

Friends and family responses to domestic and family violence during COVID-19

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. In addition to the technical and logistical challenges associated with staying connected to friends and family members under self-isolation and social distancing measures, there are additional challenges for those experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV).

Adverse events (bushfires, job loss, financial crisis, financial stress) can lead to an escalation of gendered violence and domestic abuse*.

Remote working and self-isolation measures will exacerbate the physical isolation of people experiencing DFV and put them in almost constant, close proximity with the person who is abusing them. Perpetrators of DFV intentionally isolate victims from others to increase their control over the victim and to minimise the victim’s resistance to the perpetrators abuse and violence.

It is highly likely abusers will exploit this period of enforced isolation to increase their use of violence during this period.

*Parkinson, Debra & Zara, C.. (2013). The hidden disaster: Domestic violence in the aftermath of natural disaster. Australian Journal of Emergency Management. 28. 28-35.

Do | Don't | Remember

With this in mind, here are some tips for friends and family during this time:

Do

- Assume that a perpetrator of violence can hear, see and/or monitor all communications you have with your friend or family member.
- Ask your friend or family member what channels they prefer to be contacted through. Keep checking as this may change.
- Ask your friend or family member if there are better and worse times of day for you to contact them. Keep asking as this may change.
- Ask your friend or family member if there is anything you can do to make their lives easier e.g. shop for supplies, play games or activities with the kids via video call, or anything else allowed within government guidelines. Keep asking as this may change.
- Uphold the dignity of your friends and family members (including children) by honouring their competencies, strategies and choices in responding to perpetrators of DFV and their efforts to keep themselves and other safe.

Don't

- Assume your friend or family member are safe.
- Assume that if someone does not call that they are uninterested or ignoring you.
- Underestimate the potential value of your friendship, kinship and familial support for connection, safety and meaning.
- Assume that physically intervening will create safety. For example, knocking on your friend or family member’s door and inquiring about their safety may inadvertently increase their risk of harm.

Remember

Domestic and family violence services are deemed “essential services” by all levels of Australian government and continue to operate through this time. Most services have moved to significantly reduce face to face contact but have increased remote methods of working. Where it’s safe and appropriate to do so, you can continue to refer people to specialist services.

See page 2 overleaf to read about the importance of friends and family members as responders and explore the resources



Responding to domestic and family violence during and beyond COVID-19 – A guide for friends and family

Victims/survivors of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) often discuss their concerns about assaults, abuse and coercive control with their friends and trusted family members before making reports and disclosures to police and human services¹.

Family members and friends often hold concerns about DFV and sexual assault without the person experiencing violence mentioning their distress and fears. With or without disclosures, many friends and family members feel uncertain as to how to respond.

Friends and family members are best placed to offer meaningful social responses that uphold the dignity of victims². Meaningful social responses include, believing the victim and taking their accounts of violence and abuse seriously, respecting their competencies, strategies and choices. Friends and family members are vital to sustaining a supportive connection through the dangerous constraints of control and isolation enforced by perpetrators of violence.

Resources



Read and share [Follow My Lead](#)

An awareness raising resource for any person who may be listening to and responding to a person experiencing DFV.

[Read More](#)



Read and share [My Safety Kit](#)

A reflection resource for people who are (or may be) experiencing domestic and family violence.

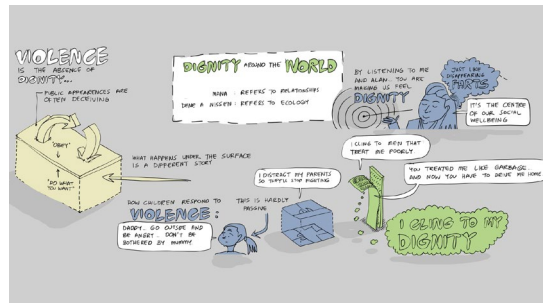
[Read More](#)

For more insights and resources like these, visit [Insight Exchange](#).

Build your awareness

Watch the Insight Exchange video (10mins) Dignity - Our Social Responses with Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade

<https://vimeo.com/288468075>



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I think changing the culture is about raising awareness in the public domain to such a level that what we learn can't be unlearned, and what we know can't be unknown. I think it is imperative to raise this issue to the point where everyone knows it's an issue, everyone knows the statistics and everyone understands the different forms of family violence³

[Batty, Royal Commission into Family Violence]

Virtually every form of violence has as its function, to isolate the victim.

[Dr Linda Coates]

Try to learn what people (victims) already know, feel, believe and do instead of rushing in with advice.

[Dr Allan Wade]

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1. State of Victoria, (2014-16), Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parliamentary Paper No 132.
2. Coates, L., & Wade, A. (2007). Language and Violence; Analysis of Four Discursive Operations. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22 (7), 511-522.