

Information for services concerned about family violence risk during coronavirus (COVID-19) period

If someone is in immediate danger **call 000**

Why the likely increase or escalation of family violence risk?

Family violence is behaviour from someone in the family, including emotional abuse, financial abuse, physical or sexual violence, and increasing controlling behaviours, such as increased monitoring or restrictions to the victim's ability to communicate with friends or family.

Family violence risk is expected to increase for some people during the COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions.

You may already be aware that a service user is experiencing family violence, or you may see signs of risk during the COVID-19 period.

Be aware that any escalation or change in the frequency or severity of violence (i.e. the violence getting worse) is an important time to offer support.

Be aware that the person experiencing violence may have fear of police or services, related to their risk, previous experience, visa status, or for fear related to their children and parenting. Any person can ask for help to escape from violence, regardless of their circumstances, such as where they live or their visa. They do not need to provide their name or details to ask for help. Services will provide support to respond to family violence risk.

Children, young people and older people, people with health conditions, disability or additional communication needs are at increased risk during isolation, and from reduced access to supports.

Asking about family violence

It is safe to ask about family violence when:

- The person is alone, in a space where they cannot be heard by other people
- The person suspected of using violence is not aware of the conversation
- Children who are old enough to understand the conversation are not present
- An interpreter is used (who is not a community member)

If you are worried about someone and it is safe to do so, **you can ask:**

'how are things at home?' 'how are you finding the isolation?' 'are your family finding it stressful?' 'how are things with your partner [carer/adult children]?'

'are you unsafe or afraid?' 'has there been a time before or during the isolation period that you were very afraid? Has this changed during the isolation period?'

'do you have any immediate safety concerns for yourself, any children or family members in your care?'

If the answer to the above questions indicates family violence is occurring – **you can say:**

- You are **always allowed to leave your house if you are not safe.**
- You can **go to another area** of the flats complex and find help if you need to.
- You **won't get into trouble** or get a fine from police if you need to leave because of family violence.
- You can **ask for help from any worker** you can see at the flats or police person you talk to.
- We will call an interpreter to help if you need it, whatever your situation – it doesn't matter what visa you have or where you live. You don't have to give your name or personal details to get help.

What you can do: communicating with service users in isolation

When speaking with a service user that you are aware is experiencing family violence:

- **Contact help:** Call police on **000** for people at serious risk and requiring immediate protection. Identify a friend, family member or neighbour who can assist in an emergency, and how to make a plan with them to be a contact point – identify potential signals, codewords or other ways that the service user can communicate the need for police or other interventions.
- **Alert to increased risk:** Be alert for any increase in risk such as change or escalation in type of violence being used, increase in threats, increased level of fear or anything else you are concerned about.
- **Safe accommodation:** Talk to them about their options for safe accommodation during an isolation period. Talk to police on site, or **000** for assistance or if there is immediate risk. Consider if a friend or other family member could offer accommodation – or if they could go there if they are in danger. Safe accommodation services are available, such as refuges (see **safe steps** contact below). If the person tests positive for COVID-19, alternative accommodation is available.
- **Safety in the home:** If they decide to stay in the same location as the person using violence during isolation, they may need other ways to protect themselves and their children/anyone in their care. Consider calling a specialist family violence service for advice on planning for safety in the home, including planning for escape, if needed.
- **Safe communication:** Think about secure ways to communicate, such as using Whatsapp, Signal etc. Agree on a code word or signal to let you know they need help or **need you to call 000**.
- **Prepare for escape:** Support them to prepare a bag with essential items – such as money, keys, clothes, bank cards, driver's license, medication, birth certificates, passport and other important documents for them and their children. Consider offering to hold the bag for them if needed. Let them know they can go to another area of the building or flats to wait for help. They can ask any worker for help to escape violence.
- **System supports:** Ask if they have an Intervention Order or if one is needed. Consider if any intervention order needs to be amended, including exclusion of the perpetrator.

Ways that services can help

- **Call 000** if you believe they are at immediate risk. Consider asking for a police welfare check if you are concerned.
- Contact a specialist family violence service for advice on how to support the service user/client – they can assist with risk assessment and management – including determining if immediate intervention and coordinated responses are required.
- Refer the service user/client for specialist support if you believe they are an elevated or serious risk.
- Refer to the **MARAM Practice Guides** for further information and guidance.

There is information from police **about family violence** in a range of languages here:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpVg5dbr6bQ&list=PL76a1Le9-C8efc6c169_tpgkrFamI4_2U

There is information **about COVID-19** in a range of languages here:

- <https://www.multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-language-advice-and-information>

Key contacts: Statewide, after-hours services

Service	Contact number / operating hours	Purpose
In an emergency, call 000		
safe steps	1800 015 188 (24 hours a day, seven days a week)	For women and children who are victims of family violence and information about refuge and secure accommodation
VACCA	(03) 9287 8800 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)	Family Violence Case Management Program. For Aboriginal women, young people and children who have experienced family violence

Djirra	1800 105 303 (9am-9pm, Monday-Friday)	For all Aboriginal women and people who are currently experiencing family violence or have in the past
InTouch	1800 755 988 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)	Family violence services for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, their families and their communities
TIS (Interpreter services)	131 450 (24/7)	Ask for an interpreter with the language needed - the operator will connect you
Victims of Crime Helpline	1800 819 817 or text 0427 767 891 (8am to 11pm every day)	For adult male victims of family violence and victims of violent crime
Child Protection	13 12 78 (5pm to 9am Monday to Friday, 24 hrs on weekends and public holidays)	For children and young people whose safety is at risk
Sexual Assault Crisis Line	1800 806 292 (24 hours a day, seven days a week)	For victims of sexual assault
Men's Referral Service	1300 766 491 (8am to 9pm Monday to Friday; 9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday)	For men using controlling behaviour For women seeking information For family or colleagues of people who are using or experiencing family violence
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)	A free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 25
w/respect	1800 542 847 (5pm to 11pm each Wednesday and 10 am to 10pm on Saturday and Sunday)	A specialist LGBTIQ family violence service
MensLine Australia	1300 78 99 78 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)	Telephone and online counselling service for men with family and relationship concerns