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Managing Domestic Abuse Risks during COVID 19 Restrictions

The current COVID 19 restrictions mean that couples and their families are spending much more time at home together which means the risk to vulnerable children and adults is likely to increase. An increase in domestic abuse along with other forms of abuse is a real risk. This guide shares some ideas about how this risk might be managed where you are worried about current or emerging conflict within families.

Helping Families Plan, Adjust and Cope

We are all having to adjust to the new restrictions which can raise anxiety and present families with greater challenges. Therefore, having an open conversation with families about how they are coping and support them to develop safety/wellbeing plans is really important. This might include;

- Enquiring if they are eligible to access childcare provision
- Having a daily routine which involves spending time together and apart in and out of the house in line with Government guidance
- Talk about how household, chores, childcare, shopping and other responsibilities are shared
- Where safe to do so support parents to think about times of day, situations or activities that they are likely to find stressful or lead to conflict

Safety Planning

Completing safety plans may be more challenging in the current circumstances, keeping copies at home where they may be found could increase risk so verbal planning may be the best option. Consideration will need to be given to how, when and where a safety planning

conversation can take place without the perpetrator being present.

Were possible safety planning should adopt a whole family/network approach and include the survivor, child and preparator.

Restrictions on social contact and mobility doesn't mean that those at risk shouldn't protect themselves or others. Considering how to do this and where they will go will be made more difficult by the current situation. Advise the survivor that there will not be any repercussions from the Police if they need to leave their home if things are escalating and they feel unsafe.

Government current advice is that children under the age of 18 can move between homes where they spend time on a regular basis, e.g. between separated and divorced carers.

Advice is that consideration needs to be given to how transitions between households will be managed. Wherever possible people should avoid using public transport and following the social distance rule while moving to and on arrival between parents/carers homes.

If either home is under quarantine due to someone in the household having symptoms of COVID 19 or has been in contact with someone showing symptoms, this should take precedent over maintaining normal arrangements.

Safety planning with the survivor

Support from families, friends and neighbours: Can they FaceTime or call someone they trust? Can they talk to them about what's happening & what their concerns are? Do they have a code word/phase they use to let them know it is not safe to talk and they need to phone the police?

Can they set up with someone they trust a check in call so that they know that

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someone will be in contact at certain times in the week?

Check if the person already has a personal safety plan does this need updating given the current situation.

- What is the usual pattern of abuse e.g. is it worse when the children are around or not around?
- What are the person's main worries?
- Is the perpetrator working out of or inside the home?
- Is the family income being affected, what is the potential impact of this?
- Does either the preparator or survivor use drugs/alcohol how could their use change and what will this mean?
- How might the perpetrator respond to isolation? Consider whether this might lead to an increase in sexual violence/cohesive control or physical abuse?
- Does the perpetrator and or the survivor have mental health issues how are current restrictions impacting on this?
- Where the survivor is a female are they pregnant? How might the perpetrator respond to this?
- Thinking about the layout of the house is there a safe space that they could go to?
- If they were to leave in an emergency have they thought where they would go as many shops and pubs are closed?
- If someone is doing their shopping could they write a message on the shopping list asking for help?

Safety planning with children

It's important to understand how the domestic abuse may be impacting on the child and what action needs to be taken in order for them to remain safe.

The below website has a workbook and worksheet that you could adapt to help create safety plans with children.

<https://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk/>

<http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/>

The Social Work Toolbox website has a safety planning tool for children affected by domestic abuse.

Safety Planning with Preparators

Where ever possible perpetrators must be supported to manage their own behaviours.

Where possible perpetrators should be supported to manage their own behaviour. Whilst not relevant for everyone the time out tool can be used to support the perpetrator to try and stop themselves from doing or saying anything violent, abusive and remove themselves from the situation that may be building up. An example of a time out might include taking a walk, sitting in the car. The below website has a guide called Living without abuse, the tool kit sets out the steps people need to go through in order for time out to be successful.

<https://www.idas.org.uk/>

Resources: If a survivor or their children are in immediate danger, they need call 999 and ask for the Police.

If the survivor is not in immediate danger, the following numbers might be helpful:

- Telephone 24h National Domestic
- UAVA Helpline – 0808 80 200 28
- AbuLGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 999 5428
help@galop.org.uk
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
info@mensadvice.org.uk
- Karma Nirvana, UK Helpline for 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage: 0800 5999 247
- Victim Support National 24-hour Support line: 0808 1689 111

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- Childline: 0800 1111

Websites and useful guides

<https://safelives.org.uk/> provides a number of useful resources. A guide to private browsing, the survivor's handbook, and developing safety plans can be found at <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>