

Family violence safety planning during COVID-19



This tool is intended for survivors and the family, friends, and community around them, as well as for people using violence. Here, you will find family violence prevention and intervention tips to promote safety, well-being, and healing.

As a whole, this packet will help you and your family to create a family safety plan during COVID-19.

You can also use only the specific information that you need.

To that end, this packet includes information for:

- How survivors can identify patterns of harmful behaviors in a relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Safety planning for survivors of violence and abuse during this pandemic
- Self-reflection and awareness tools for individuals using violence or abuse, power or control
- Tips and guidance for community members on how to support survivors of violence during the pandemic
- Additional support for survivors on how to remain safe and healthy during COVID-19

Families who have experienced domestic violence (DV), sexual assault (SA), human trafficking, and/or child abuse are at a higher risk of experiencing power and control, violence and abuse, especially during this time of social distancing/isolation in the home.

One important note: the coronavirus pandemic, otherwise known as COVID-19, is a real threat to the health and safety of our community and our country.

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control, COVID-19 symptoms include fever, shortness of breath, and a cough. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure. Those at higher risk of getting COVID-19 include older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions, including asthma and lung disease.

Call your doctor for medical advice if you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop symptoms.

How to identify harmful relationship behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic



The purpose of this document is to help potential victims and survivors of domestic and/or family violence to identify patterns of power and control that could lead to violence (or increased violence) during this period of social distancing.

These patterns of power and control could include:

- Withholding information from you regarding COVID-19 or local updates.
- Interfering with needs for mental health care, medical care, medication, disability or other health needs.
- Interfering with healthy daily family functions, such as sleeping, eating, working from home, online school, exercise, bath or bedtime routines, or going to get groceries or medical care.
- Threatening to get you and/or the children/friends/family sick, or to kick you out if you if you/your children get sick.
- Using social distancing as an excuse to increase their efforts to isolate you by not allowing anyone to visit, or not allowing you to visit others, even virtually or by phone, including receiving resources, checking on family, and/or sharing resources/meals.
- Cutting off contact with others, not allowing you to connect with anyone over the phone, social media, or other ways.
- Keeping you or your children isolated in one room or from each other in separate rooms, even if no one in the house is sick or has tested positive for the coronavirus..

- Excessive limitations or not allowing outside time for walks and exercise, TV time or online educational sites, child's play with other children/family who also live in the home, etc.
- Withholding food from you or the children, not purchasing enough food, over-emphasizing food rations, and unnecessarily decreasing mealtimes, and/or restricting you from accessing free meal pickups within the community.
- Increased control over money (including SSI/disability resources), vehicles, etc., or spending funds on other things (weapons, alcohol, drugs, etc.)
- Not allowing you or children to listen to or participate in online or broadcasted services for worship, prayer, cultural celebrations, etc.
- Increased demands to perform sexual acts to satisfy or entertain your partner or others (this includes coercion of sexual acts that you do not want to do).
- Continuous efforts to sabotage sobriety (requiring you use or threatening using substances, etc.) OR using substance use/abuse as a way to excuse their harmful parenting and behaviors.
- Forcing you to sign legal documents for items for which they can benefit (car, new phone, additional bills/services, lease, loans, etc.)
- Racist statements or comments that are degrading to you/your family/your culture. Name calling and/or public/online humiliation (fat, skinny, ugly, too tall or short, or other insulting names). This includes shaming you by telling others that you are crazy for taking precautions.
- Practicing exclusion or the silent treatment.
- Involving the child in harm, such as participating in or making them watch harm being done to you or others (including the pet).
- Leaving you and children at home for long periods of time (all day or a few days/weeks) with no means of transportation, phone, access to food, and other needs.
- Destroying property (throwing or breaking things) to cause harm, fear, intimidation, or punishment.
- Sabotaging parenting efforts by undermining parenting role.
- Preventing you from reaching out for help/support for you to keep your children safe from your partner's parenting and behavior choices, including interfering with your safety plan, locking you up, breaking your phone, etc.
- Causing you physical harm, including bumping, pushing, shoving, smacking, punching, pinching, pulling your hair, choking/strangling, etc.
- Using any weapons against you or your children, or leaving weapons visible as warning or intimidation tactics.
- Threatening to harm you in other ways, like getting you arrested, calling immigration enforcement, outing you if you are in an LGBTQIA+ relationship, or threatening to take the kids if you leave.
- Causing harm to the children (accidentally or on purpose), including physical injury or sexual abuse.
**Children cannot give consent of any sexual act, sexual grooming, or abusive behaviors. Signs of the intent to cause harm may include requiring the protective parent to leave the room/house or making the child stay inside while others leave or go outside, or forcing the child to go for a drive or go to bed with the potentially abusive parent/caregiver/other. Sexual Abuse could include groping, inappropriate touching, oral acts, penetration of any kind, kissing, forcing child to sit on lap, take showers with the abusive parent.*
- Threatening to hurt or kill you, family/others or pets.

