

Guidance

Coronavirus (Covid-19) - Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse

This guidance is for those who are affected by domestic abuse, setting out the services that are available for help and support. It may also be helpful to those who are concerned about someone else (such as a friend, family member or a neighbour) that may be suffering from domestic abuse. Those affected by domestic abuse are not alone, support is available.

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Introduction

We are conscious of the impact Covid-19 is having on victims of domestic abuse (including domestic violence) and their greater vulnerability, given the current government restrictions on staying at home and self-isolation. It is important that those suffering from abuse, violence or a threat of violence in their home reach out and seek help.

Steps have been taken to ensure that support, advice and accommodation remain available as needed, and we are actively seeking to raise awareness of the support and help available to victims. Media campaigns have been re-launched by the Department of Justice and PSNI i.e. 'See the Signs' and 'Behind Closed doors' and information provided on the 24-hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline, all to raise awareness of the issue of domestic abuse and to reassure those suffering from this that help remains available.

The courts, whose services have been severely impacted by the pandemic, continue to offer emergency applications through their Family Proceedings courts, to include Non-molestation Orders and Restraining Orders etc.

Anyone can become a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ability, sexual orientation or ethnicity and the safety and well-being of everyone who is at risk of experiencing domestic abuse is a priority for us. Anyone who is suffering domestic abuse or is fearful for themselves or others will be supported by key organisations throughout Northern Ireland during the Covid-19 outbreak.

People's day to day lives have changed drastically, we are all staying home as much as possible to help save lives and protect the health service, but we acknowledge home is not always a safe place, especially for those men, women and children experiencing, or at risk of, domestic abuse.

For anyone who feels they are at risk of domestic abuse, the order to stay at home will have increased their anxiety and fears and we want to assure everyone in this position they are not alone, and that support continues to be available 24/7, including police response, online support, helplines, refuges, emergency accommodation and other services, during this pandemic.

As reported in the media, there has been an increase in calls to the police, as well as the 24hr Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline, concerning domestic abuse during the period of restrictions on movement within Northern Ireland. There is also the concern that there may be even more incidents not being reported. The police would encourage anyone experiencing any form of domestic abuse to get in touch with them or one of the specialist organisations, many of which are listed below.

There is never an excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what the circumstances are, and help and support is available.

The household isolation instruction introduced as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak does not apply if someone needs to leave their home to escape domestic abuse.

The support of family, friends, neighbours and community groups can be a vital lifeline to those living with domestic abuse. Those who are worried that someone they know may be a victim or at risk of domestic abuse should reassure them that the police and support services are still there to help and direct them to sources of support.

The government supports and funds several charities and organisations who can provide advice and guidance and we remain in regular contact with them during this challenging time to ensure they have the support needed to deliver their vital services.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined as any violent behaviour within a family or relationship, as well as emotional abuse. This would apply to relationships between a couple or one family member abusing another.

It is important to remember that someone does not have to be physically harmed (pushed, hit, punched, kicked, choked etc.) to be abused. Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- coercive control and 'gaslighting' – (gaslighting occurs when an abuser manipulates information in such a way as to make their victim question their sanity)
- financial/economic abuse
- online/digital abuse
- verbal abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- honour based violence and forced marriage

Legislation is being taken forward in Northern Ireland to ensure that these types of domestic abuse will be illegal.

What signs to look for?

There are often signs that someone is a victim of domestic abuse. These include the individual:

- being withdrawn
- having bruises or unexplained/frequent injuries
- having heightened anxiety or fearfulness
- having their finances controlled
- not being allowed to leave the house
- having their technology use, such as social media platforms, monitored.

Friends and family should be aware that physical injuries may not always be visible.

Where to get help

It is important that those who are being abused, or are worried that they may commit domestic abuse, tell someone. The police will take this seriously and should be the first port of call for those who feel confident enough to speak to them. They can be contacted as set out below.

