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## Guidance for providers during COVID-19

*This guidance has been produced by Standing Together with the support of the Chelsea and Westminster Trust, their co-located hospital IDVA service (provided by Victim Support, Advance and the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP))*

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological (including coercive and controlling behaviour)
- physical
- sexual
- financial\*
- emotional

\*This can also include economic abuse, which is when an abuser restricts how their partner or family member acquires, uses and maintains money and economic resources, such as accommodation, food, clothing and transportation.

The Government's stay at home advice in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic can create new challenges for people experiencing domestic abuse and for those who support them. Victim/survivors may be at home with their perpetrator and unable to escape from the abuse. Perpetrators may have more free time and less barriers prohibiting them from abusing survivors, leading to them increasing the frequency or severity of their abuse. Self-isolating while living with an abuser may also increase the risk of harm. Reports of domestic abuse as much as tripled in China during periods of isolation.

Your response to domestic abuse is therefore even more important during these times. We have produced guidance on how you can offer safe responses to your service users where it's known they are living with domestic abuse or where new concerns arise.

## Raising awareness of domestic abuse in your organisation

Using your organisation's networks (e.g. website, newsletters and mailing lists) to disseminate information about domestic abuse is a crucial way to reach out to and provide safety information to survivors.

However, it is essential that any information shared in public forums considers the safety implications of information becoming accessible to perpetrators as well as survivors. For example, sharing specific safety-planning information may reveal measures a survivor has taken to keep themselves safe, enhancing their risk to a survivor.

### Safe information to share in public forums raise awareness about domestic abuse:

- The definition of domestic abuse
- Information on common abusive tactics
- Signposting to national support services
- Signposting to local support services – including any details of their opening hours and any adapted measures they are taking to support survivors as a result of Covid-19.
- Generic safety planning advice

### Example of information to share in public forums raise awareness about domestic abuse:

#### What is domestic abuse:

Domestic abuse is defined as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological (including coercive and controlling behaviour)
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

### **Spotting signs of domestic abuse:**

Everyone's experience is individual, but common examples of abusive behaviour include:

- making or carrying out threats, such as threats to harm you or get you in trouble
- breaking your things
- harming animals
- putting you down or making you feel bad
- not letting you see or speak to your friends, family or professionals
- monitoring your communication, for example looking through your phone or social media
- making you ask for money or prove how you spend your money
- making threats about your children, or making you feel like a bad parent
- making you feel that you are to blame for their behaviour

You might feel that you regularly have to change the way that you behave in order to prevent someone close to you getting angry, putting you down or harming you.

If isolating with an abusive person, you may notice that they:

- tell you how and when money is spent on food or other essential items
- tell you when you can use your mobile phone and/or social media and/or monitor you doing so
- control your daily routine, for example, your meals, exercise or medication
- not allow you to take daily exercise, or insist on coming with you

If you are separated, you may notice an increase in contact, for example texts, calls or messages of social media. They may also alter child contact agreements without consultation

More examples of abusive behaviour can be found here: <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/PowerControlwheelINOSHADING.pdf>

Surviving Economic Abuse have published guidance for [spotting the signs of economic abuse during the COVID-19 outbreak](#).

Abuse is only ever the fault of the person causing harm, never the person who is being hurt or controlled.

### **Support for domestic abuse:**

If you feel afraid of or controlled by someone close to you, the Government's advice to stay at home in response to the Covid-19 pandemic may cause you to feel at an increased risk of harm and isolated from support.

It is important to remember that, if you feel at risk of harm and/or want to reach out for information and support about how to stay safe, or longer term support options, Covid-19 restrictions should not prevent you from doing so.

Support from emergency services should still be accessed when needed and specialist domestic abuse services are continuing to deliver services, some with adapted measures to continue offering face to face support and others offering online and telephone support only.

**Some safety and support options available to you:**

**Call 999** and/or try to **get to a place of safety**, if you feel at risk of **immediate harm**.

**Silent Solutions:** If you feel afraid or further danger or escalation of harm if you are overheard calling 999:

When you call 999 an operator will ask you which emergency service is required

If you do not respond, the call will be put through to Silent Solutions

Press **55** and the call will be transferred to the police.

