

Intimate Partner Violence and COVID-19 Response



People who are surviving intimate partner violence and family violence are likely to be experiencing increased isolation and danger caused by social distancing measures during the Coronavirus pandemic. Survivors often have specific needs around safety, health, and confidentiality. People who are already more vulnerable to economic and health insecurity are facing additional challenges.

Health providers have the unique opportunity to offer patient-centered harm reduction strategies, which enhance survivor health and safety, as well as provide invaluable support and access to resources during this time of heightened risk.

What can you do for IPV survivors?

Implementing universal screening practices can be the most effective strategy. In other words, check in with *all* patients on their well being and if they are feeling supported by their partners and family members.

Three important steps for supporting IPV survivors are to Ask Questions, Listen and Respond, and Provide Confidential Support and Information.

Ask Questions

- Are you feeling supported by your partner or family while you are at home?
- What's your biggest concern?
- What are you most worried about?
- What do you need or want?
- How can I help?

Listen and Respond

Take time to really listen. Some trauma-informed responses are:

- Thank you for sharing this.
- I believe you.
- I am concerned for your safety.
- You don't deserve this.
- It's not your fault.
- You are not alone.
- I don't know what to say right now, but I'm glad you told me.

Listen for high risk concerns like access to firearms, threats of suicide or to kill, or prior attempts of strangulation. If a patient shares one or more of these concerns with you, it is important to share your concerns for their safety and offer options that will reduce those risks, including access to a 24-hour Hotline.

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Provide Confidential Support and Information

Discuss ways to reduce stress.

- This might include teaching breathing practices, or helping someone problem solve how they can eat healthy, exercise, and get enough sleep during this crisis.

Offer to brainstorm safety strategies and ask about emergency safety plans.

- Help a patient think through tactics that may have helped them stay safe in the past.
- Help someone to prepare in advance for how to get to a safe and secure space with a phone to call for help in an emergency.

Inquire about supportive friends and family members.

- Isolation is a powerful tactic of abuse. Breaking down isolation can help to reduce risks for the entire family. Offer your patient the opportunity to contact supportive family and friends while in your facility and make a plan with them to reach out regularly for safety and wellness checks.
- Help the patient identify a “code” word to share with family and friends if they need immediate help.

Provide access to and information on hospital-based services such as an IPV Program within your healthcare facility.

- Consider the resources available within your facility including IPV advocates, other patient advocates, social workers, and behavioral health professionals.
- Connect survivors to the network of support that they need.
- Find out the contact information for your local Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Agency and be prepared to share that information (You can get that number by calling the Virginia Statewide Hotline at 1-800-838-8238).

Encourage individuals to contact the Virginia Statewide Hotline, which is available through text (804-793-9999), via chat (www.vadata.org/chat) or by phone (800-838-8238) 24 hours a day.

- Encourage every patient to leave with a hotline card so they'll have the information for themselves and others who may need help now or in the future.

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