

Domestic violence safety plan during COVID-19

Abuse is any kind of behaviour that causes pain through fear, humiliation, and that disempowers another person. Abuse can happen in any relationship and is always destructive.

Due to COVID-19, individuals might be at increased risk of experiencing abuse as many countries implement social and physical distancing measures including lockdowns. These measures might trap individuals with their abusers in the same house with no respite. Uncertainty, financial stress and movement restrictions can also make abusers more volatile and lead to an escalation in the frequency or intensity of their abuse.

What steps can someone take during this time to develop a safety plan?

Reaching out for support and alerting others to the risk:

- Do you have a friend, colleague, family member or local organisation that you trust and can call on for support/help? If so, make contact with that trusted person/organisation and let them know that you may need help during this time. Secure their support to do so. If they are not comfortable, reach out to others. Delete the WhatsApp/SMS if the abuser regularly accesses or has access to your phone.
- You can reach out to multiple people if need be by developing a WhatsApp group. This helps in case some people are not reachable at the time that you may need support. Give that group a “safe” name so that it does not alert suspicion should the abuser readily access your phone. Try to name the group something that reflects what you would ordinarily do in your day-to-day life, for example, “church/mosque group” or “book club”.
- Create a code word with your trust person/group so that people are aware when you are needing help.
- If the abuser tends to look through your phone or you share the use of a computer at home, do be careful when reaching out for help. Delete your Internet browsing history, websites visited for resource, e-mails and/or WhatsApp messages/SMSs sent to friends and family asking for help.
- If you called for help, dial another number immediately after, in case the abuser hits redial.

- If you have neighbours that can help, you can also develop a visual signal that will alert them should you be in distress. Examples of visual signals could be switching an outside light on and off several times, or tying a piece of material around the railing of a fence or a tree or around/on anything that is visible from the outside of your house. Agree with your neighbour about what type of assistance is needed depending on the visual signal. For example, a piece of red material could signal that you need your neighbour to contact the police. White material could signal that you need your neighbour to create a diversion such as calling your cellphone/landline.

If you feel uncomfortable about reaching out for help:

- Identify a room in your house that you can get to quickly and which you can lock from the inside or use furniture to prevent anyone from entering. This will be your designated safe room if you are unable to leave the house.
- Keep an old phone hidden in this room loaded with pre-paid airtime and have key numbers programmed into the phone. These numbers might include the police or emergency services numbers, numbers of friends or family members who have committed to helping you or the number of local shelters in your area.
- Ensure there are non-perishable food items and water in the room in case you need to remain in it for an extended period. These items might include energy bars, crackers, bottled water or easy to open tinned food.
- If you have children, and it is appropriate, practice with them entering and locking the room quickly. Tell them where to find the phone and how to call for emergency help if needed and you are incapacitated.



Please remember your EHWP is always available to provide you with support 24/7.

If you or your loved one needs support during this time, reach out to your ICAS EHWP via your toll-free number or the ICAS On-the-Go App to seek counselling support.

Call your **Toll-free Line** (from land and mobile phones).

Or request a call back: ***134*905#**

Download the **ICAS On-the-Go APP**.

Applicable to you and those who live under your roof.