



Beyond Words
empowering people through pictures



When it's not safe to stay at home:

A guide to supporting people at risk of abuse during coronavirus

By Sheila Hollins, Valerie Sinason and Marie Grant



When it's not safe to stay at home: A guide to supporting people at risk of abuse during coronavirus

It's true that during coronavirus most people must stay home to stay safe. But home is not a safe place for some people so, if you are a victim of domestic or other abuse, to stay safe you must get help which may mean breaking the rules on lockdown.

Councils have hugely increased the accommodation available to victims of domestic abuse at this time. Police forces have committed to responding quickly to calls for help. Safeguarding the welfare of children and adults in vulnerable situations is an absolute priority during this crisis.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is when one person in a relationship tries to dominate or control another person through threats, violence or other abuse.

It can take the form of physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse and a pattern of bullying and controlling behaviour develops. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is sometimes called domestic violence.



Domestic abuse increases during times of isolation, because victims lose other forms of support and their dependence on their abuser increases. In the UK, an increase of 25% in the number of people contacting domestic abuse helplines was reported after just two weeks of lockdown.

Domestic abuse overwhelmingly affects women and children, either directly and deliberately, or through the emotional and psychological harm caused by witnessing or overhearing abuse. But as many as a quarter of victims are men. Adults with learning disabilities can be vulnerable to being hurt by people they live with, or who they meet online.



Nowadays technology allows lots of people to access support, even during times of isolation. But an abuser may monitor a person's phone, computer, and their use of any other technology that helps them keep in touch. Unfortunately, people with learning difficulties or autism, or older people, may not be able to access support online.



All pictures taken from *When Dad Hurts Mum* and *Finding a Safe Place from Abuse*.

Other types of abuse

It is everyone's responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults against abuse and trauma – especially now,

as the way we keep people safe has changed overnight. With community centres, schools and colleges shutting, people at increased risk of abuse will feel more isolated and even less able to ask for help.

Coronavirus can definitely be defined as a stressful life experience! Mental health problems often result from negative or stressful life experiences such as poverty, unemployment, physical illness, social isolation, domestic abuse or relationship breakdown – many of which may occur at this time.

During lockdown, the extra stress of having children and vulnerable adults at home from their school or daytime activities can increase domestic conflict.

The overall pressures on women to meet family needs, to access food/ supplies alongside the additional stress of being seriously ill or of caring for a sick family member are huge. Social distancing in confined accommodation such as a flat without access to a garden or in a refuge or emergency local authority accommodation will be very difficult to achieve.

The reality is that the lives of many of our most vulnerable children and adults could continue to get worse over the coming months as the economic impact of the virus kicks in. Many parents will lose their jobs or income in the coming weeks, some of them already struggling with poverty.

With pubs, bars, restaurants and clubs closed, it is likely that there will also be a significant increase in people drinking at home and an increase in the number of children being cared for by adults under some degree of intoxication. On the other hand, for people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs, their trauma and mental health problems may be made worse by the emotional and physical problems of withdrawal from their supplies. They and anyone with a disability or extra vulnerability who lives with them may be less safe because of this.

Recognising abuse

Some people are especially vulnerable at this time of uncertainty, including children or young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), 'Looked After' children with Child Protection Plans as well as some adults with learning disabilities and any children or vulnerable adults who have a parent with mental health problems..

We will need to be vigilant to pick up early signs that something isn't quite right, because people react to abuse in different ways.

- A child or vulnerable adult may tell someone what is happening to them.



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk

from **Bob tells All**



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk

from **Jenny Speaks Out**



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk

- Signs of abuse or neglect may be visible – although this is harder to see during social isolation.



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk



© booksbeyondwords.co.uk

from **Finding a Safe Place from Abuse**

- A child or vulnerable person's behaviour or mood can change.



from I Can Get Through It

It can be difficult to know what to say to children and vulnerable adults about the global crisis. For children or adults who find change particularly stressful, reassure them about what will stay the same in their lives, despite all the changes.

Their usual ways of seeking help are through their trusted teachers and support workers, the staff in the day care and leisure settings where they are well known. With all regular activities outside the home now closed, some support providers or schools are struggling to offer one-to-one telephone or video contact with their usual educators/ supporters.

Information sharing and integrated working will be more difficult too during lockdown, but is a vital element of early intervention. Sharing information is often hindered by people quoting the Data Protection Act and GDPR; however, child/ vulnerable adult safety overrides this and information sharing must take place with or without the knowledge of the family of the person who is at risk.

RESPOND's advice (<https://respond.org.uk/coronavirus-being-at-home-at-risk/>) includes:

- If you have not heard from a person you are worried about, is there someone in the network who has? Share your

worries with peers and colleagues – contact might be all someone needs to feel safe.

