everything, and the woman may be experiencing other issues/ behaviours, too):

- Physical harm - such as hitting or hurting her or her child (if she has one)
 - locking her in
 - holding her so she cannot move
- Emotional harm – bullying her or saying things that scare her
 - making her feel sad or upset
 - making her feel stupid
- Sexual harm – making her do sexual things that she does not like or understand
 - touching her body, her private parts or kissing her when she says no or does not want them to
- Financial harm - taking her money and things that are hers
 - telling her how to spend her money or checking how much she spends
- Controlling – doesn’t like her speaking to her friends or other people
 - always wants to know where she has been or where she is going
 - always wants to know who she speaks to
 - stops her seeing her family or friends

The following numbers may be helpful:

Police Scotland
If someone is in danger and it is an emergency, they should call 999 (or you can offer to call on their behalf?). For non-emergencies call 101
National Domestic Abuse Helpline (<i>women and men</i>) Free and confidential advice. Open to all. 24 hours a day. Telephone: 0800 027 1234. Website: sdafmh.org.uk
Aberdeen City Domestic Abuse Team (<i>women and men</i>) Telephone: 01224 538000. Email: DomesticAbuseTeam@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Grampian Women’s Aid Telephone: 01224 593381. Website: grampian-womens-aid.com
Rape Crisis Grampian Telephone: 01224 590932. Website: rapecrisisgrampian.co.uk

For more information about domestic abuse, and support available, go to:

www.communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/domesticabuse/

1. Introduction

The evidence on the impact of coronavirus on domestic abuse is limited but we do know that in times of crisis and disaster, domestic violence increases. In affected provinces of China police reports show domestic abuse tripled during the epidemic. Add to that the current lockdown situation where families are forced together for prolonged periods, are worried about money and health, are isolated from supports, routines are disrupted and children are fractious, and there is real concern for the safety and wellbeing of women, children and vulnerable adults. Australian colleagues have also noted an increase in calls to the men's referral service from men worried about their behaviour (and this added to the spike they had already experienced as a result of the bush fires).

2. How to Respond

i) Take Note

Listen to women; don't make kneejerk decisions; think of both the woman's immediate and longer-term safety; don't make things worse; if possible, minimise the number of times that women have to tell their stories by having consistent workers/responders.

Women may, or may not, want to leave abusive relationships. Check whether they already have Safety Plans in place and offer support to review and revise if needed. If they don't support them to put one in place. (Be aware that research shows that separation may increase risk).

ii) Check it Out

Find out what the presenting problem is. Not everything may be as it seems. It may be that on the surface it doesn't appear to be anything related to domestic abuse but explore further. For example seeking financial assistance may be as a result of economic abuse (<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Economic-abuse-and-the-coronavirus-outbreak-110420.pdf>). Anxiety, lack of sleep, mental health issues etc. may be a result of coercive controlling behaviour.

iii) Believe

You may have suspicions that a woman is suffering is being abused or has disclosed to you that they are experiencing domestic abuse. It takes a lot of courage to disclose so your initial response is crucial. It is important to show empathy, let her know that you believe her and reinforce that her that it's not her fault.

iv) Ask

Immediate safety is the priority. Before having any phone conversation, establish if it is safe to talk, simple yes or no responses from the woman will do. If she says no then give suggested safe times to call back. If she is able to talk, be aware that the perpetrator may be in the house or may enter at any time, so ask the woman to terminate the call if necessary. In anticipation of this you may want the woman to have a planned alternative as to who just phoned e.g. housing officer etc.

v) Respond

Validate the women's experience with phrases like "I believe you" or "it's not your fault". Acknowledge that she may be self-isolating with someone she is particularly frightened off. Your response may be to listen and/ or to act depending on what the woman wants.

vi) Risk Assess

Once you have established that abuse is an issue, explore further.

- Is the abuse getting worse?
- Do you feel unsafe to stay in your home?
- Are you in immediate danger?
- Do you need me to phone the police?

