
Kingston Domestic & Sexual Violence Partnership

COVID-19 DA Services Update

April 24th – May 7th 2020

The government defines domestic abuse as an event or pattern of events of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people aged 16 or over who are (or have been) intimate partners or family members.

Physical violence is just one type of abuse – domestic abuse can be any behaviour which is used to harm, punish or frighten you, or makes you feel bullied, controlled or intimidated. This includes mental, sexual, financial and emotional abuse and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), so called ‘honour’ based violence and forced marriage.

National Updates

The Victim’s Commissioner has informed MPs that domestic abuse killings are “more than double” amid the lockdown. At least 16 killings were identified by the Counting Dead Women project in the 3 weeks between 23rd March and 12th April. Data for the same period over the last 10 years show an average of 5 deaths.

The Home Office has launched a public awareness campaign as well as £2 million funding to help tackle domestic abuse during lockdown. The public have been encouraged to show their solidarity and support for those suffering by sharing a photo of a heart on their palm and use the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone. The additional funding is going towards national helplines and online services. Kingston are supporting this government campaign and our Councillors and Chief Exec came together for a tweet:



Please note: The Government has made it clear that **lockdown** rules **do not apply** to those facing abuse in their homes. Survivors of domestic abuse can be supported to leave their homes and find a safe space.

Please note: The National Domestic Violence Centre have been wrongly advising women to seek a court order to legally rule safe zones in their homes which perpetrators cannot access during the lockdown period. **This is unsafe and inaccurate advice and could cause additional risk.**

Civil Courts are still able to hear cases remotely for emergency non-molestation and occupation orders. Information can be found on the Rights of Women webpage [here](#).

It is important to highlight that COVID-19 must not be considered the cause of domestic abuse, these are not isolated incidents that have been brought on by the pressures of quarantine. The lockdown has simply added additional risk factors, means of control and visibility of families who were already at risk.

Local Updates

Our providers are continuing to ensure support remains available for all those who may be experiencing domestic abuse. These services are vital for our communities and offering support in the current situation has become even more challenging. This puts more responsibility on us given the escalation of risk for victim survivors who are self-isolating at home with their abuser/s

The **Kingston DV Hub** has seen a 50% increase in calls from survivors and professionals since the lock-down and a gradual increase in referrals. The Kingston MARAC is seeing an increase in referrals to the May MARAC.

The local **Wolverton Sexual Health Clinic** has seen a significant decrease in the number of people reaching out for support. Please encourage any clients to contact the sexual health centre for support - they are still open and are requesting that people call and speak to an advisor before attending. More information can be found [here](#).

Kingston iCOPE have created a COVID-19 [Resource pack](#) for clients – it contains useful information regarding COVID-19 including links to key services and lots of information on managing emotional wellbeing.

It is important for us to continue to work as a coordinated community response. We are all working hard to adapt to the new guidance to try and slow the spread of Corona virus, while continuing to provide support to those in need. This means resources will be stretched so we ask that professionals work together to make this process run as smoothly as possible.

Partnership Positives/Recognition of Contributions

- The Kingston MARAC ran virtually in April and **all MARAC partners** were able to attend and contribute towards an effective risk management plan for high risk survivors.
- Recognition of the contribution made by the **RBK Communications** team who have been sending out regular comms updates around domestic abuse services and identifying new national campaigns to link into.
- Recognition of the contribution made by **Louise Doherty**, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children from CCG who has provided innovative ideas on how to reach out to more survivors in Kingston during this time.
- Recognition of the contribution made by **Clare Moore**, MARAC Administrator for the effective management of the MARAC process including the request for emergency MARACs and increase in referrals to the May MARAC.
- Recognition of contribution by **all the Domestic Abuse workers** in Kingston who are tirelessly supporting survivors of domestic abuse during this difficult time.

This week's spotlight: Tech Abuse

Due to the current restrictions and recommendations around social distancing, technology has become an even more integral part of life. Although it can be a source of safety and support, it's also important to highlight the online and virtual risks that victims face; and support them to safeguard themselves online.

Encouraging survivors to reduce their use of tech at this time is unrealistic and could isolate them even further from sources of support.

The Tech vs Abuse initiative saw SafeLives undertake a six-month research project to understand the potential **opportunities, gaps** and **risks** for technology in the context of domestic abuse – alongside partners **Chayn, Snook** and **Comic Relief**. **The report can be found [here](#).**

Refuge Charity have created the following questions to help identify Tech Abuse:

- *Does your partner/abuser constantly call, text and message you online?*
- *Does your partner/abuser publish posts about you online which encourage others to harass and abuse you?*
- *Does your partner/abuser constantly call, message and send “friend requests” to your family and friends?*
- *Does your partner/abuser harass you, your employer and your clients through business social media pages and work email addresses?*
- *Has your partner/abuser threatened to share any information about you online such as confidential information, for example screenshots of messages, photos of you, or information that could cause you embarrassment?*
- *Has your partner/abuser threatened to share or shared intimate images of you?*
- *Does your partner/abuser seem to know about conversations that you have had without being present?*
- *Does your partner/abuser give the children the latest tech gadgets during child contact? Does he play Xbox and PlayStation games with them online outside of his agreed contact time?*
- *Does your partner/abuser have access to your banking and social media accounts, and assure you that it’s normal to have access to your partner’s information?*
- *Does your partner/abuser know your whereabouts or turn up unexpectedly wherever you go?*
- *Does your partner/abuser stalk and harass you via fake social media profiles?*
- *Has your partner/abuser installed any apps such as ‘find my iPhone’ onto your device? Did he assure you that it is for your safety in case you lose your phone?*


If they answer yes to any of the above, there are several resources to support victim survivors protect themselves:

Safelives [Digital and Online Safety Resources](#)

Refuge [Tech Abuse Service](#)

Chayn’s [Guide on how to secure your devices](#)

If they are experiencing tech abuse, it may not be safe for them to access these websites, so professionals should offer to provide tips in an agreed, safe way.