- WhatsApp: Nearly everyone who has a mobile phone has WhatsApp and knows how to use it. By arranging a video call, you can check their surroundings and see them.
- Facebook has a video call option, and enables you to connect with people at home.
- Use virtual classrooms or small group sessions on a video calling platform – this way safe peer-to-peer conversations can keep you up to date with how people feel.
- Offer social games online – not only to ensure learning and development, but as a positive way to keep in touch and notice any changes that might otherwise go unseen.
- Set a game or something fun to do for a family or group home. Offering opportunities to bond positively can be an effective safeguarding tool.

How Books Beyond Words can help children and vulnerable adults who have worries or may be at risk

We have lots of stories for you to read together. Some are light reads such as **A Day at the Beach** and **Ginger is a Hero**. But there are also coronavirus-related stories: e.g. **Beating the Virus**, **Good Days and Bad Days During Lockdown**, as well as stories about feeling sad, looking after yourself and many others to help ease people's worries.

Group sessions for chats and shared creative sessions are no substitute for regular one-to-one contact which seeks to sustain trusted relationships and check-up on the wellbeing and current needs of each individual person.

Some online book clubs reading Beyond Words' wordless picture stories have started. The leader screen-shares images from a Beyond Words story and the readers take it in turns to add their own understanding of the story, page by page. Reading this way takes some getting used to, so try a lighthearted story first!

Supporters who are concerned about a person can also encourage them to look at short stories from the **BW Story App** by image sharing in the same way. Where this is not possible, you could try enlarging one of the images in this pdf and showing it on WhatsApp.

Getting help

If you are in immediate danger dial 999.

When the call centre answers, you don't need to say a word – just dial 55. This is a silent code for domestic abuse.

Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge

Tel: 0808 2000 247

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

Tel: 0800 999 5428

SignHealth Domestic Abuse Helpline

Tel: 020 3947 2601

Text/WhatsApp: 07970 350366

Men's Advice Line

Tel: 0808 8010327

RESPOND

Respond specialises in working with people with Learning Disabilities, Autism or both, who have been hurt by people

or suffered loss or trauma. Some may have gone on to hurt other people too.

Tel: 020 7383 0700

Email: admin@respond.org.uk

<https://respond.org.uk/coronavirus-being-at-home-at-risk/>

Victim Support

Victim Support is a national charity supporting people affected by crime, including abuse. People can be referred by the police or can refer themselves whether or not they report the crime and regardless of when the crime happened. Victim Support also operates a confidential helpline.

Victim Supportline: 0845 30 30 900

www.victimsupport.org.uk

Other resources

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) offers information and training resources for all social care workers, including '*Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for social care*'.

www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding-adults

NICE public health guidance, '*Domestic violence and abuse: how health services, social care and the organisations they work with can respond effectively*'.

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph50

Don't Put Up With It! – Domestic Violence And Women With Learning Disabilities

A video produced following a two-year research project by Tizard Centre at the University of Kent Canterbury which explains the types of abuse experienced by women with intellectual disabilities.

<https://vimeo.com/116967832>

Related titles in the Books Beyond Words series

When Dad Hurts Mum (2014) by Sheila Hollins, Patricia Scotland and Noëlle Blackman, illustrated by Anne-Marie Perks. After her dad is violent towards her mum, Katie's teacher supports the family to get the help of an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate and the police.

Finding a Safe Place from Abuse (2014) by Sheila Hollins, Patricia Scotland and Noëlle Blackman, illustrated by Anne-Marie Perks. Katie meets David and falls in love, but the relationship turns dangerous when David begins to steal her money and hurt her. Katie gets help through her GP. After a stay in a refuge, Katie begins a new life with renewed confidence.

I Can Get Through It (2009, 2nd edition) by Sheila Hollins, Christiana Horrocks and Valerie Sinason, illustrated by Lisa Kopper. Susie's life is suddenly disturbed by an act of abuse. This story shows how with the help of friends and counselling, the memory of the abuse slowly fades.

Bob Tells All (2015, 2nd edition) by Sheila Hollins and Roger Banks, illustrated by Beth Webb. Bob feels unsettled when he moves into a new home in the community. His carer helps him to unravel his painful past as a victim of sexual abuse.

Jenny Speaks Out (2015, 3rd edition) by Sheila Hollins and Valerie Sinason, illustrated by Beth Webb. Jenny feels unsettled when she moves into a new home in the community. Her carer and friends help Jenny to unravel her painful past as a victim of sexual abuse, and begin a healing process.

Making Friends and Hug Me, Touch Me (both 2015, 2nd edition) by Sheila Hollins and Terry Roth, illustrated by Beth Webb. These books tell the stories of Neil and Janet who want to get to know new people but go about it in the wrong way. The stories tell how they learn when you can and can't touch other people.

Acknowledgment: Some of the ideas in this paper came from the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Partnership.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.