If there is immediate danger to anyone within the household, you may need to call the police. If the woman feels that she is not at immediate risk she may want support around safety planning. If there are children or a vulnerable adult living in the family it may be necessary to refer to Children and Families SW or Adult Support and Protection. If unsure discuss with your line manager.

3. Giving Support about Safety Planning

The woman may only be wanting a listening ear and may, or may not, want to take things further at this time. Although she may be frightened, she may not want to leave the family home as moving could increase her risk. She may however want to be signposted to specialised services, either local or online (see below).

It may be that she would prefer to receive further support from you. Remember that the woman will be the expert of her own situation. While your opinion may make her feel safe, it might in fact increase her risk. If she would prefer to speak directly to you, please see below for additional guidance and support.

It is important to ask if the woman already has a personalised safety plan. Although there will be common themes, women need to have plans that are specific to their circumstances. What if the woman has a disability – either physical or unseen. The plan would need to take that into consideration including her communication needs. Explore further:

- Do you already have a safety plan in place and, if you do, what needs updating or changing because of what is happening now?
- If you don't have a safety plan, now's the time to think about it. (*See the sections below re how to develop a Safety Plan.*)
- It is ok for you to tell other professionals involved that the person harming you is living in the property.
- Do you want me or a specialist domestic abuse worker to support you with this?
- 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 [Brightsky](#) app will help you find services and the [Hollie Gazzard](#) app turns your smartphone into a personal safety device.

i) Questions to ask to Inform Safety Plans:

- What is the usual pattern of abuse? How has it changed since lockdown?
 - Has it increased? Are there different triggers, different controls?
- Are there children in the house?
- What are your main concerns and worries in the current situation?
- Is the person who is harming you at work, working from home, not working?
 - Is your family income be affected? How is this affecting things?
- Does the person harming you use drugs and/or alcohol?
 - How has their use changed and what does this mean for you?
- Do you think there is software on your IT, any listening devices, cameras in your home?
 - How does 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?

ii) Suggestions you can give about Safety planning:

- Have you thought through the layout of your house so you can identify any places of safety? Is there a place in your house where you can be safe?
- If you had to leave in an emergency do you know where you would go? Remember that public transport is reduced, and most shops are be shut.
- If someone you trust is doing your shopping for you, could you write a message on the shopping list to ask for help?
- Could you have a bag packed ready if you need to leave and, if you can, store this at a trusted friend/family/neighbour's home:
 - If possible should contain medical essentials, important documents including passports/driving licence. Maybe the service you are in touch with could keep copies of these documents?
 - If you can't do this, have a list of what you would need to pack in a hurry, even if it's just in your head.
- Have a code word or sign to signal when you are in danger. Set this up for family and friends to let them know by text/FaceTime/Skype. The code word would 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.
- If you can, try and hide some money away in case you need this if you decide 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
- Think about believable reasons for getting out of your home so that you can safely call or speak to someone e.g. there are no online shopping slots available, so you'll have to go to the shop
- 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 – then 55 if you can't talk – see [here](#).

4. If Children are involved

- The person harming may use child contact to further control and abuse. If court orders are in place which are not being followed, the woman should contact her solicitor or the police to enforce them.
- If children are living between two family homes this counts as 'essential travel' according to the Government.
- See: [guidance about child contact orders during the crisis](#)

5. How family, friends and neighbours might be able to help

Family, friends and neighbours can be another way for a woman to get the support she needs.

- Can she call, or video-call, someone she trusts? (Eg through Apps like WhatsApp, Skype, Duo, KIK, Facebook, Instagram, snapchat etc.) Can she talk to them about what she is experiencing and what her concerns are? Does she 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 she set up with someone she trusts a check-in call so she knows that someone will contact her at certain times of the week?

6. Advice for women about Self-care

How can a woman look after herself?

