

# WHEN WORK IS SAFER THAN HOME

## Supporting Workers Experiencing Domestic & Sexual Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

For the health and safety of ourselves, our families, and our communities, many workers are suddenly and unexpectedly finding themselves isolated inside of their homes for an indefinite period of time.

**Unfortunately, home is not a safe place for everyone.**

For many survivors of domestic & sexual violence, the workplace is not only an oasis of safety from an intimate partner who uses violence, but working also provides them with the financial resources that may provide a pathway to leave an abusive relationship.

**Crime rates plummet amid the coronavirus pandemic, but not everyone is safer in their home**

Kenny Jacoby, Mike Stucka and Kristine Phillips USA TODAY

**Domestic violence is up**

Several police agencies tracked by USA TODAY reported an increase in domestic violence-related calls for service across the second half of March. Charts show domestic violence calls weekly from Feb. 2 through March 28.



[[USA Today](#)]

**The rapid spread of COVID-19 has created worldwide uncertainty and is reshaping our lives.**

To slow the spread of the virus, state and local governments have mandated social distancing or sheltering at home in order to limit interactions outside of households.



These mandates have required employers to lay off or furlough millions of workers, while millions of others are working from home.

**Women Are Bearing the Brunt of Coronavirus Disruption**

• While the illness hits men harder, women are on the front lines at work and at home.

By Janet Paskin

[[Bloomberg Businessweek](#)]

Many survivors who have been laid off or furloughed due to the COVID-19 pandemic have lost their workplace as a potential respite from violence in the home as well as an opportunity to gain financial independence.

Other survivors who are able to work remotely have similarly lost their workplace as a safe haven, but while they are able to earn a paycheck, their financial independence may still be at risk.

They may be experiencing heightened physical and emotional violence as well as employment sabotage at the hands of an intimate partner, who is now equipped with additional opportunities to monitor the survivor's job-related activities.

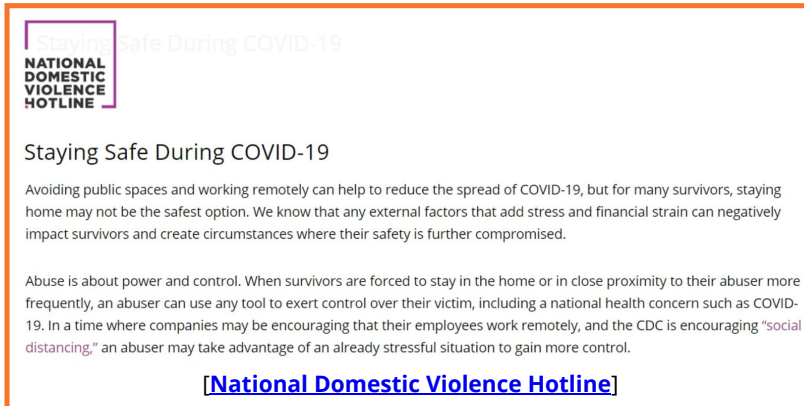
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For all survivors, their fears are founded: [domestic violence is on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), as stress and the uncertainty of financial stability may exacerbate an abusive partner's need to employ power and control tactics in the home.

Prior to this pandemic, [supervisors](#) and coworkers already played a key role in extending support and helping survivors connect with resources and services. The workplace's role is even more critical when a national crisis creates barriers to seeking safety due to increased isolation, scarce resources, and inaccessible pathways to escape from abuse.

As workplaces adjust to an unfamiliar reality of remote interactions, these tips may help supervisors and coworkers recognize when a colleague may be experiencing violence at home, respond in a manner that centers the survivor's physical and emotional safety needs, and refer them to resources available to help during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Staying Safe During COVID-19**

Avoiding public spaces and working remotely can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but for many survivors, staying home may not be the safest option. We know that any external factors that add stress and financial strain can negatively impact survivors and create circumstances where their safety is further compromised.

Abuse is about power and control. When survivors are forced to stay in the home or in close proximity to their abuser more frequently, an abuser can use any tool to exert control over their victim, including a national health concern such as COVID-19. In a time where companies may be encouraging that their employees work remotely, and the CDC is encouraging "social distancing," an abuser may take advantage of an already stressful situation to gain more control.

[\[National Domestic Violence Hotline\]](#)

**Remember, there is no one-size-fits all approach to safely supporting survivors; many of the typical strategies and avenues to seek safety or provide support may no longer be viable.**

Recognize that this is not the first time survivors have had to navigate complex situations; they are experts on what they need to be safe, they are resilient, they are resourceful, they are survivors. As allies, there is still much workplaces, survivors, and coworkers can do to support survivors.

