

MANAGING FAMILY VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19

Families can be experiencing a lot of stress during COVID-19. Families may be stuck at home together, they may not be able to work and may be worried about how they are going to survive financially. Some family members may be drinking or taking drugs to deal with the stress. All of these things can lead to an increase in physical, emotional or sexual abuse in the home, especially abuse towards women and children. Being stuck in the house with an abusive person during isolation can put you and your kids in danger. Moving out is not an option for many women. Here are some steps you can take if you experience violence or the threat of violence in your home.

Have a safety plan in place

Keep your phone charged and with you. Know where it is. Make sure you have airtime.

Know who to call

Put emergency numbers into your phone, for example, the police (tel: 10111 and for SAPS child safety 08 600 10111) or security company, abuse 24 hour helplines, women's shelters etc (see contact options below).

Tell someone

Make sure you tell a friend, a family or a neighbour that your partner might become violent. Discuss a safety plan with them. Tell them what you want them to do if you are in danger.

Have code words for you and for your children

Have a word which you can call or WhatsApp to your friend or neighbour if you are in danger, so that you don't have to explain the whole story. Discuss before what the person will do if they get the code word message from you. Will they come and get you? Do they call the police? etc. If your children hear the code word, what should they do? Run to the neighbour's house, etc?

Keep an emergency bag

Keep your most important documents – your ID, you and your children’s birth certificates, a bit of money – in a secret place, so you can grab them if you need to leave in a hurry.

Get a Protection Order if you have to

If you haven’t done it already, get a protection order in place. Go to your nearest police station or magistrates court. You will need to fill in a form called **Form 2: Application for a Protection Order**. A protection order is a legal document that gives the behaviours that the abuser should obey: for example, they should stop beating you, or they should support you financially, or they should hand over their gun to the police etc. A protection order is not the same thing as laying a charge against your abuser. But if they do not follow the protection order, and you tell the police, they have to arrest the abuser.

Self-care

It is not easy, but really important, to look after yourself. This can help you to cope better and get through the time of isolation. Looking after yourself is not being selfish. Do simple things, get enough sleep, eat properly, get some exercise every day, get some fresh air (this is still fine as long as you are still keeping a physical distance from other people). Do things to take your mind off your stress: watch a funny movie, play with your kids, play a computer game, knit, cook, sing, do housework – whatever helps you.

Stay connected with others

Tell people about your feelings. Chat to someone you trust – a friend, a family member, a neighbour, maybe someone from your church or mosque. You can also reach out to a counsellor. A lot of counsellors are providing services online, on the phone or via WhatsApp during the COVID19 crisis.

Physical distancing does not mean being alone.

You have the right to be safe.

You can get through this.

Have a look at our other information for mothers on Coping with depression, anxiety and addictions and Coping with Stress during COVID-19.

Contacts (keep trying they may be busy)

- GBV Command Centre Call 0800 428 428; Send a “Please Call Me” by dialling *120*7867# SMS ‘help’ to 31531
- People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) www.powa.co.za
tel: 0800 029 999
- Lifeline’s Domestic Violence line 0800 150 150
- Tears Foundation www.tears.co.za tell dial *134*7355# or 010 590 5920
- Rape Crisis 021 447 9762 ; WhatsApp 083 222 5164
- South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) www.sadag.org – has many helplines 0800 21 22 23 or 0800 456 789 or 0800 20 5026 and others

For more info and helplines visit www.messagesformothers.co.za or

www.pmhp.za.org