

## Domestic Abuse - COVID-19

During the current COVID-19 lockdown, it is more difficult for victims and survivors of domestic abuse to seek support, especially if they live with their abusers. [This document contains some practical tips and resources to support clinicians facilitating and handling disclosures of domestic abuse from patients, during remote consultations.](#)

## Southwark IRIS

Clinicians at IRIS trained practices can refer patients to the IRIS Specialist Advocate based at Solace Women's Aid. There is no waiting list and she will be able to offer support to the patient straight away. All patients over 16 years old experiencing domestic abuse, of any gender, can be referred. IRIS can accept current and non-recent cases.

Once referred, patients can receive support for up to 9 months. This includes practical and emotional support; we will always prioritise increasing the patient's safety whilst reducing the risk of further abuse. During lockdown, the Southwark IRIS team is still open and accepting referrals. Unfortunately, we are unable to meet with patients, but can provide practical and emotional support over phone and video calls.

When referring to Southwark IRIS, please use the referral form in the Resources section below, where possible. In an emergency, the IRIS Advocate can be reached on [07483014573](tel:07483014573). If she is unavailable, call Solace's Southwark office on [0207 593 1290](tel:02075931290) – this number is also an OOH emergency helpline. Referrals to IRIS can only be accepted if the patient consents – where a patient is unsure if they would like support, clinicians can signpost to IRIS by giving the Advocate's direct number, in addition to Solace's office number.

## Non-IRIS Trained Practices

Practices that are non-IRIS trained are not able to refer to the IRIS service, but can still refer to Southwark's Solace Advocacy and Support Service (SASS). There is a referral form available in the Resources section below. If signposting patients to SASS, please give the office number, [0207 593 1290](tel:02075931290).

The vast majority of guidance and resources available in this document can also be used by non-IRIS trained clinicians.

## During Consultations

If you are concerned that a patient is experiencing domestic abuse, the first thing you will need to do is check:

1. [Is the patient living with others?](#)

If the patient lives with others:

2. How old are other members of the household?
3. Are other members of the household currently in the property?
4. Are other members of the household in the same room as the patient?

These questions will determine how freely you are able to speak with your patient about domestic abuse.

If the patient lives alone / other household members are not currently in the property / others in the property are below 2 years old:

- Follow IRIS guidance on facilitating disclosures. This can be found in the Resources section below, and includes asking questions such as, “Sometimes women who have these symptoms when they are at risk of abuse. Are you afraid of anyone? Does anyone try to control you or what you do?”
- Risk assess and safety plan with patient – this does not need to be extensive, there is IRIS guidance on this available in the Resources section below, including a safety planning template.
- Discuss IRIS service (Solace for non-IRIS practices) and explore referral – referral pathways after disclosure can be found in the Resources section below.
- Signpost patient to resources below.

If the patient lives with others above 2 years old and they are in the property (but not room):

- If appointment is via video call, you will need to ensure that you are not on speaker phone – ask if patient could insert headphones into their device, or revert to phone call.
- Follow IRIS guidance on facilitating disclosures but use [yes/no questions](#). A perpetrator of abuse might overhear a conversation from another room. If others in the household are not perpetrators and above 2 years old, do not assume that they will not inform a perpetrator of what they have overheard.
- Risk assess and safety plan with [yes/no questions](#) – you can still follow the IRIS guidance and safety template in the Resources section below.
- Discuss IRIS service (Solace for non-IRIS practices) and explore referral – referral pathways are available in the Resources section below). If the patient would like support, please refer [via the form](#) and do not signpost – it will be more difficult for patient to contact the IRIS Advocate whilst on lockdown with others.
- Ask if it is safe for IRIS Advocate to make contact – if the perpetrator is on lockdown in the property, it will not be safe to call, but it might still be safe to text/email instead.
- Signpost patient to resources below – it might not be safe for patient to write down details, so use words that are easy to remember and google e.g. “Solace” and “Women’s Aid”. Advise patients to enter “incognito mode” if looking at these websites.

## If household members above 2 years old are in the same room as patient:

- If appointment is via video call, you **will not** be able to continue domestic abuse related conversation – ask if patient will be available for “routine” check-in call at another time.
- If appointment is via phone call, check that you are not on speaker phone / cannot be heard by others and ask **brief yes/no questions** – check if the patient is in immediate danger, if they want to flee or need to call 999. If the patient answers yes to any of these questions, end the call and call 999 immediately.
- If the patient feels safe to remain in property, ask if it is safe for them to move to another room where they can be alone – if yes, follow guidance in the section above. If no, ask if you can arrange a time to call back when the patient can be alone – if no, where possible, briefly ask if patient would like support and offer IRIS (Solace for non-IRIS practices) referral. If patient would like referral, **do not** signpost – also check if it is safe for IRIS Advocate to text/email.

Please refer to relevant referral pathway (available in the Resources section below) when responding to disclosures of domestic abuse.

