

How frontline services can help survivors of gender based violence during Covid-19.



The COVID-19 outbreak combined with social distancing and self-isolation measures have been shown in other countries to heighten the prevalence of violence against women and girls, such as: *domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, child sexual abuse, stalking, commercial sexual exploitation, pornography, sexual harassment and honour based violence*¹. Gender based violence can happen to anyone, including yourself, your family and the people you are in contact with - it is experienced in all communities and in all socio-economic groups.

Women, children and some men, are at risk of being trapped in very unsafe situations at home. They may be quarantined with an abuser, or fear that the abuser knows they are at home. They may have limited access to vital support (family, friends, neighbours and services), may have little money so getting away can feel impossible. The abuser will also be under greater stress and will have more control over victims than ever. The stress of quarantine is hard for all of us - it is even harder if you are coping with trauma from past abuse, even if the abuser is no longer there.

Our services, organisations, centres and groups are working hard to provide the vital support victims need and adjusting by offering helplines and remote support. **Frontline services and communities play a crucial role in protecting people living with gender-based violence.**

Here are some things to look out for:

- Appearing evasive, socially withdrawn and hesitant
- An overbearing or overly solicitous partner who is always present
- Partner has returned home following a break up
- Doesn't have access to phones and the internet (especially where there had been before)
- Constant noise/arguing within the home
- At home damage to the locks, furniture or door panels
- Becoming more isolated - less contact with family, friends and children in care.
- Children on the child protection register or referred to specialists for behavioural, emotional or developmental problems
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Missed appointments and not following agreed actions or treatment.
- Repeated, non-specific symptoms.
- Denial or minimisation of abuse or injuries / injuries don't fit the explanation of the cause.
- Delay between an injury occurring and seeking medical treatment / multiple injuries at different stages of healing.
- Self-harming and risky behaviour

Whatever setting you are in, if you suspect that anyone may be affected by domestic abuse or other forms of gender based violence, it is your responsibility to help.

How can you find out?

Introduce the subject sensitively and safely - you'll need to find a way to speak to them alone without fear of being overheard. Ask non-threatening, open questions – such as:

1. I've seen women and men with problems like yours who have been experiencing trouble at home. How are you feeling generally? Can I do anything to help? Do you feel frightened?

¹ Find out more: Equally Safe Scotland's strategy to end violence against women and girls

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls>

2. Is there anyone you are close to who you go to for help at any time?
3. Do you need help with food, money advice or a safe place to go?
4. Do you have access to a phone for emergencies?
5. Do you have a plan to keep yourself and the children safe?

Are there things you can do to help?

1. Check the safest way and time to contact them - can you give them a phone and a personal alarm?
Agree a code word they can use if they aren't safe and what actions you will take if they use that word (e.g. hang up call and/or contact police)
2. Can you connect them with a specialist VAWG service that can help from the list below?
3. Can you provide practical support such as a regular food and personal care parcel (may need to be weekly) and money advice?
4. Can you include some information and helplines through your newsletter/bulletin?
5. Do you need to refer them to adult/child protection, the Police or MARAC - or ask for advice?
6. Can you provide an interpreter for hearing impaired people or those whose first language is not English, or an advocate for someone with a learning disability? The interpreter must be professional. Do not use family or friends.
7. Make violence against women and girls a standing item in your team meetings / case discussions.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL SERVICES WHICH CAN HELP

- **Police Scotland - In an emergency always call 999 – otherwise 101**
- **East Lothian Social Work** 01875 824090 (children and adults) | **Midlothian Social Work** 0131 271 3413 (children) / 0131 271 3900 (adults) | **Emergency Social Care Service** (out of hours) 0800 731 6969
- **Women's Aid East and Midlothian:** Phone 0131 561 5800 / Email: info@womensaideml.org / Facebook: Women's Aid East and Midlothian / Twitter: @WomensAidEML
- **Shakti Women's Aid:** Phone 0131 475 2399
- **EDDACS – domestic abuse court service:** Phone 0131 315 8122
- **FearFree domestic abuse service for men and any LGBT+ person:** phone, text, WhatsApp on 0131 624 7266 / <https://fearfree.scot>
- **Lothian Sexual Health Services:** abortion service 0131 536 2454 <https://www.lothiansexualhealth.scot/>
Professionals can contact Chalmers Sexual Health Centre Senior Nurse for triage on 07831527976
- **National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline – for anyone:** Open 24/7. Phone: 0800 027 1234 / Email: helpline@sdaafmh.org.uk / Webchat: buff.ly/2Muc8sK
- **Rape Crisis Scotland:** 08088 01 03 02 (6pm – midnight). If you have experienced rape or sexual assault in the last 7 days, please contact support@ercc.scot
- **Survivors UK** help for men who have been sexually abused or raped: 0203 598 3898 / help@survivorsuk.org / <https://www.survivorsuk.org/>
- **CLICK** for women selling or exchanging sex: Anonymous online chat support 24 hrs/week – for times visit <https://www.click.scot/> -Twitter @click_scotland
- **National Stalking Helpline:** 0808 802 0300 (daily 9:30– 4pm;Wednesday 1–4pm)
- **Scottish Women's Rights Centre helpline:** 08088 00789
- **Revenge Porn helpline:** email help@revengepornhelpline.org.uk
- **Victim Support Scotland's helpline:** 0800 160 1985 (Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm)
- **Breathing Space helpline:** 0800 838587 (Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am/Fri 6pm-Mon 6am)
- **Are you hurting the one you love? Choose to Stop! Contact Respect for help:** Call 0808 802 4040 / <http://respectphoneline.org.uk/> for information and webchat.