

Respect

Responding to the challenges of Covid-19

Guidance for practitioners
working with domestic abuse
perpetrators.

Responding to the challenges of COVID-19: safeguarding and practice guidance for practitioners working with domestic abuse perpetrators.

Version date: 31st March 2020. Please note that this document will be subject to regular review and updates.

Who is this guidance for?

Both in the UK and across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the widespread implementation of social distancing measures and self and household isolation imperatives. The aim of this document is to offer advice to professionals and practitioners who are working with domestic abuse perpetrators at this difficult time.

The current situation raises a number of concerns. As well as the danger that perpetrators use social distancing and isolation guidelines to further isolate their victims, these measures place additional practical, emotional and financial stress on families – increasing the likelihood that abuse will take place and that children will be exposed to it, and reducing opportunities for victims and their children to safely and confidentially seek support.

Countries including China, Brazil and Spain have already reported a significant increase in domestic abuse as a result of similar measures, and in the UK there is broad cross-sector support for increasing the availability and range of support services available to victims and their children, whose safety and well-being are paramount.

As the UK membership organisation for safe and effective work with perpetrators of domestic abuse and their partners and ex-partners, Respect has been working with our accredited members – as well as a wide network of national and international colleagues – to share ideas about how services can respond to domestic abuse perpetrators at the present time. This document is based on the learning from those conversations, and we will keep updating this guidance as the situation progresses.

Key Messages

All practitioners should follow their own organisation's Health and Safety guidance, Safeguarding Procedures and Business and Contingency protocols.

When considering any changes to existing service provision, the principles set out in the Respect Service Standard remain as important as ever:

Safety First

In the current context, we are particularly aware that:

- Additional environmental stressors can increase the likelihood and severity of violence, abuse and controlling behaviours taking place;
- There may be an increased prevalence, but also onset of abusive behaviour within many families;
- Many perpetrators will choose to respond abusively to current challenges and stresses;
- Notions of isolation and social distancing may be used in an abusive way;
- Children and anyone else sharing households with perpetrators are more likely to be present when abuse takes place;
- The families and housemates of those perpetrating abuse are likely to face significant barriers in accessing specialist support.

It is therefore critical that the safety and well-being of survivors and children remains the focus of any intervention aimed at domestic abuse perpetrators; this is especially the case when considering or implementing any changes to existing materials or modes of delivery.

Guidance:

Services should prioritise the provision of support for victims, and seek their views about any proposed changes to interventions with perpetrators; where this is not possible, or their concerns cannot be allayed, then services will need to consider whether the work can safely proceed.

Women's Aid and SafeLives have both produced safety planning tools for practitioners to use when working with victims/survivors during

the COVID-19 crisis, and these can be found on their respective websites:

<http://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19>

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/>

Respect recommends that practitioners should also explore what specialist survivor services are still operating locally, in order to enable relevant signposting.

Do No Harm

Many services are in the process of adapting their approach to working with perpetrators of domestic abuse. In-person group-work programmes are not currently viable, and many accredited members are exploring whether and how one-to-one work can be delivered. Many members are exploring the use of video conferencing software (VCS) and the potential platforms for facilitating this, including Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp.

It should be noted that there is currently little to no evidence or research concerning the efficacy of using video conferencing software to deliver domestic abuse perpetrator work. In their recent paper 'Initial Lessons Learned from using Video Conferencing Software to deliver Interventions for Men using Violence in Intimate Relationships', Bellini and Westmarland highlight some of the challenges encountered by Pathways to Family Peace in using video-conferencing software to provide group-based programmes.

The challenges which were specific to web-based and/or remote support included:

- Lack of internet access to support video-conferencing, or unstable connections which make video streaming impossible
- A strong sense from survivors who were consulted as part of a focus group, that undertaking sessions with perpetrators who were still in the family home was not recommended and could be risky
- Lack of a private space from which to access the internet and engage with sessions
- Concerns about participants and/or survivors overhearing one another's web or telephone sessions, and the potential for this to generate conflict that leads to abuse

- The potential for participants to become distracted by children, pets or anyone else in the home
- Data and privacy concerns when undertaking sessions in the presence of partners and/or children
- The fact that it is more difficult to notice had anyone been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs

These issues should be borne in mind by services when adapting their materials or mode of working, and solutions or ways of addressing them should be clearly documented.

Guidance:

It is Respect's strong recommendation that any work delivered remotely should be focused on safety planning, stress and de-escalation techniques in the short to medium term, rather than long-term attitudinal and behavioural change.

