



**BEXLEY
DOMESTIC
ABUSE SERVICES**

solace



Domestic Abuse and the COVID-19 crisis

In this unprecedented crisis, the Government has had no choice but to introduce emergency measures to protect those who are vulnerable to the coronavirus and to ensure that services can continue to function in the event that cases of sick and dying people overwhelm the capacity of public services.

We are very aware that the lockdown conditions created by the pandemic, particularly the isolation of families, could lead to the doubling of the number of victims of domestic abuse. The isolation of families, while necessary to contain the spread of the virus, could exacerbate domestic abuse leaving thousands of adults and children, who are victims of abuse, locked in with their perpetrators.

COVID-19 cannot cause domestic abuse, just as alcohol, drugs, unemployment etc. do not cause it. However, a heightened state of anxiety and stress – including medical anxiety and the stress many of us will feel around being in such close proximity for such extended periods of time with our families – is likely to make this a more dangerous time for victims and children. This is in line with existing research that highlight that natural disasters and diseases are factors in increased reports of domestic abuse.

Perpetrators may attempt to deal with extra stress and anxiety by imposing stricter and more unrealistic regimes on their families' activities and behaviours. It's a moment when the net of coercive control can be tightened. In fact, "social distancing" and "isolation" are core tactics of a coercively controlling partner.

It is important as professionals that we recognise this increased risk and are able to assess the risk and respond to safeguard both adults and children.

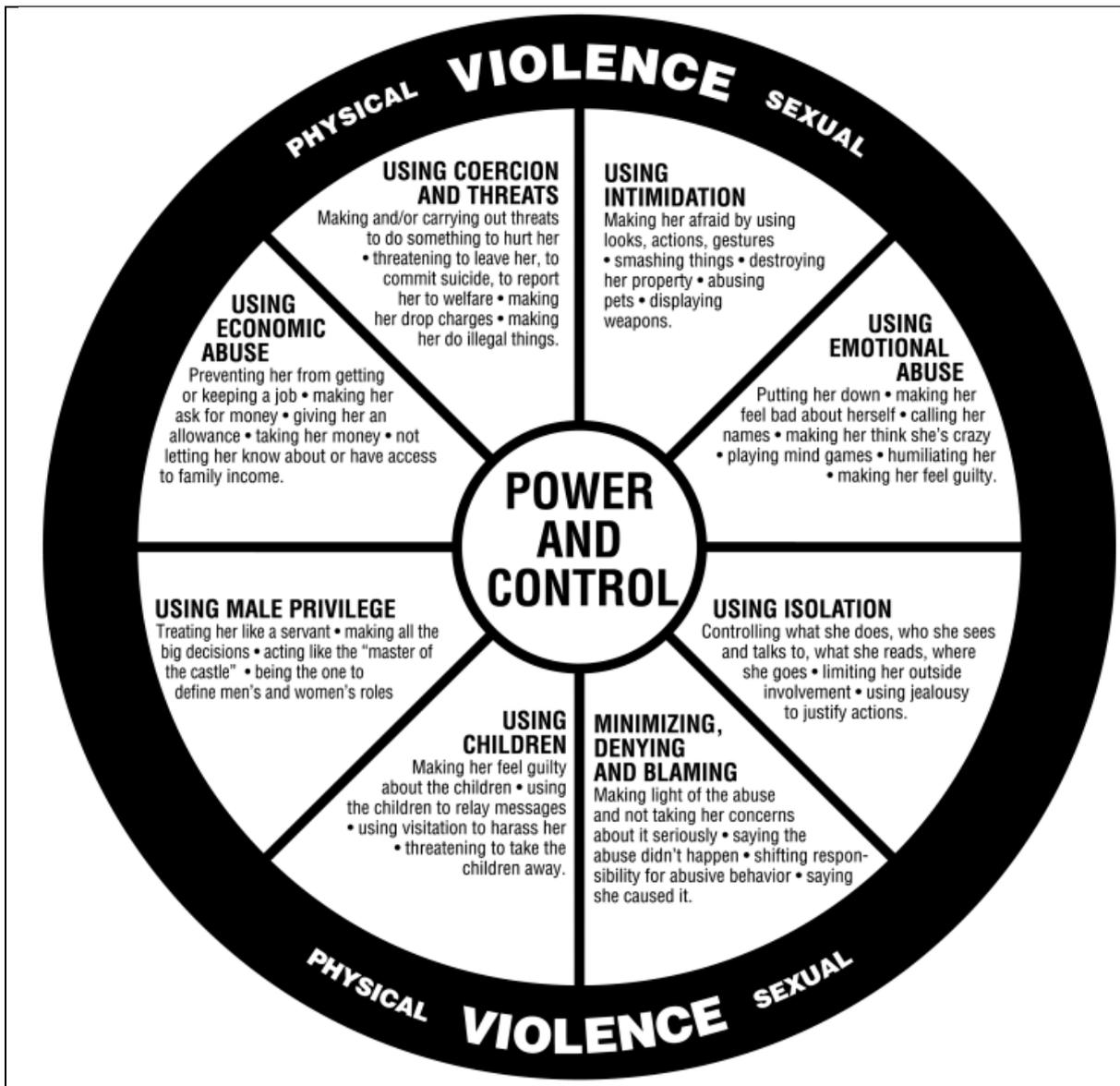
It also important to note that domestic abuse includes familial abuse, so assessing risk and safety planning is vital at this time.

