



# Staying safe during COVID-19

## Guidance for practitioners working with those who harm

We know that if you are currently facilitating some form of behaviour change work, you and your clients will be feeling the effects of the situation we find ourselves in. Clients may be worried about self-isolating with their family and not being able to engage with the techniques you have been working on. We have created this guide to help and support you to think about what you might do over the coming weeks to alter practices and approaches and support people at risk of using harm to choose a different path.

It is vital that we remind those who harm that they are not alone in this. There are numerous organisations and professionals out there who want to help them make different choices. Please bear in mind that in their guidance, Respect state, *'It is our strong recommendation that any work delivered remotely should be focused on safety planning, stress and de-escalation techniques in the short to medium term, rather than long term attitudinal and behavioural change'*.

Below are some things that may help your practice at this time. It is important to try and think about the things that may change to ensure the safety of families and individuals, especially thinking through how they might get help if they need it. We also know, like everyone, that you could be worried about contracting the virus and the [NHS](#) website can give you advice around this.

### Support for your client from family and friends

During this time of disruption, it is vital that we encourage clients to consider how the people around them can be a source of support. If possible, family and friends can be another way to get support needed.

- Ask them to consider: Can you FaceTime or call someone you trust? Can you talk to them about what you are experiencing and what your concerns are? Do you have someone who you can discuss your behaviour change work with? Who can support with set exercises to help challenge your thought process?
- SafeLives have a number of these set exercises from the Engage Programme **available on our website to download**, these can be tailored to use for frontline professionals, people who live alone or with another trusted person.

### Self-care

Taking care of ourselves is vital for anyone and is even more important at an unprecedented time like this when our mental health may be likely to dip. How can we encourage our clients to spend time looking after themselves?

- As much as possible stick to usual routines. Maintaining basic self-care like eating, showering, sleeping and exercising can all help your mental health
- Take breaks from work if working from home, walk around any outside space you might have, read a magazine, do the jobs around the house that you have been putting off.

### General safety planning

One of the fundamental aspects of behaviour change work is developing a safety plan to use when away from the setting/time with professionals. If this is not already in place, it is a good idea to complete this over the phone as soon as possible.

Below are some examples of questions you may want to include:

- Do you have a personalised action/safety plan?
  - Think about what needs updating or changing because of what is happening now.
  - How can you help to do this?
  - If you can't see or speak to your support worker, are there other professionals you trust and can talk to?
  
- What is the usual pattern of abuse? Think about 'triggers' and the physical/emotional/behavioural signs that you are struggling. This might help you think about times when things are calmer, how did it feel?
  
- What are your main concerns and worries?
  - These are the things you need to share with me or another trusted person
  
- Who is in the family home? Who is going out to work and who is staying at home?
  - Will your family income be affected? How could this affect things?
  
- Are you or anyone in the house using drugs and/or alcohol?
  - How could your use change and what could this mean for your behaviour?
  
- Do you know how you and your family might respond to self-isolation?
  - Think about whether this might increase your use of sexual violence/ coercive control/ physical abuse and work with me to create an action plan/safety net strategy for this
  
- Do you know what your options are if you want to leave? I can help you think this through.

### Safety planning suggestions:

Have you talked about the timeout strategy and how this will be impacted by the lockdown?

This is a structured way to interrupt an argument or negative emotions that are escalating before things become violent or abusive. It has five key steps which we call the **5 Rs**:

#### 1. Recognise

Recognise your own warning signs that you are becoming stressed, controlling, aggressive, or angry.

- This might be inward signs like negative self-talk about your partner or children
- It could be more physical signs like feeling your heart race or chest tighten or outward signs like clenching your teeth or fists more tightly.

We know when we are stressed; our body sets off a physical and psychological chain reaction that rolls forward like a freight train. It requires a conscious and deliberate effort to stop it. Stop yourself and turn away from the conflict.

#### 2. Referee

Referee yourself by blowing the whistle on what is happening. You will need a deliberate word or phrase that calls time on the interaction or on the direction your thoughts are heading. The obvious one is to call **Time Out** but people use all sorts of phrases that have some personal significance or meaning for them. It is also important that everyone knows what the word means when someone uses it. It means that whatever the discussion, argument, situation, the person who uses the word needs a break to calm down.