If a patient would like a referral to IRIS/Solace, advise patient not to tell the perpetrator.

If you are worried that someone is **perpetrating abuse**, there is IRIS guidance on how to speak with them in the Resources section below.

## Resources

- Southwark IRIS Advocate – Beth Ridsdale: 07483014573 / [b.ridsdale@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:b.ridsdale@solacewomensaid.org)
- Southwark’ Solace Advocacy and Support Service (SASS): 0207 593 1290 (operates OOH).

## Practical support for victims and survivors:

- **HollieGuard** is an app that turns a smartphone in to a personal safety device; it works with iPhone, Android and Windows phones. Further information can be found here, <https://hollieguard.com/>.
- **Silent Solution**: when somebody calls 999, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system. If 55 is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency. Further information can be found here, [https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent\\_solution\\_guide.pdf](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf).
- **Solace Women’s Aid** website: <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/>.
- **Women’s Aid Live Chat**: available Monday-Friday, 10:00-12:00, <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>.

- **Women's Aid Email Service:** <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/help-by-email/>.
- **SafeLives** has set up a page with information and resources for victims and survivors, <http://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19>.
- **Citizen's Advice Southwark:** although face-to-face support has been suspended, phone, email and webchat is still available – <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/southwark/>.
- **Migrant Information Hub:** although this is geared towards those in Yorkshire and the Humber, it has some useful general COVID-19 related information and guidance for migrants in the UK, including translated resources, <https://www.migrantinfohub.co.uk/>.
- **Southwark Sustainance:** for those struggling to access food, this map notes food sharing initiatives across Southwark, including food banks, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=16HM-J2TwBre-4wGCNclp5ZiMExFWdmoS&ll=51.482951063956065%2C-0.07743119999997816&z=12>.
- Southwark Council's **housing department** is currently closed to face-to-face appointments – for those needing to access temporary accommodation, the department can be reached on **020 7525 5950**.

### Emotional support for victims and survivors:

- **COVID-19 Wellbeing Tips:** this document has been written by a member of Southwark's Solace team and focuses on activities that promote well-being. It also includes a small directory of emotional support services/apps.



COVID-19  
Well-being Tips.pdf

- **Stop, Breathe & Think** offer free guided meditations on their website, <https://www.stopbreathethink.com/meditations/>.
- **YoungMinds** offers mental health support to young people, and has some specific COVID-19 related resources, <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>, <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>.

- **Self-harm:** there are a number of apps for young people who self-harm and would like support to manage this.



Apps for  
Supporting Young F

### For those with children:

- For those with **Family Court Child Arrangement Orders**, the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary have published the following guidance: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>. Although this advice is general and does not focus on domestic abuse, it is useful to know that there is scope to vary an arrangement if there are concerns that complying with the would be against current government advice around COVID-19.
- **YoungMinds** have a section on their website which offers tips on how parents can speak to children about COVID-19 <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>
- **Anti-baddies Resilience Toolkit:** this is an interactive resource that parents can use with their children, <https://primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/penruddock/UploadedDocument/4b4285dbd03949e884cfb1bc5d70e5ce/the-anti-baddies-resilience-toolkit.pdf>.
- **My Name is Coronavirus:** another interact resource that parents can use to help explain COVID-19 to children: [https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685\\_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf](https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf).
- Tips for parents **managing isolation** for secondary school-aged children.



Managing Isolation  
- Parents of Second:

- **Gingerbread** is a charity that offers practical advice to single parents on a range of topics. They have some specific COVID-19 advice which can be accessed here, <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/coronavirus/>

### For clinicians:

- The **RCGP** have issued safeguarding guidance around COVID-19 – it has some practical tips and resources when speaking to patients about domestic abuse, [https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/pluginfile.php/149180/mod\\_resource/content/2/COVID-19%20and%20Safeguarding%20%286%29.pdf](https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/pluginfile.php/149180/mod_resource/content/2/COVID-19%20and%20Safeguarding%20%286%29.pdf).

- WHO have published documents about the effect of COVID-19 on violence against women.



WHO - COVID19  
and VAW - What the



WHO - COVID-19  
and VAW.pdf

- An IRIS referral form.



IRIS Referral  
Form.docx

- A Solace referral form.



Southwark SASS  
Service Referral Form

- IRIS guidance on risk assessment and safety planning.



Assessment of  
Safety and Risk.pdf



Safety Planning  
Guidance and Temp

- IRIS guidance on facilitating and responding to disclosures of abuse from victim/survivors and perpetrators.



How to Facilitate  
and Respond to Dis



Speaking with  
Perpetrators About I

- IRIS referral pathways for victim/survivors and perpetrators.



Referral Pathway -  
Victims and Survivor



Referral Pathway -  
Male Victims and Su



Referral Pathway -  
Perpetrators.pdf

- IRIS guidance on recording domestic abuse.



Guidance on  
Recording of Dome: