

Multi-Agency Briefing– COVID-19

This is a critical briefing from Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership and is part of a wider response aimed at protecting survivors of domestic abuse and their children during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. It is vital that you read this document and consider how you can implement the advice giving within your role and beyond.

DA Harm & Homicide Reduction Guidance

What follows are considerations for keeping people safe from the harm perpetrated by DA abusers and preventing DA homicide during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown. When considering these options, it is imperative that you consider the individual circumstances of each incident/survivor/family in order to increase routes to safety and manage risk.

We know that COVID-19 will have serious impacts on the lives of survivors and children. Survivors are telling us that they are feeling unsafe with the prospect of being isolated in the house with their perpetrator and research from countries like China, Italy and Spain have reported significant increases in DA. In China one town reported a tri-fold increase following lockdown and over the weekend the UK saw 9 domestic homicides.

We want to reassure survivors that local specialist services and others are here for them and we will be doing everything we can to support them during this challenging time.

Key message

Isolation and lockdown have severely impacted upon survivor's ability to report abuse to the police so you must see every contact with a survivor as an opportunity to provide potentially lifesaving safety advice. Our window of opportunity to provide follow up advice and support safely has also lessened so the 'one chance rule' is more important than ever. If you are having contact over the phone with survivors during the pandemic always presume the perpetrator is present and that you could be on loudspeaker

Key Safety Advice to give to survivors (further info. on each of these is provided in this briefing)

- Encourage survivors to try and keep a mobile phone with them and charged at all times if possible.
- Ensure survivors are aware of the Silent Solution system
- Ensure survivors are aware that they are still permitted to leave their relationship during this time (however their options on where to go maybe limited). The Home Secretary has made a specific announcement on this issue

- Reassure survivors that the Surrey specialist Outreach Services are still open and able to provide advice, information and support via the phone, email and online chat
- Provide advice about safety planning both for staying at home and if they are intending to leave their relationship during the pandemic this should include showing them how to access the BrightSky app, Hollie Guard and specialist support services
- Ensure survivors know how to delete their browsing history on both phones and computers, useful tips can be found here <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/>
- The police are a key service when in immediate danger. Do not be afraid to call 999 in an emergency.

Further information that should be given to survivors

Information about domestic abuse and help and support available can be found at: www.surreyagainstda.info

All Surrey specialist Outreach Services are still operating during this crisis and will support survivors who contact us. We understand that the measures we are all having to take to reduce the spread of the virus are particularly difficult and potentially dangerous for those experiencing domestic abuse which is why we are determined to keep running our vital services.

SDAP outreach services offer an independent, confidential, listening service to anyone affected by domestic abuse. They are free and impartial services, which can assist by giving practical help and emotional support as well as providing information on a wide range of issues including housing, benefits, safety planning and the needs of children affected by domestic abuse. They can also assist with accessing refuge accommodation if you need to leave your home in order to keep yourself safe. SDAP's outreach services provide support to any victim of domestic abuse regardless of age, gender, sexuality or race.

- **[East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services](#)**: 01737 771350 9am to 4pm (Serving Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge)
- **[Your Sanctuary](#)**: 01483 776822 9am to 4pm (Serving Woking, Runnymede and Surrey Heath)
- **[North Surrey Domestic Abuse Services](#)**: 01932 260690 9am to 4pm (Serving Epsom and Ewell, Elmbridge and Spelthorne)
- **[South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Services](#)**: 01483 898884 9am to 4pm (Serving Guildford and Waverley)

Helpline:

The Surrey Domestic Abuse Helpline provided by Your Sanctuary is available from 9am till 9pm seven days a week Tel: 01483 776822

Online Chat:

The Your Sanctuary online chat service is available here: <https://www.yoursanctuary.org.uk/chat>

www.safelives.org.uk have a dedicated Covid 19 advice page and <https://veritas-justice.co.uk/cyber-and-online-safety/> has some good advice on staking and staying safe online.

DVPN/O Applications (Domestic Violence Protection Notice)

The issuing of DVPN/O's will still happen and therefore it is imperative that housing options are available to survivors and perpetrators.

On the application for a DVPN/O the Superintendent does need to justify why the Notice/Order is necessary, and it can be mentioned that self-isolation was considered, but ultimately, the Notice/Order is to protect the Victim from violence or fear of violence. The police's priority in making these applications is to protect the Victim.

Bright Sky App (Free)

<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

An app that looks like a weather app and provides support and information to anyone who maybe in an abusive relationship. It is available in Polish, Punjabi and Urdu.

To activate you open the app and then simply hold your finger down on the screen and it will take you to the safeguarding advice screen which includes a risk assessment – online safety advice – support resources – a journal so you can keep a log of events. This can be via a voice recording or and there is a facility to take photos of injuries or damage that won't show on your phone in your photo gallery.

Holly Guard (Free and is an alternative App to Bright Sky)

<https://hollieguard.com/>

'Hollie Guard turns your smart phone in to a personal safety device. If in danger, shake your phone or tap the screen to generate an alert. Your location and audio/video evidence will automatically be sent to your emergency contacts who can take action to help you quickly. Three alert types – personal, stealth and deterrent – allow you to choose an alert setting appropriate to your specific needs'

You can set meeting timers, when the meeting has expired an alert will automatically be raised. If travelling, you can notify people of your journey so the emergency contacts will know when you've started and completed the journey.

