



Domestic Abuse & Covid-19 **Frequently asked questions**

Many people who are living with domestic abuse face additional concerns as the Covid-19 lockdown takes effect. Here are some of the questions we have recently been asked by survivors.

Will the police still come out if I report domestic abuse?

If you are at risk of serious harm or if you fear your partner and what they might do, you should always call 999.

It is understandable that you might be worried about the Police's response during this crisis. Every organisation is having to adapt to the changing circumstances; it is possible that there could be a delay to their response, but they have assured the public that they will attend domestic abuse incidents.

In many Police forces, an officer will attend the incident and then this will be followed up by a Domestic Abuse Officer. In some areas these officers may now be using phone calls rather than face to face appointments to follow up with victims of crime.

If you've called 999 but are unable to speak, you can cough or dial 55 once the call is connected and operators are trained to know this means you need assistance.

If you would like to talk to the Police and it isn't an emergency dial 101.

If I need to leave, where can I go in a hurry?

Even though the country is in lockdown you can still leave your property if you need to do so because of abuse or violence. If you are planning to leave you can talk to IDAS, another local service or the national domestic abuse helpline about refuge and emergency accommodation.

It may be more difficult during this time to access a refuge space so please think about where else you might stay if you need to leave. Are there friends or family members you could stay with?

Local housing departments also have a duty to help anyone escaping domestic abuse find support and accommodation and are still operating via telephone. Please be aware that you will be asked questions about your health on assessment for a space at a refuge so that workers can make safe judgments.

Before you leave, it is a good idea to have a plan for how you might get out of the house and to a safe place if you needed to.

This may involve having a small bag packed with essentials such as:

- Spare cash,
- Credit card,
- Car keys,
- ID documents,
- Children's birth certificates,
- List of contact telephone numbers,
- Spare phone,
- Medications.

You may have already put these items in a safe place, perhaps at someone else's house. Going to someone's home in a hurry may be tricky under the circumstances. If you are able to leave and someone else has your belongings, you could ask them to leave these in a safe place outside of the home, in a garden shed or other place where parcels might be left.

If the police stop you, it is likely they will want to know what you are doing. Likewise, neighbours and other people who are not usually at home may notice if you are leaving the home.

Can I access support during this time?

IDAS and many other specialist agencies are still available to support survivors of domestic abuse or sexual violence. Our helpline continues to be available in addition to Live Chat on our website; you can also email info@idas.org.uk if you have a query. If you have a worker already assigned to you, then they will have spoken to you about how to continue their support, if it is safe to do so. We may have spoken to you about a code word or phrase to say to indicate if it isn't a safe time to speak. If you can take phone calls, we will be arranging support calls during this time to ensure you can still check in and discuss any concerns you may have. We can also look at other options for support including video calls, messaging services and emails. We'll work with you to offer support in a safe way.

How can I keep myself safe whilst I am self-isolating with my abusive partner?

We have developed a safety plan that you can work through with someone from a specialist agency, by yourself or with a trusted friend or family member. Some things that you may want to think about are:

- **Set up supportive networks** who can check-in on you to make sure that you are safe. This could include agencies that are supporting you, friends, family, colleagues or neighbours. If you don't feel that you have anyone, local councils are setting up groups of volunteers who might be able to help. You could also use trips to the supermarket or pharmacy as an opportunity to let someone know that you don't feel safe at home.
- **Try to find time to spend away from the abusive person.** This could be taking your daily exercise, spending time in a different room, in the garden, or with your headphones on. A routine might help you to factor in this time.
- **Think about whether the abusive person could be monitoring your communications.** Log out of social media after use, change passwords regularly and turn off notifications and message displays. Talk to the people in your supportive network about discrete ways that they can check how you are doing.
- If you are at risk of harm you may need to think about how you can **get to the safest room in the house or get out the house safely and raise the alarm.**

- During this uncertain time, you can try to **calm situations down** and move away from situations into safer rooms.
- You will know what antagonises your partner, **consider what you can change at home to cope** with the restrictions on your movements and what would potentially escalate any unhealthy behaviours from your partner.
- Where possible **prepare for someone being ill** so that they can be as far away from other members of the family as possible and be as comfortable as possible. You may need to think about what would happen if you were ill and how you would keep the children safe in this situation.
- **If you are at serious risk of harm call the Police on 999**

Can I obtain a civil Order during the Coronavirus Outbreak?

It is still possible to obtain a civil order, such as a non-molestation order or an occupation order. The Courts are working differently to adapt to the rapidly changing situation. The courts and tribunal service provide the following information:

“During this unprecedented public health emergency, it’s essential that our courts and tribunals continue to administer justice. We’re adjusting practices and taking steps to minimise any risk to the judiciary, staff, professional and public users, including justice partners. Any changes to individual hearings will be communicated directly to those affected, usually by email and/or phone.

“We have put in place arrangements to use telephone, video and other technology to continue as many hearings as possible remotely. We will make best possible use of the equipment currently available; and are working nonstop to update and add to that. Some hearings, the most obvious being jury trials, cannot be conducted remotely.”

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation>

To obtain an order, you should first contact a local solicitor who can advise you on whether you can obtain legal aid. The solicitor will also be able to provide information on how hearings are being arranged at your local court.

