

Staying Mentally Well. Part Two:

Recognizing the Need for Help in Dealing with Domestic Violence

Staying strong and resilient is important in these uncertain times. Recognizing challenges to members' mental wellness can be especially difficult since communication now is most likely taking place remotely - over the phone, by email or text - and not in person. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a change in the member's attitude more than expected given the current situation?
- Are they late for calls, miss calls, say they forgot about the call? Is this behavior different than their usual behavior?
- Do they not return calls or texts like they usually would?
- When you talk to the member, do they seem uninterested?
- Does the member seem to be avoiding talking with you or answering questions?
- Do they seem lonely or isolated?

The above scenarios may indicate the member is experiencing mental health issues. Below is guidance useful to follow when talking with members about domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If a member's behavior starts to change, there could be issues such as domestic violence that are happening beyond their control.

Signs to look for include:

- Seems constantly worried about making their partner angry.
- No longer spends time with their family or friends.
- Appears anxious, depressed or other changes in their personality.
- Mentions their partner is extremely jealous or possessive.
- Has unexplained injuries.
- Makes excuses for their partner's behavior.

Questions to Ask to Ensure Mental Wellness

- "Is there a safe time we can talk?"
Let them know you're concerned about their safety.
- "What specific kind of help do you need?"
Don't place shame, blame, or guilt on the member.
- "Do you think about leaving your current situation?"
If they decide to leave, continue to offer help.
- "Do you have a safety plan?"
Be supportive. Ideas for creating a safety plan are in the next section.
- "Do you have a safe place to go to?"
Offer resources on finding a safe haven found in the next section.

Advice to the Member: What to Do

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

If you have been injured, **get medical care**. Go to a local hospital emergency room or urgent care center.

Reach out to someone you trust.

A family member, a friend, a co-worker, or a spiritual leader. Look for ways to get emotional help, like a support group or mental health professional.

Get help to get safe.

If your safety and well-being depend on leaving your violent partner, help is available. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE (7233) or 800-787-3224 (TDD), available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.

Make a safety plan.

Planning is key to be ready to make a safe exit, perhaps in a hurry.

- Know where important items are and be ready to pack them – identification, medication, keys, money
- Come up with a code word to use with friends/family to let them know you are in danger.
- Identify a safe friend/family member to reach out to and safe places to go. If possible, agree ahead of time on a secret location where they can pick you up, if needed.
- Memorize the phone numbers of friends, family, or shelters. If your partner takes your phone, you will still be able to contact loved ones or shelters for a safe place to stay.
- Consider keeping an alternate cellphone nearby, like a prepaid cellphone. Try not to call for help on your home phone or on a shared cellphone.
- Consider contacting your local family court (or domestic violence court if your state has one) for information about getting a restraining order. If you need legal help but don't have much money, your local domestic violence agency may be able to help you find a lawyer who will work for free or on a sliding scale based on what you can pay.

Consider reaching out to a domestic violence shelter. These shelters can provide basic items for women who have to leave in a hurry and arrive with nothing. Many of these services are usually free.

Domestic violence shelters often provide:

- Transportation or pay for transportation to the shelter
- Basic items for women who have to leave in a hurry and arrive with nothing
- Food and child care
- Individual and family counseling and support groups
- Help enrolling children in school
- Job training and help finding work
- Legal help
- Help getting financial aid
- Help finding permanent housing

Housing in a domestic violence shelter is usually short-term, but they can help with the [next step in housing](#).

Sources:

US Department of Human Health & Human Services. Office on Women's Health. How to help someone who is being abused. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/signs-domestic-violence#1>

US Department of Human Health & Human Services. Office on Women's Health. What can I do if I am being abused? <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/signs-domestic-violence#1>

US Department of Human Health & Human Services. Office on Women's Health. How can I plan to leave and keep myself safe? <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/leaving-abusive-relationship#7>

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US Department of Human Health & Human Services. Office on Women's Health. What happens after I arrive at a domestic violence or women's shelter? <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/leaving-abusive-relationship#7>