

Domestic Abuse




Efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have led to changes in the way people live their lives across the world. Changes such as school and business closures, social distancing, confinement, and economic uncertainty have all impacted on our work and home environments.

In these challenging times, UNHCR recognizes that some colleagues might find themselves in unsafe situations at home. If you are experiencing domestic violence or are concerned for someone else, it is important to know that support is available. Support is also available to help staff members change abusive behaviour. UNHCR takes violence inside or outside the workplace seriously; it can amount to misconduct.

If you are concerned for your immediate security or that of a colleague or an eligible family member, contact your local [Field Security Advisor](#) who will try to get you to a place of safety. If you specifically wish to speak with a [female Security Advisor](#) contact Julie Spooner.

 Email: spooner@unhcr.org




If you are experiencing domestic abuse or are concerned for someone or think you might behave in an abusive manner contact the [Psychosocial Wellbeing Section](#). They can provide psychological and emotional support. If you are worried you might hurt someone, they can also help you to understand and manage your emotions.

 Phone: **+41227397388**
If you have an **urgent need for support**, our helpline is available to you 24/7.

 Email: HQSW00@unhcr.org



You can also contact the Speakup Helpline for support if you are at risk of domestic abuse or if you are concerned for a colleague by entering the code-word COVID-19 and your contact details.

-  Freephone, local rate and international dialing options (dependent upon availability in country). For more info: <https://intranet.unhcr.org/en/about/ethics-office/speakup.html>
-  Web Based Reporting Form: <https://wrs.expolink.co.uk/UNHCR>
-  Mobile App: 'SpeakingUp' App available for download

Advice to people who may be experiencing domestic abuse

Tips for increasing safety during a family violence crisis:

Prepare a Safety Plan

A safety plan is a personalised, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you have left. During COVID-19 travel restrictions may impact on your escape or safety plan. For example it may not be possible to use public transportation.

- ➔ Find out what services are available in your area.
- ➔ Prepare a way to escape in case you need to leave quickly.
- ➔ Have a prepared excuse to leave
- ➔ Keep a bag of important items in a safe place or with a trusted person, such as: money, keys, bank cards, documents, clothes, toiletries, medication, phone
- ➔ Create signals/code words that will let your neighbours/family members know to create a supportive or defusing presence. For example, a turned-on porch light, drawn shade, or an "I can't call you on Thursday after all" phone call.
- ➔ Think about the types of essential services you may be in touch with during COVID-19 restrictions (such as teachers, doctors and other healthcare services, post office, supermarkets, community or religious leader) and how you can use them as part of your safety plan.

Immediate response

Do whatever you need to do to buy time and/or space, to defuse the situation, or to protect yourself and your children.

- ➔ If you sense trouble or find yourself in an argument, move if possible to a 'lower risk space': rooms with two exits and fewer things that can be used as weapons, where you can be seen or heard from the outside.
- ➔ Be aware of the safest room/s in the house - kitchens, bathrooms and garages are more dangerous than living rooms, dining rooms or bedrooms.

Caring for children

Depending on age and ability, develop a safety plan for the children so they know how to call for help or get to a place where they will be safer.

- ➔ Create signals and/or code words that will let your children know to get out and go to a pre-arranged place of safety.
- ➔ Teach your children their home address and when and how to call the police or a trusted adult.

De-escalation tips for people who may be experiencing domestic abuse

- ➔ **Awareness:** Try to notice when a situation is escalating. It may be easier to prevent a situation from getting worse than dealing with it once it is out of control.
- ➔ **Positioning:** Try to position yourself out of danger by using natural barriers in a room e.g couch. If it is safe, ask your partner to sit down as this can reduce agitation.
- ➔ **Body language:** Be attentive to body language, both yours and your partner's. Try to appear calm even if you are not. Look out for changes in your partner's breathing pattern, for clenched fists. Minimize the use of your hands and gestures.
- ➔ **Tone:** Try to lower your tone and speak slower. When scared we tend to use a high pitched voice and speak quickly.

What can you do if you think you might act in an abusive manner?

- ➔ **Know your triggers:** Do you have a need to be right or in control? Knowing what can set you off can help you to avoid a situation escalating. Perhaps tiredness is a trigger - if you and your partner tend to argue at night, try discussing topics during the day.
- ➔ **Find a project/alternative to stressors:** Options will be limited inside the home but try to find activities that relax you rather than irritate you. You might find exercise helps or yoga, meditation or just time alone.
- ➔ **Know the physiological signs:** You might notice your heart rate going up, that you are shaking, your palms are sweaty, that your body temperature is increasing etc. This would be a good time to stop the discussion or argument and find some way to cool down.
- ➔ **Get help:** reach out to professionals for counselling and support if you are having difficulty controlling your anger. Counselling is non-judgmental and will help you to find ways to understand and manage your emotions.
- ➔ **Avoidance:** Often avoidance can make a situation worse. However during confinement if a habit bothers you, try to avoid focusing on it. Rather than spending time thinking of it, try to remain calm and find ways to distract your attention to something else.

Sources:

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria Australia 2016
'Gathering Support' <https://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-publications/booklets/gathering-support-safety-women>
GBV AoR Global Protection Cluster - COVID-19 Outbreak & Gender - Advocacy brief re COVID-19 <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-help-a-victim-of-domestic-violence-66533>
APA <https://www.apa.org/topics/anger/control>
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