For more general information you can visit our [family court website](#). Please note that this website may have some information that has not been updated to reflect the latest government guidance. Please refer to the latest guidance.

You could also try <https://www.flows.org.uk/>

I am due to attend court. Will the trial still go ahead?

If your case is due to go to court this will be a very difficult time for you already. The added uncertainty caused by the current crisis will likely make you feel even more unsettled. To find out more about the arrangements for your case, you can contact the court. All courts are having to adapt their ways of working. You should receive notification of changes to the arrangements. In line with the latest government guidance on social distancing, many courts are moving to telephone, video and other methods for trials and hearings.

On the 27th of March, the person who oversees criminal courts, the Lord Chief Justice suspended all new Jury trials. [Find out more here.](#)

“We have put in place arrangements to use telephone, video and other technology to continue as many hearings as possible remotely. We will make best possible use of the equipment currently available; HMCTS is working round the clock to update and add to that. Some hearings, the most obvious being jury trials, cannot be conducted remotely.

“I have decided that we need to pause jury trials for a short time to enable appropriate precautions to be put in place.”

[You](#) can also find further information here.

Can my children still go and stay with my ex-partner during the Coronavirus outbreak?

Everyone must stay up to date with government “Stay at Home” guidance. It is understandable that in these circumstances you may feel anxious about allowing your child to move between households but, if you have child contact arrangements in place, there is an agreement that these should remain the same wherever possible.

Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice has offered advice on a general level as a guide- [Coronavirus Crisis: Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders](#). The “Stay at home guidance” given on the 23rd of March 2020 gives a caveat of **“Where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents’ homes.”**

Andrew states *“This establishes an exception to the mandatory ‘stay at home’ requirement; it does not, however, mean that children **must** be moved between homes. The decision whether a child is to move between parental homes is for the child’s parents to make after a sensible assessment of the circumstances, including the child’s present health, the risk of infection and the presence of any recognised vulnerable individuals in one household or the other.”*

A charity called Rights of Women have also provided some information to assist with this including the following to consider:

- If you normally travel by public transport to get to handover, can either you or the other parent drive instead?
- If contact arrangements involve a high frequency of travel between households, is there a different way of arranging contact to reduce the amount of time spent out of the house?
- If you are worried about the other parent not complying with the guidance, have you told them this and sent them information about staying at home, hand washing, etc?
- If you have access to technology, have you explored the different ways in which the child and other parent can communicate with each other?

I am worried that my abusive ex-partner will use the Coronavirus outbreak to keep the children and not send them home. What should I do?

This is a worrying time and it is normal to feel anxious about your child and how to keep them safe. The pandemic isn’t necessarily a reason to vary contact arrangements unless it is necessary to do so to comply with government and PHE guidance. There are some reasons why it might be sensible to agree a way to amend the arrangements. However, stopping contact without good reasons is unlikely to be looked upon favourably by the courts.

It may help to carefully consider what arrangements would be reasonable to take account of the most up to date government guidance. For example, it would be reasonable to agree that a child

should not move from a household where no one has symptoms into a house where someone has symptoms and should be self-isolating with other members of the household. Equally, if someone develops symptoms, everyone in that house at the time should self-isolate together in line with government guidance. Whilst this would be reasonable, an abusive person may use this as an opportunity to control the situation and vary contact arrangements.

If it is safe to do so, you may wish to communicate about suggested options to reduce travel between houses, use of public transport etc. If there is a vulnerable person in one of the households this may also need to be considered. If you can reach an agreement in advance of contact taking place this may reduce the possibility that your ex-partner will take advantage of the situation. Having this in writing may also be helpful should you need to go to court later.

If you are unable to communicate safely you may need to seek legal advice. If possible, try to do this before contact is due to take place.

The following websites may also have some helpful information and resources.

[CAFCASS – Child and Family Court Advisory Service](#)
[Rights of Women](#)

What happens if I or my child develop symptoms of Coronavirus when they are due to go to stay with my ex-partner?

It's helpful to know what the symptoms are and to seek advice if necessary. The NHS Covid symptom checker provides guidance and can also provide a note for work: <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>

Government guidance is clear that if anyone has symptoms, they should self-isolate along with everyone in the household.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

It is important to keep up to date with the latest government guidance.

It may help to carefully consider what arrangements would be reasonable to take account of the most up to date government guidance and to manage a parent or child becoming unwell. For example, it would be reasonable to agree that a child should not move from a household where no one has symptoms into a house where someone has symptoms and should be self-isolating with other members of the household. Equally, if someone develops symptoms, everyone in that house at the time should self-isolate together in line with government guidance.

If you do need to alter the arrangements, you can try to find other safe ways to keep in contact. Your safety and the safety of your children is paramount. Make sure that you are happy with the form of communication suggested and have considered how this could impact on your safety.

I am worried about child maintenance payments as my ex is self-employed and not working. What can I do?

Many people are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Child Maintenance payments are classed as priority payments so these should not be stopped without a genuine change to the persons income that is registered with the Child Maintenance Service.

In circumstances where Paying Parents have registered financial difficulties due to coronavirus, CMS officers have advised that no action will be taken where payments are missed or not in full.

You may find the information on the Citizens Advice website helpful.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/children-and-young-people/child-maintenance/child-maintenance-where-to-start/>