

Coronavirus & Domestic Abuse



Tip Sheet for Churches

Understanding and responding to Domestic Abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic Abuse is a pattern of behaviours using power and control to dominate and intimidate a family member – most often an intimate partner. It may include sexual and physical abuse, though, this is not always the case. The victim may be living in fear or feel as though as they are ‘walking on eggshells’.

Domestic Abuse also causes trauma for children and is associated with increased rates of direct child abuse.

Domestic Abuse during the coronavirus pandemic

In times of natural disaster, rates of Domestic Abuse are known to increase, with women and children being most significantly at risk. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are sadly likely to see this same increase.

Heightened personal and family stress is not the primary cause of violence, but it is likely to increase its frequency and severity. Social isolation may limit a person’s contact with their support networks and place them in closer contact with the perpetrator of abuse.

This may increase the risk of emotional, verbal and physical abuse. The pandemic may be used as an excuse for greater monitoring and social control or financial abuse. More time together may see a rise in abuse of children or sexual abuse of a partner.

How can you help?

- **Raise awareness** - Remind everyone in the church community of the realities of Domestic Abuse and where to get help: use the Diocesan information and resources.
knowdomesticabuse.church
safeministry.org.au/domestic-family-abuse
- **Check in** - If you are currently supporting someone who is experiencing Domestic Abuse, check in to see how they are doing – but be sure to do it carefully. Make your enquiry general until you are sure the perpetrator is not in the vicinity.
- **Code word** - If possible, set up an agreed code word which the person can use that can let a designated friend or pastoral carer know if they need help in an emergency – when police will be called. Be aware that the perpetrator may be monitoring your friend or loved one’s electronic communication. Be wise about what you send them.
- **Access to essentials** - Check to see that they have access to enough food and personal care essentials – that these are not being withheld.

- **Be careful not to minimise** - New disclosures or concerns about Domestic Abuse, should not be minimised as “just the stress everyone is under” – take any concerns you may have seriously and seek professional support services. Follow the [Flow Chart](#) when responding to disclosures. Always prioritise safety, it may be that now is the time to leave.
- **Support separated families** - Where shared parenting arrangements exist: help the children stay in touch with both parents if that is the agreed arrangement. Seek advice - check with a Family Relationship Centre or Community Legal Service for advice if difficulties arise.
- **Remember those at greater risk** - Those who are isolated and dependent on a carer may be at greater risk of abuse during this health crisis.
- **Encourage** - Encourage those experiencing Domestic Abuse to keep in touch with service providers who can check on their wellbeing. Remind them they are not to blame. Only the perpetrator can stop the violence.
- **Be informed** - For further training and information on recognizing and responding to Domestic Abuse refer to online KNOW Domestic Abuse training – courses.safeministry.training/know-domestic-abuse-course

Support Services

Anglicare Counselling: 1300 651 728

1800 RESPECT National Helpline: 1800 737 732

NSW DV Hotline: 1800 656 463

Men’s Referral Service: 1300 766 491

Women’s Domestic Violence Court Assistance Programme NSW: 1800 938 227

Family Relationships Advice Line: 1800 050 321

E-safety women: www.esafety.gov.au/women

Daisy App (connecting women): download from [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#)

May the God of hope and peace sustain each of you in the coming days.

Lynda Dunstan

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