

# 6 things you can do if you think a friend might be experiencing domestic abuse



How you react to a friend's disclosure of violence can save their life because it affects their likelihood of seeking out further supports. It is critical to not take her power away; trying to make decisions on her behalf may make her situation even more dangerous.

1

## When it is safe to do so, virtually check in on your friends, family, and colleagues

"how are you feeling?"; "do you feel safe in your home right now?"

2

## Believe them. Validate and empathize with their feelings.

Even if you haven't seen it. Even if you know/care about the person harming your friend.

Try: "That sounds hard"; "you seem scared"; "I'm sorry you're going through this right now"

3

## Use I see & I feel statements.

It's common that people don't recognize or label their own relationship as abusive.

Try saying things like, "I see the way he\* talks to you, and it makes me feel scared" or "I see the way he treats you, and it makes me feel sad that you're in that situation."

Ask if they want you to help and how.

4

## If they want help, support them with safety planning

Safety plans are practical steps to improve safety

Women's shelter workers are trained to help you with this.

5

## Avoid victim-blaming. Many of us use harmful language without knowing it or meaning to be hurtful.

Avoid asking "why" questions or saying things that make the person being harmed feel blamed for the abuse.

6

## Educate yourself about the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. Refer your friend to trained professionals – like the ones at women's shelters

You don't have to go into shelter to get help from one.

In Alberta - [acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters)

Across Canada - [Sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca)

You can call a shelter for resources on behalf of someone else.

Positive change can take time. Though your friend may not use these resources right away, you are empowering her with access to helpful information.

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911**.*

*To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at **1-866-331-3933**.*

*To locate a shelter near you, visit **[acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters)** or **[sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca)**.*

*If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)***

**\*Note: Violence and abuse can be used by people of any gender expression and sexual orientation toward people of any gender expression and sexual orientation. While we all continue to learn about the dynamics of domestic violence, the focus, experiences, and evidence of our provincial membership continue to teach us that the most deadly forms of relationship violence are perpetrated mostly by male-identified people against mostly female-identified people.**

Adapted from sources: Julie Lalonde's Instagram Live presentation 23 March 2020, with consultation from Alberta shelter experts.

# How COVID-19 may impact those living with domestic violence



Forced isolation may be harder to recognize during physical distancing. An abusive partner may limit social interaction with colleagues, friends, and family during working from home arrangements.

Reduced accommodation options make it even harder to leave an abusive partner. Physical distancing makes it harder to stay with friends, and many landlords have temporarily stopped taking new applicants.

Survivors may have been given frightening misinformation about COVID-19 by their abusive partner to control or manipulate them.

Abuse tactics can increase or worsen in emergencies like this. This may show up in signs not apparent before - like bruises or burns, or in sharing about instances of sexual or emotional abuse.

Most instances of sexual assault are from someone the survivor knows, and sexual violence may increase as families are confined in their homes for longer periods of time.

It may be more difficult for someone in an abusive relationship to communicate during social isolation because their partner may be more closely monitoring or limiting their technology use.

With children now at home all day, every day, there may be more incidences of child abuse happening in the home. Be mindful of communication that indicates signs of child abuse are present. If you suspect a child is at risk, you are legally required to report it. 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)

Abusive partners may withhold necessary items, such as hand sanitizer or disinfectants.

Abusive partners may prevent survivors from seeking medical attention if they need it or find ways to control access to extended health benefits.

An abusive partner may make the survivor go outside of the home. The abuser may blame her if she or the children get sick.

Travel restrictions and fewer travel options may impact a survivor's escape or safety plan – it may not be safe for them to use public transportation or access flights or buses.

An abusive partner may use COVID-19 scare tactics to keep a survivor away from their children.

An abusive partner may make it difficult or impossible for the survivor to work from home.

An abusive partner may block their partner from applying for employment insurance benefits or other forms of COVID-19 financial assistance, making them more dependent on the abuser.

---

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.  
To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at 1-866-331-3933.  
To locate a shelter near you, visit [acws.ca/shelters](http://acws.ca/shelters) or [sheltersafe.ca](http://sheltersafe.ca).  
If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)*

# How you can respond to domestic violence during COVID-19



If you or someone you love is facing domestic abuse, here are a few suggestions that may make this uncertain time feel a little bit safer:

## **Create a safety plan.**

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Women's shelters safety plan with survivors, friends, family members, and anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of someone else.

You and your partner may be told by either or both of your employers to work remotely to limit physical interaction. Having a safety plan laid out can help you to protect yourself during this stressful time. When a mother is at risk, her children should also be considered at risk, particularly when families are spending more time together during COVID-19. Safety planning that considers children is often recommended but can be more complicated. Connect with a shelter to safety plan with their trained professionals. Keeping a mother safe is recognized as the best way to keep children safe.

