

Covid-19 and Domestic Abuse

The need for household isolation and social distancing due to Covid-19 will have a direct impact on the people and families experiencing domestic abuse, and it's more important than ever that Oxfordshire residents have access to information and support. Isolating with somebody who causes you harm can be incredibly frightening. Offering help and support might save lives, but doing it in a way that isn't safe can actually increase the risk.

This is an extremely risky time for victims of abuse.

As well as supporting people with their health and social issues at this incredibly difficult time, you as professionals/ volunteers are likely to be in touch with people who are experiencing higher levels of domestic abuse including coercive control. Isolating and distancing guidelines mean it could be even more difficult than usual to identify and then support people experiencing abuse. Asking about domestic abuse as routine as part of your phone contact might be their only route to help. However, it is likely that more perpetrators are going to be in the home when we have contact with the victim.

There are things we and you can do to try and minimise the risk to the victim but **safety is paramount**. It is better to do nothing and just report and record your concerns with your line manager and our local specialist domestic abuse services, than to increase the risk faced by somebody trapped at home with person causing them harm.

- If you have telephone contact NEVER leave a voice message alluding to relationships or domestic abuse if you believe the victim and perpetrator share a home. If you're calling from a generic support service (meaning not domestic abuse specific) only mention that service.
- If you're not calling from a generic service, ensure you call from a withheld number so the perpetrator cannot trace it/call you back. When calling from a mobile phone the option to 'show your caller ID' is usually within phone settings.
- If you think the perpetrator has answered the phone and you're making a targeted call to ask about domestic abuse, ask for somebody else - a made up name - and pretend you have dialled the wrong number. Consider that the call may be monitored.

Let them know that relationships are likely to be under increased pressure in this time and domestic abuse might get worse, or people might experience abuse for the first time.

Always assess if it is safe to talk about domestic abuse first, if it's safe then discuss code words with them for future contact. If not from a generic service, ask them who you should pretend to be. If it's safe to talk, go through possible safety plan which includes information below and in the infographic on page 2.

- If you do manage to speak to a potential victim, only ask yes/no questions only and explain they only need give a yes or no answer. E.g. are you ok? Do you feel safe? Do you need help?
- Agree on a code word for the victim to use if they need your help but can't say explicitly.
- If the victim uses the code word (or emoji if communicating via text or email), or you feel they are in need of immediate assistance / are in danger, **call 999**. Let them know they can use the silent solution if they can't talk by pressing 55 when prompted on a 999 call.
- Victims can self-refer through the **Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 731 0055** (10am - 7pm, Monday to Friday). For 24-hour domestic abuse advice call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247.
- If the victim wants to self refer, but can't access the internet or make phone calls safely, offer to make the referral for them. **If it is safe to do so** recommend that they download a safety phone app outlined in part 2 on the page opposite.

For more information and advice please go to www.reducingtherisk.org.uk

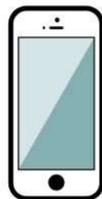
ISOLATING AT HOME CAN BE A FRIGHTENING THOUGHT IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

THERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL SAFETY PLANNING STEPS THAT YOU CAN TAKE AND ARRANGE TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HARM



1 SAFE WORD OR EMOJI

Speak to a trusted friend/neighbour or family member and arrange a safe word, and a generic emoji that you can text quickly, to alert them that you need them to contact the emergency services on your behalf. Keep your phone charged, topped up and accessible



2 PERSONAL SAFETY APPS

The Hollie guard app features a number of silent safeguarding options, including alerting designated contacts if you are in danger with a shake or tap of your smart phone. This app also features a 'man down' feature, that will alert designated contacts of potential danger if deceleration, non movement or impact is detected



3 SAFETY IN THE HOME

If you are in a situation where violence or abuse is starting or escalating, try to keep yourself close to exits, and away from rooms where you are more likely to come to harm. Try to move yourself away from kitchen areas, and consider rooms with secure locks that you can flee to and call for help.



4 UTILISING SUPPORT OPTIONS

Ask your family and friends to check up on you if it is safe, and you are able to do so. Utilise online and telephone support services if you can. Finding ways to safely stay in touch with trusted family members can help us feel better able to cope with stress and difficulties with mental health during hard times



5 IMMEDIATE RISK

Immediate risk to life comes before social isolation. If you are at immediate risk of harm, dial 999. Our emergency services continue to be available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Our domestic abuse services remain open and available for specialist help support and advice
 WORTH Domestic Abuse Hub 0330 222 8181
 CONNECT Worthing and Crawley area 01403 229701

