



What will this guide cover?

This guide is intended to be an introduction to reducing harm in your community and Mutual Aid group. It will cover:

- What is Mutual Aid?
- What is Harm?
- What is Transformative Justice?
- Hierarchies and power in your group
- Safeguarding & Practical Resources
- Groups at heightened risk of harm

We welcome your feedback, corrections and suggestions to help develop this guide. If you would like to get in touch with the collective that developed this guide, please email:

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If ideas of mutual aid and harm are not brand new to you, you may be interested in the '[Minimising Harm: A Resource-Kit for COVID-19 Mutual Aid Groups](#)' we are also putting together.

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What is Mutual Aid?

In the last month, Mutual Aid has been somewhat of a buzzword. For some of us, Mutual Aid has long been a part of our lives, our politics, and our understanding of community. For some, it is a new word to describe what they have already been doing in one form or other, perhaps amongst our family or close friends.

We thought it would be helpful to briefly outline Mutual Aid.

Mutual Aid is a way of organising to support one another. It recognises that we are all interconnected and that our survival requires us to cooperate to improve the lives of people in our communities. Typically, Mutual Aid works most effectively on a local scale. For example, all the neighbours on a street communicating about their needs and their resources, and pooling their resources to ensure everyone's needs are met.¹

Mutual Aid has been written about extensively. If you are interested in reading more about Mutual Aid and examples of how it works, we would recommend this [article](#).

What is harm, and what is the difference between harm and abuse?

We have all experienced harm at different points in our lives. We have probably all acted in ways that could be called harmful too. Despite it being a familiar concept to us all, it is also quite an abstract concept.

We have taken our definition of 'harm' from a video called *Transforming Harm: Experiments in Accountability*.

Harm - an incident where a person, people, or system behave in a way that negatively impacts another, creating unmet needs or obligations.

An example of harm that may arise in a Mutual Aid group could be the alienation of certain groups, perhaps because of unacknowledged bias or through the use of oppressive or discriminatory language. This may lead to a group or an individual not getting their needs met, as they cannot trust your group enough to ask them for support.

Abuse differs from harm in that it is a sustained pattern of harm, often involving coercion and an imbalance of power.

What is Transformative Justice?

Transformative Justice is a term used to describe a wide variety of practices that address violence and abuse without calling the police. These strategies have been developed by and for communities for whom calling the police is not an option. This includes communities in which police involvement is much more likely to result in arrest, conviction, fines, prison, detention and deportation. Rather than increasing safety, police involvement instead

¹ Paraphrased from the [Mutual Aid 101 Toolkit](#)

deepens violence. For example, this may be experienced in working class, Black, queer and trans, disabled and migrant communities and by sex workers. Faced with these problems, people in these communities had to come up with alternative ways to address abuse and harm given the reality that getting the police involved often made things much worse.

Transformative justice includes practices that focus on:

- preventing abuse and harm
- intervening when abuse and harm is happening
- holding people accountable for causing abuse and harm
- transforming individuals and society to build safer communities

It is important to remember that everyone has a different understanding of what safety means to them. Explicitly discussing how different members of your community experience safety is an essential part of Mutual Aid. **Do not assume that what feels safe to you applies for other people.** You may have only positive experiences of the police and criminal justice system. However it is important to remember that we do not all experience or understand the police, courts or prisons in the same way.

Resources

- *Sisters Uncut* have developed [this guide](#) on responding to harm in your community. It is UK specific.
- [Transform Harm](#) - a resource hub about ending violence that offers an introduction to transformative justice, created by Mariame Kaba
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha & Ejeris Dixon (eds.) (2020) [Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement](#). AK Press

Hierarchies and power within your group

A lot of Mutual Aid groups are structured non-hierarchically or horizontally. This means that there are no formal leaders and that everyone has equal decision making rights. However, we think that describing a space in such a way can lead to confusion, as hierarchies inevitably form. Examples of this may be:

- Members of the group with more skills or experience of community organising vs those with less experience or skill
- Members with more resources (such as knowing more people in their community, or having access to commodities such as bikes or cars) vs those without such resources
- Members who do not experience marginalisation (due to their race, gender, sexuality, being able-bodied, or socio-economic class) vs those who do experience marginalisation

Some hierarchies can be beneficial to your group. For example, someone with a lot of experience in community organising could offer to do an online workshop to share those

skills with less confident members. However, even informal hierarchies like this can make it difficult to minimise harm done to more marginalised members, particularly if they are not consciously acknowledged.

