

# WORKING WITH DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVORS DURING COVID: REMOTE SAFETY PLANNING AND RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Safety planning with survivors, which is based on ongoing and dynamic discussions that promote their physical, psychological, and social well-being, is critical as we respond to COVID. Incorporate this guidance into your outreach and engagement strategies to address the unique challenges created by working remotely.

## DO's and DON'Ts For Using Technology to Reach Survivors

- Identify whether the survivor shares devices with their abusive partner to assess for technology safety concerns.
- Offer them multiple ways to communicate with you (phone, text, email or video chat) and let them choose the safest method to communicate a date and time for you to reach out, every time.
- Offer non-phone based support options, like Anti-Violence Project's online report form (<https://avp.org/get-help/report-violence>) or Safe Horizon's Safe Chat text line (<https://www.safehorizon.org/safechat>)
- Ask yes/no questions, not open-ended questions, since the abusive partner or others may be present.

## During every conversation, address any immediate safety or privacy concerns

Ask the survivor if it is safe to speak, or if they need to connect at a different time.

- If it's safe, discuss strategies to ensure future safe conversations, like:
  - What part of their home is "safer" for a conversation?
  - Is talking outside a safe possibility? Will talking outside be private?
  - Can running water or other ambient noise help maintain privacy?
- Develop a code word or phrase with the survivor that they can use to let you know if it becomes unsafe to talk at any time.

## Continue to Assess for Risk and Lethality Factors

- Continue to ask about the survivor's safety and key lethality factors included on Domestic Incident Reports.
- Ask about family stressors that may be present now as a result of the COVID crisis, including loss of employment, or lack of access to basic resources (such as food, medication, stable housing).
- If any of these factors are present, let them know you are worried about their safety and that they may be at elevated risk and offer to connect them with a Family Justice Center.

## Discuss Access to Essential Items and a Plan to Leave

- Ensure the survivor has access to their important documents
  - Suggest that they keep photos or copies of identity documents, such as children's information and identity documents, in a safe or hidden place.
- Ask whether the survivor and their children have access to food, medicine, and cash
  - Suggest that the survivor hide these vital resources if they feel that they may lose access in their home.
- Ask the survivor if they are planning to leave the home
  - If they are not, DO NOT suggest that they do so as this may increase their risk.
- If they are planning to leave, discuss what that plan might look like, including:
  - NYC domestic violence shelter options, ensuring the survivor has the DV hotline number if they decide to be linked to shelter.
  - Creating a "go-bag" with important medicines, documents, cash, and other items that the survivor and their children may need if suddenly forced to leave their home.
  - Asking friend/family members if they are willing to support them if they leave.

# ADDITIONAL WAYS TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO SURVIVORS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

## Staying Safe and Connected

- You can talk with survivors about helpful strategies they are already using to stay safe. For example:
  - Where in their home may be safe for the survivor and their children, particularly when an incident of violence occurs?
  - Are there particular de-escalation techniques the survivor has used or may want to use with their abusive partner?
  - Are there grounding techniques they have been using to help stay emotionally well?
- Help them identify opportunities to safely distance from the abusive partner:
  - Is it possible to a walk around the block, or otherwise go outside?
  - Can the survivor take responsibility for any essential errands, like groceries or pharmacy runs?
- Encourage the survivor to stay connected with others:
  - Are there friends, family members, or neighbors who can form a safe circle to provide support?
  - Is it possible to set up regular check-ins via video chat or group texts with members of their safe circle?
  - Can they use a code word, sentence, or visual signal with someone in their safe circle when there is an immediate safety concern?

## NYC Resources for Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Survivors

Survivors can call their nearest FJC for comprehensive services Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to file for a Family Court OP, get legal assistance, connect with DV Bureaus at DA Offices, and access case management, support with shelter/housing, and other programs.

**NYC Family Justice Center, Bronx**  
Call 718-508-1220

**NYC Family Justice Center, Queens**  
Call 718-575-4545

**NYC Family Justice Center, Brooklyn**  
Call 718-250-5113

**NYC Family Justice Center, Staten Island**  
Call 718-697-4300

**NYC Family Justice Center, Manhattan**  
Call 212-602-2800

After hours, survivors can call NYC's 24/7 DV hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673) and use **NYC HOPE** ([www.nyc.gov/nycchope](http://www.nyc.gov/nycchope)), an online resource directory that helps survivors connect to support and safety.