

Responding to tertiary students experiencing domestic and family violence during COVID-19

The technical, logistical and social challenges associated with COVID-19 pandemic have been, and continue to be, enormous. TAFE, Universities and other tertiary education centres, across Australia have pivoted to online learning modalities and have adopted social distancing measures throughout the pandemic. These measures have helped keep as many students safe from the infectious disease as possible whilst maintaining access to quality education. However, Australian¹ and international evidence² has indicated a sharp rise in the frequency and intensity of domestic and family Violence (DFV) and sexualised violence perpetration during this time.

Tertiary students experience DFV and sexualised violence in a range of contexts such as: residential colleges, share houses, on campus, in workplaces and/or in the family home. Studying/working under the COVID-19 measures exacerbates the physical isolation of students and puts them in almost constant, close proximity with the person who has chosen to abuse them.

Many First Nations students, International Students, students living with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex students and students from Out of Home Care families (foster care) are experiencing heightened job insecurity, housing and financial stress at this time. Many of these students are also facing greater challenges in reporting and in accessing support services for DFV and sexualised violence.

¹Boxall, Morgan & Brown (2020). *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

²Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, Shah, Oertelt-Prigione & van Gelder, (2020). *Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children*. CGD Working Paper 528. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

Do | Don't | Remember

With this in mind, here are some tips for staff and student peers during this time:

Do

- Assume that a perpetrator of violence can hear, see and/or monitor all communications you have with students.
- Ask students what channels they prefer to be contacted through. Keep checking as this may change.
- Ask students if there are better and worse times of day for you to contact them. Keep asking as this may change.
- Uphold the dignity of students by honouring their competencies, strengths and choices in responding to perpetrators of DFV and their efforts to keep themselves and other safe.

Don't

- Assume students are safe from violence and abuse.
- Assume that if a student stops attending online tutorials or lectures that they are uninterested or disengaged from their studies – a perpetrator may be preventing their access to free use of their devices.
- Underestimate the potential value of your role (as a student peer, academic or administrative staff member) in maintaining connection, safety and meaning for students experiencing DFV and sexualised violence.
- Assume that physically intervening will create safety. Attempt to physically intervene. For example, knocking on a student's door at their home address 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 staff and students as responders and explore the free ready resources

Responding to tertiary students experiencing domestic and family violence beyond COVID-19

Student peers, academic and administrative staff are well placed to provide meaningful responses to tertiary students experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) and sexualised violence. Victims often discuss their concerns about assaults, abuse and coercive control with people they know and trust such as peers, friends, lecturers, tutors/teachers and administrative staff before making reports to police and seeking help from human services¹.

Yet, many people feel uncertain as to how to respond when a student describes experiencing DFV and sexualised violence. We encourage tertiary education centres and student peers to develop their awareness and readiness to respond to disclosures of DFV. Meaningful social responses include, believing the victim and taking their accounts of violence and abuse seriously, respecting their competencies, strategies and choices².

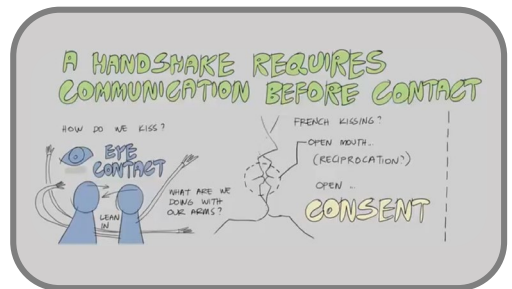
Student peers, academic and administrative staff are vital to sustaining supportive connections through the dangerous constraints of control and isolation enforced by perpetrators of violence.

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.

Build your awareness

Watch the Insight Exchange video (8mins 45secs) **Consent vs Violence** - Our Social Responses with Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade



<https://vimeo.com/286278637>

“ Many women reported experiencing multiple forms of physical or sexual violence and emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour following the Australian COVID-19 Measures. It was also common for women to report experiencing both coercive control and physical or sexual violence.

[Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2020]

Free Ready Resources

Whether a student tells someone now, later or ever, it is their right to have access to information and resources that support them in making sense of the violence and abuse used against them.



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](#).