

Resources for victims of domestic violence and child abuse during COVID-19

While millions of people are spending time sheltering at home in close quarters, stress levels are heightened, and the rates of domestic violence and child abuse are rising. The uncertainty of the pandemic situation, combined with the disruption of normal routines, loss of employment and isolation from social supports, is leaving many people at risk for abuse.

Violence and abuse can happen to anyone—males or females, children, teens, adults, older adults or people with disabilities. Physical, verbal, or sexual abuse is not acceptable, regardless of the relationship. The victim is not to blame, no matter what happened.

After abuse starts, it usually gets worse if you don't take steps to stop it. If you are a victim of abuse, or you know someone who is, ask for help. This may be hard, but know that you are not alone. Your family, friends, community groups, employer, doctor, local police department, hospital or clinic can help you.

If you are in an abusive situation:

- Anytime you are in danger, **call 911**. Teach your children how to call for help, too.
- Connect on social media. Many people are offering help by using a code word, like "lipstick" or "mask" to communicate with and check in on victims. You'll know someone is looking out for you, even if it's someone you don't know well.
- If you need to leave your home but do not have a safe place to stay, tell someone and ask them to help you, or contact one of the resources listed below.
- Once you find a place to go, have a plan prepared for when you may need to quickly leave. Do not tell the abuser about your plan.

If you know someone who may be in an abusive situation:

- Tell them that abuse is not their fault and that no one deserves to be abused. Remind them that domestic violence and child abuse are against the law and that help is available. Be understanding if they are unable or unwilling to leave.
- Let them know that you are willing to listen whenever they want to talk. Encourage them to reach out to their doctor, church, local human services office or employer to see what resources might be available.
- Remember that social distancing doesn't have to mean emotional distancing. Use technology to do virtual check-ins and agree on a code word like described above. Look for signs of distress and serve as a reassuring, reliable presence. If you have concerns, report them to the police.
- Do things to ease the stress of this time. Small acts of support—whether in the form of giving someone food, toilet paper, coloring books or just an empathetic ear—can make a difference and ease their stress.
- If the person has children, gently point out that you are concerned that the violence is affecting them. Many people do not understand that their children are being harmed until someone else talks about this concern.

- If you suspect a child is being abused:
 - Offer to watch them for a few hours if you can. If your schedule and home life permit, help the child with at-home schooling. This helps remove them from a dangerous situation for a while and shows them someone cares.
 - Contact Child Protective Services about your suspicion. If you see abuse firsthand, call 911.

National hotlines

While in-person service availability at crisis centers has changed because of COVID-19, help is still available. Advocates who answer hotline calls can make referrals, provide information and help connect those in need with support services. The following national organizations can help you and your friend find resources in your area.

National Domestic Violence Hotline®

The Hotline is open 24/7 and has access to service providers and shelters across the United States. It provides lifesaving tools and immediate support to enable victims to find safety and live lives free of abuse.

- Call 1-800-799-7233 (TTY 1-800-787-3224).
- Visit www.thehotline.org.
- Text LOVEIS to 22522.

National Sexual Assault Hotline

Available 24/7 to talk with a trained staff member who can provide confidential crisis support.

- Call 1-800-656-HOPE (4673).
- Chat online at rainn.org.

National Parent Helpline

Provides parents and caregivers with emotional support and empowerment strategies to help families.

- Call 1-855-4-A-PARENT (1-855-427-2736).
- Visit www.nationalparenthelpline.org.

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

Dedicated to the prevention of child abuse. Staffed 24/7 with professional counselors who provide assistance in over 170 languages (via interpreters).

- Call 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
- Visit www.childhelp.org.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

Sources:

- *Domestic Abuse. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2020, from <https://www.healthwise.net/magellanhealth/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=dabus>*
- *Agrawal, N. (2020, April 7). The Coronavirus Could Cause a Child Abuse Epidemic. Retrieved April 9, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/opinion/coronavirus-child-abuse.html>*