Use these tips as general guidance, and rely on the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) and the [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) – which accept calls from friends and coworkers, too – for additional tips relevant to specific situations.

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## Survivors, Family & Friends

**If you are a Survivor, you are not alone. You deserve to be safe, even at this time.**

As you adjust your safety plan in response to the pandemic, know that there are advocates ready to help you navigate the changes as a result of this global crisis.

The [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.thehotline.org) remains available during the COVID-19 pandemic, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at (800) 799-7233, via text at LOVEIS to 22522, or via chat at [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org). For The Hotline's tips on staying safe during COVID-19, visit: <https://www.thehotline.org/2020/03/13/staying-safe-during-covid-19/>.

The [National Sexual Assault Hotline](https://www.thehotline.org) also continues to operate 24/7. If you need to talk, call (800) 656- HOPE or log-in for an [online chat](https://www.thehotline.org).

Both hotlines can offer services in a number of languages.

For other tips on safety planning visit: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/get-updates-information-covid-19/>

## Supporting Survivors

[Futures Without Violence](https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org) suggests [a few ways](https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org) to support those who are experiencing violence, even if you can't be there in person. [Workplaces Respond](https://www.workplacesrespond.org) has adapted many of these tips to the workplace context in order to help supervisors and coworkers better support colleagues who may be surviving violence and isolated at home with an abusive partner or family member.

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## 1. Reach Out

Survivors are often isolated from friends and extended family. Many are afraid of asking for help or feel ashamed. They might feel like the violence is their fault. Now is the time to reach out, check-in, and inform the survivor that you are listening.

Keep in mind that an abusive partner may be monitoring their phone, texts, emails, or use of social media, and it's best to reach out using the safest forms of communication possible. If you do not know if a form of communication is safe, do not discuss your concerns about violence and instead offer general support. If a survivor discloses violence to you, consult with them in order to determine which forms of communication are least likely to be seen by an abusive partner.

In reaching out, you can let them know that you care about them, are concerned for their well-being, that you are there to listen, and want to help in any way you can. Acknowledge that there is a lot going on right now as we all try to cope and adapt to these new realities and that there are resources out there that can help. Don't push them to talk to you about the violence, but acknowledge these are challenging times. Offering to be there for them right now can go a long way.

While keeping in mind that anything in written form can be read by others, there are still ways to send notes that remind a colleague how much they matter, and that they are worthy of love and support. Remind them that they are strong and courageous. Share one of your favorite quotes, proverbs, verses or affirmations. Small acts of encouragement can help the survivor feel like they are not alone.

Establish a safety word or phrase that a survivor can send by text to inform you they need immediate help or intervention, or that ask about their safety needs. This allows for urgent communication without tipping off an abusive partner who may be monitoring text messages or emails. For example, to inquire about a survivor's safety, you can text: "Are you missing french fries as much as I am right now?"

If the survivor needs help or intervention, they could text back: "Yes, I do."

If all is well, the survivor could text: "Not me, I'm good."

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## 2. Send Basic Necessities

If your colleague needs food, transportation or supplies, ask them what they need and help out when you can. You could offer to drop off food or cleaning supplies, send takeout/grocery gift cards or money through cash apps, or provide them with care packages of books, toys, and other supplies for children. You can also share what you know about local resources, like food bank hours or transportation programs. If you are connected to a neighborhood, faith, or other community group, you can offer to connect them or ask for support from these groups on their behalf.

## 3. Use the Power of your Relationship

If you have a strong and trusting relationship with a person abusing their partner, child, or other family member, call them and talk to them about how to manage their behavior. Use this time as an opportunity for real talk, and support them in getting help. Ask them if they would be willing to work with you to make a plan to manage their behavior and stress and provide them with local and national helplines they can call to get support.

- For friends and family of people causing sexual harm to children, call Stop It Now at 1-888-PREVENT (773-8368) or visit [stopitnow.org](https://stopitnow.org).
- If you know someone is hurting their partner, suggest they call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://thehotline.org) at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit [thehotline.org](https://thehotline.org).
- LGBTQ people can also call the Anti-Violence Project at 212-714-1141 or visit [avp.org/get-help](https://avp.org/get-help).
- If you are worried about a parent hurting a child, you can call the National Parent Helpline at 1-855-4A-PARENT (427-2736) or visit [nationalparenthelpline.org](https://nationalparenthelpline.org).
- If you are concerned for the well-being of an elderly person who may be experiencing abuse while isolated, contact the Adult Abuse Hotline at 800-222-8000.