Boots pharmacies, throughout Northern Ireland, now offer a *safe space* for people living with domestic abuse. Those needing help can ask staff at their counters to use the consultation room and from there they will be able to contact services for help and advice.

Those who suspect that a friend, neighbour or someone in their community is a victim of domestic abuse should report suspicions to the police. This may save someone's life or prevent serious harm occurring.

The Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI)

The PSNI are there to help anyone suffering domestic abuse and they are committed to bringing offenders to justice. They work closely with partner organisations to provide help, support and guidance to those in need.

They are particularly conscious of the impact Covid-19 is having on victims of domestic abuse and have been proactive in leading a multi-agency proactive operational response, in collaboration with the Department of Justice, Health and Communities and key voluntary sector partners; to keep all partners informed and ensure a joined-up approach to preventing harm and provision of support. Accommodation has been a key focus and much valuable work has been progressed e.g. three 'Crash pads' have been established by Women's Aid NI for the highest risk victims.

In an emergency

If someone is in **immediate danger** or feels threatened, or knows somebody else who is in immediate danger or feels threatened, they should **call 999** (18000 for text phone users) and ask for the police. During the COVID-19 restrictions, the police continue to respond to emergency calls.

If a victim is in danger, but unable to talk on the phone, they should dial 999 and listen to the instructions. PSNI have a **Silent Solutions** system which enables a 999 mobile caller who is too scared to make a noise, or speak, to press 55 when prompted – to inform police they are in an emergency situation.

Non-emergency

Anyone needing assistance or advice concerning domestic abuse in a non-emergency situation can call the PSNI on **101** or call into their local police station. They can also contact the police online.

For further information:



www.psni.police.uk/crime/domestic-abuse/what-can-i-do/

The Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline

The Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline is a freephone confidential service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week across Northern Ireland. It will provide support in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

The Helpline is funded by three government departments – Health, Justice and Communities and offers support, help, information and referral to victims, as well as to concerned friends, family and professionals. It is specifically for domestic and sexual abuse and will refer those presenting with other issues to appropriate services. Those callers from outside Northern Ireland will be directed to other regional support services.

Contact the 24 hour Domestic & Sexual Abuse helpline for support on:



0808 802 1414 (Freephone)



help@dsahelpline.org



www.dsahelpline.org (web chat)

If necessary assistance can be provided in alternative languages.

It is safe to make a call to the helpline from a landline as the number is not traceable by dialling 1471 and the number will not show up on a phone bill. No one will therefore know the call was made.

Victim Support NI

Victim Support NI is an independent charity which helps people affected by crime. They offer a free and confidential service, whether or not a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place.

During the COVID-19 outbreak their physical offices are closed, but they are still open for business and offering support services.

Victim Support NI believes that with support and help, survivors of domestic abuse can be empowered to move on from the impact of abuse. They don't just help men and women who've recently experienced domestic abuse, they will provide support and advice months or even years afterwards. This includes support during any criminal proceedings, through Victim Support NI's Witness Service, which supports victims through the court process; or if someone has been injured as a result of a crime, offers support to submit a criminal injury compensation claim to the Compensation Services.

They also offer specialist advocacy support in relation to sexual violence. Their Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) can support someone to report a crime to the police and through the criminal justice process.

Their services are all confidential, free and available to anyone who has experienced domestic abuse. They can help, regardless of whether the police or anyone else has been told about the abuse and the support they offer will be tailored to an individual's specific needs.

Victim Support NI can be contacted on:

02890 243133 or 02871 370086. Or via Live Chat (9am – 5pm)
on www.victimsupportni.com/about-us/contact-us/ and clicking on the 'chat' icon.



belfast@victimsupportni.org.uk or foyle@victimsupportni.org.uk



www.victimsupportni.com/help-for-victims/domestic-violence/

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is a voluntary organisation addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. It is made up of nine local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse.