[www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent\\_solution\\_guide.pdf](http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf)

Your place of safety may be your local **Emergency Department** and you **can still attend** here if you feel at risk, regardless of Covid-19 restrictions.

Seek safety information and support from a specialist DA service, such as an **Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)** in your local area:

**Find your local specialist DA**

**service** - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/> / call the National Domestic Violence Helpline on **0808 2000 247**

**What is an IDVA?** IDVAs are specialist workers who support people being subjected to domestic abuse. They can offer immediate safety planning and advice, let you know about more long-term support and safety options, and help you access the support that's right for you. Find more information here

- <https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/our-services/independent-advocates/>

**Angelou partnership** - <https://www.angelou.org/>

ANGELOU is a partnership of 10 specialist organisations that have come together to support women and girls experiencing domestic or sexual violence. The services have moved over to telephone and web-based support and you can continue to refer via the routes below;

**0208 741 7008**

**Mon - Fri 10am - 6pm**

**Translators available**

Seek information and support from a **helpline** or **webchat**:

**National Domestic Violence Helpline:** 0808 2000 247 (24-hour information on safety and support)

**Women's Aid live chat:** <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/> (10am – 12pm, Mon-Fri)

Try to **Maintain links** with those around you:

**Let those around you**, such as your family, friends, employer, neighbours and/or support worker, **know** that you are going into self-isolation.

If safe to do so, **arrange safe contact** with someone you trust to check in on you on **at scheduled times**:

Plan what your trusted person should do if they can't reach you, for example, try again, call your support worker or call the police.

If your phone is monitored, **create a code word** with your trusted person that the person you are afraid of will not understand. For example, code words could mean 'I am safe', 'call back later' or 'call the police'.

## Professionals responding to domestic abuse during Covid-19

Professionals may be required to adapt how they support survivors due to Covid-19 response measures. This may alter the advice that you provide survivors, for example, safety planning advice may need to be tailored to encompass self—isolation. Also, how professionals support survivors may now have changed, for example, support may now be taking place over the phone.

It is important to remember that specialist domestic abuse services are best placed to work with survivors of domestic abuse and will collaborate with them to create safety plans. Most services are operating and accept referrals in the same way as before. If you are not sure about how to respond to those living with abuse you can reach out for advice.

### Speaking to survivors over the phone:

When discussing domestic abuse over the phone, considerations need to be made to ensure safe and clear communication.

In all phone communication:

- **Confirm** whether the patient **can communicate** in English:

If required, **call back using an independent phone interpreting service**. Request a female interpreter where possible.

**DO NOT USE A FRIEND/FAMILY MEMBER AS AN INTERPRETER**

- **Check the patient is alone/in as confidential space as possible** in the property, or suggest they go out for their once a day exercise if possible (to enable as much privacy/safety away from any potential/alleged perpetrators) and confirm their **current location** (full address)
- At the outset, establish a code word or sentence, which the victim/survivor can say to indicate that it's no longer safe to talk and they can then end the call. You could say

*'If your situation changes and you're no longer safe to talk, please say **'thanks but I'm not interested'** and I'll know you have to go. I will then try to call you back at another time'.*

- It's recommended that in all calls you gather the following information:
  - Ask how you can safely check in with them next. Are there times when the perpetrator is out of the house such as if they leave to do the food shopping. Is there a time of day where they get out for exercise?
  - Establish who is in the property and any additional risk they may pose?
  - Is it safe to send text messages / emails? Do they have phone credit?
  - Find out what the person is frightened of and/or worried could / will happen
  - Check that they have access to basic items e.g prescriptions / medication. Discuss what they can do if the perpetrator prevents access
  - Ask if the victim/survivor has any concerns about their children (if applicable) or other people living in the household
  - Check if they are safe to remain at home and if they feel safe to call 999 in an emergency
  - Find out what they want to happen and want to do next
  - Let them know what essential shops will remain open as they may become safe places to flee to during an emergency. This includes food retailers, pharmacies, hardware stores, corner shops, petrol stations, shops in hospital, post offices, banks, newsagents, launderettes and pet shops.
  - Check if it's safe to offer information about specialist domestic abuse services. Check if it's safe to store the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** number (see below), which they can do under a different name, like a hair salon or GP practice.

