



Guidance for supporting young people during COVID-19

Introduction

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on families experiencing domestic abuse. For young people, there may be specific issues that need to be considered and thought given to how we reach out and ensure they have the support they need.

In a recent podcast we spoke to two SafeLives Pioneers about experiencing domestic abuse in the family home, what the issues might be at the moment, and some ideas about what young people, the people around them, and services could do: <https://soundcloud.com/domestic-abuse-podcast>

We also wanted to explore issues for young people experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationship. Domestic abuse services told us they were struggling to make contact with young people, so we asked young people's practitioners and young people themselves what they thought some of the issues and challenges are right now, and some ideas on ways practitioners can engage with young people.

This document contains the pointers suggested by young people and practitioners. More in depth resources are included in links at the bottom.

Issues and challenges for young people

Young people and practitioners highlighted a variety of issues; increased vulnerabilities due to isolation, impact on their wellbeing, and practical issues such as access to phones and data:

- Pressure on young people to go out and see their perpetrator which may result in breaking the lockdown rules, increasing risk to their health and health of their household, and risk of a fine either to them directly or to their parents.
- Young people may feel pressured to live with the perpetrator, cutting them off from their family and increasing isolation.
- A young person may already be isolated from friends and family and the lockdown measures will make this worse. They may now lose any of the social or practical support they had in place.
- Lack of opportunities for someone to see what's going on, such as trusted professionals, schools/colleges, services and employers.
- They may not have access to smart phones, laptops or the internet. They may have limits on their data amount which limits access to online information, resources and contact with people.
- Increased anxiety impacting on mental health and wellbeing.
- Young people may spend more time online and isolated which increases the risk of being groomed online. This could be through existing contacts or new ones made during lockdown and could include sending risky photos/media which make them vulnerable to exploitation i.e. sexually explicit photos.
- Exploitation risks: pressure to enter trap houses/county lines.

- Much more influence coming from their peers as they will all be home from school/college.
- May not feel safe in the family home which increases vulnerabilities.
- Lack of resources at home – i.e. financial pressures or food shortages.

Opportunities

The lockdown might present an opportunity for some young people, who do not live with the person harming them and who have a safe home environment, to get the help and protection they need. It is also a chance for those around them to reach in and start the conversation about what they have been experiencing and get specialist help. [Read about a young survivor who took this opportunity.](#)

Tips for engaging with young people

We asked young people and practitioners to give us their advice on ways to engage with young people during COVID-19. They thought about the differences in building relationships when you cannot see someone in person, and some ideas on how to reach young people:

- Where possible, go slowly in the way you approach working with young people. Build rapport, try and develop relationship and trust.
- Explore emotional wellbeing, how they're structuring their day, give them useful tools to use.
- Find out the young person's interests and positive influences in their lives as opposed to directing the conversations directly to abusive behaviours.
- Find out from the young person how best to contact them: email, video calls, text messages, calls – don't assume what works or what they have access to.
- Find out best times to contact. Be aware that you may need to be available at unconventional times that are suitable for the young person, e.g. evenings and weekends.
- If they can't talk – check if they can listen while you give them some information.

Useful links

Helplines

The national domestic abuse helpline: <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk> / 0808 2000 247

Childline: <https://www.childline.org.uk/> / 0800 1111

Shout crisis text line: <https://www.giveusashout.org/> / text 85258

Online support

Women's Aid developed a website with a range of information for young people worried about abusive relationships, and includes information about the support they offer: <https://loverespect.co.uk/help/>

The Mix offer a range of support for young people, including online chat, forums, helpline and counselling: <https://www.themix.org.uk/>

Online safety advice for children and young people: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Resources

SafeLives spotlight on young people: <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-3-young-people-and-domestic-abuse>

Resources for professionals working with young people: <https://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-frontline-domestic-abuse-workers-and-idvas/resources-ypvas>

The government recently announced a scheme to help disadvantaged children and young people with laptops and data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-major-package-to-support-online-learning>

Related articles

<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2020/april/young-people-facing-risk-outside-the-home-exploring-the-implications-of-covid-19/>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-trafficking/refile-uk-coronavirus-lockdown-raises-fears-of-rise-in-child-drug-mules-idUSL8N2BP3Y9>