Use the power and control wheel to identify behavior patterns that have been used against you or someone that you love



If you or anyone you know are experiencing any of these behaviors in the home, please find help. You can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1.800.799.7233 and they can help you find a local entity able to get you the help you need.

Or, locally, you can contact:

Confidential, 24-hour SAFeline

Call: **512.267.SAFE (7233)** Text: **737.888.7233** Chat: safeaustin.org/chat

For Deaf people of all identities, please use relay/VRS

How to safety plan during the COVID-19 pandemic



The purpose of this document is to help potential victims and survivors of domestic and/or family violence think about how they can create a safety plan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consider the following:

Identify your strengths and protective parenting efforts

- Assess your situation. This could include asking yourself the following questions:
 - What do I have power and control over and what do I not right now?
 - What can I do to practice safety and good healthy routines to prevent the COVID-19 spread within my home and family?
 - What are the three things I do best as a parent to keep us safe/healthy during quarantine? (Examples may be sending them outside, keeping them busy, keeping snacks in the house, etc.)
 - What else can I do to keep myself and my children safer?
- Know when/how to attempt to reach out to friends, family, or neighbors for support and/or safety. This could include sending children to them to play or sleep when necessary or when there is danger.
- Identify ways to keep your children healthy, including taking your child to obtain medical/mental health care when needed, implementing healthy bed/bath/meal routines, and/or learning how to do chores or cook together. This could also mean talking with your children about their fears and feelings.

Look for patterns or triggers of abuse or violence

- Now that you, your partner, and children are all home for long periods of time due to the change in schools physically closing down, job strain, or job loss, what makes it difficult to avoid violence in your home. For example, answer the following questions:
 - What time of day is the most difficult to navigate? Is the morning the hardest because people are not getting enough sleep, or is it mid-day when people are bored, or evening when people are drunk or high?
 - What is the normal family routine during the “high tension times,” such as first thing in the morning, lunchtime, dinnertime or bedtime?
 - Is there any way that your routine can be adjusted to keep yourself and the children safer (both physically and/or emotionally) and more calm during that period of time despite the harm that your partner is causing?
 - What do you notice about your partner before outburst? For example, are they swearing, is there a voice change, or are they being extremely nice or agitated?
 - When you notice changes in your partner, like those mentioned above, what is an immediate action that you can take to keep yourself and your children safer?
- Once you have identified the patterns, you can think about ways to utilize your time to prepare for outbursts and what you/your children will do during those times of increased danger.

Gauge your level of social, cultural and spiritual connectedness

- Check in and attempt to stay in contact with others in your community (for example a pastor, group leader, neighbor, mentor, etc.) through remote ways of connecting, like text, video calls, or other social media access.
- Find a trusted person that you can talk to about the potential or occurring danger in your home for you and your children.
- Consider ways that you can safely share information through methods such as prayer requests or requests for other basic needs to be met during the pandemic, for example asking for food delivery.
- Be creative about how you stay connected to belief systems or cultural routines/supports, such as creating plans for how to celebrate upcoming holidays with your community from home.
- If it is safe, follow and/or share with online faith groups who are trauma-informed in prevention and intervention strategies around family violence, parenting, and trauma.
- Save important phone numbers in a notebook in case your phone is not in working condition.
- Document, screenshot, or draw a map to nearest crisis relief center or meeting place in case your family is separated or needs to meet. Make sure that you and your children understand and have a copy of that document.
- Partner with a neighbor, youth pastor, or family friend to support you and your children's safety and well-being. This could include asking the following questions:
 - Who is a close/safe family, friend, or neighbor who can agree to be available during those “peak hours”?
 - Can you create a system to alert the friend/family/neighbor when you are in danger? This could be something like flashing your lights if you need help, or having your kids ask for a neighbor for sugar if they are in danger in the house, or taking out the garbage at the same time as a neighbor – and if you do not appear then they know to call 911.
 - Who can watch your children during high tension periods of time or emergency? What is the signal (code word) that tells them that you/your children are following a safety plan?

