



Amber Womens Refuge- Practical Advice Staying Safe During COVID-19

For many survivors, staying home may not be the safest option. We know that any external factors that add stress and financial strain can negatively impact survivors and create circumstances where their safety is further compromised.

Abuse is about power and control. When survivors are forced to stay in the home or near their abuser more frequently, an abuser can use any tool to exert control over their victim, including a national health concern such as COVID-19. In a time where companies may be encouraging that their employees work remotely, and the CDC is encouraging social distancing an abuser may take advantage of an already stressful situation to gain more control.

Here's how COVID-19 could uniquely impact intimate partner violence survivors:

- Abusive partners may withhold necessary items, such as hand sanitizer or disinfectants.
- Abusive partners may share misinformation about the pandemic to control or frighten survivors, or to prevent them from seeking appropriate medical attention if they have symptoms.
- Abusive partners may withhold, food, money, threaten to cancel insurance, or prevent survivors from seeking medical attention if they need it.
- Services that serve survivors may be significantly impacted — refuges may be full or may even stop intakes altogether. Survivors may also fear entering refuges because of being in close quarters with groups of people.
- Survivors who are older or have chronic heart or lung conditions may be at increased risk in public places where they would typically get support, like refuges, counselling centres, or courthouses.
- Travel restrictions may impact a survivor's escape or safety plan – it may not be safe for them to travel, use public transportation.
- An abusive partner may feel more justified and escalate their isolation tactics.

How can you help someone that you know is experiencing Domestic abuse at home?

Ask her specific questions about how she is coping and about her homelife. Remember to be careful if she is living with the abuser or others could be listening into the conversation they might report back to the abuser. Ask her if she can talk can she go to a place in the house that she cannot be heard, that she is safe to talk, or is there a time he leaves the house so she can talk without being heard. Respect her right not to talk to you about personal matters in which case, talk to her about something entirely different but tell her she can call you and that you are there for her.

Checking levels of risk and safety with the woman is important -you can ask her if she is scared or fearful of the abuser and ask her why, explore that with her in more detail. If she feels she needs to get out of the house urgently or soon, perhaps the situation is escalating or danger/risk has increased or is imminent, having a plan to leave is important. Exploring this with a professional is best, however some important things to consider for a woman leaving are, when and how is she going to leave, will she need help to leave and from who, for example will she accept help from the gardai, and where will she stay, will she be safe.

Domestic abuse services around the county are still supporting women, we can explore personal safety and a safety plan with a woman, if she is willing to call or receive a call. A staff member at the refuge or through Outreach service can speak to the women and talk through her options.

Emergency refuge accommodation is available around the country. All refuges are following protocols and policies to protect and prevent Covid-19, Amber Women's Refuge has a Covid-19 policy regarding admissions to the refuge ensuring the health and safety of all clients, the policy will be discussed thoroughly with the women before she is admitted. There are other services available to women such as our outreach workers are available to support women in the community over the phone.

Create 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 leave. Here at Amber, we can safety plan with victims, friends, family members, and anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of someone else. Having a safety plan laid out can help you to protect yourself during this stressful time. You can learn more about safety plans on the link at the end of this page.

If you're a friend, family, colleague or professional working with someone experiencing abuse, you may not be able to visit them in person while there are restrictions in place. Seeing someone you care about being hurt is stressful. Remind yourself that you can't make decisions for someone else, but you can encourage that person to think about their wellbeing, safety plan and practice self-care while they are in their home.

Try to:

- ❖ Reassure her that these are very challenging and difficult times and she is doing her best
- ❖ Try to focus on what she is doing that is helping her cope with the situation
- ❖ Talk through any of her concerns or what is worrying her, let her talk through them with you
- ❖ Signpost or refer to other services that can assist her

You can also:

- ❖ Give her opportunities to open up and talk to you. Use open-ended questions like, "I notice you seem/sound quite down, are you okay?" if she is not ready to talk, try again. Let her know that you are there if she needs support.
- ❖ Do not judge her, just try to listen carefully and fully
- ❖ Believe what she tells you – too often people do not believe a woman when she first discloses abuse
- ❖ Reassure her that the abuse is not her fault and that you are there for her
- ❖ Don't tell her to leave or criticise her for staying. Although you may want her to leave, she must make that decision in her own time. It is important to remember that research shows an abused woman is at most risk at the point of separation and immediately after leaving an abusive partner
- ❖ Leaving takes a great deal of strength and courage. An abused woman often faces huge obstacles such as nowhere to go, no money and no-one to turn to for support
- ❖ Focus on supporting her and building her self-confidence
- ❖ Acknowledge her strengths and frequently remind her that she is coping well with a challenging and stressful situation
- ❖ An abused woman is often very isolated and has no meaningful support – help her to develop or to keep up her outside contacts (on-line) like Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype. This can help to boost her self-esteem.
- ❖ If she has not spoken to anyone else, encourage her to seek the help of a local domestic violence agency that understands what she is going through and offers specialist support and advice
- ❖ Be patient. It can take time for a woman to recognise she is being abused and even longer to take be able to take safe and permanent decisions about what to do. Recognising the problem is an important first step.