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

7. How to seek help/ support

i) Silent Solution - Dial 999 then 55 – Silent Call For Help

For use if the woman is in an emergency when she cannot openly speak or verbally ask for help or give emergency details. See <https://fullfact.org/crime/dial-999-silent-call-hang-up/>

ii) MARAC (Multi-Agency-Risk-Assessment-Conference)

MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDDA's) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. A victim/survivor should be referred to the relevant MARAC if they are an adult (16+) who resides in the local authority area and are at high risk of domestic violence from their adult (16+) partner, ex-partner or family member, regardless of gender or sexuality. For more information please click on the link: www.Safelives.org.uk

Local procedures mean that MARACs are scheduled twice weekly fortnightly throughout the year. These are continued to be held via telephone conference during the current COVID 19 crisis. If you are concerned about an individual you can submit a MARAC referral, however if you require additional support or are unsure if they will meet the criteria you can contact one of the specialist services for advice and assistance.

Contact:

Co-ordinator Barry Riddoch, Barry.Riddoch@scotland.pnn.police.uk

Debbie.Burnett@scotland.pnn.police.uk

NorthEastPartnershipCoordinationUnit@scotland.pnn.police.uk kelly@advocacy.org.uk

iii) DSDAS (Disclosure-Scheme-for Domestic-Abuse-Scotland)

The aim of this scheme is to give members of the public a formal mechanism to make enquiries about an individual who they are in a relationship with or who is in a relationship with someone they know, and there is a concern that the individual may be abusive towards their partner.

If police checks show that the individual has a record of abusive behaviour, or there is other information to indicate that the person you know is at risk, the police may share this information with the person(s) best placed to protect the potential victim. This might be you, or someone else.

The scheme aims to enable potential victims to make an informed choice on whether to continue the relationship, and provides further help and support to assist the potential victim when making that informed choice.

Please click on the link below for more information and an application form:

<http://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/disclosure-scheme-for-domestic-abuse-scotland>

iv) Support Services

The advice is always: **If you, or someone you know, is in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.**

(or staff member could dial 999 on the woman's behalf.)

If the woman is not in immediate danger, the following numbers might be helpful (*see over page*):

Grampian Women's Aid	01224 593381 www.grampian-womens-aid.com
Rape Crisis Grampian	01224 590932 www.rapecrisisgrampian.co.uk
Aberdeen City Domestic Abuse Team (<i>support to women & men</i>)	01224 538000 DomesticAbuseTeam@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Cyrenians Violence Against Women Project	Email: vaw@weareac.org
Cyrenians Domestic Abuse Support and Accommodation Project (<i>support to women and men</i>)	Email: dasap@weareac.org
Scotland's 24hr Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (<i>support to women and men</i>)	0800 027 1234
LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline	0800 999 5428 help@galop.org.uk
Men's Advice Line	0808 801 0327 info@mensadviceline.org.uk
FearFree (Sacro) (<i>support to men and LGBTI+</i>)	Email: infoaberdeen@sacro.org.uk Online referral: https://bit.ly/2Uhnqq8
Karma Nirvana, UK Helpline for 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage	0800 5999 247
Victim Support National 24-hour Support line	0808 1689 111
Samaritans	116 123 Samaritans
England: Freephone 24h National Domestic Abuse Helpline	0808 2000 247
Wales: 24h Life Fear Free Helpline	0808 80 10 800
Northern Ireland: 24h Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline	0808 802 1414

A link to a 'live' Tracker providing information about current service provision for people affected by abuse in Aberdeen can be found at:
<https://acvo.org.uk/aberdeen-abuse-services-tracker/>

8. Housing - Local Procedures during COVID 19

Most of the Council's housing services continue to be provided, however face-to-face engagement is being restricted as far as reasonably possible. If someone requires assistance they should visit:
<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing> or telephone their local housing office.

If someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness, as usual they should contact the Council's Homelessness helpline - 0800 917 6379 (24 hours). Further advice is available at:
<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing/homelessness/homelessness-advice-and-support>

In general a Housing Officer will discuss all housing options with current council tenants who are the victim of domestic abuse (this has not changed since COVID19), and they will also signpost to relevant agencies for support.

9. Finance/ Funding support

i) No Recourse to Public Funds

A New Framework has been published, to help local authorities support migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds, and EEA nationals during the pandemic.

