



Advice for Parishes in relation to domestic abuse during COVID -19 April 2020

What is domestic abuse?

The Home Office definition, as used by all police forces in England and Wales is as follows: 'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse perpetrated by those aged 16 or over who are, or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality'.

In addition to gender and sexuality, domestic abuse also transcends age, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. Abuse can take many forms and can encompass:

- Psychological and Emotional (threats, intimidation, being criticised and blamed for the abuse, isolated from family and friends, phone/emails monitored)
- Physical (punched, kicked slapped, strangled, kept locked in)
- Sexual (forced to have sex or perform a sexual act against their will)
- Financial (being kept short of money, having to account for every penny spent)
- Digital (being tracked, stalked, threatened or intimidated via social media)
- Spiritual (not allowed to attend church and/or passages in the Bible used to justify the abuse)

One or more of the above can be happening at any one time. Domestic Abuse is about one person exerting power over another by coercion or control to make them subordinate and/or dependent on them. Perpetrating domestic abuse IS A CHOICE.

Impact of COVID-19 and domestic abuse:

The latest government advice on social distancing and self- isolation will have a serious impact on victims of domestic abuse. Our home should be a safe haven where we can relax and feel secure, however this will not be the case for those experiencing domestic abuse. Not only will they be in close contact with their abusive partner (or family member) in isolation, there is a real concern that abusers will use social distancing and self-isolation as a tool for coercive and controlling behaviour and shut down routes to safety and support. The government has recognised this and has included safety advice and planning for those experiencing domestic abuse in its national government advice on COVID- 19.

The following information is provided to you as guidance if you are currently supporting a victim of domestic abuse; someone discloses to you or you are made aware that someone has disclosed domestic abuse, or you suspect that someone is a victim of domestic abuse.

The following advice has been provided by Women's Aid, a national charity that supports victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Women's Aid also wishes to reassure victims and survivors of domestic abuse that their services are still available during COVID-19 via telephone, e-mail, text and chat line.



The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) has clarified with local support agencies that their services are still available and contact details are contained in this guidance.

For victims suffering domestic abuse

- Try and keep a mobile phone with you at all times if possible. The police are a key service when in immediate danger. Do not be afraid to call 999 in an emergency.
- Familiarise yourself with **Silent Solutions**. This is a system for victims of domestic abuse who might be afraid of further danger if they are overheard when calling 999 in an emergency. When ringing 999 and you are unable or afraid to speak, press **55**. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force.
- Pack a bag for yourself and children and keep it somewhere safe in case you need to leave your home in an emergency. Try to include essential things such as medication, identification, money/cards, clothing and mobile phone.
- If you are thinking of leaving or leave in an emergency, staying with family and friends might not be an option due to self-isolating and you may find it hard to secure a refuge. 'Shelter' provide free confidential housing information, support and legal advice on all housing and homelessness issues for victims of domestic abuse. Their emergency helpline is available 365 days a year on **0808 800 444** or if you can visit their website on <https://england.shelter.org.uk>

If a disclosure of domestic abuse is made to you

DO:

Find a safe space to talk if this is possible

- Listen, give time and reassurance
- Believe what they say
- Prioritise immediate safety
- Give information on support services
- Help them to report the abuse to the police if they wish to so do

DON'T

- Minimise the severity
- Go to the abuser to confirm the story or obtain their side of the story
- React with disbelief or disgust
- Expect them to make decisions quickly
- Encourage them to forgive, pray for, or take back the abuser



If you suspect that a family member, friend, or someone in your community is experiencing domestic abuse

- Ask opens questions such as 'How are you? Is everything OK at home? You don't seem yourself lately – is there anything you want to talk about? If you have seen something that concerns you let them know you've noticed something is wrong. They might not be ready to talk and if not don't push them but give reassurance that you are there to listen and support if they ever want to talk. If you notice an injury that concerns you ask "How did you get that/how did that happen?" but be prepared for the victim to make excuses or minimise the injury. Don't question them further. If they feel able and safe to disclose they may do in their own time.
- **Please note: Only speak if it is safe to do so. If the abuser is present and in hearing distance this could increase the risk for the victim.**
- See support agencies detailed in this guidance as some offer support and guidance to friends and family also.

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

Under this scheme anyone in a relationship can ask the police to check whether a new or existing partner has a violent past. This is called 'right to ask'. If records show that they may be at risk of domestic abuse from a partner, the police will consider disclosing the information. A disclosure can be made if it is legal, proportionate and necessary to do so. The "right to ask" also enables a third party, such as a friend or family member, to apply for a disclosure on behalf of someone they know. Again, the police can release information if it is lawful and necessary. Applications can be made by visiting a police station, phoning 101 or speaking to a member of the police on the street. At this present time in line with current government advice in relation to COVID-19, a telephone call would be the way to make a request.

If you are concerned for the immediate safety of a family member, friend or someone in your community ring 999.

