A woman with long brown hair is sitting in front of a window, covering her face with her hands. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt. The lighting is soft, coming from the window behind her.

**Restored**  
Ending Violence Against Women

**COVID-19 AND  
DOMESTIC ABUSE:  
A TOOLKIT FOR  
VICTIMS AND  
SURVIVORS**



# COVID-19 AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: A TOOLKIT FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

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 help.<sup>1</sup> This is not necessarily unexpected, domestic abuse normally increases whenever families spend more time together, such as Christmas<sup>2</sup> and 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 at all times, in the household, 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."*<sup>3</sup>

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"*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52157620](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52157620)

<sup>2</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-51562247](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-51562247)

<sup>3</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html)

<sup>4</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html](http://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:<sup>5</sup>

- 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 survivors' 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 the survivor about isolating the 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.

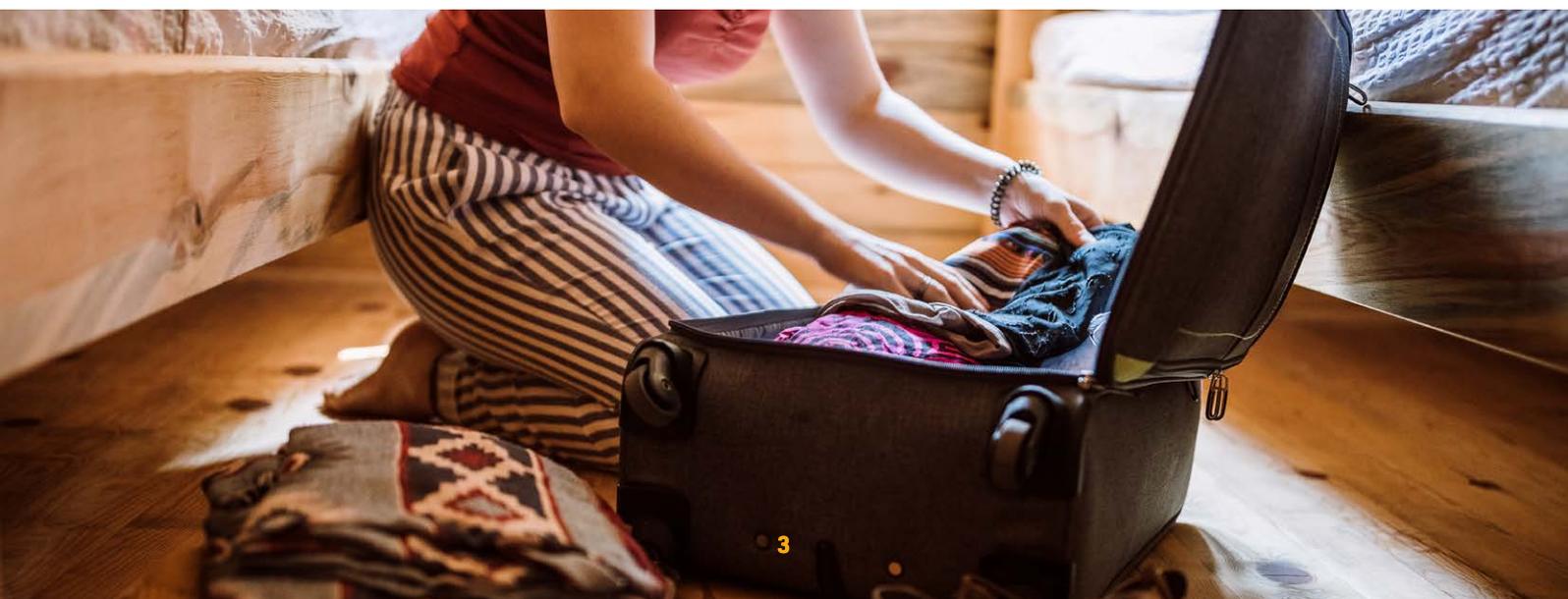
*"It's been bad... I didn't care if I didn't wake up like from the night before... I just knew what was going to happen the next day, I just wanted the days to go past."*

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 (as with 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.**

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<sup>5</sup>[www.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](https://www.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)



## I AM A VICTIM WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF

The most important message is that help is out there.

The Silent Solution: Call 999 and press 55

You will then be transferred to your local police force, the police call handler will attempt to communicate with you by asking simple yes or no questions. If you are not able to speak, listen carefully to the questions and instructions from the call handler and do not hang up if possible, so they can arrange help if needed.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Call 0808 200 247

This helpline is open 24 hours a day seven days a week. You can call from anywhere in the UK. They will help you to find a refuge vacancy for you and your children, or to find other specialist services in your community, which can provide support whether or not you have left your partner.

A Domestic Violence Protection Order can remove a perpetrator from the residence and from making contact with the survivor for up to 28 days. An Occupation Order is an injunction which removes an abusers' rights to reside in the family home. Find out more information from Rights of Women:

[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/family-la](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/family-la),

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-protection-orders](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-protection-orders)

