

Living with domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic

We know that the Covid-19 outbreak will have serious impacts on the lives of victims and children. We fully recognise the enhanced risk and hardship that restrictions are putting upon those in abusive and controlling relationships and are working hard to develop solutions.

Unfortunately, home is not a safe place for everyone. Partner agencies are making every effort to keep crisis services as accessible as possible to those who need them, whilst following Government guidelines and keeping staff and service users safe.

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.

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.

National helplines, email, text and live chat support services, and local specialist services, are all currently open for business as usual, although their delivery is likely to have to adapt over the coming weeks as new and innovative ways are found to safely contact and support victims and children.

Summary of Useful Helplines

Wearside Women in Need Helpline: local 24-Hour Helpline: 0800 066 5555.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline 24-Hour Freephone: 0808 2000 247

The Men's Advice Line for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them 0808 801 0327 www.mensadvice.org.uk

Women's Aid Live Chat <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk>

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428 (run by Galop) www.galop.org.uk

Rape Crisis (England and Wales) 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Forced Marriage Unit Tel 020 7008 0151

Karma Nirvana (support for honour-based abuse and forced marriage) 0800 5999 247

Victims First Northumbria 0800 011 3116

Samaritans 116 123

Respect helpline (for those worried about their own behaviour) 0808 8024040
<https://respectphoneline.org.uk/>

The Family Law Advice Line is each Monday 10.00 am - 1.00 pm Tel: 0191 2304777

Call the Police on 999 if you are in immediate danger. Silent calls will work if you are not safe to speak so use the silent solution service by dialling 999 and press 55

Or visit www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse

Support for Victims and Children

Local and national services that support those living with domestic abuse in Sunderland include:

- **Wearside Women in Need Refuges:** Domestic abuse refuges are open. The local 24-Hour Helpline: 0800 066 5555
The refuges continue to be staffed. If you think you or someone else might be in danger you should always call the police immediately on 999.
- **Wearside Women in Need Outreach support:** Wearside Women in Need are running their other vital support services using telephone contact. They are reviewing all services daily. Outreach Services: 0191 565 8877
- **Wearside Women in Need Helpline:** The local 24-Hour Helpline is open: **0800 066 5555**. The specialist advisors offer confidential, non-judgemental support and information to survivors, anyone experiencing domestic abuse, and their friends and families. Wearside Women in Need (WWiN) are requesting that this is only used by people needing direct support (not for general enquiries) to keep the line open for those most in need. You can contact our staff on the usual Office numbers if you need to speak to anyone at [WWiN](https://www.winsidewomeninneed.org.uk) for other reasons on 0191 416 3550 during office hours.
- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** Freephone 24-Hour: 0808 2000 247
- **The Men's Advice Line** is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them 0808 801 0327 www.mensadvice.org.uk
- **Women's Aid Live Chat** is currently available Monday to Friday 10am-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. They will:
 - Never judge you or what you say
 - Always have a fully trained female support worker available
 - Give you space to explore your options
 - Support you to make safe choices for you and your children
 - Keep everything you tell us confidential
- Women's Aid [advice for survivors](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/). 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/>
- Safe Lives [safety planning guide for victims and survivors during COVID-19](#).
- **Economic and 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/> See their [guidance](#) designed to support your economic wellbeing and safety.
- **Tech abuse and tech safety resources.** Many victims suffer from tech abuse where their abuser monitors them on-line. There are many different types of technologies that can be used to facilitate abuse. Refuge have [guidance and tips for survivors](#) about how the devices can be recognised and how to lower the risk they pose.

Support for those causing harm

If you are worried about your own behaviour then the **Respect Phoneline** 0808 8024040 www.respectphoneline.org.uk is a confidential helpline for people who are hurting and/or scaring their partners and families. Respect can also support the professionals who work with them.

What can the community do?

Our plea to all community members during this difficult time is to be our eyes and ears. Please be vigilant and look out for the people around you. The role of communities, family and friends is now more important than ever. Check in with your friends, families and neighbours, whilst respecting current Government guidance from Public Health.

Please report any concerns if you see or hear evidence of domestic abuse or suspect it may be happening, or if you are worried about a friend, neighbour or loved one. Often in cases of domestic abuse, the community knows something but struggles to know what to do to help. Neighbours, family and friends may be suspicious, but are often reluctant to get involved because of spilt loyalties, embarrassment, or fear of reprisals. However, when victims and children are in self-isolation with their abuser, it may not always be safe for them to call for help. We are urging anyone who has concerns or suspicions that someone they know, or live near, is experiencing domestic abuse to contact the Police. Alternatively, you can call Crimestoppers 24/7, free and anonymously on 0800 555 111 or pass on information on-line at <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/>

All police referrals are assessed and forwarded on to support services. Keep safe –and help keep others safe.

Thinking of Leaving

During the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving an abusive partner 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 and options and will support you.

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

The Police can issue a Domestic Violence Protection Order if called to an incident where there is risk of further harm. The Police can remove a perpetrator from the residence and prevent them 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-law

Child Contact

Child Contact arrangements are of particular concern to many survivors at the moment. Perpetrators have often used child contact arrangements as a tool to coercive and controlling behaviour and are likely to use COVID-19 as a way to threaten to not adhere to – or flout – contact arrangements. 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, then 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 them in as this could escalate the risk to you and your children. Call 999 if you are feeling threatened.

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/>