**Practice briefing on how to respond to Domestic Abuse during Covid-19 from April 2020 until further notice.**

Following the announcement by the Government on 23/03/2020 on the new emergency measures, families have been asked to isolate, to contain the spread of the Coronavirus. We are aware that self-isolating at home is supposed to be the safest place to be, however, for people experiencing domestic abuse, this can mean being trapped inside with their abuser. The measures to limit social contact are also likely to have significant mental health impacts, and this could be acute for survivors of domestic abuse coping and recovering from trauma.

This briefing note outlines the steps that should be taken by professionals who may come into contact with victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse.

This guidance applies to any professional in virtual or in person contact with members of the public including but not limited to: social workers; police; health professionals including GPs and pharmacists; IDVAs; education providers; probation staff; support workers.

**Responding to Victims and Survivors of Domestic Abuse**

1. If a service user arrives at your premises, please be aware they may be with their perpetrator. NICE guidance outlines the need for private discussion. This means, talking to individuals alone especially before you start asking the individual any questions relating to domestic abuse. This may be more challenging with Covid-19 procedures however social distancing provides the opportunity to say you need to reduce entry to a building and allow entry one at a time.
2. Don’t attend home visits unless absolutely necessary. Arrange non-contact communication methods, ie. Telephone, Facetime, WhatsApp. Where stalking is a concern be mindful that perpetrators may be looking at technology and so provide victims appropriate advice and information about how to check for this.
3. When calling a service user try to establish if it is safe to have a telephone conversation, be aware the perpetrator could be listening. To establish if it is safe for the victim to talk, consider asking them ‘who are you with at the moment?’; ‘Is now a good time to talk?’
4. Be curious - Ask them how things are, how are they coping in this difficult time? Do they feel safe with their current living arrangements? This will enable them to indicate if things are not safe. If they do feel safe at that time, advise them to get a plan in place just in case things change.
5. All victims of domestic abuse presenting to any service in South Gloucestershire should be signposted to the relevant specialist services such as Next Link or Victim Support who can assist with assessing risk and developing safety plans. (See contact list of support services below).
6. If you are a professional who is familiar with DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) Risk Assessments, where possible please complete and process in the normal way (escalating those scoring as high risk or judged professionally as being high risk to the MARAC which will continue to be convened every other Wednesday.  To upload your referral, please contact your agency’s representative with access to the Professional Choices platform.  If you unsure of who your representative is please contact the MARAC Administrator via email:  [southglos.marac@nextlinkhousing.co.uk.cjsm.net](mailto:southglos.marac@nextlinkhousing.co.uk.cjsm.net)
7. If the individual wants support please also complete a referral into Next Link which remains open and is accepting referrals.

**Safety Planning**

If you are a professional who is familiar with safety planning you should complete this along with a DASH by telephone. Try to establish an agreed code word or phrase so, when this is said by the service user you can end the conversation knowing it is no longer safe for you to speak to them without raising the suspicion of the perpetrator. This word or phrase should be easily used in a conversation without alerting others.

**When safety planning you should ask the individual to consider the following:**

* Encourage the individual to think about how they might respond to a crisis situation, including getting out and away from their perpetrator. They should consider and plan their escape route in advance of a crisis. Where possible, this should include a small bag with ID (passport, birth certificate, national insurance number etc.), money, medication, documents for children, and some clothes.
* Consider safe locations in the community a victim could go to alert safe networks or professionals that they were unsafe during Covid-19 restrictions. Identify local pharmacy, supermarkets, community hubs and police stations which will remain open through the restrictions.
* Advise the individual of high risk areas in the home if they suspect a physical attack is imminent avoiding kitchens, garages, bathrooms or small places where they can be trapped or locked in.
* Encourage them to keep their mobile phones charged and on them at all times.
* Encourage them to teach any children/dependents to be able to call the police, including providing their name and address to the call operator if they are unable to do so.
* Remind the individual that if they are unable to alert police to their situation they may be able to contact the pharmacy or GP without raising the perpetrators’ suspicion and indicate to them that they are at risk
* If a service user calls you urgently, needing assistance to leave their perpetrator, you should advise them to call 999 if they, or any dependents, are at risk of immediate harm or life is in danger. Please advise them to key in ‘55’ if they ring the police but are unable to speak (if you ring 999 and key in 55 when the operator responds to your call it will highlight to them immediately you are in danger but unable to speak).

