

FACT SHEET

Family violence and COVID-19: SEEKING SUPPORT



The COVID-19 pandemic is having a major impact on all Tasmanians. While it is critical to stay at home and save lives, for many Tasmanians, particularly women and their children, home is not a safe place.

Public health measures introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as social distancing, isolation and quarantine, means families may be at home with someone who chooses to use violence.

Isolation, financial insecurity, stress, concern, family disruptions, changes to roles and routines may compound or increase the risk, severity and frequency of violence. However, they are not the cause of violence.

COVID-19 does not cause, justify or excuse violent and abusive behaviour. Everyone deserves to live free from fear and violence.

The person engaging in violence is responsible for their abusive and violent behaviour.

In Tasmania, family violence is defined by the *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas). It includes a range of violent behaviours including assault; sexual assault; threats; coercion; intimidation; verbal abuse; abduction; stalking; or an attempt to do any of these things; as well as economic abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, breaching any existing orders relating to family violence; and property damage.

COVID-19 as a tactic for abuse

People engaging in violence may use COVID-19 as a reason, excuse or tactic for abuse. For example, they may:

- Withhold essential items such as food, medicine, hand sanitiser or disinfectants.
- Use misinformation about COVID-19 to control or frighten.
- Use the pandemic as an excuse to gain total or increased control of the family's finances.
- Prevent those experiencing violence and their children from seeking appropriate medical attention.
- Further isolate those experiencing violence and their children in the home by restricting their movements within the house.
- Increasingly monitor personal communication devices such as mobile phone, email, online messaging.
- Use COVID-19 to excuse, blame or justify their abusive and violent behaviour.
- Use COVID-19 in their attempt to reconcile or enter or live in the family home.

Visit www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au for more information about COVID-19.

If you think you might have COVID-19 call the Public Health Hotline on **1800 671 738**.

If you have left a violent situation and are sick or have been exposed to COVID-19, the Public Health Hotline can provide advice, organise testing and discuss quarantine options.

Staying safe

A safety plan is a personalised, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Having a safety plan can help you to protect yourself during this difficult time. Remember, you are the expert in your safety, and you can take steps to manage this.

The best way to make a safety plan is with the help of specialist family or sexual violence service. A list of services is provided below and further information is available at **www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/safety-planning**

If home is not a safe place for you, please reach out! Ask family or friends for help if you can or contact a specialist support service.

If you have to stay at home with a violent partner, some key things to consider include:

- Identify safe areas of the house where there are ways to escape if possible.
- If possible and safe, have a phone charged and accessible at all times with numbers to call for help.
- Let trusted family, friends and neighbours know of your situation and develop a plan and visual signal for when you need help. For example, closing curtains or turning on a light.
- Make a habit of backing the car into the driveway and keeping the car fuelled.
- Specialist support services are open and available to provide information, counselling and support.
- Call the police on 000 if things escalate and you are concerned for your safety. Let the police know if there are any COVID-19 concerns.

If you must leave for safety reasons, then do so. Your life and your children's lives are important.

IN AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS CALL 000



Safe at Home Family Violence Response and Referral Line

1800 633 937

Available 24 hours. Note: After hours calls are directed to Tasmania Police

Statewide Sexual Assault Support Service (1800MYSUPPORT)

1800 697 877

Available 24 hours

1800RESPECT: National sexual assault, domestic, family violence counselling service

1800 737 732

Available 24 hours

www.1800respect.org.au

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491

Available 24 hours

www.ntv.org.au

Family Violence Counselling and Support Service

1800 608 122

Monday to Friday: 9am – midnight;

Weekends and public holidays: 4pm - midnight

Safe Choices

1800 806 189

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

www.safechoicesttas.org.au

Engender Equality

(03) 6278 9090

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

www.engenderequality.org.au

Australian Childhood Foundation

1300 381 581

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

www.childhood.org.au

Sexual Assault Support Service (SOUTH)

(03) 6231 0044

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

www.sass.org.au

Laurel House

North **(03) 6334 2740**

North West **(03) 6431 9711**

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

www.laurelhouse.org.au