For example, say there is someone in your community who requires support but, for whatever reason, cannot offer support to others. They may have a negative experience of interacting with your group; maybe someone is dismissive towards their needs or someone uses oppressive language in their interactions. The individual may find it hard to raise this issue due to perceived hierarchies; perhaps the person who caused harm to them is a particularly prominent or vocal member of the mutual aid group. This may make it a lot harder for an individual to raise concerns about the way they have been treated. They may even feel guilty for doing so, as they are not in a position to provide others support and so may feel obligated to feel grateful for the support they receive, even if the process of accessing that support is, in some way, harmful.

The best way to avoid such circumstances is to work on being self-aware - as individuals, as a mutual aid group, and as a wider community - as to where these hierarchies, and where power, lie. Ongoing and evolving discussions on this topic can lead to structures where members of your community feel able to raise issues and grievances they may have.

Resources

- [Thoughts on Mutual Aid COVID-19](#) by Skills Network Women's Collective
- [Leadership Qualities that Support Mutuality and Collaboration](#) by Dean Spade
- [How To Make A Good Apology](#) by Mia Mingus

Safeguarding

Many of you will be well-versed in safeguarding principles and procedures, from professional or voluntary capacities. It is vital to carry this knowledge over into Mutual Aid spaces.

Safeguarding is the mitigation of risks that come from interactions between people. Safeguarding is both for volunteers and for the people they're supporting. Everyone should think through the risks of their actions when working with others.

Safeguarding includes:

- Assessing risk
- Taking precautions
- Setting up systems for reporting, review and accountability

Resources

- National Food Service Safeguarding Training Resources for Mutual Aid Groups: [Info-sheet](#), [Slideshow](#), [risk assessment template](#) and [Emergency Food Preparation Video](#)
- Online meetings:
 - Running a Zoom meeting [protocol](#) by Queercare

- Good Night Out - [A guide to safer online meetings](#)
- There is further information about how to set up a Zoom meeting to prevent zoombombing and how to deal with Zoombombers [here](#)
- A [masterlist](#) of Queercare Covid-19 protocols, including hand hygiene and supporting immunocompromised people
- The ICO has written a [blog about what mutual aid groups need to know about data protection](#)
- Health information
 - To mitigate against misinformation that can be distressing it is worth cross-checking with the [NHS](#) and [public health](#) guidance
 - We now live in a world full of infographics about COVID-19. Learning how to understand these infographics about can lead to more effective wellness behaviours and help us to feel empathy for others in more risky situations. Information about data literacy has been provided in a web comic [COVID-19 Data Literacy is for Everyone](#).
 - For guidance translated into common languages spoken in migrant and refugee communities in the UK, check out [Big Leaf Foundation](#) and [Doctors of the World](#)

Groups at heightened risk of harm

Those who are most impacted by COVID-19 are those who have been historically affected by systems of oppression. Mutual aid groups can centre these communities whilst valuing their existing knowledge and skills. Below is a non-exhaustive list of communities that are particularly affected by COVID-19 (listed in alphabetical order), none of which are mutually exclusive and are all complicated by class, gender, race, sexuality, immigration status, age and geographic location.

Disabled people

Disabled people are ‘a diverse social group of people with a variety of impairments who continue to face unequal and differential treatment resulting from systems, structures and cultures which fail to take disabled people into account’ ([DPAC Policy Statement](#)). An impairment is a lessening or loss of a function. This could include physical, mental, cognitive, learning or other types of function (see DPAC [A Guide to Disabled People, for non-disabled people](#)).

Many disabled people have extensive experience of isolation, working and organising remotely, dealing with social services and practicing mutual aid. One US example is the [Surviving the Apocalypse Together Workbook: A mutual aid safety and wellness planning template for COVID-19](#) developed by Elliot Fukui. These are skills that are incredibly valuable to us all and should be recognized by your Mutual Aid group.

