

COVID-19 AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

We expect domestic and family violence incidents will increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know this because of research and evidence that domestic and family violence can become more frequent and severe during periods of emergency.

Times of stress and hardship are never an excuse for violence. All women and children deserve to live free from fear and domestic and family violence.

During this time, people using domestic and family violence may use COVID-19 as another way to hurt or abuse you. For example, they may:

- *Withhold necessary items such as food, medicine, hand sanitizer or disinfectants.*
- *Misinform you about the pandemic to control or frighten you.*
- *Use the pandemic as an excuse to gain total or increase control of the family's finances*
- *Threaten to expose you or your children to Covid-19*
- *Threaten or prevent you and your children from seeking appropriate medical attention if you have symptoms or hide your Medicare card.*
- *Increase their monitoring and criticism of your parenting such as blaming you if the children 'misbehave' or are upset.*
- *Further isolate you or your children in the home by restricting your movements in the house, forcing you or the children into specific spaces in the house, or disabling your mobility devices.*
- *Increasingly monitor your mobile phone, email, online messaging.*
- *Use COVID-19 to excuse, blame or justify their abusive and violent behaviour towards you and the children.*

- *An ex-partner may use COVID-19 in their attempt to reconcile or enter/live in your home. They may try to emotionally manipulate you to allow them to stay to 'help' you with the children.*
- *Breach a family violence restraining order because they think the police will be too busy to respond to your call.*
- *An ex-partner may use COVID-19 to threaten you about isolating the children. This could include using Family Court orders to bluff you to allow them in to stay or have contact with the children.*
- *An ex-partner may use their health issues , housing situation or job loss to emotional manipulate you into letting them stay.*

The person perpetrating family violence is responsible for their abusive and violent behaviour. You or your children are never responsible.

STAYING SAFE

A safety plan is a personalised, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Having a safety plan can help you to protect yourself during this difficult time. The best way to make a safety plan is with the help of a support service, in particular a Specialist Women's DFV Service.

Remember, you are the expert in your safety and you can take steps to manage this.

Things to consider for increasing safety during a family violence crisis:

- *If you sense trouble or find yourself in an argument, move to a 'lower risk space': rooms with two exits and fewer things that can be used as weapons, where you can be seen or heard from the outside.*
- *Kitchens, bathrooms and garages are more dangerous than living rooms, dining rooms or bedrooms. Learn – and teach your children – to get positioned 'between trouble and the door'*
- *Teach the children how to **call police 000** and to know their home address.*

- *Where possible have a charged phone and a back-up plan in case you are separated from your phone, for example have a hidden second phone.*
- *Create signals and/or code words that will let your children know to get out and go to a pre-arranged place of safety.*
- *Create signals that will let your neighbours/family members know to create a supportive or defusing presence or call 000. For example, a turned-on porch light, drawn shade, or an “I can’t come over on Thursday after all” phone call.*
- *Have an escape plan and back-up. Rehearse getting out in the dark and with the children. Keep spare keys and important documents where you can get to them readily. Have some money stashed away for emergencies.*
- *Consistent with their age, their instincts and their skills, develop safety plans for the children – about calling help or getting to a place where they will be safer.*
- *Do whatever it is you need to do to buy time and/or space, to defuse the situation, or to protect yourself and your children.*
- *Be extra mindful of good hygiene practices: wash your hands regularly, avoid touching your face, minimise contact with surfaces that other people have had contact with.*

REACH OUT FOR HELP

While people are encouraged to stay at home, you may feel isolated from your friends and family and support network. 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.

It is important that you know you can reach out for support and that **specialist family violence services are here to help**. Our message to all victim-survivors is that even during the current pandemic, specialist family violence services are open and available for support and advice for anyone experiencing family violence who is worried about how potential self-isolation or quarantine will impact on their safety and well-being.

- *If you are in danger, please **call 000 or contact the police***

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- *For confidential crisis support, information and accommodation please call crisis Care 9223 1111 1800 199008*
- *Or Women's DV helpline 9223 1188 1800 007 339*
- *For confidential phone help and referral in Australia, please contact **1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732**, the National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line.*