Identifying risk

When identifying risk indicators, always consider:

- who is at risk?
- the context of the behaviour
- how the risk factors interact with each other
- the victim's perception of risk.
- Identify high risk factors

It may be useful to consider the Power and Control wheel below to assess domestic abuse and help recognise cohesive control.



By understanding this model a professional will be better able to understand the situation that the family may be living with.

Please do not underestimate **power and control**, as research highlights that this is present in most Domestic Homicides and can be used against children, as much as the non abusing parent.

Perpetrators may control and abuse children to further control and abuse their victim, therefore strategies and support plans must link child/ren and mother, rather than seeing them independently.

If you would like further information on coercive control and children, please refer to the works of Professor Evan Stark. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvHbVzTzpX0>

Responding to Domestic Abuse during this period of lockdown.

If making a phone call to a potential domestic abuse victim, **always assume** that the perpetrator could be listening in. The same goes for instant messaging services. Refer to safety planning below.

Do ask about victim's mental health and well-being. There is an increased risk of suicide when the victim feels that there is no other option. Speak about the options available to them.

Keep detailed, accurate records on the information disclosed to you.

Using the Safe Lives DASH RIC

[\(https://www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk/professionals/bexley-multi-agency-risk-assessment-conference-marac/\)](https://www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk/professionals/bexley-multi-agency-risk-assessment-conference-marac/)

This is an assessment based on actuarial data, involving the use of risk indicators to assess the probability of serious harm or homicide. For domestic abuse cases, the number or 'yes' answers on the DASH usually determines the level of risk.

SafeLives recommends that 14 'yes' answers on the Dash should result in a referral to Marac. However, completing the DASH is not a simple 'tick box' exercise and, even where there is a lower number of ticks, professional judgement should be used to inform the overall assessment of risk. In addition, professional judgement should not be used to 'downgrade' an actuarial risk assessment.

The potential for escalation can be assessed by looking at the frequency and/or severity of abuse and **includes 3 incidents within a 12 month period.**

Referrals to MARAC can be made based solely on professional judgement. However, it is the practitioner's responsibility to articulate what their concerns are and the reasons for the referral.

If your assessment scores 14+, using professional judgement or escalation then the case should be immediately referred to the MARAC **and** referred to Children's and/or Adult Services.