## Protecting yourself if you are living with the perpetrator

1. Tell someone you trust. Let them know you might be at risk from your partner. Arrange a secret code with someone who lives close by (like ringing and hanging up, or a blank text), that lets them know you need help.
2. Read some information regarding domestic abuse: You can find clear and concise information about domestic abuse on the [Women's Aid website](#). Please, remember that your partner might be tracking your search history. Find out more about safer browsing [here](#), and keeping your devices safe from your partner [here](#).
3. Get specialist support: You can phone the national helpline or use their chat function at any time. Or go to [www.refuge.org.uk/covid19-survivor-tips](http://www.refuge.org.uk/covid19-survivor-tips)
4. Contact the police: Be ready to call 999 if you or your children are in danger.
5. If you are considering leaving:
  - a. If possible pack an emergency bag for you and your children and keep it somewhere safe. Try to include essential things such as medication, identification, money or cards. Essential clothing for you and your children.
  - b. Due to self-isolation staying with family and friends might not be an option. You might be finding it harder to secure a refuge. The Local Authority has a responsibility to give you information about your housing rights. [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 survivor for up to 28 days. An Occupation Order is an injunction which removes an abusers' rights to reside in the family home. Find out more information from [Rights of Women](#)

## Welfare Benefits

If you are concerned about your financial situation, you could contact [Turn2us](#). They help people to access the money available to them through welfare benefits and grants. Their website has an income-related benefits checker enabling you to check that you are receiving all of the benefits you are entitled to: [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

## Financial Abuse

Many women experience economic abuse within the context of intimate partner violence. You can download a financial guide for victims of domestic abuse [here](#) produced by Refuge and the Co-operative Bank. Additionally, [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) can provide information and resources: [survivingeconomicabuse.org](http://survivingeconomicabuse.org)

## Immigration

Your abuser might be using your immigration status against you. If you need some guidance you could contact [Immigration Advice service](#). They can offer expert legal advice on all aspects of immigration, asylum and nationality issues: [www.iasservices.org.uk](http://www.iasservices.org.uk).

[The NHS have confirmed](#) that no charges will be made in the diagnosis or treatment of coronavirus (COVID-19). This applies to everyone living in the UK, regardless of your immigration status. No immigration checks are required for testing or treatment for COVID-19, so please access healthcare if you need to: [www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide)

[Southall Black Sisters](#) offer specialist support, advocacy and information to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk).

[Opoka](#) provide a national helpline for Polish women living in the UK: [opoka.org.uk](http://opoka.org.uk)

[LAWA](#) offers support for latinamerican women living in the UK and experiencing domestic abuse. [www.lawa.org.uk](http://www.lawa.org.uk)

## Disability

[Deaf Hope](#) provides practical and emotional support to deaf women experiencing domestic abuse: [www.signhealth.org.uk](http://www.signhealth.org.uk).

[Emergency SMS](#) provides a text message service for deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired people in the UK to send SMS messages to the UK 999 service where it will be passed to the Police: [www.emergencysms.net](http://www.emergencysms.net)



## Pets

Many refuges are unable to accommodate pets too, but there are specialist pet fostering services that can provide a solution. Pets will be loved and well cared for in experienced foster homes until they can be reunited with you. These are strictly confidential services and are completely free to access. For more information please contact the [Dogs Trust Freedom Project \(www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-freedom-project/freedom-project\)](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-freedom-project/freedom-project) or [Paws Protect \(pawsprojectfoundation.org\)](http://pawsprojectfoundation.org). If you do not live within the coverage areas then please do contact the team anyway who will see if they are able to help, or can help to find you another solution.

## Protecting yourself when sharing child custody<sup>6</sup>

Child Contact arrangements are of particular concern to many survivors at the moment. Perpetrators have always used child contact arrangements as a tool of coercive and controlling behaviour, and are likely to use COVID-19 as a way to threaten to not adhere to – or flout – contact arrangements.

The guidance given around 'isolation' can feel very unclear. Therefore, you may be concerned that you will be accused of breaching a court order by not allowing contact for example. The President of the Family Division has released '[Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders' during COVID 19](#):

The guidance does not include specific advice in cases of domestic abuse, but states that if parents cannot agree to an arrangement they may exercise their parental responsibility and vary the arrangement to one that they consider to be safe. If a contact arrangement is varied as a result of COVID 19, the courts expect alternative arrangements – such as video calls – to be made.

If you have concerns around the family court, it will be useful to take a look at the [CAFCASS](#) website for guidance. They are regularly updating their information:

Be mindful of sharing details such as your address, phone number or email address with your abuser that could compromise your safety. If your abuser turns up at your property without agreement do not allow him in as this could escalate the risk to you and your children. Call 999 if you are feeling threatened.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors)



## USEFUL LINKS

### UK

**National Domestic Abuse Helpline** 0808 2000 247

[www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMlu7vT69Dl6AIVTLDtCh3LMwQ-EAAYAAEgJKB\\_D\\_BwE](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMlu7vT69Dl6AIVTLDtCh3LMwQ-EAAYAAEgJKB_D_BwE)

**Women's Aid** - Support for victims of domestic abuse including a chat and lie forum.

[www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/)

**Shelter** - Information about housing

[england.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice/coronavirus](http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/coronavirus)

**Parenting-through-coronavirus-covid-19**

[ihv.org.uk/families/parenting-through-coronavirus-covid-19/](http://ihv.org.uk/families/parenting-through-coronavirus-covid-19/)

**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](http://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/](http://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](http://www.restoredrelationships.org).

We are launching our Tea Time Talks every Monday at 4:00 o'clock. On each session there would be a 15 minute talk covering key content about domestic abuse followed by Q&A. For more info please visit. [restoredrelationships.org/teatimetalks](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.restoredrelationships.org/survivorshandbook)



## Addendum:

### WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE

The working definition<sup>7</sup> 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.”

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<sup>7</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence](http://www.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. It hosts an international online Survivors Network which aims to build community and provide resources to female Christian survivors of domestic abuse.

 [www.restoredrelationships.org](http://www.restoredrelationships.org)  [Info@restoredrelationships.org](mailto:Info@restoredrelationships.org)

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