

COVID-19 and Potential Risks for Victims of Domestic Violence

Increased Risk of Harm Due to COVID-19

Those caught up in abusive situations are desperately seeking connection and a sense of control and safety. Many are trapped as they shelter in their homes and cannot even make a call to local crisis lines safely. In addition, the high prevalence of co-occurring domestic violence and substance use creates an increased risk for victimization. Communicating in new ways can be challenging; however, many therapists, counselors, and local agencies are using web-based platforms and telephone sessions to reach those experiencing increased fear and anxiety. As many of us are practicing social distancing and quarantine, there are additional risks for survivors and their safety, such as:

- *Isolation:* Abusers can use this time to further isolate survivors from their loved ones. They may also use this as a time to further restrict a survivor's movement in person, controlling where they go and when. They might also control a survivor's interactions online, limiting their access to the outside world.
- *Restricting Access to Information:* Abusers may also restrict access to the news and other outlets, making themselves the source of all information.
- *Increased Abuse:* The abuse may worsen as survivors may be spending more time in contact with their abusers. Survivors may also experience new or different types of abuse during this time.
- *In-Person and Digital Stalking:* Abusers might try to exert their power by trying to monitor, control and stalk survivors in person and digitally.
- *Financial Abuse:* Many individuals are experiencing financial burdens due to being unable to work, and abusers may further financially exploit survivors during this time.
- *Parenting:* Survivors who co-parent their children with their abusers may be facing unique challenges during these times, such as barriers to visitation and/or increased exposure to the abuser due to lack of accessible childcare. For example, in order for a survivor to work, he/she/they may need to utilize their abuser for childcare.

What is a Safety Plan?

A safety plan is a set of steps you can take to reduce the risk of harm in unsafe situations with an abuser or family member.

Why Should I Create a Safety Plan?

It can be hard to think and react in a time of emergency or high stress, especially with the added stress and uncertainty of COVID-19, so it is helpful to create a plan in advance. It is also important to update your safety plan often, as circumstances can change. Abusers often try to have power and control over a survivor's life, and a safety plan is one way a survivor can have power and control over their own situation, as much as they can. Having a plan can empower you to make the safest decisions you can for your situation.

With the changes in our environments due to coronavirus, consider following safety tips created by survivors.

SAFETY PLANNING - COVID19

A GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. BUDDY SYSTEM CODE WORD

Identify at least two people that you can contact with a “code word” to let them know if you are in trouble. Plan in advance what they should do if you send them the code word.

2. “SAFEST ROOM”

If there is an argument, identify an area of the home you can move to where there are no weapons and there are ways for you to leave the house, apartment, or building, such as a door or window to exit the house/apartment.

For some survivors, especially those quarantined at home with an abuser during coronavirus, no room may feel safe, so we call it the “safest rooms”. If you can at least identify the lowest risk areas, you may be able to reduce harm.

3. PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

CODE WORDS: If you have children, decide how to communicate urgency with them. For example, one survivor would open her arms and her daughter knew that meant to come running to her for safety. Some survivors create a “code word” with their children that means they should go to the “safest room” in the home that you have already decided upon.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS: If for some reason you are not able to make emergency calls, give your children the safety number/s, if they are old enough.

4. NOTIFY THE POLICE BEFORE AN EMERGENCY

Ahead of time, you can notify your local police station of your concerns. Let them know the history and your concern of being in isolation due to coronavirus. It may be useful to speak with the Domestic Violence officer.

5. EXIT PLAN

In case you have to flee, create an exit plan ahead of time with someone who could support this need. Is there a trusted friend/relative who you can stay with, if needed?

6. SUPPLIES, FOOD & MEDICATION

Check your supplies and food. If you need food and do not have the money, check your local pantry, temple/church/mosque, etc., or other community organizations.

Remember to keep your medication in the safest, easily accessible location in case of emergency.

7. EMERGENCY BAG

Pack a bag with an extra set of keys, clothes for you and your children, a pay-as-you-go cellphone, medications, copies of important documents, etc.

8. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Make copies or take pictures of your important documents for yourself and send them to a trusted friend or relative. (IDs, social security cards, immigration documents, birth certificates, health insurance information, and Orders of Protection) Be mindful of sending anything via phone or computer. Please use whatever method is safest for you.

9. SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT

With social distancing and quarantining, survivors can feel even more isolated, and abusers may use further isolation as a power and control tactic.

Identify trusted friends, relatives or online support groups where you can still connect virtually. If you have a friend who may be experiencing abuse, be sure to reach out to them even more during this time.

10. CREATE A “PEACEFUL SPACE”

If you cannot leave your home, try to create a “peaceful space” for yourself in your home (if that is safe for you). You can draw pictures of a more peaceful place and put them on a wall to help you take an emotional break to visualize a more peaceful place. This is also an activity you can do with your children. You can also write positive affirmations and put them up on the wall to remind yourself of your worth.

11. HOLDING ONTO YOUR PLAN

Consider keeping a list of your safety plan in your phone or wherever might be safe for you. Please consider what is safest for you.

If you choose to write your plan somewhere, consider listing only key words that help you remember the plan, but that would not be clear to your abuser. If this is not safe, try to memorize your plan, focusing on memorizing at least one key emergency number on your list of resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES, PLEASE VISIT

sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19



Sanctuary for Families

Local Resources

Women In Distress of Broward County, Inc. is the only nationally accredited, state-certified, full service domestic violence center serving Broward County. They offer 24-hour crisis intervention through our Crisis Hotline and emergency shelter, as well as counseling and support for victims and their children.

24-HOUR CRISIS HOTLINE: (954) 761-1133 | (954) 527-5385 TTY/TDD

<https://www.womenindistress.org/>

For immediate assistance, you can also call the Florida Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-500-1119 or TDD (800) 621-4202

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is still accessible 24/7. Please call them at 1-800-799-7233

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is still accessible 24/7. Please call them at 1-888-373-7888 or text them at 233-733

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is still accessible 24/7. Please call them at 1-800-273-8255

Other Resources

Emergency SOS on iPhone: Here is a link to a shortcut to using Emergency SOS to quickly and easily call for help and alert your emergency contacts if you have an iPhone. How to Use Emergency SOS on your iPhone:

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT208076>

Emergency Location Sharing on Androids and iPhones: Here is a link for how to set up emergency location sharing on your phone, in case you want to share your location with a trusted friend or relative in case of emergency. How to Use Emergency Location Sharing: <https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/18/18267500/how-to-set-up-emergency-location-sharing-android-ios>

Where to Find Information About Coronavirus

For the latest information, visit the Florida and Broward Health Department Websites, as well as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Coronavirus website.

Broward County Department of Health: <http://broward.floridahealth.gov/>

Florida Department of Health Coronavirus Website: <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov/>

CDC Coronavirus site: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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www.drugfreebroward.org