



Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Family violence warning signs Tips for professionals delivering essential services

Family violence and COVID-19

While we haven't experienced a pandemic of this scale in recent history, research into natural disasters and other major events shows that family violence can increase by at least 30%. This is due to:

- » A tendency to revert to stereotypical gender roles during times of crisis and uncertainty; such as men taking the role of protectors and decision makers, and women being seen as carers. These strict norms limit women's independence and autonomy, and can put them and their children at risk.
- » A tendency to dismiss or downplay victim survivors' experiences of violence more often during times of disaster or emergency, and to justify or excuse perpetrators' behaviour with statements like "he's just stressed".

Other factors that can increase the likelihood, frequency and severity of family violence are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including financial, employment and housing insecurity and increased and sustained periods of time families are together at home, while isolated from other people.

Indicators or warning signs of family violence

It can be hard to tell whether someone is experiencing family violence. Sometimes people living with family violence are reluctant to call what's happening to them violence or abuse, or they may not even realise that's what they are experiencing. Often, people living with family violence blame themselves for what's happening to them.

It is critical, particularly during the pandemic when people are isolated in their homes, sometimes with violent partners, to be aware that the people you are delivering essential services to may be impacted by or at risk of family violence.

Some of the common warning signs to look out for are:

- » They seem afraid of their partner or anxious to please them
- » They seem anxious or upset when you mention their partner or family situation
- » They tell you that their partner criticises or embarrasses them in front of other people
- » They tell you that their partner pressures them into doing things they don't want to
- » They talk about their partner being jealous, very angry or possessive
- » They say their partner 'doesn't like it when...' or talk about their partner not wanting them to do particular things
- » They don't seem comfortable making a decision about themselves or their health
- » They have unexplained physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts, etc.) or give unlikely explanations for these
- » Their children seem anxious, afraid or nervous when the partner or ex-partner's name is mentioned
- » They say they don't want to leave the children with their partner or ex-partner
- » They say their partner or ex-partner checks in on them a lot (for example through text messages, calls, checking their social media, etc.)

There are some warning signs that are specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- » They express significant anxiety about being isolated at home with their partner
- » They mention the safety of their home or talk about being afraid to be at home

Individually, one of the above warning signs may not necessarily mean that someone is living with family violence. However, if you notice more than one of these warning signs – either in a single meeting or appointment, or over a number of interactions – you should ask questions to try and determine whether the person you're working with is experiencing violence.



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What to do if you suspect someone is living with family violence

1. Call 000 if you believe anyone is at immediate risk.
2. If it is safe to do so, ask:
 - » 'Has anyone in your family done something that made you or your children feel unsafe or 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?'
3. Contact a specialist family violence service for advice on how to support the person you're working with. They can assist with risk assessment and management, including determining if immediate intervention and coordinated responses are required. Use [The Lookout's service directory](#) to find an appropriate service.
4. Refer the person you're working with for specialist family violence support if you believe they are at serious risk.

What if the person you're working with refuses your offers of support, or tells you that everything is fine, but you are still concerned? Make sure they know there is support available, and that you can have another discussion when they are ready.

Please be aware that it may not be safe for someone to take printed information about family violence home with them.

All professionals delivering essential services can play an active role in identifying family violence, by conducting a basic risk assessment and ensuring that the people you are working with are referred to appropriate support.

Information and resources for people experiencing family violence

[Gathering Support](#) is a booklet that provides comprehensive information on how to keep safe during separation, and where to get help.

[The Lookout service directory](#) lists support available for people experiencing family violence in Victoria.

[Arc](#) is a free app that helps people to identify patterns of behaviour that make them feel scared, unsafe, undermined or intimidated, record their experiences, and tell their story.

If someone is experiencing family violence

- » **If someone is in immediate danger call 000** or contact the police in your state or territory.
- » For confidential crisis support in Victoria, information and accommodation call the **safe steps** 24/7 family violence response line on 1800 015 188. If it is unsafe to call, email safesteps@safesteps.org.au.
- » For counselling and support in Australia, contact **1800RESPECT**, the national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line, on 1800 737 732.
- » For a specialist LGBTQI+ family violence support in Victoria, contact W|Respect on 1800 LGBTIQ (1800 542 847) or visit www.withrespect.org.au.
- » For specialist family violence support for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria, contact **inTouch** on 1800 755 988.
- » If concerned about a man's behaviour, call the **Men's Referral Service** on 1300 766 491.

Tina's story:

I was in my late twenties when I met my ex at the church I attended. We married a year later.

The abuse started a week after we were married and escalated very quickly. He said that if I divorced him he would kill me and kill my parents.

He cut me off from my family and friends and eventually from my church. I became a prisoner in my own home. He destroyed my self-esteem by telling me how worthless I was and continued with the mind games. It got to a stage where I didn't know what the truth was and what was a lie. He stripped me of my dignity and self respect.

I lived in fear for my life.

Read more of Tina's story, and stories from other victim survivors of family violence, at dvrcv.org.au/stories.