



## Living with domestic abuse or coercive control during the coronavirus outbreak

If you're currently experiencing – or have experienced - domestic abuse and coercive control you may feel even more isolated and frightened than usual while you and your family are social distancing or having to self-isolate.

We hope that this information will help you to feel safer and less alone at what is a difficult time for everybody, but perhaps especially those who are having to keep themselves and their family safe with the added challenge of living with someone who is or has been harming you.

### **Staying safe**

You deserve to live a life free from fear, abuse and violence. If you're living with abuse it's important to know that it's never your fault.

In this unprecedented situation you may feel more at risk, or not able to reach out for help. The police have confirmed that any restrictions that are in place must come second to keeping yourself, and your children, safe. If you need to leave the home do so and if you are directly at risk and need to ring 999, you should.

You should do what you need to in order to stay as safe as possible in your situation. Remember, you're the expert in your relationship and if you're reading this then you're already a survivor.

If you're working with a supporter, it's important to let them know if your situation at home has changed due to coronavirus, so we can help you in the best way.

It is worth reviewing your safety plans or escape routes on a regular basis, and seeking advice if you need to. Here are some things you may want to consider:

#### **Staying safe – adapting at home**

- ❑ If the choice is between you or your children being harmed then it's ok to play along with your perpetrator. Seeming to agree or concede (as long as it doesn't harm you or someone else) may be the safest option in a crisis.
- ❑ Do you recognise the pattern the abuse takes? Is it worse at different times or in different situations? Can you avoid contact at these times or during these situations?
- ❑ Remember that even at the moment, as long as you have not been specifically advised to shield yourself, it's still ok to go for a walk. Even under the current guidelines, going out to exercise or to buy food or medicine is allowed, and you can take your children with you if necessary.
- ❑ Consider what to do if things go wrong at home, or where you would go if you absolutely had to leave. Take into account that many public places are now closed so your new 'safe place' outside the home may be a shop or a pharmacy, from which you can contact the police.

#### **Planning ahead**

- ❑ Keep your phone charged and with you at all times.
- ❑ If you are self-isolating due to illness then could you pass a note to a helper, carer or volunteer delivery driver who is providing support or help with shopping? Consider how you could safely get a message to someone if it became necessary for you to raise the alarm.

- ② Avoid going into rooms in the home with the perpetrator where they could access a weapon (kitchen, shed etc.) or where they could lock you in.
- ② Identify a safe room in the home. Does the door lock and is there a phone signal or outside window/exit so that you can call for help or get out? You may have an ideal excuse to go to this room if you are trying to self-isolate yourself due to illness.
- ② Agree a code word now with a trusted family member/friend or neighbour to let them know that you are safe or to signal that you need them to call for help.
- ② If your children are mature enough to understand how the 'code word' works then share this with them; knowing that they can play a part in keeping everyone safe might help them to cope and recover better.
- ② Show your children how to call 999 and how to ask for help. Tell them not to let the perpetrator in (if practical).
- ② Check or update your social media, banking, email and computer privacy and password settings. Can you 'block' the perpetrator?
- ② Make sure you have your (and your children's) important documents in a safe place, or keep copies of them at a friend or family member's house for safe keeping.

### **Stay in touch**

If it's safe to do so, talk to someone you trust about what is happening to you. Don't underestimate how important it is to have someone to talk to, and of someone else knowing what is going on at home.

If you are not sure who to trust then there are helplines and live chat services available for support or just a listening ear.

### **If it comes to a crisis point...**

Don't threaten to leave. Research shows that you are most at risk when you separate. Please ask for help to leave as safely as possible, from a professional or support worker. Call the 24hr National Domestic Violence Helpline on [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247) for advice or the police on 101.

If you feel that you, or someone else, is in danger please always call 999. If you can't speak try to make a noise, like coughing, and then tap '55' on the keypad. The police will know you need help, and will ask you to follow their instructions.

If, as a result of the current coronavirus situation, your living arrangements have changed in some way, it's important to let your support worker or social worker know of these changes. They can then take into account any increase in risks and can ensure that they can support you in the most appropriate way should things escalate.

### **Look after yourself too**

Don't forget to look after you. You may think that you don't have the time for self-care, especially if you have children or other family at home. But looking after yourself is really important too. We promise that you are worth it.

Here are some other ways, which are free and completely confidential, to look after yourself:

- ② [SilverCloud](#) is a free, safe and secure online guided self-support and includes online programmes for depression and anxiety, sleep, and stress. You can access the programmes on a phone or tablet, and at any time of day or night. Sign up or find out more.

- ② [The Mental Health Foundation](#) has advice about looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak including some specific advice for those in an abusive relationship.
- ② [Samaritans](#) offer a non-judgemental listening service. It's a free and confidential 24 hr phone and email service which provides emotional support for anyone who needs someone to talk to. No advice and no pressure. Call them anytime on [116123](tel:116123) or [email jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- ② [Bright Sky](#) is a free-to-download mobile app, providing support and information to anyone who may be in an abusive relationship or those concerned about someone they know. The app is also designed to be used by practitioners, and for anyone looking for information about issues around domestic abuse such as online safety, stalking and harassment and sexual consent.
- ② [Hollie Guard](#) is a next generation smartphone app that provides enhanced levels of protection, which essentially transforms your smartphone into an advanced personal safety device. All you need to do is shake your phone or tap the screen and you generate an alert, which automatically sends your location and audio/video evidence to your emergency contacts. Remember, if you do access online information you may want to delete your browser history when you are finished or use the 'private browsing' function on your browser.

**Don't give up. You are not alone.**

Domestic abuse and coercive control can and does happen to anyone. It's not fair and it's not your fault. You don't deserve to live in fear of the consequences of your thoughts, feelings and actions.

You can also find support via these organisations:

National 24h Domestic abuse Helpline: [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)

Our free, 24-hour Supportline: [0808 168 9111](tel:08081689111) or you can access live chat in certain areas. [Find out if it's available in your area.](#)

Men's Advice Line: [0808 801 0327](tel:08088010327) or email: [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)

LGBT DV Helpline: [0300 999 5428](tel:03009995428) or email: [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk)

Childline: [0800 1111](tel:08001111)