Women's Aid services remain open across Northern Ireland, although they are having to operate differently during the Covid-19 restrictions. Their nine local groups continue to provide emergency accommodation and outreach support services to women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse throughout Northern Ireland.

If someone is looking for help and support from Women's Aid they can find details of their local organisation, including how to contact them at www.womensaidni.org/get-help/local-groups/

Women's Aid Federation can be contacted on:



02890 249041



info@womensaidni.org (E-mails sent to this address are **not** confidential)



www.womensaidni.org

Nexus NI

Nexus NI offer services and support to people who have been affected by sexual abuse in any form, and their services are delivered across Northern Ireland. They provide counselling in 38 locations locally, deliver and support education and training programmes and manage the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline.

While Covid-19 has led to a change in how Nexus NI deliver their services, as most of their staff are now working remotely, they are still open for business. From 23 March 2020 all of their counsellors have offered telephone and online counselling to their clients instead of face-to-face counselling. Updates regarding their services can be found on their Facebook page and Twitter feed.

The Nexus Admin team (queries) can be contacted on:



02890 326803 or e-mail info@nexusni.org

The [Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline](#) operates 24/7 and can provide information and support via phone, email and webchat. The Helpline can be contacted in the following ways:

Call 0808 802 1414, or e-mail help@dsahelpline.org or visit www.dsahelpline.org

The Men's Advisory Project NI (MAP NI)

MAP NI provides support, guidance and counselling services for men experiencing domestic abuse or men who have previously left a violent or abusive relationship and who are still experiencing its effects. Their services are offered across Northern Ireland from various bases. They will provide information and signpost to other organisations (voluntary, community and statutory) that can help.

They also offer a range of services, to both men and women, who want assistance and support in dealing with their anger. The anger management services can be delivered through one-to-one counselling or via an anger management group programme.

MAP NI continue to offer their services during the COVID-19 restrictions and have secured additional emergency accommodation with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, to support male victims of domestic abuse during the pandemic. MAP can be contacted on:



Belfast 02890 241929, Foyle 028 71160001



info@mapni.co.uk



www.mapni.co.uk

Men's Action Network (MAN)

Men's Action Network supports and promotes the health and well-being of men offering services within the greater Western Trust Area and now securely online throughout NI. MAN offer counselling, support, benefits advice, advocacy and additionally a range of services addressing men's health and wellbeing education and promotion.

As an integral part of our service delivery (MAN) provides a specialist counselling helpline and specialist counselling for male victims of domestic, sexual and coercive behaviour.

Available weekdays, 9am to 4pm. **02871 226530**

MAN also offer an early intervention behavioural change program which includes anger awareness and individual counselling sessions for men who recognise and are willing to take responsibly for behaviour which is in the very early stages of becoming abusive. *(Not open to any man who has a current or pending conviction for any form of abusive behaviour against a partner or child)*

MAN can be contacted on:

 02871 377777

 admin@man-ni.org

 www.man-ni.org/

Twitter @man_in_derry FB : Men's Action Network text: 07544802916

The Rainbow Project NI

The Rainbow Project works to improve the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people in Northern Ireland. They have two centres, in Belfast and Foyle.

Domestic abuse in any relationship is wrong. Someone who is gay, lesbian or transgender may feel more vulnerable or be afraid about disclosing abusive behaviour in their relationship because they are worried they will not be taken seriously. Intimate family members are capable of this abuse as well as intimate partners. The abuse may be physical or be emotional and controlling. It may involve using someone's sexual orientation, gender identity and relationship as a weapon.

Rainbow Project NI has put in place an advocacy service which offers support in total confidence and which can provide information about other support services available.

Rainbow Project NI can be contacted on:

 Belfast: 02890 319030, Foyle: 02871 283030

 info@rainbow-project.org

 www.rainbow-project.org/abuse

Cara-Friend

Cara-Friend has been serving the LGBTQ+ community in Northern Ireland for over 40 years, providing regional LGBTQ+ youth groups, one-to-one support, awareness training for professionals and volunteers, community development, the LGBT Switchboard and the LGBTQ+ inclusive schools programme.