Physical safety planning

- Identify safe spaces within your home or yard to stay during high tension periods of time; this could mean going for a walk, hanging out in the garage, or watching a movie.
- Make sure that weapons are locked away and kept out of children's reach.
- If you are in an argument, stay away from the kitchen and areas where weapons are potentially kept.
- Pack a "go bag" in the event that you and/or the kids need to take a break, visit friends/family while practicing safe distancing, or stay somewhere during a cooling period. Make sure the "go bag" has important documents (such as ID), medications, and/or sanitation supplies (such as soap and hand sanitizer).
- If you don't live with your former partner, but need to meet to drop off or pick up your child or items, it is important to follow these tips:
 - Ideally take a friend/family member with you or have someone on the phone with you.
 - Let someone know the time and location of the pick-up/drop-off.
 - If possible, stay in the car and/or practice social distancing during the drop off.
- Make an anonymous call to a 24/7 domestic violence hotline (1.800.799.7233) for more detailed safety planning. You can also text/chat to prevent others from hearing your conversation. Most shelters are often full, however, you are encouraged to call regardless. Many communities are creatively using hotels, churches, etc. You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

Emotional safety planning

- Develop a routine that you can follow during difficult times; creating a regular routine that you follow during dangerous or traumatic periods will help you to stay calm and focused on your safety plan.
- Create a schedule for yourself to practice grounding exercises, meditation, prayer, etc.
- It's OK to cry. We are human beings filled with different emotions at different times. Plan a time for yourself to release your tears in a safe, quiet space during some alone time.
- Support yourself and your children by talking/writing about their fears and/or concerns in a safe space and during a time that is safe to do so. You or your kids might write in a notebook, on a notes app on your phone/tablet, or create a blog. You can also email your thoughts to yourself or a trusted person in your life.

If you need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Self-reflection and Accountability

Tips for the Person Using Power, Control, Violence or Abuse

The purpose of this document is to help a partner or parent that is considering using violence or abuse in a relationship. The goal is to help you, someone who may use violence or abuse, to think about yourself and your actions, taking into account why you may decide to use power or control.

Before using power, control, violence or abuse, you could consider the following:

Questions to ask yourself during moments of feeling the need to execute power and control

- Do I make all of the decisions for the household? Do I ask for my partner's opinion? If so, do I allow my partner to make decisions (even if I disagree)?
- What are the impacts that my behavior/parenting choices are having on my partner and children?
- What is the root cause of my current anxiety, anger, frustration and stress? Examples may include loss of income, mental health, irritation due to social distancing, etc.
- Do I think I have a short temper? Am I jealous or have insecurities?
- What are some of the things that I argue/disagree about with my partner? Is there an area of healthy compromise or do I feel the need to "win" or get my way?
- How do my behaviors effect my partner physically, emotionally, psychologically/mentally, verbally, or sexually? Children? Others in the home?
- What does my body feel when I am triggered? Examples my include tightening hands, increased heart rate, sweating, etc.
- And what happens before and/or after my body begins to react?
- Where can I go or what can I do to prevent myself from hurting my partner/children?
- What is my typical response when I do not feel in control?
- What are the consequences for my partner or children when they are "disobedient"? Do I give physical, emotional or psychological/mental, verbal, or sexual consequences?
- Do I contribute to the stress in my household? If so, how?
- Do I regularly interrupt healthy daily routines, such as sleep, meals, bath, or homework?
- Is checking my partner's phone, email, social media accounts hurtful to my partner or cause problems in the household?

Ways that you have the power to share responsibilities and have equal parenting roles

- You can, with a positive attitude, lend a helping hand to support your partner/children with meals, bedtime, play time, school, etc. without manipulation or penalty later on.
- You can help calm your partner and children during stressful moments during this time.
- You can practice supporting your kid's relationship with their other parent. Consider whether the things that you are saying about the other parent are helpful and positive or harmful and negative.
- You can practice safe distancing, wash your hands, or clean areas that your family may touch daily to keep your family healthy and use/access resources as necessary.
- You can quarantine yourself if you think that you may have come in contact with someone who has been exposed to COVID-19 or experience symptoms or any other illness.

