

Domestic Abuse and what to do if you don't feel safe at home during the pandemic

Many people who are experiencing, or at risk of, domestic abuse will be feeling unsafe if they are isolating with an abusive person and they're unable to connect with their usual support networks. It's important to know that even under the lockdown, **you are allowed to leave home** to get help if someone is hurting you or you don't feel safe.

If possible keep your **mobile on you** (or in secret place that is easy for you to reach) **and charged at all times**. **If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the Police**. If you are in danger and **unable to talk on the phone, call 999** and listen to the questions from the operator and if possible, **respond by coughing or tapping the handset**. They may ask you to **press 55** if you can't make any noise. If you can't make a voice call because you're deaf or have difficulty with speech, you should register with the Emergency SMS Service (part of the normal 999 service). Text **REGISTER to 999**. You will then get a text which tells you what to do next. Do this now, or as soon as it's safe - don't wait for an emergency.

The Police have a duty to protect you and your children, if children are involved. You should not be discriminated against because of your immigration status or for any other reason.

Anyone can be a victim of abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. If you're experiencing abuse, or feel at risk of being abused, it is important to remember that there is help and support available to you, including police response, online support, helplines, refuges and other services. People providing you with support will help to ensure your safety at all times and help you to get you away from your abuser. Taking that first step to seeking support is the hardest and bravest step of all, but you owe it to yourself and to your children, to be free of abuse and everything that goes with it. Please see **Support and Information** links below:

◆ **Support and Information**

Police: If in immediate danger **call 999** If it's not an emergency **call 101**

Emergency SMS Service: If you are hearing or speech impaired, **text REGISTER to 999**

[Women's Aid](#)

[Government info on Domestic Abuse](#)

[The Elms, Sexual Assault Referral Centre \(SARC\)](#): help for sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape. You can decide later whether or not you want to tell the police.

[REFUGE](#): **Freephone 24-Hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247**

[Citizens Advice](#)

[Samaritans](#) (24/7 service): **116 123**

[Dhiverse](#): **01223 508805** for general support and signposting

National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247

The Men's Advice Line, for male domestic abuse survivors: 0808 801 0327

The Mix, free information and support for under 25s in the UK: 0808 808 4994

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 999 5428

If you're unsure about your situation take a look at some of the indicators of domestic abuse below. If you recognise that any of the following is happening to you in your relationship, or to someone you know, then you should seek help and support. If you can't recognise anything below but you still feel unsafe, frightened or anxious, you should still seek help and support to discuss how you're feeling.

Domestic Abuse and what to do if you don't feel safe at home during the pandemic (cont)

◆ **Recognising domestic abuse**

It's not always easy to recognise abuse and sometimes, even when we know something is wrong, we might try to play it down in our minds or we might not want to seek support because we feel ashamed, guilty or scared. There is no reason to feel ashamed or guilty—you haven't done anything wrong. Feeling scared is natural but with the right help and support you won't be alone or at risk. Every situation is unique, but there are some common factors that point to a relationship being abusive. Understanding what abuse can look like and acknowledging it are important steps to preventing and stopping the abuse.

If you recognise that any of the following is happening to you in your relationship or to someone you know, then you should seek help and support. If you can't recognise anything below but you still feel unsafe, frightened or anxious you should still seek help and support to find out if you're in an abusive relationship:

- ◇ **Coercive control/Psychological or Emotional abuse:** domestic abuse isn't always physical. The abuser might use a variety of controlling acts to make you feel isolated and fully dependent on them. These could include: threatening to hurt you, isolating you from family and friends, humiliating you, intimidating you, controlling how you dress, what you eat, when you sleep, what you watch or read, making you do things the way they want them done, limiting and monitoring the time you spend online or on chatting to people—or taking your laptop and phone away, mocking you, accusing you of something you haven't done or making you feel as though you can't do anything right. The abuser might try other tactics such as denying they are being abusive or that the way they are behaving is for your own good, saying that you caused the abuse, saying that you wind them up and then it's difficult for them to control their anger, being kind and caring in public, crying and begging for forgiveness; telling you they can't live without you and that it will never happen again, saying that they are ill and need you, saying that if you leave they'll kill themselves.
- ◇ **Physical abuse:** slapping; hitting, punching, continually prodding, biting, pinching, scratching, kicking; pushing, shoving, burning, pulling hair, making you hurt yourself while they stand over you, using their strength to pin you down, holding you by the neck, restraining you in anyway.
- ◇ **Sexual abuse:** using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don't want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; constant pressure and harassment into having sex when you don't want to, forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality or to whether you are lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, gay or trans.
- ◇ **Financial or economic abuse:** denying you access to your money (any money) your credit/debit cards; forcing you to give them access to your money and credit/debit cards and using them as their own, not allowing you to work or to go into education or training, not allowing you to make decisions about your future, putting e.g. loans, credit cards, mortgages in your name so they can benefit but you're responsible for them. Denying you food, clothes, transport or any means of improving your economic status, so that you feel you're unable to leave.