## 4. Identify and provide a referral to a local program or community group

While services and resources are more limited, most communities have advocates, counselors, attorneys and faith leaders who are working tirelessly to reach survivors during this pandemic. Family and friends can find information by researching programs in the area where they live. You can also call national hotlines that can point you to local resources and help you think about additional ways to support your loved ones. Hotlines and local advocates can also offer support to you.

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When suggesting that a colleague might consider consulting with a program or community group, take steps to protect their confidentiality and to avoid detection by their abusive intimate partner. One strategy is to integrate resources focused on helping survivors of intimate partner violence as part of a general list of resources available to all workers navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.thehotline.org) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org).
- The [National Sexual Assault Hotline](https://www.rainn.org) is 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [rainn.org](https://www.rainn.org).
- The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-4A-CHILD (422-4453) or [childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline](https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline).
- Latinx survivors can reach out to Casa de Esperanza at 1-651-772-1611 or [casadeesperanza.org](https://www.casadeesperanza.org).
- Native American and Alaska Native individuals can reach out to the StrongHearts Native Helpline at 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483) or [strongheartshelpline.org](https://www.strongheartshelpline.org).
- LGBTQ people can reach out to the Anti-Violence Project Hotline at 1-212-714-1141 or [avp.org/get-help](https://www.avp.org/get-help), or the Northwest Network at [nwnetwork.org](https://www.nwnetwork.org).
- Young people experiencing relationship or domestic violence can contact Love Is Respect at 1-866-331-9474 or [loveisrespect.org](https://www.loveisrespect.org).
- LGBTQ young people who may be experiencing abuse because of their gender identity or sexuality can contact the Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386 or [thetrevorproject.org](https://www.thetrevorproject.org).

## 5. Take care of yourself

You deserve support, too. Worrying about someone you care about who is experiencing violence can take a toll on our emotional and physical health, especially when there are so many stressful events occurring right now. Here are some ideas for how to take care of yourself while you support others: <https://www.rainn.org/articles/self-care-friends-and-family>

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## **Supporting Survivors Who Are Unemployed or Furloughed**

A colleague who is temporarily or permanently separated from work, or cannot work in order to care for themselves, family members, or children, needs the support of their friends and former coworkers now more than ever. This is especially true if they're experiencing violence while shouldering an onslaught of emotional and financial challenges as well.

### **1. Maintain an open line of communication**

Surviving violence can be isolating in-and-of-itself. The added burdens of emotional and economic distress, disrupted schedules, and unexpected healthcare or childcare responsibilities may spiral individuals into hopelessness if connections are severed with colleagues with whom they spent most of their waking hours. Staying in regular touch with those who have been laid off or cannot work, even if you're experiencing a similar predicament, can provide an opening for a colleague experiencing violence to ask for help and ensure access to supportive resources.

### **2. Help each other navigate systems**

Still working? Consider volunteering to help colleagues who have been laid off or cannot work figure out rapidly-changing and complex requirements to access unemployment benefits, paid leave, and other supports. Been laid off yourself? Ban together with other similarly-situated colleagues to support each other and share insights. Recent legislation has been enacted to provide support to workers impacted by the pandemic. Find out what is in place to assist here: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/Support-for-Working-Families>

### **3. Spread the word if you hear of new opportunities**

Unfortunately, many positions will be permanently eliminated or businesses closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are in a position to do so, keep your colleagues who no longer have jobs in mind as you hear of new opportunities.

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## Supporting Survivors Who Are Working from Home

Many of us typically spend more of our waking hours with our coworkers than our families. As a result, we often build strong and trusted relationships through work. These relationships are critical as interactions with coworkers may be the only connection vulnerable workers have with the outside world, even if these interactions are limited to video chats, emails, and phone calls. Whether you suspect a coworker is experiencing violence at home or a coworker has disclosed abuse to you, there are ways you can virtually provide support.

### 1. Recognize

This is a time of significant stress which can be traumatic for all workers but puts survivors at increased risk of violence. All workers may be exhibiting some signs of trauma which can impact their job performance and are compounded by the challenges of balancing job duties and family obligations. As a result, it may be difficult to recognize if someone is experiencing violence at home or is simply having a very normal and expected reaction to the pandemic and “new normal” of social distancing and isolation.

Be mindful of unexplained changes in behavior that may be signs of something more serious. For example, perhaps a worker suddenly stops using video conferencing because of fear of exposing physical signs of injury or because their partner is monitoring them in the background, or perhaps a coworker’s writing style or correspondence no longer sounds like them because an abusive partner is reading and editing their emails. These are potential indicators for the need for intervention or connection to the survivor.

### 2. Routinely Check-in with Employees

During these uncertain times, regular check-ins can help provide a sense of normalcy and connection to the outside world to break through the isolation. Check-in on your coworker to listen and support. Share community resources that can help connect coworkers to basic needs as well as the support services needed to get through these challenging times.

