

## **The New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NMCADV) <http://www.nmcadv.org>**

There are 32 domestic violence programs located throughout New Mexico. Programs are open and offering help in a variety of ways to maximize safety for victims and their children during the pandemic. Services including shelter, hotel/motels, telephone counseling and advocacy, and web-based connections are available. An advocate can assist callers in identifying and accessing services needed for their particular situation. Additionally, online Domestic Violence Offender Treatment services are being held remotely.

### **Domestic Violence During the Pandemic**

As shelter-in-place restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic continue, reports of violence in the home are increasing in some areas. Contributing factors for this increase, such as job loss, tight finances and constant close proximity to partners and children can have a detrimental effect on the family's ability to engage in constructive communication or coping strategies. It's more important than ever to understand the challenges victims of domestic violence face, the injury and health effects of domestic violence, and how to help victims.

#### **What is domestic violence?**

Domestic Violence has many forms. It can include physical, sexual, strangulation, financial, emotional, stalking, intimidation, threats, and even harm to pets. It is a pattern of behaviors that one person uses to maintain power and control over another person. The violence often escalates in frequency and severity over time. Anyone can be a victim of this kind of crime.

#### **Challenges to seeking help**

Even in "normal" times, victims are faced with many barriers in asking for help such as fear, finances, shame, lack of support; they may lose their children or fear deportation. The current pandemic makes help seeking behavior even more challenging. Victims may not be able to call for help with their partner in close proximity, lack of transportation, fear of going somewhere that could expose themselves and their children to the virus. Even going to work might have provided them with a break from their partner, the ability to talk to co-workers, and to offer a safe place to reach out for help. They now don't have even that outlet.

Additionally, domestic violence victims may suffer from the virus themselves, or experience negative health effects associated with intimate partner violence. Conditions may include chronic illnesses affecting the heart; the digestive, reproductive or nervous

systems; and muscles and bones. Traumatic brain injuries can be sustained through blows to the head or strangulation and suffocation. Abusive partners may accuse them of having the virus or threaten to expose them to the virus.

### **As a concerned friend, neighbor, or family member, what can I do?**

Although the effects of domestic violence are devastating, there are ways in which family members, friends, and neighbors can help a victim. If you suspect that someone you know might be a victim of domestic violence, ways to support him or her include:

- Call 911 if the victim is in immediate danger. If you are a neighbor and you hear something, call 911.
- If you are concerned about someone but it doesn't seem like an emergency situation necessitating a call to 911, you can call a Law Enforcement non-emergency number to request a "wellness check" be done on the person. Police will attempt to visit or contact the person to check on their well-being.
- If it is safe to do so, reach out to the victim by phone, text, video or social media. Don't give up, and don't be alarmed if the victim hangs up on you. He or she may not be safe having a conversation, as the partner may be monitoring the victim's activities. When calling, ask the victim to let you know that they need immediate help by saying a non-controversial word such as "orange".
- Listen, and express compassion, respect and patience in what can be a very difficult time made even more so by having to isolate at home during the pandemic.
- Let the victim know that she or he does not deserve the abuse.
- Offer to help the victim contact a domestic violence advocate or reach out to a hotline.
- Help the victim develop a safety plan. To learn more about safety planning, go to <https://www.thehotline.org/2013/04/10/what-is-safety-planning/>
- Your role is to support the victim and not make decisions for him or her. It's normal to want to try and fix the problem right away, but at this time, the victim truly just needs someone to listen and to really hear them.

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