

Information for universal 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 risk is expected to increase for some people self-isolating and physical distancing.

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.

You may already be aware that a service user is experiencing family violence, or you may begin to 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 seek support.

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.

What you can do: communicating with service users in isolation

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

- **Safe accommodation:** Talk to them about their options for safe accommodation during an isolation period. Consider if a friend or other family member could offer accommodation during isolation – or if they could go there if they are in danger
- **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.
- **Continue communicating:** If you are worried about them 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?' '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?'
- **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.**
- **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.
- **Contact help:** Safe accommodation services are available for people at serious risk and requiring immediate protection, such as refuges (see safe steps contact below). 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.
- **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.
- **System supports:** Ask if they have an Intervention Order or if one is needed. Consider if any intervention order needs to be amended to plan for isolation, including exclusion of the perpetrator in advance of an isolation period commencing.

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.

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
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)	A telephone and online counselling service for men with family and relationship concerns