



Restored
Ending Violence Against Women

**COVID-19 AND
DOMESTIC ABUSE:
A TOOLKIT FOR
CHURCHES**



COVID-19 AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: A TOOLKIT FOR CHURCHES

The UK, and indeed the world, is currently experiencing an unprecedented pandemic that has caused governments to enact lockdown measures where individuals and families are told to isolate and not leave their homes. These measures are important to decrease the transmission of COVID-19, to support healthcare systems and to save lives.

HOW DOES ISOLATION DURING LOCKDOWN AFFECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Since the lockdown due to COVID-19, the National Domestic Abuse helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help¹. This is not necessarily unexpected, domestic abuse normally increases whenever families spend more time together, such as Christmas² and during summer holidays.

Why does this happen? Isolation is one of the three tactics used by a perpetrator to subordinate and make a victim dependent. During lockdown a victim's dependency is magnified as their opportunities to physically get out of the house are diminished. The presence of the perpetrator in a household at all times also reduces the chances for victims to seek support and can make them feel like there is no way out of the situation.

*"During the epidemic, we were unable to go outside, and our conflicts just grew bigger and bigger and more and more frequent," she said. "Everything was exposed."*³

The abuser also has more opportunity to regulate her every move. There is no privacy, no respite. He may monitor her every conversation and this is now facilitated by the fact they are sharing the same space all day, every day.

*"He has been regularly abusing me. He insists on total surveillance at all times. If I try to lock myself in a room he kicks the door until I open it. I can't even have privacy in the bathroom"*⁴

¹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52157620

² www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-51562247

³ www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html

⁴ www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html

A perpetrator can also use Covid -19 as a tactic or a reason to further the abuse. For example, they may:⁵

- Withhold necessary items such as food, medicine, hand sanitiser or disinfectants.
- Misinform victims about the pandemic to control or frighten them.
- Use the pandemic as an excuse to gain or increase their control of the family's finances.
- Threaten or prevent the victim, including children, from seeking appropriate medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Increase their monitoring and criticism of the victim's parenting such as blaming them if children 'misbehave' or are upset.
- Further isolate the victim and children in the home by restricting their movements within the house, forcing them into specific areas of the house.
- Use COVID-19 to excuse, blame or justify their abusive and violent behaviour.
- An ex-partner may use COVID-19 in his attempt to reconcile or enter/live in the survivor's home. He may try to emotionally manipulate the survivor to allow him to stay to 'help' her with the children.
- Breach a domestic violence protection order.
- An ex-partner may use COVID-19 to threaten a survivor about isolating their children.

This escalation of the abuse may prove to be the last straw and some victims may now decide that they need to seek help. Tara has been in an abusive relationship for less than a year, since the lockdown the abuse got worse.

"It's been bad... I didn't care if I didn't wake up from the night before... I just knew what was going to happen the next day, I just wanted the days to go past."

For Tara, the abuse worsened when having to spend 24 hours a day in isolation with her partner; lockdown proved to her that she needed to escape her relationship forever.

However, leaving an abuser (or during a pregnancy) are the most dangerous times in the life of a victim of domestic abuse. This is why it is very important to assess the level of risk and consider relevant safety measures at all times. Obtaining professional support to effect a safe exit is important. Having the support of her church is paramount to the eventual well-being of the woman.

⁵www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/coronavirus-covid-19-and-family-violence/family-friends-and-neighbours?utm_source=Domestic%20Violence%20Resource%20Centre%20Victoria%20List&utm_campaign=6a31c7aa43-DVRCV%20eNews%20April%202020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_db8d196d05-6a31c7aa43-1212340565&mc_cid=6a31c7aa43&mc_eid=6c0fcc3f4e





IF I AM A CHURCH LEADER OR MEMBER HOW CAN I SUPPORT SOMEONE AT THIS TIME

Recognise

- That abuse does happen in Christian relationships and that at this time abuse is on the increase.
- What domestic abuse is and the signs that a person is being controlled and coerced in the relationship.

Respond

- If the victim has disclosed the abuse to you, believe her. Even when it would seem unlikely to you.
- Check with the victim what the safest way to communicate with her would be, eg. through text, video chat or phone calls and make an effort to keep in contact.
- If you have not received a disclosure but suspect someone is vulnerable or in an abusive relationship, also keep in contact.
- More info on how to respond appropriately to a disclosure of abuse is in the Do's and Don't's section of the Church Pack.

Refer

- Encourage them to reach out for support. You will find more information and links to the main sources of support in the next section.
- Have the contact information of your local domestic abuse support services to hand. These are often listed on your councils website or use your postcode [here](#) to find out more.

Record

- Keep a confidential note of dates, times and quotes of what the victim has said.
- Note your actions and your concerns.
- Don't write any information that could identify the victim or perpetrator. Use pseudonyms, code words etc. Anything you write must only make sense to you.

Do not approach the perpetrator about their behaviour; this could escalate the abuse and put the victim in further danger. It is also important that you do not put yourself in a dangerous situation. However, if you know the potential abuser, stay in regular contact via the appropriate channels, without any accusations, just by being a friend, you can provide an accountability structure and model responsible, healthy and helpful behaviour during lockdown.