**If conducting domestic abuse initial enquiry over the phone:**

**DO NOT MAKE DOMESTIC ABUSE ENQUIRY IF ANYONE ELSE IS PRESENT**

**IF IT IS NOT SAFE TO ASK:**

- DO NOT ASK
- Let the patient know you will **call them at a later date** and do so within **48 hours**.
- If you have a concern that the person is being subjected to DA, **escalate to your manager/safeguarding lead** to plan of action as a matter of urgency.

**IF IT IS SAFE TO ASK:**

- Explain confidentiality and information sharing procedures, for example:

*“I don’t routinely share information without your consent. However, if you tell me that you, or someone else, is at a serious risk of harm, I can’t keep that information to myself. If I do need to share information, I will let you know who with and can support you to find out the answers to any questions you may have”*

- **Frame the question** to explain rationale for asking, for example:

*“Domestic abuse is extremely prevalent in society, affecting [1 in 3 women / 1 in 6 men]. Domestic abuse does not just include physical violence but also [...]”*

*“We routinely ask all women about domestic abuse because it is so common affecting approximately 1 in 3 women, with approximately 30% either starting or escalating in pregnancy. Domestic abuse does not just include physical violence but also [...]”*

- Ask a **direct question** to clearly enquire about whether they are a survivor, for example:

*“Has anyone close to you (family members or sexual partners) ever made you feel afraid, controlled or isolated, or physically hurt you?”*

- Validation following disclosure: If someone makes a disclosure of domestic abuse, your first response should be a message of validation. Reassure the survivor that you believe them and the abuse they are being subjected to is not their fault. Messages survivors need to hear:
  - Thank you for telling me
  - I believe you
  - This is not your fault. You are not to blame for your partner’s violence...he/she alone is responsible, violence is a choice he/she makes
  - Your safety at home and that of your children is our priority
  - Everyone has a right to live free from violence
  - I know someone you can talk to (DV service)

For example:

*“Thank you for telling that. It is not ok for somebody to treat you that way. I am going to do what I can to get you the support that you want”*

## **Responding to an immediate risk of harm:**

**Confirm whether there is an immediate risk of harm to them or others:**

Ask:

- Do you feel at an immediate risk of harm?
- What are your immediate concerns?
- Are there any children at risk? Where are they?
- Where is the perpetrator? When will they be back?

If there is an immediate risk of harm:

- Ask “do you have somewhere safe that you can go”?
- Advise that they can attend Accident and Emergency as a place of safety
- Advise they should bring their children with them to their place of safety
- Advise that they only take essential items with them (money/bank cards, phone/charger, essential medication and documents) and they can collect the rest at a later date

If you need to call the emergency services:

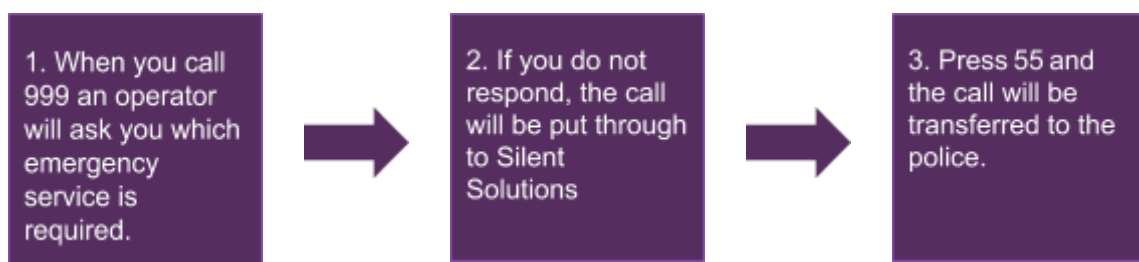
- Initially to take details of the house number and street in cases the call disconnects, followed by postcode (if still available)
- Ask if they are injured as this can help to establish if an ambulance needs to be requested
- Ask colleagues to contact 999 whilst the survivors remain on the phone
- Whilst on the phone, continue to check in regarding their safety (safe place in home where they can lock themselves?)
- Where possible ask if they are able to leave the home safely and go to a neighbours place
- Always provide the option to stay on the phone whilst remaining quiet if this is safer

