

# COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

People surviving abuse may be experiencing increased isolation and danger caused by physical distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survivors of family abuse often have specific needs around safety, health and confidentiality. During this time, people who are already more vulnerable to economic and health insecurity are facing additional challenges.

Emergency shelters and transition houses are open during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect family members and children fleeing abuse. Community resources and supports are available to provide advice and safety planning without moving into a shelter, such as the [Assaulted Women's Helpline](#) or [Victim Services of York Region](#).

If you or someone you know needs help or wants to speak to a shelter worker, visit [york.ca](#) for a [list of emergency and transitional housing](#) in York Region.

Abusers typically use various forms of abuse, such as digital, emotional, financial, physical, psychological, sexual or spiritual abuse on their loved ones. It can begin subtly and progress to be more obvious; for example, behaviours that may initially seem loving may become controlling. For examples of characteristics that may be worrisome, refer to York Region Public Health's [healthy relationships poster](#).

## **There are many ways COVID-19 can uniquely impact survivors of abuse:**

- Necessary items may be withheld, such as hand sanitizer or disinfectants
- Abusive partners may withhold information or share misinformation about the pandemic to control or frighten survivors, or to prevent them from seeking appropriate medical attention if they have symptoms
- Abusive partners may withhold OHIP and, or benefit cards, threaten to cancel benefits, or prevent survivors from seeking medical attention when needed
- Programs for survivors may be significantly impacted – shelters may be at capacity and stretched to support new intakes. Survivors may fear entering shelters due to the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in close living arrangements with others
- Older survivors with underlying health conditions may be at even higher risk for COVID-19 in settings where they would typically get support, like shelters, counseling centers, or courthouses. Older individuals experiencing family abuse can call the Senior Safety Line at 1-866-299-1011 for support
- Abusive partners may use COVID-19 to justify and escalate their isolation tactics

**Survivors of abuse who are being asked to stay at home may feel isolated from their friends and family. Friends and family can:**

- Encourage them to try to maintain social connections online or over the phone, if it is safe to do so, and try to stick to their daily routines as much as possible
- Call 911 if they or someone they know is in immediate danger. Emergency services will respond even if you are COVID-19 positive, are in self-isolation or quarantine and experiencing symptoms
- More information about staying safe using technology, planning for safety and preparing to leave an abusive relationship can be found in York Region's full [Guidance for Individuals Experiencing Domestic Violence document](#).

**For more information contact:**

[York Support Services Centre](#): 24/7 Crisis line 1-855-310-COPE

[Sandgate Women's Shelter](#): 24/7 Crisis line: 1-800-661-8294, [Facebook page](#)

[Yellow Brick House](#): 24/7 Crisis line 1-800-263-3247, [Facebook page](#)

[Ontario 211](#): Community and Social Services Help Line

[York Region Centre for Community Safety](#): 905-836-7601 ext. 100