Before COVID-19, social care was already undervalued, understaffed and underfunded. With the Coronavirus Act, we see local councils given the power to suspend The Care Act

2014, resulting in further downgrading of social care, where local authorities no longer have the statutory obligation of providing social care to all of those who are eligible. In practicality, this means many disabled people are no longer eligible for the (already minimal) care they once received. The assumption is that they can rely on family, friend and community support, with no mention of safeguards to prevent abuse or harm.

It is also worth remembering that the initial government plan of 'herd immunity' was predicated on the deaths of predominantly elderly and disabled people. Although the policy has changed since, the ways in which healthcare services are being prioritised tend to give preference to "those with the highest chance of survival". This is known as service rationing. We know of examples where people with severe illnesses and their families have been asked to complete 'do not resuscitate' forms so that resources can be allocated to other groups.

It is harmful to assume that disabled members of your community have access to care and support through local government or family.

Resources

- Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) [Blog](#)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) [Care Work](#). AK Press

Gypsy and Traveller Communities

Antiziganism - the word for discriminatory behaviour or language towards Gypsy and Traveller communities - is one of the most prevalent and unquestioned forms of racism in the UK. If you recognise this in your own behaviour or language we encourage you to question it and try to unpick your own prejudice, particularly if you are in a mutual aid group in a community where Gypsies and Travellers live.

Gypsy and Traveller communities are already disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system and face severe health inequalities so COVID-19 policing and self-isolating policies can make them even more vulnerable. Current guidance on self-isolation ignores the ways of life of those living in unauthorised encampments, on traveller sites and on boats. It is important to try and open lines of communication with Gypsy and Traveller communities in your local area to push local authorities to end enforced movement of unauthorised encampments and call for a 'Negotiated Stopping approach'. This means that travelling communities can either stay on the land they are camped on, or move somewhere more suitable. We should also be ensuring that everyone living on unauthorised encampments and traveller sites has access to basic water and sanitation. If you live in London, you can check if there are traveller sites in your area by using the [Gypsy and Travellers London Community Map](#). *Try and let this be an opportunity to learn from a community that is commonly marginalised, and work to incorporate their skills and needs into your Mutual Aid group.*

Resources

- [COVID-19 Resources for supporting gypsy, traveller and boater communities](#) by Friends Families and Travellers
- [Services](#) provided by London Gypsies and Travellers

People of colour

We are using the term 'people of colour' to mean people who experience discrimination and violence due to their racial identity. The acronym BAME - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic - and BME - Black and Minority Ethnic - are often used by charities and statutory bodies in the UK to describe Black and other racially minoritised groups.

People of colour in the UK are:

- More likely to be a frontline worker and therefore more likely to be exposed to the virus
- More likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19 due to existing racial inequalities in healthcare (see this article by the [Runnymede Trust](#))
- More likely to be negatively impacted by increased police powers
- More likely to be victim of racism and hate crimes
- Less likely to have access to specialised support as BAME charities are chronically underfunded

[The Deaton Review](#), published on 1st May 2020, found that, per-capita, COVID-19 hospital deaths are three times higher in the Black Caribbean population than amongst the white majority. Pakistani and Black African populations also show heightened risk. This is despite these populations generally being younger than the white majority, which would suggest they were less at risk. *It is of utmost important that the voices of people of colour are centred in your Mutual Aid group.*

Resources

- *Ubele* - [COVID-19 Supporting BAME Communities](#)
- *UK Mutual Aid* - intersectional support group for marginalised people in the UK. This group has been running since December 2018. Facebook [page](#) and private Facebook [group](#).
- *Healing Justice London* - Black, brown, indigenous and spiritual traditions and healing spaces, tools and resources to undo harms, repair, vision and sustain futures possible free from intimate, interpersonal and structural violence. [Website](#) and [instagram](#).
- *Majonzi fund: Covid-19 bereavement fund* - scheme to provide small grants to help BAME families and workers to organise memorial events and access bereavement counselling. You can donate [here](#).
- The Min Quan project of the Monitoring Group can support Chinese and South Asian victims of hate crime. The Monitoring Group can be reached at office@tmg-uk.org or by phone – 020 7582 7438 – between 10am and 6pm on weekdays.