#### 3. Remove

Remove yourself from the situation as much as you are able. Obviously, the current circumstances make that even more challenging. So you need to think carefully about this and plan ahead. It's no good trying to enact this strategy when you are already in the thick of a heated argument.

Each person should have a 'place of retreat'- somewhere that they can go to calm down and be guaranteed that they won't be disturbed, interrupted or bothered by anyone for a period of time.

When someone takes a Time Out, it is important that the people around them DO NOT FOLLOW, recognise the warning signs and safeguard.

#### 4. Relax and Reflect

Be careful of activities that increase your anger or fuel negative thinking (e.g. punching things, using drugs or alcohol).

Once you are feeling a bit calmer, engage in some activity that relaxes you, such as breathing exercises, stretching, reading, listening to music, playing a game on your phone. Try to distract your brain for 10-15 minutes from the argument you just left. Giving your brain this break allows it to reset and grab your emotions by the reigns again so you can think more rationally about the issue.

Finally, when you feel calm, take some time to reflect on the issue you had. What is it that you wanted out of the discussion? If it is to frighten your partner or children into doing what you want, is that something you want? Think about it in these three simple steps: 1) What is it I want to happen? 2) What could I do instead to get my views across? 3) Is it worth the consequences of scaring my partner and children into doing what I want?

#### 5. Return

When you return are you going to try to resolve the issue by discussing it again or are you going to just release it by letting it go?

Sometimes, we look back on a situation and think 'what were we even arguing about?' If that is the case, apologise and accept that your emotions just got the better of you. It is ok to feel stressed and it is normal to sometimes lose a handle on our emotions. The important thing is that you recognise it, accept it and move on.

If the issue is more significant and you need to talk it out, try to follow these basic ABC's of communication:

- **A**ccept and listen to the other person's point of view.
- **B**e clear and direct about the problem.
- **C**ome to a compromise if you can that respects each person's wishes.

#### Things to Consider

**Respect** have released full guidance, available [here](#). You may want to talk through the following with your client:

- Where will you go for your timeout? Think outside of the box, where can you go? Walk around the garden? Walk around the block? Separate rooms?
- Have you discussed this with your partner so they know the plan for when you do call for a timeout? It is vital that they know what you plan to do so that they can give you space.
- If you had to leave in an emergency do you know where you would go? Remember many shops and all restaurants / pubs will be shut.
- If there are times you know you can talk, share this with your support worker and agree how you will reach them.

#### Working with your client

- Depending on risk levels, consider de-prioritising behaviour change work if full contact is not possible and ensure agencies who are involved with the family are aware.
- Consider alternative exercises to complete at home. Emily Alison, Behavioural Psychologist, has made a number of her resources available on our website.

- Review safety and support plans, support them to come up with strategies they can use at home.
- With disrupt cases, the link and regular communication with multi-agencies will be essential. Besides the email and phone call updates, services can potentially arrange professionals' meetings using virtual updates via Microsoft Teams, Zoom or conference calls. This is suggested to ensure everyone is updated around risk management

### Support for Support Workers

As many of us adapt to life working in isolation, predominantly from our own homes and without their colleagues, supervision will play a fundamental role in terms of managing risk, stress and avoiding burnout. Services will need to provide both professional and emotional support to delivery practitioners, and on-call arrangements will need to be put in place where calls with clients are taking place outside usual working hours.

Respect advise:

- Daily or weekly team meetings will help to maintain positive lines of communication within the organisation and the delivery of key messages.
- Services should consider securing personal protection equipment (PPE) for practitioners if they are having any face to face contact with clients.

### Resources

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.

### Telephone and email

- **Respect** helpline (for anyone worried about their own behaviour): **0808 802 4040**
- Respect **webchat**, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 10am-11am and 3pm-4pm
- Respect email [info@respectphoneline.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphoneline.org.uk)
- **WWP EN Guidelines to ensure responsible perpetrator work during COVID-19**
- **Samaritans** can also be a source of support to you if you are generally feeling low and would like to talk to someone. They are a non-judgemental listening service that will not give advice or pressure you in any way.