Confidentiality:

As much as we would like victims to leave their abuser or report domestic abuse to the police, there are many reasons why they feel unable to do so and we must respect this. If we don't and tell them what to do we are exerting control over them the same as their abuser is. Whilst we would always advise that this option is given to them, it must be their choice and any information that is shared must be with their consent. There are however instances where you have a duty to share information without consent, as follows:

- If a child/young person is at risk of significant harm, that is there is a substantial negative impact on their safety, welfare or wellbeing e.g. a child is present when the abuse is taking place, is witnessing the abuse, is being used as a shield by the victim and/or is also being physically abused by the abuser. This information must be shared with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) covering the child's home address:



Coventry MASH – 02476 788555, mash@coventry.gov.uk

Warwickshire MASH – 01926 414144, mash@warwickshire.gov.uk

Solihull MASH – 01217 884300, cc@solihull.gov.uk

- An adult is at risk of serious harm, e.g. they disclose that the abuser has tried to kill them, or has threatened to kill them and the threat is taken seriously, or they disclose that they have attempted to self-harm or intend to self-harm
- **If you are concerned for the immediate safety of an adult or child ring 999.**

Security and safety when accessing online support and using a mobile phone:

Accessing support online can be a safer or preferred option than calling for support if victims are not able to leave the house and the abuser could overhear a telephone conversation. All of the websites with online support have a quick exit button and if a victim calls a support organisation the number will not be included on their mobile phone billing. However victims will still need to delete their history on websites to fully cover their tracks as we know abusers, as part of exerting control will regularly check online activities to see what websites a victim has been on and will also check their mobile phone regularly. The below information is provided so victims can take steps to increase their safety when visiting websites and to minimise the chances of the abuser finding out that they have visited support organisations.

As a rule, internet browsers will save certain information as you surf the internet. This includes images from websites visited, information entered into search engines and a trail ('history') that reveals the sites you have visited.

Browser:

If you know what browser you are using, then skip to the relevant instructions below. If you do not know the type of browser you are using, click on Help on the toolbar at the top of the browser screen. A drop down menu will appear, the last entry will say About Internet Explorer, About Mozilla Firefox, or something similar. The entry refers to which browser type you are using – you should then refer to the relevant instructions below.

Private browsing;

All leading web browsers have a "private browsing" mode that, once enabled, stores nothing about your activity on your computer in that browsing window. This won't stop online services from seeing what you get up to, but it won't leave any traces of your activity on your computer (no history, web cache or anything else) and so it's always a useful first step to take.

Internet Explorer: Go to Safety – Tools – "InPrivate Browsing".

Firefox: Click the Menu button with three horizontal lines – "New Private Window".

Chrome: Click the Menu button with three horizontal lines and select "New Incognito Window". Similar options can be found in **Opera** and **Safari**.

It is also best to double check that nothing has been stored by following the steps below.

Internet Explorer:

Click on the Tools menu and select Internet Options. On the General page, under Temporary Internet Files, click on Delete Cookies and then OK. Click on Delete Files, put a tick in the box labelled



Delete all offline content and click OK. Under History, click on Clear History and then OK. Now look at the top of the window and click on the Content tab, select AutoComplete and finally, Clear Forms.

Firefox:

Click on Tools and then Options, then click on Privacy. Click on the Clear button next to Cache and Saved Form Information.

Deleting your browsing history:

Internet browsers also keep a record of all the web pages you visit. This is known as a 'history'. To delete history for Internet Explorer and Firefox hold down the Ctrl key on the keyboard, then press the H key (Ctrl, Alt and H for Opera). Find any entries that you have searched, right click on them and choose Delete.

Email:

If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing email messages, they may be printed and saved as evidence of this abuse. Any email you have previously sent will be stored in Sent Items. If you started an email but didn't finish it, it might be in your Drafts folder. If you reply to any email, the original message will probably be in the body of the message – print and delete the email if you don't want anyone to see your original message.

When you delete an item in any email program (Outlook Express, Outlook, etc.) it does not really delete the item – it moves the item to a folder called Deleted Items. You have to delete the items in deleted items separately. Right click on items within the Deleted Items folder to delete individual items.

Toolbars:

Toolbars such as Google, AOL and Yahoo keep a record of the search words you have typed into the toolbar search box. In order to erase all the search words you have typed in, you will need to check the individual instructions for each type of toolbar. For example, for the Google toolbar all you need to do is click on the Google icon, and choose "Clear Search History".

Don't forget to log out:

If you use for example the Survivor's Forum on the Women's Aid website, don't forget to log out of your account when you have finished your browsing session so no one else can log in as you.

General security:

If you do not use a password to log on to your computer, someone else will be able to access your email and track your internet usage. The safest way to find information on the internet, would be at a local library, a friend's house, or at work, however under the current government advice this is not possible so security on your home device is especially important in these current times.