People in prison and 'secure environments'

It can be hard to remember that people who are in prison, secure hospitals and detention centres are part of our communities, but we must reassert this in the context of COVID-19.

Prisoners are made more vulnerable in a number of ways during this pandemic. From prisoners being killed in COVID-19 riots in Italy and Colombia, to prisoners being left for 23-hour a day in their cells, with the possibility of increased self-injury and more prisoners taking their own life. The UK is no exception: inmates at HMP Coldingley for example are being locked in their cells for 24 hours, with very limited access to sanitation. All non-essential visits have been suspended, this includes visits from friends and family. The lived realities of prison conditions and the negative impacts on people in prison (including prison workers) challenge the idea that prisons provide a safer society. This is why prison abolitionist campaigners have long argued against the use of prison and are advocating for the release of prisoners during the pandemic.

People held in prison, detention centres and other surveilled environments are also skilled in surviving periods of isolation such as lockdowns and solitary confinement within prison conditions that erode health and wellbeing as a setting in which it is difficult to access adequate healthcare and hygiene. This is not to say that practicing social distancing and staying indoors is comparable to the violence of being locked up in a cell. Rather, we understand that we can learn from imprisoned and detained folks and strengthen networks supporting them, such as through letter-writing, crowd-funding and campaigning for the release of all incarcerated and detained people. *People who are imprisoned or detained, and their families, cannot be left out of the actions of your Mutual Aid group.*

Resources

- COVID-19 prisoner news on [instagram](#)
- [Remembering Rolando – Prisoner Support, Humanity And Solidarity. With Andreas Hausammann](#) - No Prisons Podcast (Community Action on Prison Expansion)
- [I've Spent 27 Years in Solitary Confinement. Here Are Some Tips on Making the Best Use of Time Alone](#) by Keith Lamar as told to Samantha Michaels
- [Locked Down Again](#), Ear Hustle podcast
- [#Coronacapitalism: Riots, Resistance and Releases – The Coronavirus and the prison industrial complex](#) - Corporate Watch

Current campaigns

- [Petition to release low risk prisoners](#)
- [Supporting People Inside During Covid-19](#) - Community Action on Prison Expansion
- Donate to the [COVID-19 Prison Emergency Fund](#)
- [bluebaglife](#) are documenting reports of conditions in UK prisons on their twitter and Instagram accounts.

Migrants, Refugees, Asylum Seekers and People with Precarious Immigration Status

The difference between Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers is not widely understood.

Migrants - a broad term that includes anyone who has moved to the UK from another country, including EU nationals, non-EU/EEA nationals, refugees and asylum seekers. Most migrants who are not refugees or asylum seekers have to pay an NHS surcharge to access healthcare. If they are a 'legal' migrant, they should have a Biometric Residency Permit (BRP card) which says what their immigration status is and when it will run out. Offering support to people in your community whose visas are about to run out is something mutual aid groups can be doing. You don't need to have an in-depth understanding of the immigration system to offer to help someone with low English to read through their forms, for example.

Asylum Seekers - someone who has claimed asylum in the UK, but is yet to receive a decision as to whether they are eligible for Refugee Status. They cannot access benefits or work. Children will be enrolled in school. They can access the NHS without charge. Most will live in 'asylum housing' and will only have access to money via their Aspen card. Asylum seekers receive £37.75 per person, per week, to live off. They will probably carry an 'application registration card' (ARC card). This looks a bit like a BRP card.

Refugees - someone who has received 'Refugee Status'. This is a legal recognition that they have fled persecution and are unable to seek protection in their home country. Refugees have the right to work, claim benefits, and use the NHS without charge. They will receive their BRP card, which will say they have refugee status, and their National Insurance number. Under normal circumstances, they must leave their asylum accommodation within 28 days of receiving their status.