Here are some resources for thinking about general safety planning:

- [Creating a Safety Plan](#)
- [Planning for Safety with Families](#)
- [Safety Planning with Children and Youth](#)

During COVID-19, consider the sanitation protocols suggested by health authorities and recommended physical distancing in your community in your planning. It could mean survivors reaching out to more trusted friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours than they normally would to increase avenues to get help and/or support safer escapes in emergencies.

ACWS member shelters are doing everything they can to stay open and support survivors in a safe and responsible way. You do not have to stay in a shelter to get help from one. You can call a shelter to get counselling and support with safety planning.

You can call **1-866-331-3933** to speak with a women's shelter for help creating your safety plan.

## **Set up a safe signal with someone you trust.**

Consider setting up a coded text message that you send to a parent or sibling, such as "we are out of milk", or, "the kids are having fun", that is really a request for them to call 911. Creating a signal with a neighbour, such as lowering the blind in a certain window, as a signal for the neighbour to call 911 is another example.

When someone is in immediate danger, contact police. Even if they are in quarantine or self-isolating due to illness – the police will respond.

## **Support defusing strategies.**

No one is ever responsible for the abusive behavior of another person, yet people living in domestic violence are often already experts at employing defusing strategies to try to minimize the impacts of the abuse and protect their loved ones.

Understand that the current situation may be used to justify an abuser's need to control others and may worsen the abuse in the home. Consider if there are additional ways to help keep the calm - especially things that those outside the family might do to help. Encouraging opportunities for exercise outside, communicating about a non-violent entertaining Netflix series or movie, sharing boardgames or online activities to help keep children occupied, etc. may help de-escalate conflict.

It is rarely acknowledged, but we know that people living in abusive situations use many kinds of survival and resistance strategies. Domestic violence can tragically escalate to homicide, and thus, Crisis Intervention Workers suggest that survivors say and do whatever they need to do to keep themselves and their families safe. These may look like: avoiding arguing near the top of a staircase, avoiding fights in the kitchen where there are many sharp objects, etc.

- [Read more about these ideas here is a resource about resistance.](#)

### Practice self-care.

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty for many people and getting through this time while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming. Taking time for your health and wellness can make a big difference in how you feel. For example, go for walks to get out of the house on a regular basis.

- [Learn more about how to build in self-care while staying safe](#)

If you're a friend or family member of someone experiencing abuse, you may not be able to visit them in person. Seeing someone you care about being hurt is stressful. Remind yourself that you can't make decisions for someone else, but you can encourage your loved one to think about their wellbeing, safety plan, and practice self-care while they are in their home. You can set up a safe signal with them if they are in danger (e.g., a coded text message or a signal from the window).

### Reach out for help.

While people are encouraged to stay at home, you may feel isolated from your friends and family. Even if you are isolated, try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so, and try to stick to your daily routines as much as possible.

You don't have to stay in a shelter to get support from one. Shelters offer counselling and support to women in the community as well, and shelters can help you find a safe place to stay.

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911**.  
To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at **1-866-331-3933**.  
To locate a shelter near you, visit [acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters) or [sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca).  
If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)***

---

**Adapted from sources:** the National Domestic Violence Hotline & Sherry Hamby Ph.D. via [Psychology Today](#). Families Thrive, Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter, Government of Alberta, Government of British Columbia Department of Justice, and with consultation from Alberta shelter experts.

2020-04-08

# Some signs that someone may be living with domestic violence during COVID-19



- 
- A mother withdraws from her normal activities with her children.
  - Your friend stops participating in the group chat.
  - You try to connect with a family member, but one person in their household monopolizes their only computer.
  - The abuser is the only one who leaves the home for walks or supplies.
  - You hear someone you care about tolerating more put-downs from their partner than usual.
  - Your neighbour asks about borrowing your car suddenly.
  - Your sister says her partner isn't letting her use disinfectants.
  - Your colleague shares misinformation about the public health requirements that their partner told them.
  - You hear abnormal sounds of conflict from your neighbour's house.
  - You notice during a FaceTime call, that your friend is using more makeup, maybe to cover a bruise.
  - Your friend has stopped using their camera on your check-ins, maybe to hide their black eye or other physical signs of violence.
  - Someone you know recently had an ex-spouse move back into their house claiming to have COVID-19 and having nowhere else to isolate.
  - You haven't heard lately from your friend at work.

---

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.  
To speak with a women's shelter, call our 24/7 hotline at **1-866-331-3933**.  
To locate a shelter near you, visit [acws.ca/shelters](https://acws.ca/shelters) or [sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca).  
If you suspect a child is at risk, you must report it. **1-800-387-5437 (KIDS)***