This is in line with the Working With Perpetrators (WWP) European Network's update on Guidelines for working with perpetrators who are currently enrolled in DAPPs during the COVID-19 crisis. This guidance states that at the current time, services should focus on short to medium term interventions designed to:

- Reduce the risk of violence and abuse taking place
- Decrease perpetrators' stress and emotional arousal
- Increase perpetrators' coping mechanisms
- Mitigate additional risk factors in families forced into lock-down
- Indirectly mitigate the effects of violence on family members
- As much as is possible and safe, coordinate with victim support services and listen to victim's voices and continue to make efforts to gather feedback from victims

It will also be important for services to consider privacy and safety issues, especially if perpetrators are engaging with telephone or web-based support while cohabiting with victims and their children. Respect is working in partnership with other services to develop guidance on working remotely and managing the associated safety issues, including the impact on victims and their children of potentially overhearing sessions. At the present time, as we continue to consider these complex issues, we are urging services to focus their efforts on interventions aimed at short-term stress management and de-escalation techniques.

The System Matters

Instead of stopping or suspending multi-agency safeguarding processes, the vast majority of statutory and non-statutory organisations are delivering a revised service – with many members of staff working from home, or furloughed. Statutory services are likely to be extremely pressurised, due to the simultaneous upsurge in domestic abuse safeguarding requests, and the depletion of their workforce through illness and/or isolation guidelines.

It is therefore important that domestic abuse services stay up to date with which local and national services are still operating, what level of service can be provided, and the relevant and available referral pathways.

Guidance:

Respect recommend that domestic abuse services catalogue key local services and contacts, and distribute them amongst their staff. Where there is – or it is anticipated that there will be – an inappropriate or insufficient response to risk or safeguarding concerns, the services should consider how they will escalate concerns with other services.

Support for Staff

Practitioners will be working in isolation, predominantly from their own homes and without their colleagues. Treatment Management and supervision will be crucial to help them explore their practice, in terms of managing risk and delivering the intervention using new methods (phone/video calling) and new material. Services will need to provide both professional and emotional support to delivery practitioners, and on-call arrangements will need to be put in place where calls or VCS sessions with clients are taking place outside usual working hours.

Practitioners should also be made aware of their service's Business Continuity Plans so that they are aware of relevant protocols in the event of widespread staffing shortages or difficulties as a result of COVID-19.

Daily or weekly team meetings will help to maintain positive lines of communication within the organisation and the delivery of key messages.

Service's should consider securing personal protection equipment (PPE) for practitioners if they are having any face to face contact with clients.

Other resources for professionals:

WWP EN Guidelines to ensure responsible perpetrator work during COVID-19: <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/>

Respect helplines

The Respect Phonenumber is a confidential helpline for people who are hurting and/or scaring their partners and families, which can also support the professionals who work with them 0808 8024040 (www.respectphonenumber.org.uk)

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them 0808 8010327 (www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

Emergency services continue to operate and can be contacted by individuals or practitioners alike: 999

Resources for perpetrators:

Corona Crisis: Survival Kit for Men Under Pressure: A prevention contribution by the umbrella organizations for work with boys, men and fathers in Switzerland (www.maenner.ch), Austria (www.dmoe-info.at) and Germany (www.bundesforum-maenner.de):

https://www.maenner.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GZA_Merkblatt_Corona_ENGLISCH.pdf

Apps and online content for victims/survivors

- Women's Aid: Live Chat chat.womensaid.org.uk, email, Survivors forum or Survivors handbook <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>
- Chayn have set up a Telegram channel which survivors can sign up to; they'll be sharing supportive notes and helpful information every

day. Link here:

<https://twitter.com/ChaynHQ/status/1239235431469854723>

- There are a number of useful apps – for example, the Hollie Guard app – which can also offer reassurance. The details are here: <https://hollieguard.com/>
- Bright Sky can be found here: <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>. The Bright Sky app is currently available in English, Urdu, Punjabi or Polish and is free to download.

Additional support services and helplines:

- Freephone 24h National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge on 0808 247 2000, or visit www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
- In Scotland, contact Scotland's 24-hour Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234
- In Northern Ireland, contact the 24 hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline: 0808 802 1414
- In Wales, contact the 24-hour Life Fear Free Helpline on 0808 80 10 800.
- National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 999 5428
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
- Women's Aid: Live Chat chat.womensaid.org.uk, email, Survivors forum or Survivors handbook <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>
- Elder Abuse Helpline – <https://www.elderabuse.org.uk/> helpline: 08088088141
- NSPCC Helpline <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/get-advice-and-support/> or 0808 800 5000
- Local Government Association: resources to help others, includes a batch of multi-lingual hygiene posters – <https://adcs.org.uk/health/article/coronavirus>
 - Private online support group run by Sam Billingham www.sodahq.uk or Abuse Talk run by Jennifer Gilmour #AbuseTalk – run via @AbuseTalkOnline (only if it is safe to do so).
- NCDV <https://www.ncdv.org.uk/> and Advice Now's resources at www.advicenow.org.uk for those requiring support for injunctions or Legal advice
- Stalking Guidance: <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/pages/category/national-stalking-helpline>
- For service users who are self-employed, HMRC have just set up a helpline specifically for the self-employed and businesses who will be

struggling now. The COVID-19 helpline: 0300 456 3565. They will provide advice on tax and any benefits you can claim.

[Interim guidance for first responders and others in close contact with symptomatic people with potential COVID-19.](#)