The government policy of the 'hostile environment' towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees means people in this community may be scared of accessing healthcare services. Identity checks and charges for NHS care have contributed to deterring people with precarious immigration status from accessing healthcare because of the risk of detention and deportation. **The government has decided that the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 will not be charged.** However, many people will not know about the exemption and may still not access these services due to language barriers, limited internet access and because of the fear and mistrust created through hostile environment policies. An important role of mutual aid groups is to create lines of communication with such groups and to ensure their access to resources on coronavirus in forms they can understand.

Another important aspect to be aware of is the immigration condition called 'No recourse to public funds', usually abbreviated to NRPF. NRPF prohibits access to certain benefits, homelessness assistance and social housing. This phrase can usually be found on someone's BRP card, or on other immigration documentation. It can be confusing to understand which benefits and publicly funded services are treated as 'public funds' for immigration purposes. The NRPF network has produced guidance [here](#).

In 2019, a number of charities - including St Mungo's, who dominate much of the homeless support sector - were revealed to be sharing the immigration data of the people they were supporting with the Home Office. This led to people being at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. It is important that you do due diligence on any organisation that you signpost

an individual with insecure immigration status to, and ensure that they do not share information to the Home Office.

Important updated guidance for asylum seekers and refugees:

- Newly granted refugees will be able to continue receiving their asylum support payments until they receive their first Universal Credit payment. This will last at least until the end of June.
- No new refugees should be removed from their asylum accommodation, even after the usual 28 day limit. If their housing manager is pressuring them to leave, they should be empowered to stay put, or they face risk of destitution.
- New temporary locations for the registration of asylum claims have been set up - in Glasgow, Belfast, Liverpool, Leeds, Solihull and Cardiff. Usually you have to go to the Asylum Intake Unit in Croydon to claim asylum.
- At the moment, face-to-face substantive asylum interviews are cancelled.
- Similarly, most appeal hearings (for those challenging a refusal of refugee status) are currently cancelled

Within our Mutual Aid groups we should be working towards making these spaces accessible for people with precarious immigration status who may refrain from reaching out if they know that local authorities or the police are participating in them.

Resources

- [No Recourse to Public Factsheet](#) by NRPF Network
- [Advice for UK Covid-19 Mutual Aid Groups on Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#) shared by Feminist Fightback
- [PatientsNotPassports](#) is a toolkit designed to advocate for people facing charges for NHS care, and in taking action to end immigration checks and upfront charging in the NHS.
- [Changes to the asylum and immigration process due to Covid-19](#) - Right to Remain

Current campaigns

- Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants ([LGSMMigrants](#)) are creating an emergency fundraising campaign to support three London-based groups: [South London Refugee Association](#), [Room to heal](#), [Women 4 Refugee Women](#), and [Hackney Migrant Centre](#). You can make a donation [here](#).
- The mutual aid group Apoyo Comunitario Sur de Londres is crowdfunding for Latinx people without access to public funds. You can donate [here](#).
- South Yorkshire Migrant and Asylum Action Group have a petition [here](#) to have wifi installed in all asylum accommodation.

LGBTQIA+ Communities

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) communities face additional barriers to help and support as well as increased risks of being homeless, being in insecure employment, and navigating poor mental health and wellbeing.

Access to face-to-face support, Gender Identity Clinics (GICs), hormones and gender affirming surgeries may have been cancelled and/or restricted in the COVID-19 pandemic. Queer, trans and intersex children, young people, and adults may be facing long periods of isolation with unsupportive family members and/or in unsupportive neighbourhoods. LGBTQIA+ people may not trust their neighbours, or feel safe contacting them, to ask for help provided by local mutual aid groups. This can have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

In recognition of the barriers that these communities face, work has already been done by organisations to develop a culture of community care for queer, trans and intersex communities without needing to reach out to institutional care as well as develop virtual spaces for queer community to flourish. *Understanding the specific barriers faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and their needs is vital work for your Mutual Aid group.*

Resources

LGBT support

- [LGBT Foundation](#) - are offering a range of [online services](#) including a helpline, online assessments, support and events as well as a free sexual health delivery service.
- [Switchboard LGBT](#) - offer a wide-range of emotional support to LGBT community via a helpline, webchat and email. They have also put together an [emotional wellbeing support pack](#) to help people to manage anxiety during this time.