Although offices are currently closed, due to the coronavirus pandemic, their team are working from home and can be contacted by email. All services are confidential. Cara-Friend can be contacted on:



admin@cara-friend.org.uk



www.cara-friend.org.uk/



If someone is in distress or needs help or support out of hours, call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.

HERE NI

HERE NI is a community organisation and registered charity based in Belfast. They support lesbian and bisexual women and their families in many ways such as providing information, peer support, training facilitation and offering a community space for meeting. HERE NI can be contacted on:



02890 249452



tracey.mcdowell@hereni.org



www.here875008472.wordpress.com/

Relate NI

Relate NI provides a service to individuals, couples or families experiencing violence or abuse in their relationships. They offer services or interventions as part of an ongoing assessment, as a series of counselling sessions or programmes delivered to individuals.

Relate has increased availability of their trained counsellors to support relationships and in addition they have developed specific advice and guidance for couples and families to help them maintain healthy relationships during self-isolation, social distancing and in dealing with other concerns they may during the Covid-19 pandemic. Relate NI can be contacted on:



028 90323454



office@relateni.org



www.relateni.org/domestic_violence_and_abuse_services

Chayn

This is a global volunteer network addressing gender-based violence, by creating and providing resources online. It aims to help women experiencing abuse find the right information and support they need to take control of their lives. It identifies manipulative situations and how friends can support those being abused.

The on-line help and resources are provided in a number of languages and their website can be viewed at:



www.chayn.co

Sexual Assault Referral Centre – The Rowan

The Rowan is the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Northern Ireland. It is jointly funded by the Department of Health and the PSNI. It delivers a range of support and services, 24-hours each day to children, young people, men and women who have been sexually abused, assaulted or raped – whether this happened in the past or more recently.

There are a number of ways someone can access help and support from The Rowan:



The Rowan can be accessed through the police. If someone has been sexually assaulted, they can report this to the police directly by telephoning 999 or 101. They will arrange for them to visit The Rowan to discuss and receive the support and services they need.



Contact The Rowan directly, without any police involvement, by telephoning 0800 389 4424 (freephone from landlines). A friend or family member or any professional or support worker can be asked to make that first call on their behalf.



www.therowan.net

Children and Young People

Witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse can have a serious impact on a child's long-term health and it is a top priority for us that vulnerable children and young people remain safe during Covid-19 restrictions. If someone is concerned that a child is at risk of harm they should inform Children's Social Care or contact the police, if they believe the child is in immediate danger, by ringing 999.

To contact Children's Social Care for Northern Ireland, ring the Gateway Service teams, *for the area where the child lives*, their contact details are available using the following link: [Gateway Service Teams contact details](#).

-  028 9504 9999 Out of Hours Regional Number
-  028 9050 7000 Belfast Health & Social Care Trust Gateway
(out of hours 028 9056 5444)
-  0300 1234 333 Northern Health & Social Care Trust
-  0800 7837 745 Southern Health & Social Care Trust
-  0300 1000 300 South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust
(out of hours 028 9056 5444)
-  028 7131 4090 Western Health & Social Care Trust

NSPCC

The National Society for the Protection of Children (NSPCC) offers a free and confidential, 24-Hour, Helpline [NSPCC - Child protection helpline](#) for adults who are concerned about a child or young person.

It is available for anyone with concerns about a child and provides professional advice and support.

The NSPCC offer a Therapeutic Recovery Service to children and young people aged 4 - 17 years, who have experienced sexual abuse. Referral can be made through Social Services, The Rowan Centre, GPs, CAMHs or young people can self-refer. NSPCC can be contacted on:

 0808 800 5000

 help@nspcc.org.uk

 www.nspcc.org.uk/

Childline

[Childline](#) is available for children and young people to reach out for help and support by phone or using their online chat service. They also provide specific guidance for young people on how to get help and what to do if they are worried about a friend.

