

Guidance for volunteers on domestic abuse and sexual violence during social distancing and isolation



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

Introduction:

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence can take many forms including sexual assault, coercive and controlling behaviour, threats and/ or physical violence. In this time of social distancing and self-isolation we know that many people who are living with their perpetrator will be fearful of abuse escalating and unfortunately, we know a rise in incidents of abuse and violence is highly likely.

Social distancing and isolation provide more opportunities for a perpetrator to invent new tactics of control and survivors may find their communications with trusted support networks and loved ones are limited and their routes to escape an unsafe space restricted.

Survivors who have previously left their perpetrators might also be fearful during this time as the current conditions could provide opportunities for ex-partners to restart controlling and threatening behaviours. These could include failing to comply with restraining orders or child contact orders.

Survivors who have experienced abuse in the past may also be finding it hard with limited support networks. Distancing and isolation can trigger flashbacks and painful memories which can be detrimental to well-being in an already stressful time.

As a volunteer currently acting within the community, it is important to be aware that you might be coming into contact with survivors. It will be helpful to familiarise yourself with the information and tools in this leaflet, to both be supportive to survivors and keep yourself safe.

What is Domestic abuse and sexual violence

Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling behaviour by one person over another within an intimate or close family relationship; the abuse can be sexual, physical, financial, emotional or psychological.

- It can happen regardless of sex, age, carer responsibility, class, disability, gender identity, immigration status, ethnicity, geography or religion.
- However, the gender of the survivor and of the perpetrator influences the severity, risk, and harm caused.

Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity.

- Sexual violence can be committed by someone known and even trusted, such as a partner or ex-partner, friend, colleague or family member, as well as by strangers and acquaintances.
- Sexual violence can happen regardless of sex, age, carer responsibility, class, disability, gender identity, immigration status, ethnicity, geography or religion.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence are never acceptable, no matter the circumstances.



Live Fear Free Helpline
0808 80 10 800
Llinell Gymorth
Byw Heb Ofn



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What to do if someone discloses:

It takes a huge amount of courage to make a disclosure. It is fundamental therefore, to create a safe environment to make a disclosure by:

- Thanking and reassuring them for trusting you.
- Listen and believe them. Do this without trying to 'fix' their situation, instead use phrases such as: "Help is available- you are not alone" or "It is not your fault"
- Not making promises that you are unable to keep.
- If in doubt, be honest and ask for clarification 'I'm not sure I understand...'
- Giving choices and options. Refer to specialist services if appropriate. Don't tell them what to do.
- Be led by them and the amount they feel able to tell you.
- Keep boundaries and understand the limitations of your role, you are not a counsellor and need to take care of yourself too.
- Call the Live Fear Free helpline (0808 8010 800) for advice or the police on 999 if there is an emergency.
- Safely signpost to the **Live Fear Free Helpline on 0808 80 10 800**. If a perpetrator is present or monitoring communications it is not always safe to directly share the number. Promoting on websites, leaflets and in community spaces can help.

Listen, Believe and Signpost

How to support if you are a volunteer coordinator/manager:

- **Provide a safe and supportive environment** for volunteers within your team to be able to speak about their experiences with trust and confidence is imperative.
- **Talk to volunteers in your team about an escalation process;** if they tell you that they have come into contact with someone who has disclosed abuse or who they believe is experiencing abuse and encourage them to keep the confidentiality of that person where possible (see below information on breaking confidentiality). Remember the volunteer or yourself can contact the Live Fear Free Helpline for expert guidance and support. Remind them that this is not their responsibility to take on or 'fix' the situation. Ensure they know to Listen, Believe and Signpost.
- It is important that your team of volunteers know that in an emergency-if they know or believe that the perpetrator is threatening, attacking or pursuing the survivor, they should **call 999 in an emergency** as soon as possible. (See below for more information on what to do if its an emergency).
- If a volunteer within your team makes a personal disclosure of abuse or violence to you, keep the advice in this leaflet in mind. (See box on what to do if someone discloses).
- Welsh Women's Aid have published more guidance for employers supporting staff experiencing domestic abuse during social distancing and isolation that can help. Please find that here: **Employer Briefing: Domestic Abuse and COVID 19**



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In an emergency: If the perpetrator is threatening, attacking or pursuing them, ring 999 as soon as possible.

Remember the **Silent Solution System**: If after dialing 999 you are not safe to speak to the operator, what for the operator to answer then press 55 to make the call handler aware you can't speak but need help.

Plan an escape route – think about where they will go so they can call the police or alert a neighbour, and plan a place to meet with their children if they get separated.

Teach their children how to call 999 in an emergency.

Avoid rooms like the bathroom, kitchen or garage, which contain objects that could be used to hurt them.

If they are not able to get out of the house, barricade or lock themselves in a room, from which you can call the police and contact friends, family or neighbours.

Move to lower-risk parts of their home, where there is an escape route or access to a phone.

Important note about breaking confidentiality:

In circumstances where confidentiality cannot be assured, e.g., where there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where a voluntary organisation needs to act to protect the safety of employees, volunteers and service users – information will, as far as possible, only be shared on a need to know basis and in accordance with your own organisational safeguarding procedures.

In circumstances where you must breach confidentiality, discuss this with the employee, volunteer or service user to explain why this is the case, seeking their agreement where possible.

Live Fear Free Helpline

Live Fear Free is open 24 hours 7 days a week and is free to contact. They can provide help and advice to:

- Anyone experiencing domestic abuse.
- Anyone who knows someone who needs help. For example, a friend, family member or colleague.
- Practitioners and volunteers seeking professional advice.

All conversations with Live Fear Free are confidential and are taken by staff that are highly experienced and fully trained.

Call: 0808 80 10 800

Text: 07860 077333

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Live chat service: <https://gov.wales/live-fear-free/domestic-abuse-wales>

Please promote the above information about the Live Fear Free Helpline in shared community spaces, on your website, social media, leaflets and handbooks.



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