The Silent Solution System

<https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/domestic-abuse/help/silent-solutions>

Familiarise yourself with The Silent Solution system. This is a system for victims of domestic abuse who might be afraid of further danger and escalation of harm if they are overheard when calling 999 in an emergency. When somebody calls 999, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system. If 55 is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency.

Child Contact

Child Contact arrangements are of concern to many survivors now. Perpetrators have always used child contact arrangements as a tool of coercive and controlling behavior and are likely to use COVID-19 to threaten to not adhere to – or flout – contact arrangements. We are also hearing from survivors that the guidance given around ‘isolation’ can feel very unclear. Survivors are concerned that they will be accused of breaching a court order by not allowing contact. We recognise that accessing legal advice might be difficult now.

The President of the Family Division has released ‘Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders’ during COVID 19: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>

The guidance does not include specific advice in cases of domestic abuse, but states that if parents cannot agree to an arrangement, they may exercise their parental responsibility and vary the arrangement to one that they consider to be safe. If a contact arrangement is varied as a result of COVID 19, the courts expect alternative arrangements – such as video calls – to be made.

Financial Abuse

Many women experience economic abuse within the context of intimate partner violence. Surviving Economic Abuse can provide information and resources: <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/>

Digital Safety

- Choose a strong email password with multiple characters, capital letters and numbers.
- Change your password regularly, particularly if you become concerned it has been compromised.
- Do not open links from senders you do not recognise in case they contain malware, and always run anti-virus software on all your devices.
- If you are being harassed via email: do not reply, and consider creating a new email address (emails received should be kept as they could be used as evidence)
- Limit who you accept as a 'friend' or 'follower' on your profiles. Change your privacy settings on all social media profiles to ensure that only those you choose can see your updates, photos and location.
- Be wary of revealing your location when posting images which may use geo-tagging.
- Turn off location services, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth on your device when you do not need them.
- If your partner or ex-partner set up your phone or registered the app store account, they can see what you have downloaded without needing access to your device. If you think this is the case, change your app store registered email and password.
- You can use the 'My Shadow' tool (myshadow.org) to discover other areas where you may be vulnerable online.

Concerns around Stalking

- Tighten up security at home, to and from home, and at work. Change the locks to your home and if you can, install a burglar alarm or camera.
- Vary your daily routine if walking or driving to work or other places.
- Be careful when giving out personal details when on the phone, dealing with credit card services, social networking sites and people you meet.
- Tell people what is happening to you, particularly at work and at home

Safety at Home

- Plan an escape route from every room in the house.
- Put your bag, keys, documents and money in a safe accessible place so that they can be grabbed in a hurry.
- Let friends/neighbours that you trust know about your situation and ask them to call the police if they hear suspicious noises.
- Teach your children when it is appropriate to call for help. They should never use a phone in front of the abuser as this may endanger them further.
- Talk to children about what is happening and encourage them to call for help and not to intervene.
- Create "code words" for friends and children so that they know when to call for help and/or leave danger areas.
- Plan where to go in an emergency and have an alternative route.

You may also be able to do some of the following:

- Keep a record of the perpetrator's violence and controlling behaviour to support any future action, civil or criminal. Log incidents with the police even if you do not wish to press charges at present.
- Increase your financial independence by opening a separate bank account/transferring your money (including benefits) into your name.
- Seek legal advice (some solicitors offer an initial free appointment).
- Keep important documents in a safe place, either hidden in the home or at a friends or relatives house (e.g. birth/marriage certificates, national insurance card, passport, driving license etc. You may also want to hide items that have a sentimental value to you or your children.

Suggested items to be included in an emergency bag

- ID - Passport, birth/marriage certificate, NI number, driving license, insurance documents
- Money - cheque book, bank cards, credit cards, benefit books etc.
- Medical - prescribed medicines, prescriptions, medical cards, vaccination certificates

- Legal - injunction/divorce papers, mortgage documents
- Special Items - child's favourite toy, photos, jewelry
- Basic/essential clothing

Useful Contacts

1. National 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline – 0808 2000 247
2. Citizen's Advice National Line – 03444 77 20 20
3. RASASC – 0800 0288022
4. NATIONAL STALKING HELPLINE – 0808 802 0300
5. PALADIN – 02038664107
6. Men's Advice Line – 0808 801 0327
7. Samaritans – 116 123

Remember to always keep your safety information safe and never leave it where it could be found by the perpetrator. Share this safety advice with a trusted friend or family member, and with trusted agency workers you are in contact with.

Support for potential perpetrators

The Respect Phone line is a confidential helpline, email and web chat service for perpetrators of domestic violence looking for help to stop. They help male and female perpetrators, in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Partners or ex-partners of perpetrators, as well as concerned friends and family and Frontline Workers are welcome to get in touch for information, advice and support. Tel: 0808 8024040

It's Free from landlines and mobile phones within the UK. Your call will not appear on itemised bills. You can also call free from BT pay phones.

<https://www.respect.uk.net/>