

Bystander Guidance: Supporting people experiencing domestic abuse in your local community during COVID-19

Lockdown and social distancing may increase domestic abuse and sexual violence and have an impact on a survivor's safety and support networks.

Now more than ever, it is vital that we understand violence and abuse and support the needs of those experiencing it.

This information will help you spot the signs of abuse and offer signposting to support available.

Please Do

Signpost to support. The most effective way to help is to share the Safer helpline number: 01481 721999 or email: enquires@safer.gg Call the helpline directly if you would like information and advice. If you think someone is in immediate danger, call 999.

Think outside the box. Make the helpline number as visible as possible. You can display the number on a poster in your window, in your car, or at your place of work. You can ask colleagues and friends to share the number on their company shared drive. You can also share the helpline number on charity groups or posts on Facebook.

Please Do

Remember that social distancing has made it harder for survivors to talk. Many will not want to be overheard disclosing abuse or won't want to discuss anything that can be overheard by children and other members of the household. Some may have their communications restricted or monitored. Be on the look out for changes to regular patterns of communication.

Listen to and believe survivors of abuse. Those experiencing abuse are more likely to seek support from friends or family before contacting a formal agency. The response they receive when they disclose abuse can be the difference between whether they choose to get specialist support or not.

Acknowledge and validate. Survivors may talk about feeling nervous, scared and worried. Validating their concerns can show that you will take them seriously.

Stay alongside them. Survivors know their situation best, so be led by them. If they are not ready to fully disclose abuse, stay in contact in ways that feel safe. You may not be able to talk safely about what is happening to them but general chats, exchanging memes or other forms of communication may be safe. This will allow the survivor to know that you are still there for them if they are able to talk at a later date.

Know the details about your local specialist services. You can find information on local support services by looking at www.gov.gg/domestic-abuse

Don't stand by.

See it? Hear it? Suspect it?

Report it.

Your support is essential in helping to end abuse. Now, more than ever, survivors of domestic abuse in your community need you. Don't Stand By See it? Hear it? Suspect it? Report it.

Please Do Not

Don't give advice or try to fix what are often very complex situations. It can be really tempting to tell survivors of abuse what they should do, make suggestions about what worked for you or try to solve their problems. Taking over can mimic the behaviour of the perpetrator. Most individuals won't be able to give appropriate advice in these unprecedented circumstances. Safely signposting to local domestic abuse support services or the police is always the best approach.

Don't press them for information. It's natural to want to understand what has happened. But this can make survivors feel disbelieved or interrogated. Let them tell you what feels right for them.



Please Do Not

Don't make any interventions that could potentially endanger you and/or the survivor. If you suspect someone is in immediate danger of physical violence, call 999 straight away.

Don't share blanket coded messages for support on social media. Code words or coded messages shared widely on social media are not always a safe and secure way for a survivor to seek help. When shared as a generic way to flag abuse, they can cause confusion or be intercepted by a perpetrator. They can also place the safety of a survivor in jeopardy if messages on social media are only checked intermittently. Wherever possible signpost to support via the Safer helpline 01481 721999.

Avoid unhelpful assumptions, for example assuming that someone doesn't 'look' or 'act' like a survivor. Remember domestic abuse can be perpetrated by family members as well as intimate partners and may involve teenagers abusing their parents or elder abuse.

Don't ignore a situation that doesn't feel right to you. If you are concerned for anyone in your local community call the Safer Helpline directly for more advice – 01481 721999 or enquiries@safer.gg.

Guidance: Advice for victims in your local community during COVID 19 is available in English, Portuguese, Latvian and Polish on www.gov.gg/domestic_abuse