Refuge and emergency accommodation

- [LGBTIQ Outside](#) - run a 24-hour shelter and are working to provide emergency housing and support to the LGBTIQ+ community for the next 3 months in collaboration with YHA and a virtual community centre. Link to fundraiser [here](#) and get help [here](#).

Support for young trans people

- [Gendered Intelligence](#) are a trans youth work charity who have adapted to offer [youth support groups online](#)
- [Mermaids](#) - a charity that predominantly supports the parents of trans and gender diverse children and young people. Here are their [helpline, webchat, email support and text support services](#)

Trans-specific support

- [Mindline trans+](#) is a national helpline for confidential emotional mental health support for trans and non-binary people. They have volunteers with lived experience of to calls as often as possible and are open 2 evenings a week Mondays and Fridays from 8pm to midnight.
- [Galop](#) - have produced a '[Trans Resilience in Isolation](#)' powerpoint presentation with useful tips on how trans people can cope during isolation.
- [What the Trans](#) - a trans, intersex and non-binary podcast that has set up a [discord group](#) for chats, gaming and community building

Queer-specific mutual aid resources

- [Queercare](#), whose approach to community care was at the forefront of early mutual aid responses in the UK, provides [crucial resources and models for COVID-19 mutual aid work](#) that centre LGBTQIA+ needs.
- [London LGBTIQ+ COVID19 Mutual Aid Group](#) offer a form to [offer support](#) and form to [ask for support](#)
- [Durham Queer Mutual Aid](#) offer support for queer people, by queer people. [Here](#) is their form to request support.

People of Colour specific

- [Unmuted Brum](#) - QTPOC (queer, trans, intersex people of colour) organisation based in Birmingham is running a QTPOC togetherness programme of free online events for LGBTQPOC only. You can [volunteer to run an event here](#) and [check out and sign up to attend an event here](#).
- *UK QTPOC Emergency Relief & Hardship Fund* - An emergency relief and hardship fund set up to provide short term support to Queer, Trans and Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTPOC) currently living in the UK who are affected by the outbreak and ongoing lockdown caused by Covid-19. Make donations [here](#) and apply to the fund [here](#).
- [@l.b.q.womxnofcolouruk](#) are organising an online weekly support group centred on POC queer mothers and non-biological mothers including trans and nonbinary parents. You can find more information about this initiative [here](#).

Sex Workers

Sex work is an umbrella term that encompasses an array of different types of work, whereby sexual services are sold. The industry has been severely hit by enforced lockdown and the economic downturn, both of which contribute to a decrease in its client base. Nonetheless, many sex workers are continuing to work, either because their brothel or club expect them to come in or they cannot afford to lose their income. This puts them more at risk of having to accept requests from dangerous clients and of being fined and harassed by the police. Sex workers are frequently women, including trans women, or/and part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Many sex workers are also migrants or/and people of colour.

Sex workers are being profoundly impacted by COVID-19, although their struggle is rendered largely invisible. Many sex workers cannot get self-employed status because of the many ways in which sex work is still criminalised and not recognised as work. Therefore most will not be eligible to receive the 80% wage supplement or sick pay under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Discrimination and stigma associated with sex work mean that tracking income for tax as self-employed sex worker might be unsafe. People who have precarious immigration status cannot register their income with the state.

The Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM) has created a hardship fund for sex workers. SWARM is a grassroots sex worker-led collective fighting criminalisation, supporting sex workers and engaging in solidarity across issues of justice. Given that sex workers do not have access to the government Coronavirus Job Retention

Scheme, and may still encounter multiple barriers to apply for the self-employed support, this hardship fund is reaching those most at risk of destitution.

Although sex workers may have their own resourceful support networks, it is important that Mutual Aid groups are aware of this community and offer support in whatever way they can, such as through creating spaces for discussion to raise awareness about sex work, challenging discrimination and stigma associated with sex work, donating to sex worker hardship funds and advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work.

Resources

- [Monday 13 April 2020 Institute of Contemporary Arts Daily](#) put together by members of Decriminalised Futures
- RadioAvA Sex Workers Radio has released two episodes on the coronavirus, which you can find [here](#).
- [Sex Worker COVID-19 Support Doc](#) by SWARM

Current campaigns

- You can make donations to SWARM [here](#) and contact [here](#).
- You can donate unused phones and money to Dialtone Project [here](#).