Resources for Professionals & Practical Tools

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR WHEN A DISCLOSURE IS MADE

If a victim survivor makes a disclosure of domestic abuse on the phone, please check that the alleged perpetrator is not in the same room and if it is safe for them to talk.

If it is not safe to talk;

- Offer to text the local and/or national number to them and agree a safe way to do this (ie. text the number backwards).
- If they have access to the internet, encourage the victim survivor to Google the Women's Aid Live Chat and speak to someone online.
- Encourage them to contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline if it is safer to call later in the evening.
- ***If they are in immediate danger, ask if they would like you to ring 999***
 - *Please FIRST take the house number and street in case the call gets cut, followed by postcode if they are still on the line*
 - *Check if they are injured as this will determine if an ambulance needs to be requested for as well*
 - *Keep the person on the line and ask a colleague to call 999 with the details*
 - *While you have them on the phone, continue to check regarding their safety (Is there somewhere in the house they can lock themselves in). Give them the option of staying on the phone and not say anything if that is safer.*
 - *If it's safe to do so, ask if they can leave the house and approach a neighbour or anyone in the street to help them*
 - *Please stay on the phone until you have confirmation that emergency services have arrived*

If it is safe to talk, please use some of the key-messages highlighted below and encourage them to contact our local domestic abuse service for further support.

Questions that could be asked if concerned about abuse in the household:

- *'Are there any particular obstacles you are facing that are stopping you from accessing support? Is there anyone in particular who is stopping you from accessing support?'*
- *'Are there any concerns in your household, is there any particular risk to you or your child/ren?'*

If a disclosure of domestic abuse is made - these key messages that were created by Refuge charity are a great way to acknowledge it -

- *People who experience domestic violence come from all walks of life. All ages, all religions, all races*
- *You are not to blame for your partner's violence...he/she alone is responsible, violence is a choice he/she makes*
- *There are solutions to the problem. . .getting help is a brave and positive step*
- *Take your time to consider your options...take one day at a time, don't feel pressured into making any decisions*
- *Everyone has a right to live free from violence*
- *Reaching out for help (talking about it) is a massive step and you should be proud of yourself for doing this!*

SAFETY PLANNING WITH SURVIVORS WHO ARE SELF-ISOLATING

These tips should be used alongside pre-existing [advice on safety planning](#)

- Ask survivors what their priorities are in terms of safety and what they are concerned about, you can then prioritise their worries and concerns when safety planning
- Feel free to help survivors with their safety plan if there are things you think they haven't considered, but don't scare them or be judgmental
- Enquire about whether the perpetrator is still going out to work and if not, if there are times during the day where you can speak to the survivor where the perpetrator will not be around
- Ask the survivor if there are increased risks around the perpetrator being at home more during this time, and if so, if they can call you perhaps on their daily walk instead of you calling them
- Ask the survivor if they have considered what they would do in situations that they are worried about, including a crisis, and help them to make a safety plan for each situation that they are worried about so they can feel prepared and supported
- Go through different options that you know about, for example the resources and numbers above, IDVA support, calling the police, refuge accommodation etc. so that the survivor knows there are people out there to help them to keep safe, but don't force anything on them or tell them what they 'should do', respect their choices.

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- Always highlight the importance of calling 999 in an emergency. Survivors will never be forced to make a statement or report a crime, but the police are always who they should call if they feel immediately at risk

Checking in re: Health & Wellbeing

- Does the survivor have any medical conditions? Do they have access to their own Medication?
- Is the survivor able to contact the GP safely instead of usual face to face appointment?
- Explore if they have any interests that can be pursued while in isolation – reading, online yoga, meditation etc.
- Are they able to maintain contact with their support network?
- Encourage survivor to try maintaining a routine for the welfare of themselves and their children.

Additional Resources

[Guidance for staying safe during Covid-19 for Survivors](#) (Safelives)

[Guidance for practitioners working with perpetrators of domestic abuse](#) (Respect)

[Crimestoppers](#) have launched a campaign encouraging the public to report concerns about family, friends and colleagues who may be experiencing domestic abuse while self-isolating.

Where it is safe to do so, survivors may find it helpful and comforting in speaking with others to share their experiencing domestic abuse and how they are coping. Women's Aid has a [Survivors' Forum](#) that provides peer support and helps people feel connected with others.

[Guidance](#) on Economic Abuse while self-isolating (Surviving Economic Abuse)

[Covid-19 and Child Contact Arrangements](#) (Rights of Women)

[Advice and Resources page during COVID-19 for housing providers](#). Including [guidance](#) for housing providers to use to support survivors effectively (DAHA)

Information on how victim survivors can secure their devices can be found [here](#) (Chayn)

Resources for parents and children - a [Parent Pack](#) (West Sussex Connect)

Information on support available for young people and Covid-19 [here](#) (Achieving for Children)



Coronavirus update

Coronavirus update: For the latest updates on Coronavirus (COVID-19), visit the [NHS website](#) or view Kingston-[specific information](#).