**Identifying Previously Unknown Victims**

It is now recognised good practice for many services to ask about domestic abuse routinely. Those experiencing domestic abuse find it very difficult to tell anyone what is happening to them, and feel very scared and isolated. It is important when they have an opportunity to tell someone, they are provided with the right response. Some victims will not report abuse to the police, but if they are provided with the right opportunity, they may disclose abuse to other services.

With this in mind, it is important professionals create a safe space, where they are able to sensitively ask questions without being overheard. Be aware not all abuse is physical, but may include financial, physiological and sexual abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. For many victims, social distancing may be assisting their abuser to control and isolate them further.

Be aware many victims may not recognise the term ‘domestic abuse’ (especially if they are speakers of other languages), or they may think that it only applies to physical violence. Framing the question may include ‘We know that many of our service users also have experiences of being hurt or frightened by a partner or family member so we ask everyone about these issues. Avoid direct questioning such as ‘Are you being abused at home’? Instead, consider ‘How are things going at home? If someone discloses domestic abuse to you, it is important to be aware of the help that is available along with contact details. If it is safe to do so, provide literature which provides information about local domestic abuse services.

**Professionals can signpost victims and survivors of domestic abuse living in South Gloucestershire to the following support services:**

**Locally:**

**Next Link** are continuing to accept South Glos referrals and provide telephone support. Next Link domestic abuse telephone help lines are open 10am – 4pm Monday to Friday 0800 4700280. Outside of these times the National Domestic Violence Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week Freephone 0808 2000247. Details of live chat and other services available on the website <https://www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk/southglos/contact/>

**Victim Support:** Telephone helpline T 0300 3031972 or T 07432 504692 Available Mon, Wed and Fri 09.30-17.30 and Tues and Thurs 11.00am-19.00. The national helpline is open 24/7 T 0808 1689111. [24/7 live chat](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat) is now available.

<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/south-west/avon-and-somerset>

**Somerset & Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support [SARSAS]** provides support to people in Bristol, South Gloucestershire, B&NES, North Somerset and Somerset, who have experienced rape or any kind of sexual assault or abuse at any time in their lives.

From Monday 23 March 2020 the two helplines will be combined. Anyone can call either line.

0808 801 0456

0808 801 0464

Mondays & Fridays: 11am – 2pm  
Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays: 12pm – 2pm & 6pm – 8pm

If you need to speak to someone when the SARSAS Support helpline is shut you can call:

Rape Crisis England and Wales: 0808 802 9999. They are open every day of the year. 12 – 2.30pm and 7 – 9.30pm. <https://www.sarsas.org.uk/helpline/>

**Woman Kind** provide a telephone listening and befriending service call T 0117 9166461 or T 0345 4582914. You can email them on [info@womankindbristol.org.uk](mailto:info@womankindbristol.org.uk)

**The Bridge** (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) for victims of rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse. Telephone anytime: T: 0117 3426999. The website which is available in a number of different languages. <https://www.thebridgecanhelp.org.uk/>

**Julian House** continue to take referrals and provide telephone support to children, young people and parents who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse and can advise professionals where they are working with CYP who have experienced DVA. T: 0117 9424968 [cypservice@julianhouse.org.uk](mailto:cypservice@julianhouse.org.uk)

**South Gloucestershire Safeguarding** Concerns regarding an adult or child being abused or neglected can be reported as follows:

Adult T: 01454 868007 Mon to Fri 9am – 5pm. 01454 615165 Out of hours and weekends. 999 in an emergency.

Child T: 01454 866000 Mon to Thur 9am – 5pm. 01454 866000 Fri 9am – 4.30pm. 01454 615165 Out of hours and weekends. 999 in an emergency.

**Nationally:**

**National Domestic Abuse helpline** phone number 0800 2000247 and website <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk>

**Mankind** T:01823 334244 National helpline for male victims

**NSPCC** provide a 24/7 helpline for children who are experiencing domestic abuse at home and want to talk confidentially. T: 0808 800 5000

**The Hideout** is a Women’s Aid online resource for children and young people providing information, support and an email service via the website: [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans\* (LGBT) Domestic Violence Helpline** 0800 999 5428 see https://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk/ for further details

**Safe Lives** have produced a helpful document for survivors which can be found here: <http://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safety%20planning%20guide%2C%20victims%20and%20survivors%2C%20COVID-19.pdf>

**Modern Slavery Helpline**. The Modern Slavery Helpline and Resource Centre provides victims, the public, statutory agencies and businesses access to information and support on a 24/7 basis. Freephone 08000 121 700

<https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIl72uhdvY6AIV2ITVCh26GwNCEAAYASAAEgKqiPD_BwE>