Practice self-care.

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty for many people but getting through this time while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming. Taking time for your health and wellness can make a big difference in how you feel.

Many women are trying to cocoon or practice social distancing, alone or with their families, trying to keep some sort of routine which is very challenging. Encouraging a woman to take a few steps can seem obvious but can help with stressful situations, even small steps each day, like getting daily exercise, walk with the children, learn a new hobby, practice some free online yoga and relaxation, getting out in the garden, cooking, trying a free online course. It can be very difficult for a woman living with an abuser to have the motivation to try new things or get jobs done. Even if you can encourage one small step a day to help how they feel this can help. Minding your mental health, eating well and getting adequate sleep is important.

A woman living with an abuser at this time may decide to stay at home and not leave the situation, she might take some action or decide to get an order or leave when the restrictions are lifted or reduced. Staying in regular contact is a good way to support the person. Remember a woman can still apply for a court order for her protection and safety at home. If there is a serious risk to her and the children, she can apply for an interim-barring order whereby he will be asked to leave the home. It is important that women are supported to stay at home with their children and the abusive person leaves or seeks alternative accommodation rather than uprooting the whole family.

Helping a woman and her children to keep safe

A woman's safety and the safety of her children is paramount. Talk to her about how she and her children can keep safe. Help her to stay safe: Agree a code word or action that is only known to her and the children, so she can signal when she is in danger and cannot access help herself. Don't make plans for her yourself, but encourage her to think about her safety more closely and focus on her own needs rather than his

Contacting a woman living with an abusive partner too often can lead to her being further victimized for receiving calls, this is something to be aware of at this time. A woman might prefer to contact you or text and email you. It is important to encourage and support a woman to call the gardai immediately if she is in danger. When you have a chance talk though the woman's concerns about calling the gardai.

If you are in IMMEDIATE danger, please contact the Gardaí on 999 or 112.

If a woman has no phone coverage or access to a phone, she could try to get a message to a trusted neighbour; give them a note in the letterbox, or the person delivering the post to help her. A person can still follow the social distancing regulations. Similarly, if a woman has a trusted family member or a friend dropping groceries to the doorstep, she could leave a note in the bag or agree a code word only you both would understand to help her. Always keep yourself safe. Do not confront her partner. This could put her at real risk (and may also pose a risk for you) as her partner could become more violent if he thinks she has told someone about the abuse. Often the abuser is watching her, listening, and monitoring her.

Court Orders

The courts remain open for urgent family law issues and will prioritise domestic violence applications. There are **NO** restrictions on domestic violence applications, and you can attend court for domestic violence court orders. Remedies available under the Domestic Violence Act 2018 include the following court orders: Barring Order, Safety Order, Protection Order, Interim Barring Order, Emergency Barring Order. New applications can be made for barring, safety and protection orders at this time. You can also apply for interim barring and emergency barring orders and return hearings of interim barring order cases will also be heard. If safety order hearings are being adjourned, interim

protective orders will be extended to the new date. In the event of the breach of an existing domestic violence court order please contact the Gardai on **999**. If you need support, there is a domestic violence support service in every county. Visit [Safe Ireland](#) for details. Many of the domestic abuse services have court accompaniment workers that are working remotely but continuing to provide support in going to court with information and organising the court papers and services to expect the client. They can then be supported over the phone. For more information on court orders see the link below.

Find out information about local services for her could be helpful, just remember if she is living with the abuse, he might be checking her phone.

Suggesting that she keeps a spare set of house/car keys or important documents, such as passports, benefit books, birth certs, medication and so on in a safe place that he won't find them so that she can access them quickly in an emergency. Encourage her to think of ways in which she can increase the safety of her children. Remember that it isn't children's responsibility to protect their mother. In an emergency they could call for help from the police, go to a neighbor, or a relative or someone they trust. There are no any travel restrictions on a person fleeing domestic abuse.

Reach out for help

While people are encouraged to stay at home, you may feel isolated from your friends and family. Even if you are isolated, try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so, and try to stick to your daily routines as much as possible.

For any victims and survivors who need support, there are several services open around the country can be contacted on the phone or by email. If you live in Kilkenny Amber is here to help you on our **24/7 helpline number 1850 4242 44**. You can email us on info@amberwomensrefuge.ie and we will get back to you if you leave any important information like a phone number and maybe a good time to call back. You will find other services nationwide on the link below.

Useful Resources

List of Domestic abuse services nationwide [Safe Ireland](#)

Technology safety: <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors>

Self-Care guide for women during COVID- 19 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Je-9JTlpBSWx9jcObU3jjsd7773XSNSv/view>

Court orders & other domestic abuse resources <https://www.ucc.ie/en/covid19familylaw/>

Safety planning <https://www.copegalway.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Staying-Safe-Getting-Out-Domestic-Abuse-Leaflet.pdf>

If you are worried about someone you know and need advice on how to safely help her, contact our confidential helpline on 1850 424 244