

How you can respond to domestic violence during COVID-19



If you or someone you love is facing domestic abuse, here are a few suggestions that may make this uncertain time feel a little bit safer:

Create a safety plan.

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Women's shelters safety plan with survivors, friends, family members, and anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of someone else.

You and your partner may be told by either or both of your employers to work remotely to limit physical interaction. Having a safety plan laid out can help you to protect yourself during this stressful time. When a mother is at risk, her children should also be considered at risk, particularly when families are spending more time together during COVID-19. Safety planning that considers children is often recommended but can be more complicated. Connect with a shelter to safety plan with their trained professionals. Keeping a mother safe is recognized as the best way to keep children safe.

Here are some resources for thinking about general safety planning:

- [Creating a Safety Plan](#)
- [Planning for Safety with Families](#)
- [Safety Planning with Children and Youth](#)

During COVID-19, consider the sanitation protocols suggested by health authorities and recommended physical distancing in your community in your planning. It could mean survivors reaching out to more trusted friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours than they normally would to increase avenues to get help and/or support safer escapes in emergencies.

ACWS member shelters are doing everything they can to stay open and support survivors in a safe and responsible way. You do not have to stay in a shelter to get help from one. You can call a shelter to get counselling and support with safety planning.

You can call **1-866-331-3933** to speak with a women's shelter for help creating your safety plan.

Set up a safe signal with someone you trust.

Consider setting up a coded text message that you send to a parent or sibling, such as "we are out of milk", or, "the kids are having fun", that is really a request for them to call 911. Creating a signal with a neighbour, such as lowering the blind in a certain window, as a signal for the neighbour to call 911 is another example.

When someone is in immediate danger, contact police. Even if they are in quarantine or self-isolating due to illness – the police will respond.

Support defusing strategies.

No one is ever responsible for the abusive behavior of another person, yet people living in domestic violence are often already experts at employing defusing strategies to try to minimize the impacts of the abuse and protect their loved ones.

Understand that the current situation may be used to justify an abuser's need to control others and may worsen the abuse in the home. Consider if there are additional ways to help keep the calm - especially things that those outside the family might do to help. Encouraging opportunities for exercise outside, communicating about a non-violent entertaining Netflix series or movie, sharing boardgames or online activities to help keep children occupied, etc. may help de-escalate conflict.

It is rarely acknowledged, but we know that people living in abusive situations use many kinds of survival and resistance strategies. Domestic violence can tragically escalate to homicide, and thus, Crisis Intervention Workers suggest that survivors say and do whatever they need to do to keep themselves and their families safe. These may look like: avoiding arguing near the top of a staircase, avoiding fights in the kitchen where there are many sharp objects, etc.

- [Read more about these ideas here is a resource about resistance.](#)

Practice self-care.

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty for many people and getting through this time while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming. Taking time for your health and wellness can make a big difference in how you feel. For example, go for walks to get out of the house on a regular basis.

- [Learn more about how to build in self-care while staying safe](#)

If you're a friend or family member of someone experiencing abuse, you may not be able to visit them in person. Seeing someone you care about being hurt is stressful. Remind yourself that you can't make decisions for someone else, but you can encourage your loved one to think about their wellbeing, safety plan, and practice self-care while they are in their home. You can set up a safe signal with them if they are in danger (e.g., a coded text message or a signal from the window).

Reach out for help.

While people are encouraged to stay at home, you may feel isolated from your friends and family. Even if you are isolated, try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so, and try to stick to your daily routines as much as possible.

You don't have to stay in a shelter to get support from one. Shelters offer counselling and support to women in the community as well, and shelters can help you find a safe place to stay.

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911**.
To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at **1-866-331-3933**.
To locate a shelter near you, visit acws.ca/shelters or sheltersafe.ca.
If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)***

Adapted from sources: the National Domestic Violence Hotline & Sherry Hamby Ph.D. via [Psychology Today](#). Families Thrive, Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter, Government of Alberta, Government of British Columbia Department of Justice, and with consultation from Alberta shelter experts.

2020-04-08