## Safety planning for survivors in isolation:

Information professionals can offer survivors to support their safety when going into self-isolation:

**Call 999** and/or try to **get to a place of safety**, if you feel at risk of **immediate harm**.

**Silent Solutions:** If you feel afraid or further danger or escalation of harm if you are overheard calling 999:



[www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent\\_solution\\_guide.pdf](http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf)

Your place of safety may be your local **Accident and Emergency Department** and you **can still attend** here if you feel at risk, regardless of Covid-19 restrictions. This does however present additional health risk re Covid-19



## Make a safety plan:

**Plan in advance** how you would act if you feel at risk of harm. An IDVA can help you create a tailored safety plan. General safety planning advice can be found here: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/making-a-safety-plan/>

Some **key considerations** if you are going into **self-isolation**:

- Your safety is of paramount importance - follow your safety plan regardless of isolation.
- **Maintain links** with those around you:
- **Let those around you**, such as your family, friends, employer, neighbours and/or support worker, **know** that you are going into self-isolation.
- **Arrange safe contact** with someone you trust to check in on you on **at scheduled times**:
- Think of a reason to justify why this contact needs to take place, for example saying that your employer is checking on all employees daily.
- Plan what your trusted person should do if they can't reach you, for example, try again, call your support worker or call the police.
- If your phone is monitored, **create a code word** with your trusted person that the perpetrator will not understand. For example, code words could mean 'I am safe' or 'call the police'.
- **Ask a (close by) neighbour** you trust to call 999 if they hear shouting or unusual noises coming from your address.
- Use the **excuse of 'feeling unwell'** to **take yourself away** from the perpetrator, to another room or area of the property, if needed.
- If you feel at risk, try to **get to a room where there is a phone and/or exit** and **avoid rooms which may be dangerous** such as the kitchen or bathroom.

## Health related issues

- Does the survivor have any medical conditions? Do they have access to their own medication? Is the change to their health concerns due to COVID-19? Are they able to seek medical attention?
- Is the survivor able to contact the GP safely instead of the usual face to face appointment?
- Can they maintain contact with their support network?
- Review and introduce routine to maintain welfare of survivor and their children.
- Exploring clients interests how this can be adapted to maintain support
- Making designated areas in the property for working, playing – watch advice video on ['how to stay positive during coronavirus crisis'](#)

**Substance use related issues:**

- Ask how survivor is accessing support and substances during self-isolation? Identify risk in relation to withdrawal/detox?
- Direct to Drug and alcohol services who still working remotely [can provide these details]

**Financial issues:**

- Does COVID change the survivors financial circumstances, increase economic abuse and/or access to financial support?
- Do they have enough food, access to online shopping, is this being controlled by the perpetrator?

**Children (Any safety planning considered for survivor includes their children):**

- Establish if children are at home due to Covid-19?
- Ensuring that where age appropriate carrying out safety planning with child
- Establishing safe place in the home to go to if they are asked by my mother or if they see something that makes them feel upset or scared?
- Establishing a safe person to call who they can talk to (separately to their parents)- are they in contact with teacher during, another service or family member?
- Teach the child how to contact the police (if age appropriate and safe) and also use 55 service so that they do not have to say anything.

**Offering advocacy support:**

The victim/survivor may not be aware of what options are available and it may not be possible for them to investigate their options so they may need your help with this. They may also be limited in being able to access other services for help while in isolation.