Support from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team:

Please remember that the DST is here to advice and support you so please ring:

Deb Jennings on: **07496 369883** (Mon-Wed)

Dara Lloyd on: **07432 741953** (Wed to Fri)

The DST office on **02476 521345** (monitored on a daily basis)



Advice and Support available:

Coventry Haven Women's Aid Team/ Safe to Talk Helpline:

Continues to offer all services remotely to support victims of abuse. The Safe to Talk Helpline is available on Monday-Friday 8.30am - 5.30pm and Saturday-Sunday 10am -1pm **0800 111 4998**, or by email to referrals@coventryhaven.co.uk or for professionals referrals@coventryhaven.cjsm.net. They are open to new referrals and all existing service users have their caseworker's direct number. Website: www.coventryhaven.co.uk

Coventry Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (CRASAC)

Continues to provide services through remote working. The helpline is available on **02476 277777** - please consider that it may take a little longer than usual for them to respond at present. Clients currently accessing services at CRASAC will be contacted by them to discuss options for ongoing support via phone, text, email, and/or online. CRASAC are still taking referrals on **02476 277777** and info@crasac.org.uk.

Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Support service

Tel: **0800 408 1552** 8.30am-8.30pm Monday – Friday and 10am-4pm on Saturday
Email: dvsw@refuge.org.uk. Website: www.talk2someone.org.uk

Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Service (part of National Women's Aid)

24 hour Freephone national number: **08082000247**

Warwickshire Rape or Sexual Abuse Support (ROSA)

Tel: **01788551151**

Still taking referrals and providing counselling over the telephone

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 24 hour helpline 0808 2000 247

Provides guidance and support for victims, as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones.

GALOP

Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender victims / survivors. Helpline **08009995428** open 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Wed and Thurs. Email help@galop.org.uk. This is a reduced service so a response may take longer than usual.

Men's Advice Line - 0808 801 0327

A confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them. Operating times are: Mon and Wed 9am-8pm. Tues, Thurs and Fri 9am-5pm.

Mankind Initiative – 0823 334244

A confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse. Operating times: 10am-4pm Mon-Fri. They also welcome calls from family, friends and colleagues if they know or think that someone they know is suffering domestic abuse.



SupportLine – 01708 765200 or e-mail info@supportline.org.uk

Provides a confidential telephone helpline offering emotional support to any individual on any issue. It is primarily a preventative service and aims to support people before they reach crisis point. It is particularly aimed at those who are socially isolated, vulnerable, at risk groups and victims of any form of abuse.

Coventry Law Centre

Is working remotely but all staff are available and their service continues as usual, but just on the telephone. Solicitors will continue to represent in court (although the courts are moving hearings to take place by phone or Skype rather than in the court buildings). All existing clients have direct contact details of their caseworker. **For new clients the Law Centre will operate a telephone only reception service between 10am and 3pm on 02476 223053**, or via email to enquiries@centralenglandlc.org.uk. Any changes to this will be posted on their website <https://www.centralenglandlc.org.uk>

Women's Aid is continuing to provide the following services:

The Survivors' Forum is an online resource for survivors of domestic abuse. The Survivors' forum can be accessed 24/7. This is a place where survivors can support each other and share their experiences. To log on visit <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk>

Women's Aid Live Chat is currently available Monday to Friday 10- 12pm. This could be a safer way to access some support particularly if it's unsafe to make a call as the abuser is in the property. To access visit: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk>

Women's Aid Email Service is still operating and can also provide support.
E-mail: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

For detailed information about national and local support services go to:
<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

Respect Phonenumber

Home Office funded charity which offers help to domestic abuse perpetrators who want to change their behaviour. Helpline: **0808 802 4040** 9am-5pm Mon-Fri. E-mail: info@respectonline.org.uk

Other Support Organisations:

Welfare Benefits

If you are concerned about your financial situation, you could contact **Turn2us**. They help people to access the money available to them through welfare benefits and grants. Their website has an income-related benefits checker enabling you to check that you are receiving all of the benefits you are entitled to: www.turn2us.org.uk

Financial Abuse

Many victims experience economic abuse within the context of domestic abuse. 'Surviving Economic Abuse' can provide information and resources: <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/>



Immigration

Your abuser might be using your immigration status against you. If you need some guidance you could contact the Immigration Advice service. They can offer expert legal advice on all aspects of immigration, asylum and nationality issues: www.iasservices.org.uk.

The NHS have confirmed that no charges will be made in the diagnosis or treatment of coronavirus (COVID-19). This applies to everyone living in the UK, regardless of your immigration status. No immigration checks are required for testing or treatment for COVID-19, so please access healthcare if you need to: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide>

Southall Black Sisters offer specialist support, advocacy and information to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk.

Opoka provide a national helpline for Polish women living in the UK: <http://opoka.org.uk/en/>

Disability

Deaf Hope provides practical and emotional support to deaf women experiencing domestic abuse: www.signhealth.org.uk

Emergency SMS provides a text message service for deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired people in the UK to send SMS messages to the UK 999 service where it will be passed to the Police: www.emergencysms.org.uk. Encourage them to reach out for online support such as Women's Aid's [Survivors' Forum](#), [Live Chat](#) or [Email](#).

Chayn

Provides online help and resources in a number of languages, ranging from identifying manipulative situations and how friends can support those being abused. Visit <https://chayn.co/>