What you can do to change your behaviors and promote healing

- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What kind of parent do I want to be? What kind of relationship do I want with my children?
 - What do I hope my children think about me? What do I think my children will say about me in five years?
- Hold yourself accountable when you are not being a healthy active partner/parent without blaming others.
- Identify your own behaviors that cause the most harm and come up with alternative solutions to dealing with your anxiety, fear, frustration, and/or anger.
- Do your part to promote safety and well-being for your partner and children at all times.
- Do not interfere with daily family functions, parent-child bonding, or safety plans. This includes supporting your child's relationship with the other parent in the home, or when they are visiting the other parent.
- When you do argue, take a reasonable break (and/or support your partner to take a break) to calm down with the plan to return to the conflict, listen to your partner/children and try to compromise to reach a balanced outcome for everyone.
- Make an effort to learn more tools, practice using healthy, respectful communication and gain understanding about my perspective and others in order to prevent me from harming my partner/children and promote healing.
- Manage your own sobriety and mental health needs so that you can be your best self as a partner/parent.
- Ask for/seek help. You need not do this on your own; there are people ready to help you stop using violence, abuse, power and control.

If you need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

How to Help Someone Experiencing Violence During COVID-19?:



Tips for the neighbor, friend, family member, faith partner, or professional to help survivors and children

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to the community members that can help potential victims and survivors of domestic and/or family violence. Whether you are a neighbor, a friend, a faith leader, a professional, or even a family member, it can be difficult to know how to be supportive in the face of a family violence situation.

The most important thing is to listen. It is imperative to remember that the survivor is the expert in their own home and relationship and life. It is imperative that you listen to the survivor, and let them know that you are there to support them. If they do not take your advice, it does not mean they do not want your help – just that it might not work for their particular situation.

Besides listening, here are some other important things you can do:

Be present during the conversation

- Calmly listen to the person who is trusting you with their personal information without interruption, judgment, or dismissing their truth. And remember, violence is never the victim's fault. Manage your tone of voice and expressions.
- Be aware of your own personal biases, fears, or belief systems that could interfere with creating a safe space to ask for help. If you feel strongly that your idea of how to handle their situation is the only idea that is effective/helpful or you are going to “save” the survivor, then it is likely your own personal biases, fears, or belief systems are interfering. This type of approach also encourages defensiveness and results in less engagement.
- Refrain from judging, preaching to, victim blaming, and talking down to the survivor for being in the relationship, staying in the relationship, or not leaving the relationship (including if you don't believe in the type of relationship).

- Refrain from responding to the survivor in a racist or privileged manner. Be willing to learn more about different cultures and communities of people.
- Refrain from using clichés and victim-blaming questions such as, “What did you do?”, or “Why are you still there?”, or “Why haven’t you left?”, etc.
- Affirm the survivor and validate their strengths by acknowledging their efforts to keep self/children safe.
- Try to be available when the survivor/children are. Survivors do not typically have control over their schedules or free time. They may need to call during early/late hours, or at random times. They may be reaching out while the abusive partner is asleep, showering, or out of the house.
- Try to understand that survival tactics used by survivors can cause them to act differently when they are around their partners to appease them. This can seem to contradict confidential conversations about harm that you may have heard.
- Do not confront, call names, stare, roll your eyes, or judge the abusive partner.

Be a part of the safety plan

- Do not bring up that you have spoken and/or have a safety plan while their partner is around.
- Keep the plan, all information shared, and current status/location confidential with the understanding of when the survivor wants you to check in on them or reach out for help.
- Check in with the survivor (text/call/knock). Just chat about other things unrelated to the control and/or violence until the survivor lets you know that it is safe to talk.
- Offer to help the survivor identify and connect with others that can help and support them, for example church members, children’s schools or daycares, social groups, co-workers, family, etc.
- Trust your instincts about your own safety and the support that you can offer. Support the survivor in the way that YOU can.
- And avoid promising anything that you cannot deliver. If you are a part of a survivor’s safety plan, then they are counting on you to do what you said you would do.

Don’t justify the power, control, violence or abuse

- If the abusive parent/partner is your family or friend, refrain from rallying or plotting against the survivor.
- Refrain from accusing, or blaming the survivor or children for causing the violence.
- Do not involve the children by questioning or interrogating them. If your home is designated as a space to escape for play or to spend the night (escape), allow them space.

If you need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Staying Safe & Healthy During COVID-19:

Tips to increase safety, well-being, and resilience



The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to potential victims and survivors and their community supporters on how to stay safe and healthy during the very stressful COVID-19 pandemic.

In the best of circumstances, managing stress due to isolation, family dynamics, and financial impacts can be overwhelming and can trigger anxiety and depression, as well as substance use relapses or increased use within the home. The COVID-19 pandemic is only increasing the level of stress, while frequently removing many of the social structures that survivors rely on to remain safe and healthy.

