

Responding to customers experiencing domestic and family violence during COVID-19

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. Many organisations are experiencing increased call volumes in addition to managing significant technical, logistical, and operational challenges.

Teams are doing more work remotely and in a potentially higher stress environment. Many of your customers will be experiencing similar things and there are additional challenges for people 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.



See page 2 overleaf to read about the importance of organisations as responders to DFV and explore the free, ready-to-use, resources

Do | Don't | Remember

With this in mind, here are some tips for organisations and call -centre staff during this time:

Do

- Keep in mind the possibility that your customer may be experiencing (or perpetrating) domestic and family violence.
- Assume that a perpetrator of violence can hear, see and/or monitor all communications you have with your customer.
- Check with your customer what is the best way to communicate with them. If you are making a pro-active (outbound) call, check if it's a good time to talk.
- Ask customers if they have any other concerns. If appropriate, offer an alternative method for them to share this with you (in-branch, LiveChat or email).

Don't

- Assume customers are safe, or safer, at home.
- Assume that if someone lodged an inquiry and now does not want to speak to you about that inquiry, that they are being 'difficult'. You can suggest they're welcome to renew their inquiry at any time. Again, if possible, offer alternative ways they can communicate with you.
- Underestimate the potential value of your response to their needs, and your patience and understanding.

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 refer people to specialist services.

If you're not sure what local services are available, refer people impacted by DFV to 1800-RESPECT (24/7).

Responding to customers experiencing domestic and family violence beyond COVID-19

Staff in call-centres are in contact with people from all communities. For some people experiencing domestic and family violence, a conversation with someone from your company, agency, or organisation could be a rare opportunity to interact with another person. Yet every interaction has the potential to create or undermine the safety of the person experiencing violence and abuse.

No matter how well intended the caller, safety is always at stake and a victim of violence will be using whatever strategies, including a rapid change in strategies, to manage their safety if their risks change during the call.

Perpetrators often monitor the various channels (e.g. mobile phones, internet, email) their victim may use to communicate with others.

We encourage organisations to develop their awareness of domestic and family violence and their readiness to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

Resources | Ready to use and share



Watch the [short Follow My Lead animation](#) (4mins) Read and share [Follow My Lead](#)

An awareness raising resource for any person who may be listening to and responding to a person experiencing domestic and family violence. [Read More](#)



Watch the [short My Safety Kit animation](#) (2.5mins) 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) Understanding Abusive Behaviour - Dr Allan Wade, Centre for Response-Based Practice (Canada)

<https://vimeo.com/289600329>



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

[Coates, Centre for Response-Based Practice]

How important it is to train staff on how to respond to disclosures with dignity at the heart of all engagement. This is everyone's responsibility.

[No to Violence]

Reinforces the responsibility we all have as responders to do so with the voice of victims in mind. Reminder of resources and reigniting energy to use our network through EAP (employee assistance program) to educate clinicians and also customers to improve knowledge and response.

[Access EAP]



Are your customers experiencing economic abuse?

Explore and share the Centre for Women's Economic Safety [Directory](#)