Victims and Survivors of Interpersonal/Domestic Violence

The home may not be safe for everyone. People who live with violence in their relationships and households may be experiencing increased danger due to social distancing and isolation measures. This [short article](#) explains why a lockdown can be a dangerous time for victims and survivors of domestic violence. If you aren't familiar with the signs of abuse there are a list of useful questions to consider in this [article by Refuge](#).

The [latest guidance from the World Health Organization](#) (26 March 2020) states that:

“Community members should be made aware of the increased risk of domestic/partner violence during this pandemic, and the need to keep in touch and provide support safely to women subjected to violence. It is important to have information about where help for survivors is available”.

In your Mutual Aid work, you may know or come across someone who is experiencing violence and abuse from someone in their household. To prepare for this, it would be helpful to find out about any local specialist support services in your area and what support they are able to give at this moment (a list of national support services is included at the end of this guide).

When supporting survivors, confidentiality and safety are paramount. It is very important to find ways to support survivors (including passing on information to them) that do not increase their isolation or make them unsafe e.g. could alert the person who is causing harm who could then make the situation worse. For instance, when you are calling or messaging someone who you think is experiencing violence or abuse you should assume that the

person causing harm could be listening in and checking their messages. **Survivors are often skilled in knowing how to keep themselves and members of the household safe so it is a good idea to find ways to support survivors that also respect their self-determination and choices.**

Below is some guidance of what you could do from [Independent Domestic Abuse Services](#)

If you are worried about a friend; family member; neighbour, or colleague, this advice could help to provide a lifeline:

- *Check in with them regularly, if it is safe to do so*
- *Ask if there is anything that you can look out for that might indicate they need help*
- *Set up a code word to indicate that help is needed*
- *Call the Police if you hear or see anything that could indicate a potential risk**
- *Look at the [safety planning advice](#) on our website*

* Please think carefully about whether to call the police on behalf of someone else. **You should call the police if you believe that someone's life is in immediate danger.**

If you are facing isolation with an abusive person, we offer some [safety planning advice](#) on our website. In addition, you could consider the following:

- *Get a spare phone and store emergency contact numbers in it and hide it in a safe place or with a trusted person*
- *Keep your ID documents, emergency funds, bank cards and children's birth certificates to hand*
- *Speak to your neighbours and ask them to ring the police if they hear or see anything*
- *Set up safe words with friends so they know to call for help on your behalf*
- *Plan to check in with people regularly so that they can raise the alarm if they don't hear from you*
- *Plan to escape to the garden or to a room that you can exit from easily if abusive behaviour escalates*
- *Avoid rooms where there could be weapons if the abusive behaviour escalates*

When accessing support from home survivors who are in households with their abusers will need to think about how to best 'cover their tracks' because the person who is harming them may check up on their computer or phone and discover they are reaching out for help or getting support, which could increase isolation and risk to the survivor.

Survivors may need to clear their browser history or set up their devices to be secure. Information on how to do this is available here: <https://chayn.co/safety/> and most specialist service websites have an 'exit' or 'leave' site button. There is also some helpful safety advice for survivors by [Women's Aid](#) and [Safer Lives](#).

It is worth knowing about the silent solution system. This allows survivors who need help from the police but are not able to speak on the phone to get help. When you call 999, if you

press 55 the operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency. There is more information about this [here](#).

The 'rail to refuge' scheme offers free rail travel for women and children to travel to a refuge. Further information and application form is available [here](#).

Boots has publicised that they will [offer their consultation rooms for people to safely contact domestic violence support services](#). This means that victims and survivors have an opportunity to call specialist support services under the guise of an essential visit to the pharmacy.