10 Things to do when responding to a victim

- 1 Allow time for the person to talk.
- 2 Listen to what she has to say and take it seriously.
- 3 Believe her; her description of the abuse is probably the tip of the iceberg.
- 4 Give priority to her immediate safety and that of any children involved.
- 5 Empower her to make her own decision by providing relevant information and resources.
- 6 Support her and respect her choices.
- 7 Let her know that it is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment and it is not God's will for her.
- 8 Be patient.
- 9 Pray for courage and protection for her and her children. Pray for the abuser to stop behaving in an abusive way. For him to recognise, repent and own his behaviour and take the necessary steps to seek professional support.
- 10 Address any faith concerns she may have about leaving an abusive relationship.

10 Things not to do when responding to a victim

- 1 Do not ask for proof of the abuse or act in disbelief.
- 2 Refrain from judging her or what she is telling you.
- 3 Don't minimise the severity of the experience or the danger she is in.
- 4 Never blame her for the abuse or suggest she could "try harder".
- 5 Never make decisions on her behalf or tell her what to do.
- 6 Don't approach her partner to hear his side of the story. This will endanger her and any children they have.
- 7 Don't encourage her dependency on you or become emotionally involved with her.
- 8 Don't allow any religious reasons that the abuser may have used to excuse the abuse or go unchallenged.
- 9 Refrain for making unrealistic promises.
- 10 Don't recommend couple counselling, or marriage courses or any similar tools. These will not address the abuse. On the contrary, the abuse might increase and the abuser will find new ways and places to be abusive.

HOW TO HANDLE DISCLOSURES - FLOW CHART



WHAT SUPPORT IS THERE FOR VICTIMS

The most important message is that help is out there.

The Silent Solution: Call 999 and press 55

The person will then be transferred to your local police force, the police call handler will attempt to communicate with her by asking simple yes or no questions.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline: Call 0808 200 247

This helpline is open 24 hours a day seven days a week. She can call from anywhere in the UK. They will help her to find a refuge vacancy for her and her children, or to find other specialist services in her community.

WHAT HAPPENS IF SHE DECIDES TO LEAVE?

Leaving the abuser is one of the most dangerous times for a victim. Some helpful ways to support her may be:

1. Arrange a secret code with her (like ringing and hanging up, or a blank text), so she can let you know she needs help without calling you.
2. Keep an emergency bag for her and her children. This should include essential things such as medication, identification, money or cards, weather appropriate clothing for her and her children.
3. Make her aware of key housing information
 - a. It's the local authority's responsibility to give her information about her housing rights.
 - b. Shelter provides free confidential housing information, support and legal advice on all housing and homelessness issues.
 - c. A Domestic Violence Protection Order can remove a perpetrator from the residence and from making contact with the victim for up to 28 days.
 - d. An Occupation Order is an injunction which removes an abuser's rights to reside in the family home. Find out more information from Rights of Women.

USEFUL LINKS

UK

National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 2000 247

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIqObChMIu7vT69Dl6AIVTLdtCh3LMwQ-EAAYAiAAEgJKB_D_BwE

Women's Aid - Support for victims of domestic abuse including a chatline and live forum.

www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors

Your neighbour - Call: 0300 323 9952

Is a network of churches in the UK, coordinating church response to the Covid-19 crisis. It runs a national call centre and email support line, Monday – Sunday, 9am – 5pm. yourneighbour.org

Respect - Information about support for abusers 0808 8024040

respectphoneline.org.uk

Government information regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for victims of domestic abuse

www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse

US

Information on covid-19 for survivors, communities, and dv/sa programs

www.futureswithoutviolence.org/get-updates-information-covid-19

LINKS TO RESTORED'S RESOURCES

We are constantly updating our resources so please keep checking our website www.restoredrelationships.org.

We are launching our Tea Time Talks every Monday at 4:00 o'clock. Each session will comprise of a 15 minute training video followed by a 15 minute Q&A. For more info please visit. www.restoredrelationships.org/teatimetalks

Working from home and abuse

A blog with useful information for employees and victims of domestic abuse.

www.restoredrelationships.org/news/2020/03/19/working-home-and-domestic-abuse

The Church Pack

Identifying and Dealing with Domestic Abuse Appropriately

www.restoredrelationships.org/search/?q=church+pack

The Handbook for Female Survivors of Domestic Abuse

A resource for survivors with relevant topics and information. Written for female Christian survivors of domestic abuse in the UK, but helpful for any survivor of domestic abuse anywhere in the world and from any faith background or none.

www.restoredrelationships.org/survivorshandbook/

First Man Standing Bible Studies

Series of bible studies to be used in male groups to foster discussion and reflection.

www.restoredrelationships.org/resources/info/138/





Addendum: WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE

The working definition in the UK is the following:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by **isolating** them from sources of support, **exploiting** their resources and capacities for personal gain, **depriving** them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and **regulating** their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of **assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation** or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”⁶

⁶www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence

Restored

Ending Violence Against Women

Restored is an international Christian alliance that raises awareness and works towards ending violence against women. Enable Us to continue to do this work by supporting our work financially visit www.give.net/Restored.

 www.restoredrelationships.org  Info@restoredrelationships.org

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