Childline can be contacted on:

 0800 1111

Barnardo's

[Barnardo's](#) provides support and protection to children, young people and families facing a wide range of issues, including sexual abuse and domestic abuse. Contact details for Barnardo's can be found at:



www.barnardos.org.uk

Support for older people

Domestic abuse can happen at any age, including old age. Some older people may not recognise their experiences as domestic abuse or may find it difficult to ask for help, especially if they are isolated and/or dependent on their abuser.

Age NI is the leading charity for older people in Northern Ireland. They provide a range of support, guidance and advice for people over 50. If someone is living with domestic abuse or is concerned for an older person who may be suffering domestic abuse, they can contact Age NI for advice and guidance. Age NI can be contacted on:

 0808 808 7575 (8am to 7pm, 365 days a year)

 advice@ageni.org



www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/

Hourglass Northern Ireland is part of the UK-wide organisation Hourglass, previously Action on Elder Abuse. It is the only charity in the UK working exclusively on challenging the abuse of older people in all its forms.

It supports those experiencing or at risk of harm, as well as raising awareness and advocating effective prevention of harm.

They recognise and are deeply concerned about the increased risk of abuse and neglect of older people during the widespread lockdown and self-isolation during efforts to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

If someone has concerns about themselves or an older person, they can call their helpline, 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Outside these hours, an email can be sent or a message left.

Hourglass can be contacted on:

 0808 808 8141

 enquiries@wearehourglass.org

 www.wearehourglass.org

Support for people with disabilities

1 in 5 people living in Northern Ireland has a disability (disabilities are not always visible). **Disability Action** are a Northern Ireland charity who work with people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory disabilities, hidden disabilities and mental health disabilities.

Their head office is in Belfast, with three regional offices in Londonderry/Derry, Dungannon and Carrickfergus. Support for people with disabilities can be contacted on:

 02890 297880

 hq@disabilityaction.org

 www.disabilityaction.org

Hearing loss

For those with hearing loss an emergency SMS service has been developed. Further information relation to this can be found through the below police link.

 www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/contact/emergency_sms.pdf

Housing Advice

Lots of people are struggling to manage with housing issues because of Coronavirus (Covid-19). Accommodation issues become even more urgent where there is a risk of domestic abuse within the home. Additional emergency accommodation has been made available to men, women and families during the pandemic.

General advice or guidance is available by contacting the organisations listed above, but if someone is seeking specific housing advice this can be accessed online by using the following link:



www.housingadviceni.org/coronavirus

Employers

It is important that employers signal to their workforces that if they are facing domestic abuse, help will be provided. Employers should keep in regular contact with employees they know, or fear, may be facing abuse. If an employer believes there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, they should always call 999.

Employers should encourage employees to look out for others who may be facing domestic abuse and signpost them to support. Employees may also be worried about their own abusive behaviour at this time. There is no excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what stresses someone may be under and support should be provided.

The [Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#) website has a range of resources to support employers. Business in the Community also have a [toolkit with information for employers](#).

The Department of Health and Department of Justice have published guidance on how employers can increase their awareness and respond more effectively to domestic and sexual violence and abuse. This guidance can be accessed by using the following link:

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/sites/default/files/Developing-a-Workplace-Policy-on-Domestic-and-Sexual-Violence.pdf

Support if you are worried about hurting someone

If someone is worried about hurting the ones they love while staying at home, they should speak to someone urgently. They can speak to a GP or they may wish to contact one of the organisations listed above.

They can also call the [Respect Phonenumber](#) **0808 802 4040** for support and help to manage their behaviour. This is an anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. It takes calls from partners or ex-partners, friends, and relatives who are concerned about perpetrators.