Here are some key ways that survivors can maintain their safety and health during this time:

Maintain sobriety and mental health

- Attend virtual support meetings (online). There are a number of support programs online, including In The Rooms (intherooms.com/home/), Alcoholics Anonymous online (aa-intergroup.org) or Celebrate Recovery (celebraterecovery.com/).
- If you have insurance, ask your insurance provider or employer for a list of contracted licensed therapists, or ask your faith community for a list of licensed professionals that offer free or low cost sessions.
- Create a schedule to connect with your sponsor and support circle virtually.
- Watch YouTube videos on yoga, dance, and inspirational recovery testimonies, or join positive Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter pages to engage in chats for support.

- Eat whole foods that are good for recovery! Certain foods have nutrients that can boost brain health, mood, and alleviate some mental/physical symptoms of withdrawal and speed the healing process.
 - Foods with amino acid tyrosine (the precursor to the “feel good” dopamine chemical) such as bananas, sunflower seeds, soybeans, lean beef, lamb, pork, whole grains and cheese, beets, carrots, beans, brussels sprouts, celery, papaya and protein-rich foods like beef, chicken, fish, dairy products and eggs.
 - Foods rich in L-glutamine (immune and antioxidant), such as dark leafy greens, kale, spinach, parsley.
 - Foods packed with antioxidants (rebuild immune system) such as berries like blueberries and strawberries, as well as leeks, onions, artichokes, and pecans.
 - Foods that boost your levels of GABA (promotes calm and relaxation), such as kefir (a fermented yogurt-like drink), shrimp and cherry tomatoes.
- Practice grounding exercises that help to regain control of the amount of oxygen that circulates through your brain and nervous system. This can help you pull away from flashbacks, unwanted memories, and negative/challenging emotions. You can do this by going on a short walk, focusing on small items and simply naming them, taking deep belly breaths, and reminding yourself of three good things in your life.
- Attempt to keep your medical and mental health care appointments by phone or video chat if possible.

SAMHSA's (FREE) 24/7 National Helpline (English/Spanish) 1-800-662-HELP (4357), TTY: 1-800-487-4889 is a confidential information service for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

Enhance self-care and resilience

- Invest in you and your children.
- Engage in natural ways to balance and maintain inner-control over your own sleep-wake cycle, memory, metabolism, and emotional well-being for you and your family. Some ideas include:
 - Drink plenty of water and get enough sleep.
 - Listen to music, exercise creative skills/art, and/or reading.
 - When you can find time, play with the kids. They are likely to need more during this time of social isolation.
 - Exercise in a room or porch for 30 minutes. Research shows that exercising can boost your mood, reduce anxiety, lower stress levels, and improve your immune system.
- Spend time in nature. The sun works wonders! Walk outside to enjoy the weather, sounds of nature, or kids playing.
- Schedule time to relax (before family wakes up, with children, or after all have gone to bed).
- Use essential oils, candles, and bath bombs such as lavender and eucalyptus.
- Learn a new language. You can use apps like Duolingo, Babble, or Google Translate.
- Stay culturally/spiritually connected through calls, text, video chat, etc. You can do virtual dinners, or even virtual movie or game nights, or dance parties.
- Seek creative connections. Ask your kids what they think would be fun for you to do with them to connect with their friends and family.

COVID-19 Specific Health Tips

- Plan ahead for basic needs. Stock up on groceries and supplies if possible.
- Contact your healthcare provider to ask for extra necessary medications to have on hand in case you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time. Consider using a mail-order option for ordering your medications.
- Purchase over-the-counter medicines and supplies (Tylenol, allergy meds, tissues, etc.) to treat a fever and other symptoms in case you feel sick. Most people can recover from COVID-19 at home.
- Avoid contact with others. Avoid handshakes, hugs, and high fives!
- Wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds.
- When running water and soap are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home unless you are meeting basic needs (getting groceries, going to a medical appointment/pharmacy, or your job is essential (must stay open to meet others basic needs)).
- If you MUST go out in public, practice social distancing (stand at least 6 feet apart from others). Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throw used tissues in the trash. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into your elbow or sleeve, not your hands.
- Wear facemasks to cover nose and mouth when out in public.
- If you must go out in public for work and interact with the community, consider a station at the door to clean hands and remove shoes. Strategize with your family to create a routine regarding immediate showers and where to leave clothes. Partner with those who are vulnerable in your home to maintain good health habits in the home.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, computers, phones, keyboards, sinks, toilets, faucets, and countertops.
- Wipe or use gloves when touching gas pumps, shopping cart handles, etc.
- Stay home if you are sick. If possible, self-isolate in a room without others. If that is not possible, wear a facemask and gloves when you are around other people.

If you need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).