It's important to know that specialist domestic abuse services are continuing to deliver services, some with adapted measures to continue offering face to face support and others offering online and telephone support only. This will vary from service to service. It's likely that victim/survivors of domestic abuse may assume that these services have closed and sharing this information is crucial.

We recommend that you contact your local services to find out what services they are operating before contacting tenants / services users.

- Local services and their current availability
- Find your local specialist DA service  
[www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/) or call the National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247
- We also recommend that staff who are likely to come into contact with victim/survivors download **Hestia's Bright Sky App**, which is free to download on mobile phones. The app has been designed for victim/survivors and made to look like a weather app.

In these circumstances it may not be safe for the victim/survivor to download the app, particularly when in close proximity to their perpetrator or if the perpetrator checks



their phone as part of the abuse. However, the app has also designed to be used by practitioners and other employees to offer a UK-wide directory of specialist domestic abuse support services with contact details and links to further resources and information on topics on domestic abuse.

It's also available in 4 languages: English, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish  
<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

In this instance, you could offer to:

- Find out what services their local authority department are operating and pass on their contact details, including emergency duty lines and an email address.
- If someone is about to be made homeless and in need of emergency, you could contact the local authority on the victim/survivor's behalf either making a Duty to Refer referral (local authority website should hold this information) or simply contacting prior to the victim/survivor attending, supporting their application so this reduces the likelihood that they are turned away.
- Provide them with information about their local domestic abuse service and how and when their services are operating
- If you need to share information with other services such as Children's Services, it is vital that you tell the victim/survivor who you will be sharing information with so they are aware that another service may be contacting them
- If they are worried this will negatively impact on their safety should the alleged perpetrator find out, it is crucial that this information is included in the referral so that steps can be taken by relevant agencies to avoid the perpetrator becoming aware that the victim/survivor has disclosed domestic abuse

## **Other helpful information for survivors:**

### **Child contact arrangements**

Many families will have to make changes to the arrangements that were in place but how significant those changes are will depend on the circumstances of the individual family.

Rights of women have created helpful guidance

<https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/family-law/coronavirus-and-child-contact-arrangements/#survivors-domestic-abuse>

### **Counselling / therapeutic services**

Some local support services in the community may be temporarily suspended. This will mean that some survivors will feel particularly isolated.

If you were accessing counselling that has now been suspended, some counselling services can continue to provide helpline support.

Supportline provide a confidential telephone helpline and email counselling service, particularly to those at risk of abuse or are isolated: [www.supportline.org.uk](http://www.supportline.org.uk)

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## Supporting staff and colleagues

Domestic abuse may also be experienced by staff and colleagues. Managers should take steps to ensure that their team members are supported whilst in self-isolation. The support services and strategies mentioned in this document are applicable to everyone.

Please refer to your own internal policy and consider how new working from home arrangements may be useful in offering support to colleagues. For example, can you check in via work messaging facilities or during calls?

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## Responding to perpetrators

There may be times where a perpetrator responds to the call or contacts you. Be prepared for this possibility and, if necessary, have a safe explanation ready.

Depending on your level of involvement and knowledge of the case you may already have a relationship with the perpetrator and so you may know safe ways to engage them. However, remember that these are new times and the situation you have been familiar with may no longer be the case. It is important that this contact does not increase any risks posed to survivors. Current advice and safe practice guidelines advise against trying to engage perpetrators in behaviour change work. This is a nuanced piece of work that requires careful consideration and training

Professionals can check in with perpetrators where it is clear that their ex/ partner are engaging with a DV agency. The focus of this should be on risk reduction/management, coping strategies and de-escalation strategies. This might involve asking how they remain calm, how they give their partner space, what strategies they use to avoid conflict, what their personal and professional support network are. Explore how they are feeling where appropriate to identify their current level of stress and whether this is worsening. Ensure that you document any information you gather about the perpetrators pattern of behavior, to be able to consider where there is escalation in their risk behavior and ensure that you are sharing any risk information with relevant victim/survivor support service and/or child safeguarding representatives (either the lead for your service or Children's Social Care).