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### **3. If you are a Supervisor, Supervise with Compassion and Understanding**

Trauma-informed supervision recognizes that the majority of workers have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime which can affect how individuals relate to others, process information, and interact within their environments. A trauma-informed framework helps support an individual's resilience by prioritizing safety, trust, and empowerment, thus strengthening a worker's ability to thrive despite the long-term consequences of trauma. Adjust your leadership style to center and prioritize employees' needs. Recognize that employees' needs vary and care should be taken to understand and respond according to those needs.

The measures taken to contain the spread of the pandemic, such as isolation, social distancing, and the inability to have close contact with friends and family outside of the household, is traumatic for many of us, but can exacerbate the effects of underlying or current trauma a survivor experiences. Think about ways, as a supervisor, you can alleviate any pressure work responsibilities may add to the survivor's environment. Can the survivor work intermittently or on long-term projects? Can you institute Free Fridays, where all workers are able to work on whatever they want, can bring their kids to virtual work, or not work at all?

Supervisors should routinely check-in with the individuals they supervise, inquire about their needs and well-being, listen with empathy, offer support, and remind them of available workplace resources that may help (such as Employee Assistance Programs). At team and other group meetings, share information pertinent to support workers' and their families' physical and mental health – such as workplace leave policies and potential accommodations – and identify community resources in case they or someone they know is in need of help. If possible, offer to pay for workers to have a few months of access to apps that provide virtual counseling, meditation practices, or fitness instruction.

The economic impacts of losing pay or a job altogether can add to the stress experienced at home. Employers all over the country are finding creative ways to keep workers employed and receiving as much of their regular pay as possible at this time. Think about how your business can change its business model: Can services be provided virtually? Is delivery or pick-up an option? Is there a way for contact to be minimized if continuing to serve the public? Recent legislation has been enacted to provide support to workers impacted by the pandemic that also provide benefits to businesses who

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offer leave and keep their workers employed. Information from the IRS on tax advantages to businesses can be found here: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/covid-19-related-tax-credits-for-required-paid-leave-provided-by-small-and-midsize-businesses-faqs>

Learn more about trauma informed supervision here: [Conversation: Trauma-Informed Supervision](#) and [Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress](#)

#### **4. Be a Safe Communicator**

Be aware that phone conversations, emails, and text messages may be monitored by an abusive partner. Expressing that you believe someone is experiencing violence and that you are concerned about their safety may unintentionally expose that individual to serious harm. Providing information broadly to all employees enables you to reach those in need without singling them out specifically.

#### **5. Refer to Local Programs and Promote Safety**

If someone you supervise or work with discloses that they are experiencing abuse at home, assess their immediate safety through a series of yes or no questions to limit the possibility that an abuser may overhear your conversation.

For example, rather than “How can I help?,” ask: “Would you like me to give you the number for the Domestic Violence Hotline via text?” or “Do you need me to call the police?”

It is important to recognize that safety may look different during these challenging times as we are all navigating an unfamiliar and challenging situation and environment. Domestic violence programs can help individuals experiencing violence explore their options and create safety plans, but remember that these programs and first responders have also been impacted by the pandemic. While their capacity and operations may be limited, most programs are still open and are the best resource for survivors.

If the individual determines that it is no longer safe for them to remain in their home, provide information on sick and safe leave policies and other workplace accommodations so they can leave their homes and seek safety without jeopardizing their job.

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## 6. Safely Interrupt or Intervene

Every situation of violence differs and requires different responses. As supervisors and coworkers, there are ways we can interrupt or intervene to support a colleague, even during a pandemic. The increased frequency of work-related video conferences and calls may be prime opportunities to check-in and assess a colleague's safety, and – if necessary – interrupt or intervene.

For example, you and your colleague can agree on a code word that will alert you that they need an interruption from you or an outside intervention from the authorities. One code word or phrase could mean "please call the authorities." Another code word or phrase could mean "please call me on the phone so that I can move to another room for safety." Depending on the situation, these may be able to interrupt violence in the moment. However, it is crucial for your coworker who is experiencing violence to have total control and final say over if and how they would like you to interrupt or intervene.

Workplaces play a critical role in supporting employees who are experiencing violence at home. While supporting remote workers who are experiencing abuse presents unique challenges, it is not impossible. Recognize this is a time of high uncertainty and trauma, continually check-in on the physical and mental well-being of your colleagues, share and remind employees about available workplace and community resources, and, if safe and requested, help survivors working from home access safety.

For more information on how to support survivors, families, and communities experiencing violence during this pandemic, visit: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/get-updates-information-covid-19/>

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