

How to Stay Safe: Domestic Violence and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Avoiding public spaces and working remotely can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but for many people, staying home may not be the safest option. We know that any external factors that add stress and financial strain can negatively impact an already difficult living situation and create circumstances where safety is further compromised.

Abuse is about power and control. When someone in this situation is forced to stay in the home or in close proximity to their abuser more frequently, an abuser can use any tool to exert control over their target, including a national health concern such as COVID-19. In a time where companies may be encouraging that their employees work remotely, and the CDC is encouraging "[social distancing](#)," an abuser may take advantage of an already stressful situation to gain more control.

Here's how COVID-19 could uniquely impact those affected by intimate partner violence:

- Abusive partners may withhold necessary items, such as hand sanitizer or disinfectants.
- Abusive partners may share misinformation about the pandemic to control or frighten their target, or to prevent them from seeking appropriate medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Abusive partners may withhold insurance cards, threaten to cancel insurance, or prevent their target from seeking medical attention if they need it.
- Programs that serve survivors may be significantly impacted – shelters may be full or may even stop intakes altogether; courthouses may be unable to issue restraining orders. People may also fear entering a shelter because of being in close quarters with groups of people.
- Individuals who are older or have chronic heart or lung conditions may be at increased risk in public places where they would typically get support, like shelters, counseling centers, or courthouses.
- Travel restrictions may impact a person's escape or safety plan – it may not be safe for them to use public transportation or to fly.
- An abusive partner may feel more justified and escalate their isolation tactics.

If you believe that you or someone you love may be the target of abuse, here are a few suggestions that may make this uncertain time feel a little bit safer:

Create a safety plan.

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. The National Domestic Violence Hotline will safety plan with survivors, friends, family members, and anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of someone else.

You and your partner may be told by either or both of your employers to work remotely to limit social interaction. Having a safety plan laid out can help you to protect yourself during this stressful time. You can learn more about [safety plans here](#), and you can find an [interactive guide to safety planning here](#).

Because there may be limited shelter availability due to COVID-19, consider alternatives such as staying with family or friends or staying in a motel. Be extra mindful of good hygiene practices if you're leaving as well – wash your hands regularly, avoid touching your face, minimize contact with surfaces that other people have had contact with, etc. If you or a loved one is in immediate danger, call 911.

Practice self-care.

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty for many people but getting through this time while experiencing abuse can feel really overwhelming. Taking time for your health and wellness can make a big difference in how you feel. To learn more about how to build in self-care while staying safe, [read here](#).

Reach out for help.

While people are encouraged to stay at home, you may feel isolated from your friends and family. Even if you are isolated, try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so, and try to stick to your daily routines as much as possible.

How family, friends, and co-workers can help:

Reach out to anyone you are concerned for and advocate on their behalf. Gather resources to provide them. Call a hotline if you fear for their safety. If you work together, seek them out under the guise of a work matter and ask how they're doing. Remember to carefully listen to their concerns and needs so you can determine the best way to assist them.

You may not be able to visit them in person if you live in an area where there are COVID-19 cases. Seeing someone you care about being hurt is stressful. Remind yourself that you can't make decisions for someone else, but you can encourage your loved one to think about their wellbeing, safety plan and practice self-care while they are in their home.

Resources for victims of domestic violence:

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Call 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522

Available 24/7. Can connect callers with local resources and immediate support. Also available through [online chat tool](#).

National Sexual Assault Hotline

Call 1-800-656-4673

Provided by RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network). Available 24/7. Also available through online chat tool.

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

Available 24/7 for victims of abuse and any other type of crisis.

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

Call 1-800-422-4453

Available 24/7 in 170 different languages.

Find a list of resources organized by state [here](#), provided by the Department of Health & Human Services' Office on Women's Health.

You may also contact Workplace Solutions, your employee assistance program at [800-327-5071](tel:800-327-5071) for 24/7 confidential support, guidance, and safety planning. The EAP web portal, www.wseap.com (access code: *Publicis*), contains additional resources on COVID-19 and will continue to be updated as this situation develops.

National Domestic Violence Hotline. (2020, March 13). *Staying Safe During COVID-19*. Retrieved from URL: <https://www.thehotline.org/2020/03/13/staying-safe-during-covid-19/>

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