

# COVID-19 AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE INFORMATION SHEET

## What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence refers to a pattern of behaviour where one person aims to exert power and control over another person through fear. It can occur within intimate relationships (dating, cohabiting partners, marriage) or within family/kinship groups across generations.

Domestic violence is not only physical or sexual. Non-physical violence and abuse can also be very harmful and includes threats and intimidation, psychological or emotional abuse, social abuse (for example, stopping someone from contacting family and friends) and financial abuse.

Violence against anyone of any gender is unacceptable. However, evidence shows overwhelmingly that women experience the most domestic violence, with an average of one Australian woman murdered by her current or former partner each week. Children also experience domestic violence and witnessing violence against a parent has long-term harmful impacts for children.

## COVID-19 and domestic and family violence

Many employees are now working from home. For some, home may not be a safe environment due to domestic and family violence.

While the impacts of COVID-19 – including heightened stress, financial pressure and isolation – do not cause domestic violence, they are likely to increase the frequency and severity of violence. Additionally, people's options for removing themselves from an unsafe situation (such as staying with family or friends) are reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Violence and abuse are unacceptable at any time. In the current circumstances, police are continuing to respond to reports of domestic violence as usual, to protect victims and to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour.

## Safety planning tips for employees at risk or experiencing domestic violence.

**If you are in immediate danger, call Police on 000.**

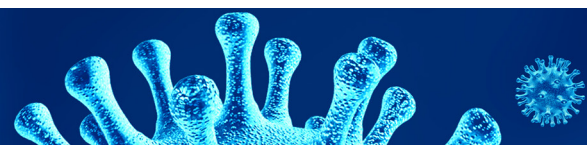
**1800RESPECT** provides the following **safety planning tips** for women at risk or experiencing domestic violence:

- Contact 1800RESPECT by [phone or web chat](#) when it is safe to do so. 1800RESPECT counsellors are experienced in dealing with situations where the person using violence is still in the house and will work with you on a [safety plan](#).
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are less dangerous items and may be ways to escape, if possible.
- Have a phone charged and accessible, with important numbers stored. If possible, have a back-up phone.
- Teach your children how to call 000 in the event that you are unable to do so.
- Let trusted friends and neighbours know of your situation and develop a plan (for example, a visual sign or code word if you need help).
- Make a habit of backing into the driveway and keeping the car fuelled.
- Look through 1800RESPECT's [Escape Bag checklist](#) and make a note of things you may need to take with you (for example, phone and charger, keys, credit card/cash, important documents).
- Download the [Sunny app](#) (for women with disability) or [Daisy app](#) for more information about safety planning and services in your area.

The [Domestic Violence Crisis Line \(1800 800 098\)](#) can also assist women to create a safety plan. DV Crisis Line staff have localised knowledge of support services and can help you find safe accommodation if needed, despite current COVID-19 restrictions and regardless of your health status.

## Supports for employees experiencing domestic and family violence

Employees working from home and experiencing domestic and family violence are encouraged to advise their manager or human resources professional so that appropriate supports can be put in place.



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The [Guideline of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment: Domestic and Family Violence](#) provides information for both employees experiencing domestic and family violence and the managers and human resources professionals supporting them.

**Paid and unpaid leave is available for any employee experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence.** This includes 15 days special leave with pay in addition to existing leave entitlements. For more information on these special leave provisions see Attachment F of [Commissioner's Determination 3.1 – Employment Conditions – Hours of Work, Overtime and Leave](#).

Additional support services are available for any public sector employee experiencing domestic and family violence:

- Employee Assistance Providers.
- For free crisis counselling and access to safe accommodation call **1800 800 098 – Domestic Violence Crisis Line, Women's Safety Services SA.**
- For free confidential help for women experiencing work-related issues call **08 8410 6499 Metropolitan** or **1800 652 697 Regional – Working Women's Centre SA Inc.**

Employees concerned about their own use of violence or abuse can contact [MensLine Australia](#) (1300 789 978) or their Employee Assistance Provider.

## Responding to disclosures from employees experiencing domestic and family violence

In line with the [Guideline of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment: Domestic and Family Violence](#) (Guideline), managers and HR professionals responding to disclosures should:

- Establish whether there is an immediate risk to the safety of the person disclosing, their children or anyone else. In an emergency, call 000.

- Listen without interruption or judgement. Show empathy. Believe the person and take their fears seriously.
- Demonstrate appropriate boundaries and not 'counsel' the employee.
- Provide accurate information on leave provisions and available supports and services.
- Remember that the person disclosing is in control of any decisions or actions and the timing of these.
- Keep any related information or records confidential, in line with the Guideline and any legal limits to confidentiality.

The *Guideline* specifies that a **workplace domestic violence personal safety plan** should be developed where it has been identified that the employee's safety in the workplace or that of their co-workers is at risk. The COVID-19 crisis means that for employees experiencing domestic violence, their workplace is now likely to be the home they share with the person using violence.

Managers and HR professionals should encourage and support the disclosing employee to seek expert advice (for example, via the DV Crisis Line or 1800RESPECT) to assess risk related to the violence and to develop a safety plan. Managers and HR professionals can also directly seek advice and support through 1800RESPECT.

Managers should document and implement any actions to be taken by the employee's manager or workplace to promote their safety while working from home, identified through the risk assessment and safety planning process. For example, the employee and manager may negotiate a regular 'check in' or agree on a word or visual cue for the employee to use during video-conference meetings if they are in danger.

Further information on responding to disclosures of domestic violence sensitively and effectively is provided by [1800RESPECT](#) and [Our Watch](#). 1800 RESPECT includes information on the signs that someone may be experiencing domestic violence and guidance on how to ask someone about it appropriately.