Tool kits for every agency in identifying and referring to MARAC can be found here <https://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-marac-meetings/resources-people-attending>

The MARAC is still operating during this current crisis and referrals can be referred to MARAC@bexley.gov.uk

Safety Planning

Safety Planning during the crisis while victims are confined to the home may be difficult, but think about how they can make plans for any potentially abusive situations in order to keep them safe. Remember safety plans are individual and what is suitable for one person may not be appropriate for another. The victim knows the perpetrator better than anyone!

If they are in immediate danger, they should call 999 and ask for the police - **the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.**

If they are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and then press 55. This will transfer the call to the relevant police force who will assist them **without them having to speak.**

If safe to do so, The **Brightsky app** will help you find services and the <https://hollieguard.com/app> turns your smartphone into a personal safety device

Safety Planning Options

- What are their main concerns and worries? Can they mitigate any risk by making a plan?
- Will the person who is harming them be at work at certain times? Could this provide an opportunity for an IDVA to make safe contact?
- Is there a time of day that the victim goes for a walk? Could this provide an opportunity for an IDVA to make safe contact

- Have a code word/sign to signal you are in danger – set this up for trusted family/friends/neighbours to let them know by text/FaceTime/skype. The code will need to alert them to contact the police if you are in danger
- Does the perpetrator have a pattern of behaviour, where in the pattern is the current abuse?
- Do you know what your options are if you want to leave? Or what your options are if you want to stay but want the person harming you to leave
- Talk through the layout of their house so you can think about any places of safety? Remember try and avoid kitchen, bathroom or garage.
- If they had to leave in an emergency do they know where they would go? Remember many shops/restaurants/pubs will be shut.
- If someone they trust is doing their shopping could they write a message on the shopping list asking for help? (if safe to do so)
- Does the person harming you use drugs and/or alcohol? How could their use change and what could this mean?
- Do you know how they might respond to self-isolation? Think about whether this might increase the sexual violence/ coercive control/ physical abuse
- Do you think there is software on your IT? Any listening devices? Cameras in the home? How will this change the way you might get help
- Always keep their phone charged and close by

Further safety planning: www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org

Bexley Solace Duty Line 0203 198 4659 9-5 Mon to Friday.

Email bexley.community@solacewomensaid.org

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/>

ASCENT – advice and counselling

0808 8025565 advice@solacewomensaid.org

Mon – Fri 10-4pm

Tuesday 6-8pm

Solace are providing free webinars for professionals in relation to domestic abuse and safety planning, register here:

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/news/free-webinar-series-supporting-survivors-during-covid-19>

NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR GUIDANCE

National stalking helpline – Suzy Lamplugh Trust

<https://www.suzylamplugh.org/>

0808 802 0300

Women's Aid live chat - This is an online chatting service which is ideal for victims who are self-isolating and do not want to be heard.

<https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

<p>https://www.womensaid.org.uk 0117 944 44 11</p>
<p>Rape Crisis – 0808 802 9999</p>
<p>Victim Support – 0808 1689111</p>
<p>The Deaf Health Charity – Sign Health https://www.signhealth.org.uk/our-projects/deafhope-projects/ Text: 07970350366</p>
<p>RASASC (Rape and sexual abuse centre) 0808 802 9999</p>
<p>Galop (LGBT) - 020 7697 4081</p>
<p>24/7 National Domestic Abuse Helpline - 0808 2000 247</p>
<p>Respect (perpetrators) – http://respect.uk.net/ / 0808 802 4040</p>
<p>Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for victims of domestic abuse</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse</p>
<p>Apps to support those experiencing domestic abuse</p> <p>https://www.hestia.org/brightsky</p> <p>https://hollieguard.com/</p>
<p>COVID-19/Coronavirus: Safety Advice for Survivors</p> <p>https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/</p>
<p>Domestic abuse and COVID-19</p> <p>http://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19</p>
<p>National campaign to raise awareness of the Silent Solution system https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf</p>
<p>Rights of Women London Legal Advice Line - 020 7608 1137 www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/</p>

Instructions to 'cover your tracks' for victims of domestic abuse

<https://www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk/covering-your-tracks/>

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