Key points are as follows:

Local Authorities have statutory Public Health duties to provide emergency accommodation to all people with NRPF who are roofless or rough sleeping during the pandemic in order to protect them from the virus and mitigate public health risks. This is in addition to **continued duties to provide any support necessary to safeguard vulnerable people, including children in families with NRPF** and adults with community care needs under devolved social care legislation.

Local Authorities can provide financial support, food or other emergency assistance, so long as the source of funding is not a prohibited public fund (such as the Scottish Welfare Fund) and can work in partnership (e.g. with third sector partners) to ensure that support can be provided effectively. In circumstances where an individual is receiving assistance solely on public health grounds, this will be provided on a temporary basis, as part of an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Any support provided and costs incurred should be clearly recorded and reviewed, in line with changes in public health advice and/or any relevant changes in UK immigration rules during this period.

The framework can be accessed here:

http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/Guidance%20Covid%2019%20Supporting%20People%20with%20NRPF%20200420_0.pdf

ii) Victim Support Funding Guidance

Overview: A 'victims fund', administered by Victim Support Scotland, to support victims of crime struggling financially. The Fund has been increased from £30,000 to £100,000 amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

What the funding covers: The Victims' Fund is available for specific costs and items in the aftermath of a crime.

The funding is for the direct purchase or reimbursement of goods and services on behalf of the victim. In most cases, we would expect invoices or receipts to be submitted along with the application to verify the amount claimed and only in exceptional cases will we provide a cash sum to an applicant.

Examples of what the Fund can cover include: emergency household, food, utility or clothing expenses; costs to repair or replace damaged property or goods; contributions to funeral costs; removal costs; travel costs to place of safety or to attend court; or security equipment costs.

Other types of expenditure will be considered if a need is identified.

Who can apply: Applications must be endorsed and submitted by a referral organisation* acting in their professional capacity. [*Referral organisations are support organisations, mostly in the third sector, who victims and their families are in touch with.] Organisations can apply for funding on behalf of victims, but payments will not be made directly to these organisations.

Funding is open to any victim of crime who is resident in Scotland who is currently accessing victim and other support services. It is also available for people who live outside of Scotland who have been bereaved by a crime that has occurred within Scotland.

Additional eligibility requirements:

- There is an urgent identified need
- No other organisation can meet this need
- The crime has been reported to the Police or other organisation
- Funds provided require to be declared by the recipient

How much can be applied for: Individuals will be able to access assistance worth up to £3,000 to help meet immediate financial needs. (Total fund is £100,000.).

Timescales: Funding available from 1st April 2020.

How to apply: Complete application form, and email it to: victimsfund@victimsupportsco.org.uk

More information and the link to the application form can be found at:

<https://victimsupport.scot/victims-fund/>

For any queries about the fund, email victimsfund@victimsupportsco.org.uk.

Aberdeen local contact: natalie.slater@victimsupportsco.org.uk

10. Other Resources

i) Websites, Useful Guides, and Online Safety

Accessing information online may feel like the best option for you at this time. If you do access any information online, you may need to delete your browser history or use 'private browsing' as a way to hide your searches.

Staying Safe on-line

- [SafeLives guide to staying safe online - https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Staying%20safe%20online%20guide.pdf](https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Staying%20safe%20online%20guide.pdf)
- [Digital Stalking: A guide to technology risks for victims](#)

- [Women's Aid guide to private browsing - https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/)
- [Guide to technology safety - https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors](https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors)
- [Chayn DIY On-line safety](#) (available in different languages)

Other Resources

- [Making a safety plan](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/making-a-safety-plan/), Women's Aid - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/making-a-safety-plan/>
- [The Survivor's Handbook](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/), Women's Aid - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/>
- [Guidance on economic abuse during COVID-19](https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources/), Surviving Economic Abuse - <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources/>
- [Karma Nirvana](https://karmanirvana.org.uk/) - <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/>
- [Chayn](https://chayn.co/) - <https://chayn.co/>

ii) Live chats and survivor forums

- [Women's Aid Survivors Forum](https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/) - <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/>
- [Women's Aid Live Chat](https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/) - <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>
- [Victim Support Live Chat](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat) - <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat>

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