Current campaigns

- [Domestic Violence & COVID-19 Petition](#)
- [Solace #StaySafeAtHome Covid-19 Emergency Appeal](#)
- [PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE & VIOLENCE DURING AND AFTER COVID-19 Petition](#)
- [Sisters Uncut Statement on COVID-19](#)

Transformative justice approaches to interpersonal violence

Local mutual aid work within neighbourhoods could offer up new possibilities for community members to develop skills, capacity and confidence in building safer communities in the long term. This includes developing options that:

- prevent violence
- intervene when violence is happening
- hold people accountable for causing abuse and harm
- transform individuals and society to build safer communities

One example is the practice of [podmapping](#) developed by Mia Mingus. You could use the podmapping worksheet to identify who your 'pod people' are (who you can rely on for help when you are harmed and when you harm others). Once you know who your 'pod people' are you can cultivate trust and use your network or 'pod' to address low-level harms before they escalate into violence.

The police can make things worse in the lives of some victims and survivors of interpersonal violence. Thinking carefully about reporting individuals and groups that you see outside their homes to the police and sharing information about what you and your communities could do to intervene when you see someone being harmed by the police is helpful. For example, Cradle Community has created the graphics '[How can we be active bystanders during lockdown](#)' and this [poster](#) asks people to think carefully about reporting breaches to the police and links to organisations to report harmful police behaviour. The Monitoring group has produced a short video [Policing the Police during the Corona Lockdown](#) outlining the key legal powers that have been handed to police under COVID-19 and how you can stay safe if you encounter the police.

Resources

- [Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective](#)
- Cradle Community [twitter](#) and [fundraiser](#)
- [Sisters Uncut](#)

Support for Victims and Survivors of Interpersonal Violence

Please double check the following as opening hours are subject to change in this moment. You may also want to look at what is available in your local area.

National specialist support for victims and survivors

- *National Domestic Abuse helpline*
Open 24 hours a day 0808 2000247
There is an online form where you can state how and when you would like to be contacted <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/Contact-us>
- *Women's Aid*
Online chat, Monday to Friday 10:00 - 12:00 noon <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>
Get help by email <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/help-by-email/>
Survivors forum <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/>
- *National Rape Crisis Helpline*
0808 802 9999 or on minicom 0208 239 1124
Daily 12:00 noon - 14:30 & 19:00 - 21:30
<http://www.rasasc.org.uk/helpline/>
- *Rape Crisis Scotland National Helpline*
08088 01 03 02 18:00 to 0:00, 7 days a week
www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk
- *Centre for Women's Justice*
Legal advice and assistance
<https://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk>
- *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Northern Ireland)*
Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
0808 802 1414
Email: help@dsahelpline.org
- *Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (Scotland)*
Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
0800 027 1234
www.sdafmh.org.uk

- *Live Fear Free Helpline (Wales)*
Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
0808 80 10 800
Live Chat Service: gov.wales/live-fear-free
Text: 078600 77 333
Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales
- *National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline*
0800 999 5428
Monday, Tuesday & Friday 10:00 - 17:00; Wednesday and Thursday 10:00 - 20:00
Tuesday 13:00 - 17:00 is trans-specific service
Online chat Wednesday 17:00 - 20:00; Thursday 17:00 - 20:00
Online report form: <http://www.galop.org.uk/report/>
<http://www.galop.org.uk>
- *Men's Advice Line* (for male victims of domestic abuse)
0808 8010327
Monday & Wednesday 09:00 - 20:00; Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 09:00 - 17:00
Webchat available on Wednesday, Thursday & Friday: 10:00 - 11:00 and 15:00 - 16:00 <https://mensadvice.org.uk/>

Peer-led support services

- *Survivors Library*
Run monthly online text only anonymous-as-you-like chats by and for survivors of trauma, abuse or assault on <https://hack.chat>
<https://twitter.com/survivorslib>
<https://www.facebook.com/survivorslibrary>
- *Not Your Fault*
A peer-led support group for men and non-binary people who have experienced sexual violence. Run online support sessions via hack.chat, a text-only messaging platform.
<https://notyourfault.support/>
- *Chayn*
Chayn offers free online intersectional survivor-led resources
<https://chayn.co>

Support for people who cause harm

- *Respect Helpline*
0808 802 4040 Monday - Friday 09:00 - 17:00
Webchat Wednesday, Thursday & Friday: 10:00 - 11:00 and 15:00 - 16:00
<https://respectphoneline.org.uk/>