



DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Women's Safety Services SA is South Australia's leading specialist domestic and family violence service.

Women's Safety Services SA will continue to provide support to families experiencing domestic and family violence during this time.

Women's Safety Services SA is an essential service and **WILL NOT CLOSE**, even if there is increased closure of other services in the community.

How Women's Safety Services SA can help families during this time:

- ✓ **24-hour crisis response** available via the **Domestic Violence Crisis Line 1800 800 098** including pathways into safe accommodation, risk assessment, safety management, and access to the Personal Protection App.
- ✓ **24-hour counselling response** available for intimate partner violence and sexual violence via **1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)**
- ✓ Short term **supported accommodation** is still available for families seeking safety due to domestic or family violence. **Access** via 24-hour **Domestic Violence Crisis Line**. A positive diagnosis of COVID19 or risk of infection is not a barrier to accessing safe accommodation. Crisis line staff will work together with the Department of Health to ensure the person's health needs and the health of the community is looked after during the process of seeking safe refuge.
- ✓ **Safety management** and **risk assessment** is still available to families needing support. Face to face support will be restricted and phone-based/video conferencing support increased during this time.
- ✓ The **Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme** continues to operate and accept new referrals. Applications can be made online via SAPOL website <https://www.police.sa.gov.au/your-safety/dvds>. Disclosures may occur via phone/video conferencing instead of face to face.
- ✓ In this time of increased risk for vulnerable families, the **Personal Protection App** (a monitored safety App that contacts police if the phone is shaken) is available to anyone who is experiencing domestic and family violence. Access is via the **Domestic Violence Crisis Line**.
- ✓ Support is available to people who might be **concerned about someone they know** who is experiencing domestic and family violence. **Phone advice** and **referral** via Domestic Violence Crisis Line or 1800RESPECT; or apply to the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.

Working together to support at risk families is even more important during this time of increased risk. Call the **Domestic Violence Crisis Line** or your local **Regional Domestic Violence Service** to get **advice** on how to support the families you are working with who are at risk due to domestic and family violence.



PRACTICE TIPS TO HELP SUPPORT PEOPLE LIVING WITH DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19

Domestic and Family Violence is a safety issue in which there is the likelihood of serious harm or death.

Safety is the first priority of any response. Safety is not just about safety from physical bodily harm and can encompass emotional, financial, cultural, spiritual, technological and community aspects.

Safety planning does not prevent or stop abuse – only the person perpetrating the abuse can stop this. A person experiencing abuse is never to blame or responsible for the abuse or their safety.

Domestic and family violence occurs within a pattern of abuse and control. Controlling behaviours are inclusive of restricting people's relationships and contact with family, friends and services. COVID-19 and the associated isolation will intensify the experience of control for our clients.

The behaviour of someone perpetrating abuse may have changed in the wake of COVID-19, and this may increase risk to families. Some families are reporting behaviour changes such as increased monitoring and surveillance, and sharing of misinformation about COVID-19 and infection control responses as a way to scare, control or isolate someone. Children are also at increased risk of abuse during this time, and some perpetrators of abuse are using COVID-19 and infection control measures as a means to disrupt family functioning and custody/access/handover agreements.

Some tips when planning around safety:

- ✓ Do not assume that previous safe modes of contacting people are still applicable. A person's situation may have changed (e.g. not going to work), and hence their 'safe time' to connect can also change. Check-in with the person about how to communicate safely during this time.
- ✓ Reassure people that essential services such as police and domestic and family violence services will be available to them (even if other services close). Help people think through how they might call a service to get help, particularly if they are living with the person who is abusive. Some examples could be:
 - call when going to the shops for groceries or medications
 - call when the is perpetrator asleep
 - call from bathroom with shower running
 - call from a room where there is a locked door
 - call when the perpetrator leaves the house
- ✓ Help the person you are supporting to develop a plan around their safety. Previous strategies that a person used may not be relevant anymore. People's access to supports may be restricted and their 'window of opportunity' to connect reduced. Help clients to find creative, flexible solutions to overcome these barriers. NGOs and government departments are all increasing efforts to support vulnerable families and there may be new support options available in this time.
- ✓ Keep safety plans simple and clear and avoid overwhelming people. Three key questions to help someone safety plan are:
 - *"What has helped you feel safe in the past?"*
 - *"Who are your supports and how can you stay connected with them?"*
 - *"How would you get help if you needed it?"*



For an interactive on-line tool for safety planning go to:

<https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/safety-planning/interactive-safety-plan/>

- ✓ It may be difficult for people to rely on the informal networks they once did to manage safety, and they may have to consider seeking more formal support (e.g. police; accessing women's shelter accommodation). Share information about what this might look like for clients who have never used these options.
- ✓ Let people know that even if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are in isolation due to increased risk of infection, they can seek help and safe accommodation. If infection control measures include a "lockdown", people can still seek help and alternative safe accommodation. Advise them to contact the Domestic Violence Crisis Line for assistance to manage their safety in this time.
- ✓ Remember to consider children's emotional and physical safety when safety planning. Acknowledge that parenting can also have extra challenges at this time. Safe and Together have developed a resource with practice tips around handover/access in the wake of COVID-19. <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/evidence-resources/covid-19-case-planning/>
- ✓ Tech safety may become more important as people increase their use of technology to stay connected during this time. Visit WESNET for some great tips on safety planning around technology. <https://techsafety.org.au/resources>
- ✓ COVID-19 infection control measures has meant many people have lost their jobs or are under financial strain - a risk factor in domestic and family violence. Help people connect with the financial support services they need (e.g. Centrelink, financial counselling).
- ✓ Domestic and family violence is a form of complex trauma. Trauma can have a significant impact on a person's ability to take in, process and remember information. COVID-19 will be an additional stress in a person's life and may exacerbate a person's stress response and feelings of isolation and unsafety. Ensure your practice is trauma-informed. Some examples of this are:
 - Ensuring intervention is based around a sense of empowerment and collaboration
 - Ensuring your tone with people is calm, kind, understanding, and non-blaming
 - Presenting any instructions/information clearly and regularly checking in with people that they understand what has been planned
 - Going at the pace of the person you are supporting and ensuring any intervention does not overwhelm or further traumatise
 - Helping people stay connected to hope in difficult times
 - Normalising body and emotional responses to stress and explore self-care and other body/mind strategies