- Check the perpetrator is able to speak privately
- If the perpetrator is aware that domestic abuse has already been disclosed, give the Respect phoneline (0808 802 4040) and ensure they understand that this is a confidential information and advice line for people worried about their abusive behaviour
- Be respectful but do not collude
- Consider whether, after any disclosure, a safeguarding referral or MARAC referral for either an adult or child/ren needs to be made

### Don't:

- Discuss any safeguarding referrals for others made as a result of the disclosure with the perpetrators, as this could place the survivor/s at greater risk

- Discuss any disclosures made by the victim unless you are *absolutely* sure the perpetrator is already fully aware of them
- Try and obtain a confession from perpetrators about their behaviour
- Explicitly confirm what the survivor and / or children have told you

**The National Domestic Abuse Helpline** offers a free 24-hour helpline offers victim/survivors emotional support, advice on their options and is the gateway to the national network of refuges available in England. They can also signpost to the local domestic abuse service. And they can offer advice to professionals who are supporting a victim/survivor.  
Their contact number is **0808 2000 247**

**Women’s Aid:** Where telephone support is not safe, Women’s Aid have an online service to support you. This includes an instant messaging service (Mon–Fri, 10am–12pm), email support (response within 5 days), a survivor’s handbook (to get help on housing, safety planning, dealing with police and more), access to local services, and an online survivor’s forum.  
[www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support)

**Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs):** MARACs are victim focused information sharing and risk management meetings attended by key agencies to safety plan for people who are at high risk of harm. Your local MARAC meeting may move from face-to-face meetings to alternative arrangements to ensure safety is maintained and risk managed during this period. Contact your local MARAC Coordinator. If this isn’t known, you should be able to find out who this is by contacting a lead from your local authority. Standing Together have produced a MARAC plan in response to COVID19, in order to continue having MARAC’s in a safe way.

**Chayn** provides online tools, information, courses and support for people experiencing abuse, all free to access. They are also launching a secure Telegram channel to provide particular support during this time. If you need to secure your devices or clear your browsing history after accessing support, take a look at Chayn's DIY online safety guide.

For a list of other national specialist domestic abuse services, see the resources section below in this document.

**Resources**

World Health Organisation guidance around what health can do... <a href="#">WHO</a>	<a href="http://survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources/">Surviving Economic Abuse</a>
Bright Sky app - <a href="https://www.hestia.org/brightsky/">https://www.hestia.org/brightsky/</a> ; We recommend professionals download the Brightsky app to inform	

**Other national specialist domestic abuse services you may want to let the victim/survivor know about:**

<p><b>GALOP</b> National LGBT+ domestic abuse helpline Emotional and practical support for LGBTt+ people experiencing domestic abuse. 0800 999 5428</p>	<p><b>KARMA NIRVANA</b> Advice and support for victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage. UK Helpline: 0800 5999 247</p>
<p><b>FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT</b> Government office providing information and advice for British nationals forced into marriage. 020 7008 0151 (out of hours 020 7008 1500)</p>	<p><b>SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS</b> Advice and support for black &amp; minority ethnic women experiencing all forms of gender-related violence. Helpline: 0208 571 0800 Enquiries 0208 571 9595</p>
<p><b>MEN'S ADVICE LINE</b> Support for male victims. 0808 801 0327</p>	<p><b>RESPOND</b> Support for people with learning disabilities who have experienced trauma/abuse. 0808 808 0700</p>
<p><b>DEAFHOPE</b> Domestic and sexual abuse support for the deaf community. 020 3947 2600 / text 079 7035 0366</p>	<p><b>RIGHTS OF WOMEN</b> Advice lines, there are a range of services available: <a href="https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/advice-lines/">https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/advice-lines/</a></p>
<p><b>RESPECT PHONELINE</b> Support for perpetrators (male &amp; female) to stop using abusive/violent behaviour. 0808 802 4040 (RESPECT also has advice for staff working with perpetrators)</p>	<p><b>CHILDLINE</b> Free 24-hour helpline for children in distress or danger. 0800 1111</p>